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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Chuck Sawyer
Conducted by Natalie Swindle and Kelly Cramer
Transcribed by Emilie Meadors
Date: April 3, June 12, 2009**

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 Natalie Swindle: This is Natalie Swindle conducting an oral history interview
2 with Mr. Chuck Sawyer. Today is April 3, 2009. Mr. Sawyer is in—I'm sorry, Mr.
3 Sawyer is in Phoenix, Arizona, and I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections
4 Interview Room on the campus of Texas Tech University. How are you doing today Mr.
5 Sawyer?

6 Chuck Sawyer: Doing just fine.

7 NS: Great!

8 CS: Doing great, thank you. How are you?

9 NS: I'm doing quite well. Well, just to get us started off if you would, give us a
10 little bit of biographical information just to kind of tell us where and when you grew up.

11 CS: My father was in the Air Force, started actually in 1939 in the Army Air
12 Corps. So we moved about every two, three years. I was born in Tucson, Arizona, and
13 we've lived in Oklahoma and Texas and California and Arizona. And Alabama, Florida,
14 London, England, and Yokohama, Japan.

15 NS: Oh, wow!

16 CS: I lived quite a few places.

17 NS: Mm-hmm.

18 CS: And I call Arizona my home.

19 NS: Okay.

20 CS: That's the reason I'm here in Phoenix. That and my grandmother.

21 NS: Okay. What year were you born?

22 CS: 1944.

1 NS: Okay. So your dad was in the—
2 CS: Army Air Corps and then, of course, he went, turned over to the Air Force in
3 '47 he stayed in and finished his thirty-three years as an Air Force fighter pilot.
4 NS: Oh, wow! So what was that like living kind of, I guess we'd say the term is
5 Army brat? Describe that a little bit.
6 CS: Well, it was, before my time Army brat, I was an Air Force brat, but
7 nonetheless it's one and the same. It was interesting in the moving, but the downside was
8 he didn't really develop good friendships until it was time to leave.
9 NS: Right.
10 CS: After a couple years you have some good friends and then you had to leave to
11 go somewhere else 'cause of new assignments. My father, he loved it, it was his life, and
12 I'm very proud of my dad. He did a heck of a job. He fought in World War II and Korea,
13 and he volunteered to go to Vietnam so I wouldn't have to be there, but, thank goodness
14 somebody said, "No."
15 NS: Yeah.
16 CS: He didn't go. I went instead and that's why.
17 NS: Okay. Well, what did your mom do? What was—
18 CS: My mother worked in banks and she also worked on the air base as a, I forgot
19 what they call them, Red Cross lady.
20 NS: Oh!
21 CS: She went to the hospitals and worked basically and helped out any way she
22 could when people were sick or wounded or whatever.
23 NS: Ok!
24 CS: And then, of course, trying to raise my sister and myself, she had her hands
25 full.
26 NS: Okay! Are you the oldest?
27 CS: Yes, I am. I have a sister one year younger than I am.
28 NS: Oh, okay. All right. Well, if you would, describe what school was like for
29 you. Especially going, just kind of going through a little bit with elementary school and
30 then on up into high school.

1 CS: I always liked school until I got to high school and it seemed like things
2 changed there. By the way, that was at Monterey High there in Lubbock.

3 NS: Oh, really?

4 CS: Yes, it was. I went to grade school in Tucson.

5 NS: Mm-hmm.

6 CS: And more grade school up to and through junior high in Enid, Oklahoma.
7 Then we moved to Lubbock, Texas, where dad was out at Reese. And went to high
8 school there at Monterrey, where as stated. School was interesting, challenging, all that.
9 And then by the time I got to high school, it was uh, other points of interest such as
10 young ladies and cold beer and things like that, that boys do.

11 NS: Mm-hmm.

12 CS: My scholastics didn't really excel. I wish I would have paid more attention
13 quite honestly.

14 NS: Okay!

15 CS: Being a boy I, I didn't so—my grades were very good in school except, like I
16 said, when I got in high school, I seemed to lose interest other than just two things and
17 that was math and history really stuck with me. After high school I went to, I went to
18 Arizona State University here in Phoenix and an outlying community called Tempe. And
19 I went to school there a couple years and that was very interesting and very unique
20 because universities are so different than high schools.

21 NS: Mm-hmm.

22 CS: As to it's your responsibility to study, it's your responsibility to do this
23 instead of the other. Where in high school it seemed like the teachers kind of proctored
24 you all the time to stay on top of your studies and then your parents did and everything
25 else.

26 NS: What year did you graduate?

27 CS: I graduated in 1962.

28 NS: Okay. What did you major in out there in Tempe?

29 CS: History.

30 NS: Okay.

1 CS: It's so very, very interesting to me. To this day I do a lot of reading on it now,
2 of course. I saved the course because I left Arizona State and volunteered to go into the
3 Marines because I knew I had to go into service. We had the draft at that time.

4 NS: Mm-hmm.

5 CS: Although my family didn't want me to do it, I realized in my own mind I was
6 going nowhere with my education because I wasn't really dedicated. I would read the
7 paper and see these stories about the Marines in Da Nang and Monkey Mountain and
8 other places over there doing these horrific battles and ending up actually throwing rocks
9 at the enemy to keep them away. I felt extremely guilty so I volunteered to go.

10 NS: Okay. So the decision for the Marine Corps, which, what year did you join?

11 CS: 1966.

12 NS: 1966. The decision to join the Marine Corps was kind of this climactic point
13 in the Vietnam War, and the decision was from what you read in the news?

14 CS: What I read in the news and, and what friends who had gone and come back
15 and told stories of and it's kind of a network of people, actually. Some of the guys who
16 graduated within ROTC at Arizona State had gone over and come back and told stories of
17 "This is a very dramatic war, very interesting war, this and that." And being a history
18 major, I also decided I want to be part of history, not just off to the sidelines reading
19 about it.

20 NS: Right.

21 CS: So there was a dual purpose in me going. Actually, there were three purposes.
22 One, one was the history side and one was my guilty conscience. The other was my
23 father. I knew that I was going to have to go in the service to continue the family
24 tradition, if you will, and to keep pride because there was so many people going to
25 Canada and leaving the country and stuff.

26 NS: Mm-hmm.

27 CS: Protesting and everything else. That wasn't allowed in my family.

28 NS: Right.

29 CS: So, I decided I better, better go and get this done and then come back and try
30 to get on with my life. Assuming, of course, that I didn't come back.

31 NS: Right.

1 CS: Which sometimes is a pretty big assumption.

2 NS: Right!

3 CS: Yeah, some nights I wondered.

4 NS: Okay! Well, if you don't mind going back a little bit. You touched on a tad

5 about the anti-war protests and that kind of thing. You're in Arizona at this point in time,

6 especially when the war is just beginning and this is the, the early 1960s. If you could, in

7 1963, that was when Kennedy was assassinated.

8 CS: Yes.

9 NS: What was your reaction to that?

10 CS: Well, we were in London, England, at the time.

11 NS: Mm-hmm.

12 CS: My dad was a wing commander over there. And he received—and these are

13 just memories I'm just going to throw out not in any particular order.

14 NS: Okay.

15 CS: He received a phone call and he had to go to the air base and we didn't see

16 him for three or four days.

17 NS: Oh, wow!

18 CS: He was not allowed to call us or anything else and the reason for that was the

19 US military went on full alert not knowing if this was a Russian takeover or what was

20 going on. I felt removed from the incident in a lot of ways. Although I watched it on TV,

21 you know, millions of times and made a ton of sense. I felt very sad about it. I didn't

22 always agree with President Kennedy's policies, but I don't think anybody wishes the

23 death of a president. Not in America.

24 NS: Right.

25 CS: The people of England were fantastic. St. Paul's Cathedral, which is

26 downtown London—

27 NS: Mm-hmm

28 CS: Held a special service for Kennedy's funeral.

29 NS: Oh, wow!

30 CS: My sister and I went down there and, of course, because of the way we were

31 attired and, of course, once they hear you talk they know you're American they were

1 amazingly graceful to us all. I mean they were just stunning. It's a beautiful church and it
2 was a very nice ceremony and American flags all over the place. It was really quite
3 impressive. We all felt kind of, we are out of the country, we are distant, we don't, even
4 if you are in the country I don't know what you could do.

5 NS: Right.

6 CS: It's after the fact, so it was a difficult time for the country, for the world. He
7 gave a lot of hope to people. My father didn't necessarily like him, but that's another
8 issue.

9 NS: Well, upon returning to the United States, afterwards, what was it like then?
10 Did you kind of sense a change in the country?

11 CS: I sensed a nervousness that things were changing, but more than anything was
12 if they could kill the president, whomever they are, they can kill anybody.

13 NS: Right.

14 CS: And to be quite frank with you, Natalie, I don't think in my lifetime I'll ever
15 know who really did that. I would like to see that crime resolved. I don't think it's ever
16 going to be. And it's shameful. You'll have to understand my father being in the military
17 and all that, America was, is, and always will be the greatest country on the face of the
18 Earth. He taught us that as children and he also taught us to respect your country, respect
19 your leaders, you don't have to agree with them, but respect them and show the proper
20 homage to whomever that it's necessary that America is the best. And I agree with that.
21 I've found that out in my own lifetime. Do have room for improvement? Absolutely.
22 Everybody does, but this is still the greatest country in the world and my father demanded
23 that respect from us and from other people, as well.

24 NS: That's a very interesting perspective.

25 CS: It wasn't, I don't mean to lead anybody on to think that it was blind faith
26 because it wasn't.

27 NS: Right.

28 CS: As I mentioned to you earlier he had fought in World War II as a fighter pilot,
29 he fought in Korea as a fighter pilot. War brings out probably the worst thing that man
30 can do to his fellow man. It's an extension of politics, but it's the bad extension. It's an
31 extension where you create a lot of disharmony and feelings that last for centuries. So he

1 was convinced that America was the best place to be, that it offered great opportunity. He
2 grew up in a little mining town east of Phoenix here called Globe, Arizona. Where the
3 mines were up and down and yet people were employed and happy and things were
4 pretty good and my dad was All-State in basketball and football there. There was just
5 much he couldn't do. He put his mind to do something and he just could do it. Right now
6 in our family the sparkling gem of our family is Timothy Jackson Sawyer, my grandson,
7 and he has so many of my father's attributes it's kind of scary.

8 NS: Oh, wow! That's awesome. Well, this patriotic air kind of brings to this idea
9 you're a young, a young student, and however dedicated to your history studies that you
10 might be, you are out experiencing these things kind of separated from your family. What
11 did you see in terms of this anti-war air that was building up?

12 CS: Well, I, I have today more understanding for it, but then I didn't have much.
13 I, I felt these people were misguided and misinformed. The trouble with protesting a war
14 is your protesting the troops as well and the troops are doing nothing more than their
15 government tells them to do. In contrary to what anybody else may have said, when you
16 go to war, you're fighting for yourself and your buddies. Somewhere in the background is
17 the fact that you are an America fighting for the American way of life or American
18 ideology in that particular part of the world. I'm still a devoted American. I think we
19 have, like I mentioned, some serious social problems and economic problems, of course.
20 But we are the best and when I say I've learned to live with him and understand him a
21 little bit. The funny thing that people don't understand is if you've ever been to combat,
22 it's probably the last place you want to go again.

23 NS: Right.

24 CS: So when you talk to career offices in the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force,
25 whatever, they don't like war. Most of them don't want to have wars. It's the last thing
26 they want to do. They also realize that if their country is threatened that it's their job and
27 they will have to do it. And if it takes their life, then it takes their life and that's the way it
28 has to be. So we've had, fortunately for America, some outstanding people who stood up
29 when they said we got to go over here and do this and that, right or wrong, and have gone
30 and done the job.

1 NS: Okay. Well, so you, you get up to this point in 1966 where you are deciding
2 that you are going to join the Marine Corps. What was your family's reaction to that?

3 CS: Well, my mom and dad were in London, England.

4 NS: Mm-hmm.

5 CS: And my grandmother, I was living with my grandmother and working and
6 trying to go to school.

7 NS: Okay.

8 CS: And that was a difficult task working, going to school, as you may well
9 know. They called, or grandma called them, and told them what I was doing. And my dad
10 kind of went off the handle. My dad was a bit of a complex person, but basically simple, if
11 you know what I mean. He, he said, "You can't do this." And I said, "Well, I have to do
12 this. I have to get this done and I want to get it done now and I can't stay here in school
13 when I'm reading about the things that are going on over there and not doing my part."
14 So although he was proud of that concept, that ideology if you will, he didn't want me to
15 go and get hurt. And he made it pretty clear that if it was up to him I wouldn't go. But I
16 said, "Well I can't, I can't do that. "Well, yeah, you can go here, you can do that." I said,
17 "I'm not ducking this. I'm not doing that." So he believed to a point, which made him
18 almost a hypocrite that if he had to go he'd go. No problem. But if I had to go, well we'd
19 have to think about that. "No, you know, that's not what you taught me." So we had this
20 long talk and, and my typical—my father was a pretty quiet guy, but when he spoke you
21 know his words carried a lot of weight, especially with the family. He said, "Do you
22 understand what's going to happen here?" I said, "Well, no because I don't see the future.
23 I can't read it." "Well, you're going to go over there and get killed, and it's really going
24 to upset your mother." Well, that kind of stung me. I said, "Well, I love you, too, Dad.
25 But please realize for what this is worth, I had no intention of getting killed, but I don't
26 have control over that either so." But he kind of made light of it in a sense because I
27 started laughing. Usually when I laugh when he was trying to be somewhat somber about
28 things he'd get mad.

29 NS: So did he get mad in this situation?

30 CS: He was very upset about it. He didn't like it. What did I thought that was
31 really neat and I didn't know this 'til I came home. He had Air Force pilots that were

1 friends of his or that were in his unit and stuff. It was at this point when he transferred to
2 —when I'd gone in the Marines, he transferred to Bergstrom which is down in Austin.
3 And he was a wing commander who had a whole wing that was ready to fly to Vietnam
4 in less than a day if things really went south. He had pilots and intelligence people
5 following me everywhere I went in Vietnam.

6 NS: Oh, wow!

7 CS: Yeah, they were, they were watching where I was and what was going on.
8 They would send reports back to him. He knew every day where I was. Which I found,
9 you know, stunning. I had no idea. He actually had a pilot carry a plane from Bergstrom
10 to Da Nang which was a pretty good haul. That's about twelve-thousand miles or more.
11 And go up to a Marine officer on duty there and say, "Where is, uh, Chuck Sawyer and
12 the first ten and a half Marines (??) and I have to go see him." The the Marine officer
13 looks in and said, "You can't go out there, it's too dangerous." Well, in my sense of
14 humor, if it's dangerous than what am I doing out there?

15 NS: Right!

16 CS: Anyway, he tracked me, he knew where I was the whole time and we could
17 converse on "Oh, yeah, you were at Gio Linh or you were Con Thien," or you were here
18 or you were there. He knew exactly everything I was doing.

19 NS: Wow!

20 CS: Yeah, well, he did when I was a child, too, which I found amazing. You
21 know, I, I'd do something silly before I'd get home and he'd be standing there and he'd
22 tell me what I did.

23 NS: Oh, wow!

24 CS: He developed a very good intelligence network that never was utilized in
25 Vietnam, darn it.

26 NS: They should have called him up and asked him.

27 CS: I should have what?

28 NS: I said the government should have called him up and said "Hey, you know if
29 you can track one person throughout the entire country, why don't you, why don't you
30 run our intelligence for us?"

1 CS: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. He, he told me more than once that he'd
2 wished he'd been there with me and I said, "Well, based on what you do for a living, and
3 that's fly jets and aircraft bombers and stuff, too, I don't want you over here because they
4 are dropping like flies."

5 NS: Right.

6 CS: And their POWs (prisoners of war) are disappeared and it wouldn't be a good
7 deal now. "If you want to come on the ground and fight with me, that's a different story."
8 He said "Absolutely not! What, are you crazy?"

9 NS: Yeah, I was going to ask you about that. You know, you said he got pretty
10 upset. I was going to ask you to clarify whether it was because you were actually going
11 into the service or whether it was because you chose the Marine Corps over the Air
12 Force.

13 CS: Actually, it was both.

14 NS: Okay.

15 CS: Believe me, I got harassed in boot camp quite a bit and he caused it in the
16 sense of he would send letters with his return label that said "Colonel and Mrs. C.W.
17 Sawyer. Bergstrom Air Force Base, Texas." And the DIs (drill instructors) just loved that.
18 I ran extra miles, did extra pushups, I you know, did the whole thing. And it was because
19 of my dad and I would write notes back "Please don't put your label on there. I'm paying
20 a heck of a price over here." You know and that didn't matter. He would do it again,
21 anyway. He, he didn't care for me in the Marines. He thought it was a terrible mistake. I
22 think what he had a hard time understanding was, he kind of looked at the Air Force like
23 it was a personal company of his, and that I should follow in the family business. The
24 trouble with that is, I could have never been my own man and that's what I always
25 wanted to be. Stand on your own, be your own man. Don't, uh, follow somebody's
26 coattails into an office or into a worksite or whatever, no. Do it on your own merit, on
27 your own ability. And, uh, it took him years to grasp that, you know? But everywhere we
28 went, Natalie, when I was an Air Force brat, he knew somebody on the base.

29 NS: Mm-hmm.

1 CS: I realized we lived in and out of this country and we lived all over this
2 country and everywhere we went he knew somebody. There's an intelligence network if
3 you've ever seen one.

4 NS: Yeah.

5 CS: Yeah, and you know we, we bounced around quite a bit and even traveling
6 across country. Sometimes when we lived in California and came here to Phoenix for
7 awhile when he was over in China. As the Air Force **had shay to shank our shag** he met
8 us here in Phoenix and we'd go to Oklahoma. Well, we were in Albuquerque or Santa Fe
9 or one of the others, I don't remember which, and he knew somebody there.

10 NS: Oh, wow.

11 CS: Not even on a base, just "Oh, so and so lives here." You know, that always
12 amazed me and it didn't happen in a, uh, for my side until years and years later when I
13 was working for Arizona Public Service that some gentleman came out of his house to do
14 a survey of the house to help him cut his bills down and he knew me! Now my dad was
15 seeing the shoe on the other foot, if you will.

16 NS: Yeah. So he kind of understood then?

17 CS: Pardon me?

18 NS: I said so he kind of, kind of understood then where you were coming from.

19 CS: Yes, I, I think he eventually did and, and he had a hard time saying that he
20 loved you or that we was proud of you, but he would show you in other ways. And, of
21 course, boys and girls, uh, seek the approval of their parents. That's one of the things that
22 you do when you are growing up. And I always wanted him to, uh, approve of what I've
23 done with my life and he was upset because I quit college. He thought that was a huge
24 mistake and, uh, as you look back at these things, as you get older you realize your
25 parents had a lot more wisdom than you'd thought. He was right in a lot of ways.
26 Quitting college, even though I went to night school years later and all this, I never
27 finished my degree. I wish I had. Uh, my life would have been different. I would have
28 had been different. And that's what he wanted me to have a better life like most parents
29 do. I, I have three boys and I, I cherish them and I want them to have better lives than I,
30 what I have had. So far I've convinced them to stay out of the service. Uh, not because

1 I'm not American, like I said I'm very much American, but I feel between my father's
2 time and my time, it's time for another family to pick up the slack.

3 NS: Right. Okay.

4 CS: We had less than one percent of Americans are serving this country at this
5 time and I, I feel that's very sad.

6 NS: That's interesting. Well, um, we've talked quite a bit about what your father's
7 reaction was. What, what did your mother say or do?

8 CS: My mother was mostly hysterical.

9 NS: Wow.

10 CS: Well, you know, you'd pick up the paper in those days or you'd watch the
11 news and they would show, uh, pretty graphic stuff and tell pretty graphic stories. And
12 parents aren't generally too excited about it anymore today than they were then about
13 their children off in war. Whether it's for a just cause or not, they want Johnny to come
14 home.

15 NS: Right.

16 CS: They want Johnny to be here, working as an insurance salesman or down at
17 the market or you know, whatever he's doing.

18 NS: Right

19 CS: My mother was extremely upset about the whole thing. She realized I felt the
20 obligation to not only to the country, but to family to do this. She was very proud of that
21 and I thank God she died fairly young, but she did get to see me come home from
22 Vietnam so, uh, it was a great day. That was, actually, the day I consider my own
23 personal parade. My whole family was there. My grandmother, my great aunt and uncle,
24 my other great aunt and uncle. That was a tremendous day! So, while some veterans say,
25 "We didn't get our parade and stuff," those of the Vietnam era, I say "Well, no. I had my
26 parade and I'm quite happy with it."

27 NS: That's awesome.

28 CS: I don't, I don't seek the limelight. I never have. It's not my choice. I'd rather
29 be in the background doing the work.

30 NS: Right.

31 CS: There it is.

1 NS: Right. Well, um, that's interesting. You've used, you've heard from both
2 sides of your par—from both of your parents. You know this is not something they want,
3 want you to do that you've made your own decision and you're going into the Marine
4 Corps. If you could, describe where boot camp was and when you went and just your first
5 impression of, of boot camp.

6 CS: Well, the Marines have notoriety and they do their darndest to live up to it.

7 NS: Okay.

8 CS: When we got off the bus, a guy and I joined here together, Byron Norell and
9 myself. We went in, we weren't in the buddy plan or anything, but he was joining at the
10 same time. We took a bus out of Phoenix and went to San Diego, **Doke**, and San Diego.
11 And when we got off the bus, there was the famous yellow footprints you're supposed to
12 stand in. Well, there were about twenty-five busses there at that time so there were
13 literally hordes of people running to the yellow footprints.

14 NS: Right.

15 CS: And I got in the footprints and was standing there like everybody else and,
16 uh, next thing I know somebody smacked me upside the head. And generally people
17 seem to do this with me for some reason and I think it has something to do with my, uh,
18 shortness. They always think they can pick on the short guys. I don't know why that is.
19 I'm getting real tired of it, too, let me tell you. So I got smacked in the head and, uh, I
20 was not the only one. They were walking around just liberally handing out love like it
21 was nothing. And, uh, I reacted to that in a normal fashion in that my hands came up and
22 I was ready to fight whomever. I didn't know what was going on. And legally, they had
23 not explained the Uniform Code to Military Justice. At that point I could have hit
24 whoever hit me and there would have been no problem, but after they explained to you, if
25 you hit an NCO, non-commission officer, you would be going into the brig, which is a
26 military jail.

27 NS: Right.

28 CS: So, I thought about it and he just kind of hit me and moved on and I was
29 watching him, waiting for him to come back so I could, you know, return some love, but
30 that's the way boot camps started. We got there it was like two in the morning.

31 NS: Oh, wow.

1 CS: And, uh, they ran us around here, there, and yonder picking up clothes and
2 doing all this other stuff. The first couple of days I don't think we slept at all. They had
3 us doing a multitude of things. Getting our barracks squared away, uh, making our beds.
4 Showing us how to do this, showing us how to do that. Trying to march us around which
5 was like trying to march, uh, a bunch of frogs around. It was, it was an undisciplined
6 mess for, you know, at least three days.

7 NS: Mm-hmm.

8 CS: And, uh, I've never had a shower with fifty other guys so that was kind of a
9 unique adventure, too.

10 NS: Okay.

11 CS: You have fifteen minutes to shower and shave, gentlemen, and there's like
12 fifty of us and okay, go! And they start timing and people are bleeding from the shaving.

13 NS: Right.

14 CS: Other people can't even get to the water because there are ten people in front
15 of you. Uh, yeah, it was a, kind of a startling effect which is exactly what they want. All
16 this, what appears to be nonsense to a lot of people is for a specific purpose, and that is to
17 make you think, act, and only dream of being a unit. Looking out for the other guy, all the
18 time. Working as one, working for the benefit of the unit, not you. As the military likes to
19 say now, uh, something bigger than self. Absolutely, it's a lot bigger than self. You as an
20 individual matter, but overall it's the unit comes first.

21 NS: Mm-hmm.

22 CS: That's hard for some people to grasp. Its, uh, it's difficult, especially when
23 you're seventeen, eighteen years old like many of these young guys were. I was twenty-
24 one at the time when I went in.

25 NS: Okay.

26 CS: And twenty-two when I graduated so it was—I was always the old man.
27 That's generally what they called me, the old man. So, it was stunning, it was interesting.
28 I was up to the physical like many of the young guys were in those days. The physical
29 and the mental part of it, uh, we, we couldn't see the big picture for a long time until we
30 started doing tactics and understanding that there's no doubt in your mind you're gonna
31 go into a killing zone. Unless you work together you're all gonna die.

1 NS: Right.

2 CS: So when that message rang through loud and clear, we all understood what
3 we had to do and we, we improved considerably.

4 NS: Where was your basic training again?

5 CS: It was in San Diego.

6 NS: Okay.

7 CS: Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego. Which is right next to the airport
8 which is a terrible thing psychologically because you're saying, "Gee, whiz, I wish I
9 could go over there and get in an airplane and get out of here."

10 NS: Right! Wonder if anybody would notice if I just went over there.

11 CS: Right, or the runway is there and the fence is there so yeah, you'd just be
12 standing out like a sore thumb. It'd be a heck of a deal.

13 NS: Funny. Well, even that brings up an interesting point, you know. Everybody
14 was saying, "Man, I wish I could get on this airplane." You kind of mentioned a little bit
15 about transition. How was the transition for, for you? I mean, you grew up in a military
16 atmosphere, but—

17 CS: Exactly.

18 NS: Actually being, being in, in the military what is—how was that for you?

19 CS: Well, I to be honest with you, my father was tougher than these guys.

20 NS: Oh, really?

21 CS: I told him years later I said, "You could have easily been a DI or the colonel
22 in charge or whatever because, uh, they didn't have anything on you," you know. The
23 other kids were, uh, and I don't mean this derogatory by any means. I, I love people in
24 general, but, uh, city kids and farm boys and everything like you probably heard about
25 World War II, how they all got together. It was the same thing then, really. And many of
26 these people never had anybody yelling in their face, nobody running them, nobody
27 doing this instead of the other. I did play a little sports at Monterrey High and so I was
28 used to the physical aspects of it. I, I love sports so, you know, the running and all the
29 rope climbing and jumping and all that, that was kind of fun, really.

30 NS: Okay.

1 CS: So that didn't, didn't bother me, but the other guys, many of them were, they
2 were stunned! They didn't, they had no transition. This was like falling off the end of the
3 earth in Christopher Columbus days and going, "Where am I going?"

4 NS: Right.

5 CS: You know, it was difficult for them. It really was. So we worked together
6 with the guys that didn't look like they were going to make it and helped them make it
7 and, uh, understand what they had to do. We kind of worked our own transition amongst,
8 you know, with the other guys. We had people who were very physically fit and we had
9 others who were not.

10 NS: Mm-hmm.

11 CS: Those of us that were in pretty good shape would help the others. It was
12 similar to combat in that way because you'd have people that really tire out quickly, you
13 know, after hiking a few miles or whatever.

14 NS: Mm-hmm.

15 CS: And obviously you can't just stop everything for one person and yet you can't
16 leave them there, either.

17 NS: Right.

18 CS: So the **end of** concept was stress and, and we went to work on that. We did a
19 pretty good job with that.

20 NS: Good. Okay, I kind of got a mental image. You said your dad was, was much
21 tougher. I kind of got that, that maybe your, your growing up you kind of had the, the—
22 what was his name? Drill instructor Frank Ermev?

23 CS: Oh, yes! R. Lee Ermev. Yeah, great guy. I wish he'd answer my e-mail, but
24 he's a great guy. Well, my father, you know, being in the service—when I realized kind
25 of because of my age that he was and his authority position in the pecking order, if you
26 will, of things.

27 NS: Mm-hmm.

28 CS: He was a major at that point and—now a major in the Air Force is about as
29 commonplace as a dime in everybody's pocket, but in the Marines, a major is, oh, my
30 goodness, he's two steps from being God's right hand man.

31 NS: Right.

1 CS: So the rank issue came into play and my father stressed that obviously on, on
2 the base where he worked. He wasn't used to having any gossip or anything from
3 anybody. When somebody, you know, is told to do something, he is expecting them to go
4 do it. Period. No questions, just go do it. If you want to talk about it we'll do that later,
5 but do what I ask you to do first.

6 NS: Right.

7 CS: And he carried that home. Funny, funny thing about that is, uh, he used to
8 come home and my mother would say, "Uh, excuse me, Colonel." and he'd look at my
9 mother and say "Yes, dear?" "Your rank here is meaningless." I always loved their little
10 discussions.

11 NS: It sounds like your mom would have made a good drill instructor, as well.

12 CS: Oh, my mother would have been. She was, she was adamant about proper
13 manners and, and eating etiquette and stuff. And if you did something wrong—and
14 realize when you sit at tables, you know, in restaurants and places like that, uh, they
15 aren't necessarily that big, but I think I said something one time to my mother and she
16 reached out and slapped me, had her hand back in her lap before I even knew what
17 happened. I was totally sunned. She would not tolerate any lip. She would not tolerate
18 any bad manners. It was pretty strict. That's why my transition in the military as, as you
19 asked me earlier, was pretty simple, really. To a degree I was actually disappointed that
20 the Marines weren't tougher.

21 NS: Okay.

22 CS: I really thought, "Well, this is going to be terrible," you know, 'cause this is
23 the Marines and all you hear is how tough they are and this and that. And quite honestly,
24 yeah, there were some difficult times, but overall my dad could run a tougher camp by,
25 by a heartbeat, you know.

26 NS: Wow! That that has to be the first time I've ever heard, "I was disappointed
27 that the Marines were not tougher."

28 CS: Well, you know, I grew up watching World War II films.

29 NS: Mm-hmm.

30 CS: There was a lot of stuff about Iwo Jima and Guadalcanal and Tarawa and
31 other places. Where the Marines had died by the dozens in a matter of minutes and they

1 were bonzai charged and, and I saw all these movies. I anticipated that, well, you had to
2 be extremely tough to live through it. So that means to me that your training had to be
3 extremely good. They were supposed to be the best in the field at everything they did. I
4 love the Marine Corps to this day, but I don't think that was always the case. I, I
5 criticized them a few times. I, I paid for that. But my father set the tone of my life even to
6 this day and that is honor, integrity, and words like that, that people don't really talk
7 about too much today.

8 NS: Okay. Well, what kind of weapons training did you receive in basic?

9 CS: We, we shot about everything that the Marine Corps had at that time in the
10 arsenal. Rifle range was within four teams, but we also shot M-60s, 3.5 rocket launchers
11 which were called the LAAW (light anti-armor weapon).

12 NS: Mm-hmm.

13 CS: I shot a BAR (Browning automatic rifle) from World War II fame when I was
14 up in Alameda. We didn't do mortars or anything. Those were specialized activities for
15 people that, that was their MOS (military occupational specialty).

16 NS: Mm-hmm.

17 CS: 45s, of course. Basic weaponry, M-1s.

18 NS: You said MOS. Now, in basic are you getting kind of the full gamut of, uh,
19 training and then you would later be separated into MOS or were you, was that done in
20 basic?

21 CS: It was done right after you graduated out of boot camp. You received your
22 orders and they were based on your MOS and your MOS where most everybody in that
23 time frame, which was '66, was in the Marines was 0311 which meant grunt infantry.

24 NS: Okay.

25 CS: Rifleman. There were few exceptions and to this day, I don't know why, but
26 even though I had a 0311 MOS, I was sent to Alameda Naval Air Station, which is up
27 just south of Oakland, California.

28 NS: Mm-hmm.

29 CS: To guard nuclear weapons and to be a gate guard of the Naval Air Station.

30 NS: So you didn't go to an advanced course?

31 CS: Oh, yes. Yes, we went to an advanced. Everybody went to that.

1 NS: Okay.

2 CS: From there we, we received our orders, like I mentioned.

3 NS: Right.

4 CS: It was an extension of boot camp.

5 NS: Okay.

6 CS: That's what it really was. It's advanced infantry training. It was called AIT.

7 NS: Okay. When did you go to AIT?

8 CS: Oh, gosh, May, June.

9 NS: Of '67?

10 CS: Of '66.

11 NS: '66 Okay. If you don't mind, just describe a typical day in AIT.

12 CS: Typical day was get up at 5:30, uh, clean up the barracks, and fall out in
13 company formation.

14 NS: Mm-hmm.

15 CS: And buy for the day's activities and usually they were out at a rifle range or
16 you were marching off somewhere to go do some tactical maneuvering. Night activities,
17 night ambushes, everything, too, including a sweep through a Vietnamese village that
18 they'd built there on the San Mateo River in Camp Pendleton.

19 NS: Okay.

20 CS: Because that's where AIT was. Everything to get you somewhat ready for
21 Vietnam, although they had a staging area that they increased it one more time was for
22 about, I think that was for about two weeks or three weeks. AIT was, uh, it was
23 interesting because you got to fire your rifle more, but most of that was blank fire
24 because you were doing, uh, advance and maneuver techniques and tactics and stuff. I
25 wasn't—I wanted to get out of AIT. I didn't typically enjoy it that much. I wanted to get
26 on with it. You know, let's, let's do what we have to do for Vietnam and all these staging
27 programs.

28 NS: Okay.

29 CS: But then I received my orders, as I mentioned, for Alameda and I had to go
30 up there and spend some time. Interesting story about Alameda was I, after I got there a

1 little while I volunteered. I went down to the major's office and volunteered to go to
2 Vietnam. Same time I had volunteered to go to embassy school.

3 NS: Oh, wow!

4 CS: Well, my embassy school orders came in and the next day my Vietnam orders
5 came in.

6 NS: Oh, no!

7 CS: And the, the major said, "What do you think about this, son?" Well, I said,
8 "Well, sir, I pretty well have an idea where I'm going." He said "That's right. When you
9 get back from Vietnam you can go to embassy school, but right now you're going to
10 Vietnam. That's where the need is." I said, "Yes, sir. I understand that." "Okay, good
11 luck to you." "Thank you, sir."

12 NS: Wow.

13 CS: I laughed and, well, of course, embassy school wasn't open unless I signed up
14 again for another four years when I got back, so I never made it to embassy school.

15 NS: Right.

16 CS: I thought that would be a pretty interesting tour of duty.

17 NS: Yeah, I, I can see why

18 CS: Well, you sit down with diplomats, you eat with them, you guard them, you
19 guard the embassy, of course. They were giving you 38s and I think it was four or five
20 suits to wear, none inappropriate. And then, of course, all your military gear that you
21 would have with you anyway. I, I thought, you know, maybe I could bump shoulders
22 with somebody a little bit smarter than me and enhance my position in life. Not to be.

23 NS: You had to go to Vietnam.

24 CS: Yeah, that's right.

25 NS: Well, I wanted to ask, in, in any of your training this is in basic and AIT,
26 were any of your instructors, had they served in Vietnam?

27 CS: All three of our DIs had one tour in Vietnam and unfortunately our lead DI,
28 Sergeant Roper, uh, got killed on the second tour. He wasn't even there probably a
29 month.

30 NS: Oh, wow.

1 CS: Those of us that are still in touch, uh, from Platoon 356, are very saddened by
2 that and he's just, he's in our memory and in our hearts. There were many times he would
3 lean and whisper in my ear, "How's your dad doing?"

4 NS: Oh, wow.

5 CS: He, he was a very good man. Surprising as this may sound, and I don't mean
6 to shock anybody, but, the DIs looked after you. Although they screamed and hollered
7 and as I mentioned, there was a purpose for all that. They looked at you like children.

8 NS: Mm-hmm.

9 CS: Their children. And, consequently, when you graduated they knew where you
10 were going.

11 NS: Right.

12 CS: It was not unusual to see tears in their eyes.

13 NS: Oh, really?

14 CS: Yes, yes. Because the volume of people going through San Diego and Parris
15 Island at that time was pretty dramatic and most everybody was going to Vietnam. We
16 were increasing our, our field force. What did we do? In '67, '68 somewhere we were up
17 to half a million people.

18 NS: Mm-hmm.

19 CS: And I think it was like, maybe two-hundred thousand before that. So we
20 doubled the people on the ground and doubled casualties and deaths and everything with
21 it.

22 NS: Right.

23 CS: They were, they were quite a group of gentlemen to do what they did and we
24 owe them a debt. They are doing their job. All DIs, all services. It's a difficult job, it
25 really is. Especially when you know they are going. The people who just graduated are
26 going off to combat.

27 NS: Mm-hmm.

28 CS: And if you've been there it's even tougher because you know what they are
29 going into and they don't. And you can tell them all day, like you try to advise your
30 children about certain things in life; don't go there it's not a good thing. And with three

1 boys believe me, they've gone their own way many times and come back and said,
2 "Darn, you were right."

3 NS: Right!

4 CS: Yeah, I'm supposed to make your life better. That's one of my jobs. Trying to
5 help here. My kids are, well they aren't kids anymore. They are young men and I'm very
6 proud of them. They are very good.

7 NS: Okay. Well, how did, you kind of mentioned how, how Vietnam may have
8 impacted the drill instructors and how they, how they treated you. Now, what do you
9 think their service in Vietnam, how do you think that impacted your training? Do you
10 think it enhanced it or—?

11 CS: I think it definitely enhanced it because you have somebody who's not
12 talking theory to you, he's talking reality. He's been there, he's seen it, and he's served.
13 They would tell us things like, "There will be days when everything is real quiet." And
14 you think, "Well, this isn't so bad." And then all of a sudden there will be two-hundred
15 people outside there, wire out there, firing at you. It all happens just that fast. And you
16 can realize that there is, uh, say, fifteen to twenty people that could easily come through
17 your section.

18 NS: Mm-hmm.

19 CS: And you and maybe your two or three buddies are going to have to, you
20 know, take them out or you all are gonna die.

21 NS: Right.

22 CS: The NVA in particular like to do—blow the bugle and do a lot of charges and
23 stuff like that.

24 NS: Mm-hmm.

25 CS: And you know the first time you, you see that kind of stuff it stuns you.

26 NS: Right.

27 CS: But you go back to what your DI had told you. "Hey, this is gonna happen,
28 that is going to happen, they do this, and they do that." Then they would even get very
29 personal with you and say things like, "Jones, over here since you always fall asleep
30 you're probably going to be the first one to die. You're going to be out on a post
31 somewhere, asleep and they are going to come up and take you out. And I'm not going to

1 write a letter to your mom and dad because you'll be out of my control at that point. So if
2 I were you, I'd figure out another way to stay awake and not go to sleep." So they would
3 point out to individuals, you know, your weaknesses that you need to work on.

4 NS: Okay.

5 CS: And that you'd need to get to it pretty quick because Vietnam will be at your
6 doorstep before you know it. It's, it's just wisdom of experience and time. They were
7 very concerned. Marines have a unique bond, Natalie. I, I guess you know that. I. I don't
8 know, but we have a very unique bond. It's a brotherhood that's worldwide with active,
9 inactive, retired, passed away veterans from ever. There is no written law that states you
10 will do anything for a fellow Marine, no matter what.

11 NS: Okay.

12 CS: And that's still the case.

13 NS: That's interesting. Well, so not only was this, you know, respect for the
14 Corps and still a bit of respect for your unit and your fellow person and that, you know,
15 he's not just your, your comrade in arms. He's just like your brother.

16 CS: Yes, that's correct.

17 NS: Okay.

18 CS: That's correct. To this day I have a good friend in South Carolina, his name is
19 Fred Smith. He was with me the whole time I was with Charlie Wodnye and he's one of
20 the finest people I know. And he has tremendous health issues at this time, but he is my
21 brother in every sense of the word. There's nothing in the world I wouldn't do for him if
22 he asked me. Sometimes when he doesn't ask me I do it anyway. That irritates him a little
23 bit because he has pride.

24 NS: Right.

25 CS: But, he and I and everybody else in our squad are extremely close and, uh,
26 and anybody else that served in 1st Battalion/9th Marines. I don't know if you know the
27 history of, of the unit, but we were pretty well obliterated time after time after time.

28 NS: I think in Vietnam y'all were called the, "The Walking Dead?"

29 CS: That's correct.

30 NS: Okay.

1 CS: The Walking Dead. So that draws you close to—if you’ve been in combat
2 with somebody it’s closer than you could ever imagine being with even family members.
3 My kids are near and dear. Fred is equally with them or better.

4 NS: Okay.

5 CS: Fred is kind of a quiet, easy going giant of a man who literally saved a lot of
6 lives by his calmness and his clear thinking, as well. I was levitating and the guy in
7 charge. I have some Irish in me and I get pretty worked up sometimes about things. Some
8 things as my dad used to say, “You have no control over it, don’t worry about it.”

9 NS: Okay.

10 CS: Well, I do. It’s my nature so—

11 NS: Well, you know you have these, you have your DIs that have been, been in
12 Vietnam. What about specific training. You, you mentioned a little bit about a simulated
13 area in Vietnam at Camp Pendleton. What, what was that like?

14 CS: It was called staging.

15 NS: Mm-hmm.

16 CS: And what they were doing was gathering people in a particular place and
17 preparing you for Vietnam. There was also a lot of logistics as to getting boats or planes
18 or whatever to take you over there. Sadly for me, I went after my boot camp graduating
19 class. I say sadly because I met many on the hospital ship after I got wounded and, uh,
20 they told me the stories about the guys here, there, and yon, and I, I would venture a
21 guess only I don’t have the statistics, but forty to fifty percent of that boot camp class
22 were KIAs (killed in action).

23 NS: Oh.

24 CS: And that, that bothers me. I feel sad about that. I didn’t know them all
25 closely. I knew a few, you know, but—so I went later to staging than those guys and so I
26 met up with a bunch of guys and Fred Schmidt was one of them. And we became very
27 close because we all knew where we were going, what we had to do.

28 NS: Right.

29 CS: We had live fire drills. We marched a lot. We did POW (prisoner of war)
30 activities, which were actually kind of funny, really.

31 NS: Oh!

1 CS: Where they would tell you, "You are now captured, put your hands laced on
2 top of your head." Then they'd march you like five miles over to this camp. And then
3 your mission was to escape. So we did that while we looked down the lights of Interstate
4 5 going up and down the California coast. Thinking, what in the world are we doing
5 here?

6 NS: Right!

7 CS: We could be in town having a beer. What's going on? The training was
8 simulated. It'd be like making a Hollywood movie. You can't show the realism because if
9 you did, obviously people would die.

10 NS: Right.

11 CS: So, it was, it was the best they could do for the time, but unfortunately some
12 of the tactics they taught there were the exact opposite of what you actually did in
13 Vietnam. And when you would get to Vietnam, they would tell you "Hey! We know
14 what you learned there. Don't do it."

15 NS: Right.

16 CS: I've talked to fighter pilots in the Air Force and the Marines and they had
17 similar scenarios about tactics, but they were taught that we're inadequate for the realistic
18 field that you had to go into. I personally don't understand that. Seems to me you'd want
19 to be up on the latest information and techniques and you wouldn't be training something
20 that they wouldn't really use unless they wanted to get killed. So interesting scenario.

21 NS: Well, so you, so you get through with your staging year, you're at Alameda
22 and you get your orders to go to Vietnam. Now, when was this?

23 CS: I received my orders for Vietnam, I believe that was January '67.

24 NS: Okay. Did you get any leave or anything like that?

25 CS: I'm sorry, did I get what?

26 NS: Any leave or anything like that before you'd have to report?

27 CS: I think I took a couple days' leave. I didn't really want to take leave because I
28 know if I went home and I was with my family, it would be very difficult to leave. So I
29 did spend some time with my family, though. I went home a couple days and my parents
30 were very upset. My mother looked like she'd been up for a week with no sleep.

31 NS: Oh, wow.

1 CS: And I told her, you know, "I'm going to be okay. We are gonna go over there
2 and do what we have to do and then we'll come back and get on with my life." It was
3 very stressful to say goodbye. It was more stressful, I think, with that sometimes than
4 being actually in combat, to tell you the truth.

5 NS: Wow.

6 CS: Because the family is so close. You know they're part of your everyday life.
7 So then I received my orders then I went to staging and we left in March of '67 and flew
8 to Okinawa and we got there on April the 1st. Which was interesting because April 1,
9 1945 was when the Marines landed in Okinawa to take it over.

10 NS: Oh, wow!

11 CS: There was a lot of dates in my life that are unique. And that was, I thought,
12 kind of funny. Of course, we called ourselves the April Fools.

13 NS: Mm-hmm.

14 CS: Here we go! The guys had a lot of good humor and some I want to make sure
15 gets on this transcript is war is not all constant death and destruction and crying and this
16 and that. Sometimes it can be a lot of fun because you have a lot of guys in an area where
17 people do the darndest things or say the darndest things. It's something that people need
18 to understand. I have some very good memories. I have some very bad memories.

19 NS: Mm-hmm.

20 CS: But the bad ones are pushed back. I try not to dwell on those, ever. But the
21 good ones are there. It brings a smile. As you get older that's what we all need is more
22 smiles.

23 NS: Right.

24 CS: That's a good thing.

25 NS: Good. Well, you mentioned that you're talking about this humor that can
26 develop especially with the camaraderie that comes on with, with combat. What was the
27 flight over like? Were people humorous or were they apprehensive or—?

28 CS: Well, it was kind of like being in a morgue.

29 NS: Really?

1 CS: It is extremely quiet. Nobody was really talking. I got on the plane and there
2 was one seat left. I went over and I sat down and I met this gentleman by the name of Bill
3 Cookie who's out of San Antonio, Texas.

4 NS: Okay.

5 CS: And interesting thing was he and I talked a little bit, but we didn't have much
6 in common. He was an aviation mechanic and I was in the infantry basically. So he said,
7 "Where you going?" and I said "Well, we are all going to Okinawa and then after that we
8 are going to our duty stations, wherever they may be."

9 NS: Right.

10 CS: He said, "Yeah, I'm probably gonna end up going to Japan to Yokosuka."
11 Which is a naval air facility there. Naval-Marine air. I said, "Well, that'll be nice. That's
12 a good thing for you." So here's, here's the funny thing about Bill, when I got on the
13 plane to come home there was one seat on the plane and I went down and sat next to Bill
14 Cookie again.

15 NS: Oh, how funny!

16 CS: That was very strange. I looked at him, he looked at me and he said, "There's
17 something strange going on here." Yes, there is. And then we had a lot to talk about. We,
18 you know it's a—I think it took us twelve hours from Okinawa to get to El Toro, which is
19 just south of LA a little bit. And we talked almost the whole time. He'd spent some time
20 in Da Nang, some time in Yokosuka, and then transporting back and forth as the need
21 was for mechanics and stuff. So he had some in-country time and, you know, received
22 some rockets and mortar fire and stuff. He, he looked at me and said "You, you can't be
23 in one piece." This is on the flight back. I said "Yeah, I got a hole in my foot, but other
24 than that I'm fine. You know, I'm okay."

25 NS: But on the flight over nobody was talking?

26 CS: Hardly anybody was talking. It was extremely quiet. Most of the guys didn't
27 know each other, but beyond that it was just everything we heard, and pardon my French
28 here, but we were going into hell.

29 NS: Right.

30 CS: And it wasn't going to be pleasant. You know, so you have to prepare your
31 mind for that. You got to do the best I can, but, you know, this is not going to be easy.

1 NS: Okay.

2 CS: And then coming back one of the nicest points of coming back was we flew
3 higher up on the arc of the globe, if you will, so when we left Okinawa we flew to Guam
4 and then from Guam we went up near Alaska. And we're coming down the coast and I
5 looked out the window and I recognized the Golden Gate because I've been stationed
6 there and, of course, it looked like a little bitty toothpick down there. We were thirty-five
7 thousand feet or whatever and the captain came on and said "Gentleman, welcome
8 home." That was stunning.

9 NS: Yeah.

10 CS: Now, everybody broke out into applause and cheers and clapping and crying
11 and shaking hands with each other and everything else. It was, it was great to be home. It
12 was a heck of a good thing for him to do.

13 NS: Right. So very, very different going over and coming back.

14 CS: It was like black and white, really. Totally somber going over and on the way
15 back guys were just talking. "I was in the **shenit** and we did this and that and remember
16 that? Oh yeah." A lot friendlier atmosphere because for the time being you knew you
17 were out of the danger zone. You were kind of gone.

18 NS: Right. Well, you land in Okinawa. What—where were you headed after that?

19 CS: From Okinawa, it was another logistical thing for the Marines to fly you into
20 Da Nang. And then at Da Nang they had a reception area for you where you went over
21 and gave your orders to the sergeant at the desk and then he would tell you what unit you
22 were going to go with, where to pick up your flight or your bus, or your truck ride, or
23 whatever you had to do. And then also over to an Army to get you an M-14 at that time.
24 And some magazines and some ammunition because this base was a huge base. Probably
25 one of the busiest airports in the world at that time.

26 NS: Da Nang?

27 CS: More air traffic because the jets were landing, taking off all the time.

28 NS: Okay. This is at Da Nang?

29 CS: Yes, at Da Nang. It was a huge facility. I was stunned by it when we came in
30 and were landing there. It looked like, it was similar in a lot of ways to Phoenix.

31 NS: Oh, okay.

1 CS: That was very strange with all the traffic and stuff going on. We, we went
2 over to the assignment tent and walked in there and the sergeant said “Well, next twenty
3 of you are the luckiest guys in the world.” And we didn’t know him so we didn’t know
4 this was sarcasm, but it definitely was. “You are going to Quang Ngai.” And I said,
5 “Well, why is that?” and he said, “Well, they just got obliterated.”

6 NS: Oh!

7 CS: “And they need some more people.” We’re thinking “Oh, wow this is great.”

8 NS: Yeah! We are pretty lucky.

9 CS: “This is where I want to be. Yeah.” Right in the middle.

10 NS: Please send me out to where they are shooting bullets.

11 CS: Don’t talk about this. You want to negotiate.

12 NS: Well, when you were coming into Da Nang was there any concern about
13 incoming mortar attacks or anything like that on the airport or—?

14 CS: They had not—a lot of times in those days they received that at night.

15 NS: Okay.

16 CS: And during the day, every now and then the underside of any aircraft is the
17 soft, belly side, if you will.

18 NS: Mm-hmm.

19 CS: And they would receive sniper fire sometimes on commercial aircraft, as well
20 as military aircraft. So we were told that and as I remember none of that happened, but
21 other times it definitely did happen, but not on this particular term.

22 NS: Well, when you first, you said that the traffic and stuff like that reminded you
23 of Arizona. What, when you first walked off the plane, quite a few veterans talk about the
24 oppressive heat. Was that something that you experienced or were you already
25 acclimated to it?

26 CS: It, it gets pretty hot here in Phoenix, but you don’t have the humidity that
27 goes with it. And as you know as a comfort level that that is now talked about with the
28 weather people quite a bit.

29 NS: Right.

30 CS: It was hot and I can handle the heat pretty well, but the humidity with it has
31 always been a problem.

1 NS: Right.

2 CS: When I lived in the South, boy, I think I inherited this from my father because

3 you could stand and do nothing and just start dripping.

4 NS: Yes.

5 CS: That can be difficult for me because I, I don't particularly like to—believe it

6 or not maybe this is my feminine side. I don't like to smell.

7 NS: Okay.

8 CS: Later on, when you're out in the weeds for thirty days there's nothing,

9 everybody smells and nobody cares.

10 NS: Right.

11 CS: In, in a public environment it's not what I choose to do, so, that, that always

12 bothered me mentally. That was kind of a phobia. It still is to this day. I, I'm very

13 hygienically proper.

14 NS: Right.

15 CS: I make sure of that. But the heat was one thing we noticed right away.

16 NS: Mm-hmm.

17 CS: And also, all over the orient because I remember as a child when we were in

18 Yokohama, my dad was stationed there. The smells of what they cooked, their quasi

19 sanitation facilities, things like that, they stay with you forever. I have some neighbors

20 right now who are Chinese and they live right next door to me on the east side.

21 NS: Mm-hmm.

22 CS: And when they cook some things sometimes it really resonates. It brings

23 backs thoughts of either Japan or Vietnam.

24 NS: Okay. Well, let's see. So you, so you kind of get your first impression of the

25 country and, and you go to get assigned and you get assigned in the 1st of the 9th.

26 CS: Yes.

27 NS: So where, where were they stationed at this time?

28 CS: They were up in Phu Bai, which was fifty road miles north of Da Nang or

29 about a twenty-minute hop on a C-130, which is what we ended up taking.

30 NS: Okay.

1 CS: They took a whole bunch of us up to Phu Bai, which about thirteen miles
2 south of Hue.

3 NS: Mm-hmm.

4 CS: Which put it in prospective for you.

5 NS: Okay.

6 CS: That was the one where everybody was advised to sit on your helmets and
7 keep your flak jackets buttoned up because the C-130s were getting a lot of sniper fire
8 either coming in or taking off or sometimes both, at both airports in Da Nang and Phu
9 Bai.

10 NS: Okay. Well, if you could, describe your first impressions of going into this
11 base at Phu Bai.

12 CS: Going into Phu Bai.?

13 NS: Yes.

14 CS: It's kind of interesting because it was the first place where I was stationed
15 there. We weren't there for too long, but I always liked Phu Bai I don't really know why,
16 it just, there was a lot of people there. It was like a small city.

17 NS: Mm-hmm.

18 CS: Bunkers and stuff everywhere and people all over the place and we were
19 basically waiting for transportation and orders to move north to Dong Ha.

20 NS: Mm-hmm.

21 CS: Which is like, I don't know, twenty-five miles south of the DMZ, Ben Hai
22 River and all that.

23 NS: Right.

24 CS: A lot of people, lot of good food, actually had bunks for us to sleep on which
25 is amazing. And I was stunned by, I guess, the growth of the air base there and the
26 facilities there because I thought, in my mind, this would be a campout somewhere and
27 you'd be laying on the ground and sleeping in the bushes or whatever, you know. That
28 kind of stuff, but it was all—they actually had shacks. We had racks. We had sandbags
29 around the sleeping quarters. About the third night we got hit with mortars, excuse me,
30 and a couple of rockets, too, I think.

31 NS: Oh, wow.

1 CS: And, I don't know if you ever saw *Full Metal Jacket*?
2 NS: Yes.
3 CS: When they were running from those huts that they were in to go take
4 positions.
5 NS: Mm-hmm.
6 CS: Against the enemy infiltrators and whatnot. That was very similar to Phu Bai.
7 NS: Oh.
8 CS: When I see that, and I've seen that movie a few times, I could take all the
9 Vietnam movies, not just to have it, but it reminded me a lot of Phu Bai. And when we
10 got hit that night, I was so tired because we hadn't slept too well. It was very warm and
11 sticky and whatnot. All the other guys took off and they yelled at me come on and I just
12 laid there in bed and said, "I'm just going to sleep. I'm not going to worry about this."
13 But that was the first dumb thing I did, for sure. Because the rockets and mortars are very
14 non-discriminatory. They don't care who you are, they are going to take you out if they
15 get too close.
16 NS: Right.
17 CS: I just lay in bed and went back to sleep. I was exhausted, just totally
18 exhausted. I couldn't, I couldn't get enough concern to protect myself, if you can imagine
19 that. That's how tired you are.
20 NS: Yeah. So your, your first reaction to your first enemy combat was, "I'm
21 going to roll over and go back to bed?"
22 CS: Yeah, the heck with this, I'm going to sleep.
23 NS: Yeah.
24 CS: They can't be interrupting my sleep. Who do they think they are? These
25 people are crazy over here.
26 NS: Don't they know I'm trying to sleep?
27 CS: Yeah, what's the matter with you?
28 NS: That's awesome. Well, Mr. Sawyer, we've been talking a little over an hour
29 and we are kind of at a, a stopping point before we really get into your, your tour. How
30 about we go ahead and take a break for today and pick this up next time?
31 CS: Okay, that'd be wonderful.

1 NS: Okay, let me go ahead and say that this will end my first session with my
2 interview with Mr. Chuck Sawyer.

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Interview with Chuck Sawyer

Session [2] of [4]

Date: June 12, 2009

2 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Mr.
3 Chuck Sawyer. Today is 12 June 2009. I am in Lubbock, Texas, and Mr. Sawyer is
4 joining us from his home in Phoenix, Arizona. Mr. Sawyer, when you and Natalie
5 Swindle left off in the interview she had you at Phu Bai and you just described a mortar
6 attack, after you'd only been in-country for about two or three days, I believe it was.
7 Now, how long were you in Phu Bai before you moved out to the rest of your unit?
8 You're with the 1st of the 9th Marines, correct?

9 Chuck Sawyer: That's correct. We were there for, I'd say, about a week and then
10 we trucked on up to Dong Ha.

11 KC: Mm-hmm. How many of you went up there to Dong Ha?

12 CS: Well, one night it just got obliterated, literally, at The Street without Joy and
13 we grew our replacements and there was a bunch of us. I would say there was probably
14 two or three truck loads so that would be around thirty people.

15 KC: Wow.

16 CS: At least. We had a nice trip. It wasn't eventful, but we were quite nervous as
17 you'd quite imagine being new and not knowing what you'd expect. And Vietnam has a
18 tendency to, when you least expect it, open up in your face kind of a thing. We, we were
19 pretty nervous.

20 KC: Well, can you go into some detail about that? I mean, you mentioned there
21 were maybe thirty others of you in these two trucks and, and that you were nervous about
22 this. Like you say, training can only take you so far. What sort of things are you thinking
23 about? What sort of things are, are bothering you about this experience?

24 CS: Well, one thing that always caught my eye was anybody moving fast away
25 from us. Always made me wonder: "What was that about?" Then, of course, we heard the
26 stories of the mines in the road. Which, I think we had a jeep or something out in front,
27 but they don't detect mines or anything just like the young men today are going through
28 in Iraq. It's on you before you know it and then you're usually in a world of hurt. We

1 were in six-bys, which are big trucks that they've had since World War II that the Army
2 and the Marines have had. And we were looking out at every possible port degree, if you
3 will, to see somebody pop up and shoot at us or to hear a mortar or two pop off in the
4 distance and knowing it was going to come in on the truck. We were also stunned by the
5 beauty of the country. Let me say that, too. It's a gorgeous country. It's hot and sticky
6 and all that, but it's very pretty and green and rolling green hills and mountains here,
7 there, and the sea, beautiful beaches, mountains are, are pretty. You get a great view of
8 everything from on top. The traveling down the roads kind of, later on made me think
9 back to that day. Because most of the time, when you get up and, deep into I Corps,
10 northern portion of South Vietnam, you, you had a tendency of realizing you were going
11 to get ambushed, it was just a matter of when. Not if, just when. So we were, everybody
12 had their finger on the trigger. If somebody would have jumped up and just pointed a
13 finger at us, we would have probably shot him. And we were all new guys. We didn't
14 know what to expect.

15 KC: Sure. At this point had anyone talked to you? You've been in-country about a
16 week. Had anyone talked to you about the kinds of things to expect? Or did anyone warn
17 you about it, or did any of the people who were in-country say anything to you about how
18 to behave or what sort of things to expect to see?

19 CS: Well, the, the veterans who were in Phu Bai really didn't want anything to do
20 with new guys. One of the reasons was new guys usually were the first ones to get shot or
21 killed. And the other thing was to insulate themselves from any kind of friendship or if
22 something happened to you, you know, it would make it more difficult emotionally for
23 them. They did tell us to watch out for booby traps, watch out for mines in the road,
24 watch out for people that run away or reach down quickly to the ground to grab
25 something because they usually are going to pull up a grenade or a rifle or something
26 and, you know, shoot you. I don't think it was any different when I was kind of like a
27 senior guy. I, I didn't hang around with new guys. We, we just didn't. They were, there
28 was no formal anything from the Marines as to—they gave us a piece of paper that
29 basically told us to say hi, goodbye, and raise your hands, and show me your ID card and
30 stuff like this in Vietnamese. But other than that, the language barrier, the customs, the

1 socioeconomics, everything was for us to figure out on our own. That made it pretty
2 difficult, you know. The orient's a different world, it really is.

3 KC: Right. Well, it certainly would have been a very, very different world from
4 growing up out in Lubbock, Texas.

5 CS: Absolutely.

6 KC: To go into, to Vietnam, obviously.

7 CS: Yeah.

8 KC: What sort of things struck you as being the most different or the things you
9 had most difficulty with? Early in-country, that is.

10 CS: You know, most of the time people I met all over Texas were friendly folks,
11 unless you were competing in sports against somebody. And there was still friendly, but
12 very competitive. The oriental people are kind of quiet and to themselves. They don't
13 really socialize openly with people from other countries. Especially what the term you'll
14 hear a lot from people, our people, is round eyes. They don't really care for us that much,
15 or they didn't at the time and rightly so. We are tearing up their country. The North
16 Vietnamese are tearing up their country and really all the people want to do is just live,
17 raise their life, raise their kids, and try to live a happy life. And pretty much like most
18 Americans do in this country. You know, just want to live, don't want to have to fight
19 every day or duck or hide and fear for your family or yourself.

20 KC: Do you think you realized that at the time or was this something you came
21 across later on as you thought about it?

22 CS: More later on than not because at first, I honestly openly didn't trust any of
23 them. I was kind of advised that early on be careful because even the babies will walk up
24 with grenades, which I didn't believe 'til I saw something like that and that was mentally
25 very disturbing. You know, because we think of human life, especially babies. Very
26 special and yet, over there it was to put two, or three, or four Marines or GIs, or Navy or
27 whoever out of business. And it was a war of attrition which we found out that, basically
28 Americans don't like that, so that's one of the problems with Iraq right now and
29 Afghanistan.

30 KC: Well, you're making this, this trip up north. You are a new guy. Everyone
31 around you is a new guy. You've mentioned that you, you already have probably for a

1 sense of protection, kind of alienating yourself on purpose from the local population. And
2 other Marines are alienating you because you are a new guy. What was it like being a
3 new guy trying to fit into this unit when you finally got up to Dong Ha?

4 CS: Well, it's kind of like you take a trip all by yourself. You try to, all the new
5 guys stay together. So we, we all knew each other and all that but, other than that you're
6 pretty much on your own. We were, I was particularly fascinated by the countryside, the
7 beauty of it, but at the same time I was scared to death because what I've heard, the
8 horror stories I heard in training back at Camp Pendleton was, you know, they would
9 come up out of nowhere and there would be thousands of them. You really had to have
10 your ducks together to live through something like that and I thought, "Well, I'd probably
11 won't make this," you know. This, this is not going to be a great thing for me so—

12 KC: So you were thinking about, as soon as you got there, possibly not even
13 making it through.

14 CS: Yeah, I did. I, I had to consider that. I mean that was a realistic option. I
15 didn't, you know, I had no intention of going out of my way to get myself killed or
16 anything, but—

17 KC: Of course.

18 CS: I realized the possibility this was better than 50/50. Our tactics were terrible.
19 We didn't take the offensive in my mind enough to, to scare anybody much less than the
20 North Vietnamese who—if he had taught the most Marines other than the fact of,
21 probably tell you they hate them, they also respect them. They were very organized and
22 hard fighters and would die and fight 'til the last man. And I think too many Americans
23 even today see too many movies and they think, "Well, that's the way it is." No, that's
24 not the way it is. So it, it was a difficult situation. I told Natalie I really had kind of no
25 choice in this matter. Number one, I was out here in Arizona, going to Arizona State and
26 I just thought I wasn't going anywhere, wasn't doing anything with my life. I was reading
27 the paper every day and they were giving detailed stories about the fighting going on in
28 Vietnam and I was a history major so I thought, "You know, it's time I kind of get off my
29 derriere and not just read history, but become part of it or actually directly involved with
30 it. And, of course, that also, that decision almost cost me my life, but I can look back now
31 and say that was a good decision.

1 KC: Sure, Sure. Tell me if you can remember, uh, once you get up to your unit,
2 what do you do? You find the commanding officer, you get your bunk, you're trying to
3 fit in. How did all that work?

4 CS: Well, we were assigned to a platoon. 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company, and then
5 from there broke down into a quad and I was in 3rd Squad. And everybody introduced
6 themselves and all that. And then other than the one, one guy who is still one of my
7 lifelong friends, Fred Smith, we were isolated from everybody else. The other new guys
8 were scattered all over the place. So we had an assignment to a platoon and a squad and
9 we felt, we started to feel like, you know, we were going to fit in and belong in and all
10 this stuff. The first night they put me on patrol they put me on point.

11 KC: Oh, wow.

12 CS: And I was—that's what I said. I said "Wow, I don't know where we're going,
13 nobody's shown me a map." You know, and basically the squad leader said, "You can
14 just go down this trail and I'll tell you to stop when we get where we want to be." And I
15 said, "It's dark." And when people talk about dark in Vietnam, especially in the jungle
16 and stuff is extremely dark. You can't see. You can put your hand and out like you can in
17 the rain in the monsoon and your hand disappears. And you put it out in front of you,
18 same thing in the dark. It's so dark you can't see diddly. And so I took point, when out,
19 and we set up an ambush and stayed there all night and came back. Nothing, nothing
20 happened, thank goodness. But I was pretty unnerved by that. I figured, "Okay, I guess
21 this is what we do so I better be ready 'cause I'm sure they'll ask me to do it again."

22 KC: Now, this was your first night in—

23 CS: No, it was actually about the third day that we were in Dong Ha.

24 KC: Okay.

25 CS: We had bunkers along the line and we stood watch all day. And then another
26 set of guys would come and take over night duty. And then we'd rack out and then we'd
27 get up in the morning and at zero dark thirty and go relieve them.

28 KC: Right.

29 CS: On the third day, though, after we got up, "Don't worry about the bunkers,
30 you're going on patrol tonight, so just kind of hang around and get loose and take it easy
31 and we'll be picking you up before sundown."

1 KC: How would you get loose? What sort of thing would you do?

2 CS: Well, we would, we would talk about this one friend of mine, **Aniam**
3 **Tickraise** from North Carolina. So we talk about home and family and just try to mainly
4 take yourself out of this area and what you're going to do and what that's all about and
5 school. We talked about school, and motorcycles and, you know, baseball, football,
6 anything else that gets your mind away from where you're at and what's going on.

7 KC: Sure. Why do you think they chose you to walk point that first time out?

8 CS: Well, they seemed to have this thing. A lot of people seem to have this
9 opinion of me. I'm not sure why that is. I guess part of it is my physical looks or
10 something. First of all, I'm short. I'm fairly stout and I'm short and I'm a pretty friendly
11 person. You know, openly friendly to people, I say "Hi" and stuff. And I guess they took
12 me for being easy. I heard other people say "No, I'm not going to do that." And they said
13 "Oh, okay." Well, I was kind of, my buddy calls me to this day "Just Blues Marine." I
14 was kind of gung ho so, you know, when they said, "We want you to walk point," I said
15 "Okay, fine." I didn't like it. I was scared to death. I didn't know what I was doing. It
16 would have been the prime time to get killed. That's, in fact, statistically new guys in the
17 first—what was it?—first four weeks and then old guys in the last four weeks or so, that's
18 when they get killed. The new guy because he doesn't know what he's doing, the older
19 guy because he's overconfident.

20 KC: Well, take me on this first patrol, if you can. Like you say, you're not
21 experienced with any of this. You're scared to death, you're certainly alienated,
22 uncomfortable, and you're doing something that you've never done before that's
23 incredibly dangerous. Can you take me through that first, that first patrol you went on?

24 CS: Well, I could probably close my eyes and see it, but I can't translate that to
25 you.

26 KC: Sure, sure.

27 CS: I wish I could. We locked and loaded, which, a lot of times this means you
28 load your weapon up and you put a round in the chamber which most of the times they
29 didn't want you to do inside the facility. Even when you stood guard duty, this for safety
30 purposes. We locked and loaded. The corporal came up to me and said, "You're going to
31 go down this trail. You got to go out the barbed wire a certain way." And he showed me

1 how to do that. “And just keep walking down the trail.” And I said, “Where are we
2 going?” He says, “I’ll tell you when we get there.” Which unnerved me as well because I
3 don’t know where this is. I don’t—Dong Ha, in the world of everything means nothing to
4 me. Although I lived in Japan and London, England, Dong Ha, Vietnam and the hills
5 thereof, you know, I didn’t know anything about it. So, I go off walking down this trail
6 and I’m taking it very, very slow. Trying to look, listen, pay attention. Every now and
7 then I would stop and get down and look and listen to the best of my ability and my
8 sense, like everybody else under those conditions, becomes quite keen. You can hear
9 crickets fifty yards away. And it can be unnerving because when they get quiet usually
10 there’s something going on. And I’ve heard that kind of stuff, you know. I’d hear noises
11 in the bushes and all this stuff. Never knowing what to expect with that so I would wait
12 and wait. Pretty soon the word would go up through the lines and people would be
13 whispering, “Lets go, let’s go.” And I’d go back and say, “No, not yet. There’s something
14 ahead of us.” So we would wait and I’d finally get up and go. By the time we got to the
15 sight and he finally told me we were going to set up an ambush here, I wasn’t a nervous
16 wreck, but I was very, very unhappy. Because it was extremely stressful. And, of course,
17 I didn’t appreciate that even though these guys did this to the new guys. Later on when I
18 became a squad leader I made sure the new guys never had point. I took away that option.
19 I said, “Nope, I’ll take point before they ever will because this is just plain suicide.” They
20 don’t know what they are doing.

21 KC: Right.

22 CS: So, we kind of cleaned that up pretty quick, but initially it was like going
23 through a grinder. I mean it was a real bugaroo.

24 KC: I would assume that while you are walking point here, especially—

25 CS: I can hardly hear you. I’m sorry.

26 KC: I’m sorry. I would assume that while you are walking point this first time,
27 you are focused, so focused on what you are trying to do that you don’t have a lot of time
28 to think about it, but once you stopped to set up the ambush did you have time to think
29 about what you’ve gone through and the emotions that you were experiencing?

30 CS: Sure did. It’s kind of like what Tom Cruise said in the movie *Top Gun*. You
31 don’t have time to think up there, you just got to do it. And that’s, that’s a pretty good

1 quote. I thought about it and I did a lot of praying and I was hoping I didn't have to take
2 point going back, but I did. He figured I knew the route. So I took it going back and of
3 course, my buddy, this Fred Smith I was telling you about, he was about four, five guys
4 behind me and he was feeling the same pressure I was. You know, we were friends even
5 though you didn't want to be friends with too many people because things happen so fast
6 then they were gone.

7 KC: Right.

8 CS: So he was nervous from where he was, in addition to where I was and what I
9 was going through he felt that, too. We got back and we talked about that a little bit. And
10 they said, "You know what, if you get hurt or anything, I'm going to thump him." I said
11 "Thump him? I expect you to kill him." We were kidding. We didn't do that, but, I mean,
12 that's what I said. And I always tried to add humor to things because life is stressful
13 anyway. You don't—and if you can't laugh at yourself sometimes then I think you better
14 get some psychological counseling.

15 KC: Sure. I agree.

16 CS: So I tried to make light of stuff and said, "Well, you know, they couldn't hit
17 me. I'm so short that they sure as heck would get you." Old Fred's about 6'4". He was
18 about 230 then and he's about 280 now, so he's a big boy.

19 KC: Right. Well, tell me about this ambush that you were on. This would be the
20 first ambush that you participated in. Do you remember how that was set up and what
21 your role was?

22 CS: Well, we had done ambushes at camp, Camp Pendleton as part of our training
23 to go overseas. So as to the ambush and the style and everything that wasn't anything
24 unique.

25 KC: Okay.

26 CS: For us, but this was not a training mission. This was the real McCoy. We're
27 out in what is commonly called now, "Bad Guy's Country" and they pretty much own it
28 at night. Our patrols were few and far between, but mine was just set up in a point
29 position right near the trail and waited for any kind of traffic to come down. I was
30 informed that as soon as I saw somebody, we were laying down so I would take my, let's
31 see, I think it was my left leg, and I would gently nudge the guy next to me. And that was

1 the signal, "Hey, somebody's coming." And he'd pass it all the way down. Everybody
2 would get the word and then I was told when they came within range, open fire. Well,
3 like I said it was so dark, range would be like four, five feet if, if you could see that far,
4 you know. And then you didn't know what you were shooting at. This bothered me
5 initially because what if it's a child coming down and they're picking up—and there were
6 kids. There were a lot of orphan kids around picking up some money or walking from A
7 to B. You know, what do you do about that? So, I didn't care for that at all because it
8 was, well, one reason I think that is later on when I was on an outpost, a listening post, a
9 Bengal tiger came into camp.

10 KC: Oh, wow.

11 CS: Yeah, if you would have seen the guy you would of said wow, too, 'cause he
12 was a big boy. And, of course, we had those silly, nonsense M-16s that jammed and
13 they're basically .22s. You could empty twenty rounds in him and he'd still be tearing
14 your head off. So, after, especially after the Bengal, I was pretty nervous about what's out
15 there. You know, supposedly now I heard there are elephants out there, there are Bengal
16 tigers, and of course, we knew about the snakes and all that stuff. So that wasn't an issue,
17 but this whole ambush thing was pretty nerve wracking and yet I usually instead of,
18 maybe blowing my cool I get mad at myself for not having enough common sense and
19 one not to realize is this just the way things are. I mean, you just have to live with it. You
20 don't have to like it, but you have to live with it. So make the best out of it and do what
21 you can and that's kind of what I tried to do.

22 KC: About how long did did your squad lay up in this ambush?

23 CS: We went out right before sundown and we got up before sunrise. So I'd say
24 ten to twelve hours, pretty close. We were out there all night.

25 KC: And you get back to Dong Ha. Tell me what you do when you get back. You
26 had your first experience walking a patrol, walking point nonetheless. You set up an
27 ambush, you make it back, again walking point, and you get back to Dong Ha. What do
28 you do?

29 CS: Well, the first thing they told us to do was clear our weapons. That means
30 drop your magazine, clear the round that's in the chamber. We did that and then we were
31 told to go get some rack time. So we went back to an area where at this point in time

1 there was, they had tents up. Which I found kind of amazing because that's like a major
2 convenience. When you're out in the weeds you don't have that. So we were told go back
3 and get some rack time, reason being quite obviously we were awake for twelve hours, at
4 least Fred and I were during the whole night. Well, I couldn't sleep. No way you could
5 sleep. So we were exhausted. We came back and I think we slept for, I don't know, five,
6 six hours or something then they told us, "Time to get on the bunkers and do your duty
7 again." So we went back to the bunkers. It was good to be able to lay down, but there was
8 helicopters in Dong Ha, there was artillery. That kind of stuff didn't shut down so you
9 could nap.

10 KC: Right.

11 CS: But we were so emotionally drained, I think, 'cause it probably a good, a
12 good word at this point we just crashed and went to sleep and anything could have
13 happened 'cause we would have been asleep. I mean we were just worn out. We, when
14 you wake up from something like that, you think that this was a dream and then you
15 realize where you are and you know it wasn't a dream and it actually happened. And you
16 also realize how am I going to make thirteen months of this? How am I going to do that?
17 This was, you know, very tough. Well, you become very callous about things. You look
18 at things a lot differently. You don't necessary give up hope for mankind or anything, but
19 you sure as heck saying, "Well, I could die tomorrow and that's the way it is." I think
20 that's one of the lessons, Kelly, that I learned in Vietnam and that is whenever the man
21 upstairs calls your number, you're going. You can be young or old or famous or poor or
22 rich or whatever and it doesn't matter, you're gone. And most Vietnam veterans pretty
23 much subscribe to that because we've seen it. Or somebody is three feet away from you
24 and next thing you look over there and there's nothing there. So it's a fatalistic kind of a
25 point of view, I guess, but for us we felt, especially in our twenties, that it was pretty
26 realistic.

27 KC: Sure. At a time when you're supposed to feel that your invincible you're
28 facing this real mortality.

29 CS: You learn quickly you're not.

30 KC: Yes, yes, indeed.

1 CS: And that's what the young men in Iraq and Afghanistan are going through,
2 too. They will come back and be the equivalent of a mature forty-year-old man at twenty-
3 two. Because they have seen so much death and destruction and hell, if you will, that
4 they're totally different from anybody else and their age and generation. And we were,
5 too. We felt when we came back like outcasts. I mean my friends, they wanted to have
6 political discussions about things and all that kind of jazz and I was, "You know, I'm
7 really not interested in that." And you know, I felt like they were in the world of theory
8 and I was in the world of reality and they are opposite ends of the spectrum. They don't
9 always come together in the middle. So for years with some of my friends we had been
10 kind of alienated because of Vietnam. My viewpoints and theirs and stuff. I respect their
11 opinions, but they didn't see what I saw and I can't relate to them. All they know is the
12 movies and the books. And that's fine. Not everybody should have to go through that, I
13 don't think. Certain people can handle it and some can't. I'm not saying I'm the best at
14 handling it, but I haven't done too bad so far.

15 KC: And, plus, like you've said before, you just have no choice. If it's—

16 CS: I'm sorry, what?

17 KC: Like you said before, it's something that you have no choice but to deal with.

18 CS: Well, you have no choice plus as I was, I forgot to say earlier, was as I
19 mentioned to Natalie, my father was career Air Force fighter pilot. He served in World
20 War II and Korea. And when I got orders to go to Vietnam he volunteered so I wouldn't
21 have to go because they only had one male member in-country at the time. And at that
22 point, I had already had some time there and I didn't want him to come and be a POW so
23 I said, "Just let me do this and that will be that." The reason I had no choice there was my
24 father, being career military and the fact that I had dropped out of college, I was going to
25 be drafted there was no two ways about it and I knew where that was going to lead me.
26 So I decided to go down and join the Marines and hopefully be in a better fighting unit
27 and have a better chance of coming out of this alive. And to, to be honest I think even
28 today if this was the case I'd probably do it again. I just believe in not necessarily naked
29 aggression, but when you commit to something, I think you have to stick to it no matter
30 what. I honestly don't think we did that with the South Vietnamese. I think we put our
31 tail between our legs and ran and I'm not saying stay there 'til the end of time any more

1 than Iraq, but we committed to those people and then we just left. And that's not only
2 shameful, but it's almost like those who died and suffered through that did it in vain.

3 KC: Well, tell me about this, you've come back, you've got some rack time. Do
4 you have any time to reflect on what you've seen, what you're going through? You're
5 thinking I've got thirteen more months of this, how am I going to get through? What sort
6 of things are you thinking about?

7 CS: I wonder where they are going to bury me.

8 KC: Wow.

9 CS: I asked for a dad and he just looked at me kind of funny. I said, "Well, I don't
10 know if I can do thirteen months of this stuff. If we do this every third day or second day
11 or whatever, I don't know how we are going to do it." We ended up spending a lot of
12 time together other than the time that I was on the hospital ship because I got wounded.
13 And if you had three days of sleep, or three days, excuse me, three hours of sleep in
14 seventy-two hours or three days, you were doing really well.

15 KC: Wow.

16 CS: So you'd become robotic. Not to the point where the adrenalin rush didn't
17 come in when things happened, but other than that you were like, literally like our name
18 "The Walking Dead," you were pretty robotic about "Okay, let's saddle up, let's go, and
19 let's get the map, let's look at this, let's do that," yada yada. All the stuff you had to do
20 you did and it was just kind of coming out at you and you didn't even know it. We were
21 concerned about making it home alive, in one piece. We were concerned about how in
22 the world are we going to win this if every once in a moon we go out and try to find them
23 and don't. How are we gonna, you know, how are we going to do anything worthwhile
24 here if this is all we do? Well, obviously, that changed when we went into big operations
25 and fought on like that because there was so many people involved. We had some
26 operations where there were literally three- to five- hundred people sweeping the areas
27 and stuff and you could see green specks like ants all over the earth. Going through areas
28 that were known to be, you know, hideouts, ammunition cache areas, and all kinds of
29 things and everything is being blown to bits in front of them. Say one hundred meters or
30 so out. It just was like a, almost like a strange dream. Sometimes you, like now, think
31 back on it and I wonder, "Did that really happen?" And then I will call my buddy Fred

1 and say “Hey, do you remember this?” “Yeah.” “Did this happen and that happen? Did
2 you do this or say that or whatever?” “Yeah, yeah.” He said, “Having your doubts again,
3 huh?” And I said, “Yeah, because it’s so Huerd you know?” Now we are talking a long
4 time now. And I understand more now, how the World War II vets feel about Normandy,
5 they went back, they can point out bushes and holes in the ground, where they were. I
6 could probably go to Vietnam and do the same thing.

7 KC: It’s such an intense time, I guess. You would have picked it up and left a
8 indelible imprint, I guess, in your memory.

9 CS: Well, do you know what an EPROM is?

10 KC: No, sir.

11 CS: You do?

12 KC: No.

13 CS: Oh, an EPROM is an erasable programmable read only memory.

14 KC: Okay.

15 CS: It’s a chip in a computer. Early on that’s what they used a lot of. That’s kind
16 of like what your brain is. You can burn things in it and it’ll stay there through all the
17 time your alive. And you can come back with flashes or memories or sounds or tastes or
18 whatever. So vivid that you think you’re there again. And a lot of people will call that
19 PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). I think that depends on how you react to whatever
20 it is. I traditionally, whenever I hear a chopper now, I look up. I always look up. I don’t
21 know why for sure because that was just what we did. They would usually, the choppers
22 would bring in ammo and food and stuff, water. At the same time, we knew when they
23 came, we were going to get mortared wherever we were so you would traditionally I
24 guess look up and listen for the tubes. That was a pretty normal event, too. Yet I still do it
25 today and I’ve been to many ASU (Arizona State University) football games where, if
26 you’re familiar with them, or at Tech, too, I think. They ring the bell at Tech, but they
27 shoot off canons and stuff, too. At Arizona State they’d shoot off mortars. And, of course,
28 they go up and do sparklies and all that stuff, but the first few times when I heard the tube
29 I got pretty nervous. One of the reasons for that is that’s how I got wounded. A mortar
30 came in and—

1 KC: Well, tell me about that. You were wounded very early on in your time in-
2 country, weren't you?

3 CS: Yes, I was. I got in-country on the first and on the twenty-seventh, local time
4 10:30, their time over there, PM.

5 KC: This was April 1967, right?

6 CS: That's correct.

7 KC: Was this, were you on a squad-sized patrol?

8 CS: We were on a company sweep through the hills just west of Quang Tri, and
9 not the province, the city, of Quang Tri. And our captain, who, to this day I still consider
10 an idiot, took us back three nights in a row to this same hilltop. Common sense tells you,
11 you don't do that. Because those positions are probably registered and, sure enough, the
12 third night they hit us. Now, they didn't do a ground attack, thank goodness, but they did
13 blow the dickens out of everything in sight, including me. It blew my foot, my right foot
14 apart, put some shrapnel in my head and then my left forearm and made me pretty mad. I
15 was in a lot of pain, but I was, I was madder at the whole story probably should have
16 never even transpired, but the man I was sharing a hole with, left his rifle back about ten
17 yards from the hole. And he was standing guard, if you will, without a weapon. And
18 when the mortars came, I was laying down on my flak jacket, my helmet, my hand on my
19 M-16, and the mortars came and I just ran to the hole. Well, I looked over at him and he
20 had no rifle. And I said, "Where's your rifle?" "Well, it's back there." I said, "What in
21 the hell are you thinking?" You know, and he, I figured out I could get out and get it. I
22 said, "Do you understand that sometimes they do the mortars? And while everybody's
23 ducking they come running up the hill? And the time you got up they are going to pump
24 you full of lead and you're going to be gone, bud." So I ran back, I get my rifle and I ran
25 back to get his and by the time I got to the hole the mortar came in and took me out of
26 action for about three months.

27 KC: Well, tell me about that if you can. You said this is a company-sized sweep,
28 you are, you're are moving up, what did you say? Was it west of Quang Tri city you say?

29 CS: Right, right.

30 KC: Okay. So it's a, it's a very, very large operation, probably one of the largest I
31 would assume you've been involved in up to this time.

1 CS: That's correct.

2 KC: And you say that your captain continues to take you to the same place.

3 CS: Right.

4 KC: You're sweeping the same area and are you digging in for the night there?

5 CS: We'd already dug in the first night and we went right back to the same holes,

6 which another thing you don't do 'cause you want to booby trap a couple holes. You can

7 blow up people quickly that way. And we wondered, "Why in the world is he doing

8 this?" Because he never left anybody behind for security purposes. And the hill stood out

9 like a sore thumb amongst the, these are rolling foothills, if you will. And it's like any

10 only rolling foothill around it, you have like creek areas and stuff. Easy to maneuver into

11 and set up an ambush or just wholesale slaughter, if you will, with mortars. Just sit there

12 and call in mortars all night. And it was just, to me it was one of the dumbest things I

13 think in almost my whole life that I've ever seen. And we were taught, as most people

14 are, officers are special people. They have all this knowledge and wisdom, they have all

15 this training. They understand, you know, tactics and strategy and all this stuff. You guys

16 just have to do the shooting. Well, it wasn't quite like that. And, of course, you have to

17 realize, too, I—for what this is worth and I'm not patting myself on the back—I had two

18 years of college, two, two and a half years of college. I'd seen the military in action with

19 my father. I'd noticed the things that happened. You know what they did and how they

20 worked together and how you would stress unity and this and that and the other. It was

21 rather stunning for me to see a Marine officer that really didn't know his rumpus from a

22 hole in the ground leading all these people out here, into God knows what. It was an hour

23 after we got hit before he had anybody return any fire. Because his statement later was,

24 we don't want them to know where we're at. Well, they knew where we were because

25 they hit us. You know, it was kind of an oxymoron for him to be a Marine grunt officer

26 or infantry officer, if you will, because he really wasn't suited for it. And I do thank God

27 tremendously for the fact that I've never seen him since because I have a feeling I might

28 just have a few words of wisdom for him.

29 KC: I bet so.

30 CS: Yeah, I think so.

1 KC: So you were back into this place for the third straight night and the—was it
2 VC or NVA?

3 CS: There was supposed to be a regiment of NVA out there and that's the reason
4 we went out in the force that we did because usually, if you went out with, say, seven
5 guys or a squad, roughly seven to nine to twelve, somewhere in there. They would count
6 that as thirty. If you went out with two hundred they'd have four hundred or six hundred.
7 If you went out with a thousand they'd come up with five or seven thousand. One night in
8 Con Thien, they had us surrounded with forty thousand NVA. We had four or five
9 hundred people there.

10 KC: Con Thien was a mess.

11 CS: But, you know the odds, they like to fight in numbers that were, you know,
12 strategically always in their favor. If it was one to one they generally wouldn't, wouldn't
13 fight it too long. That just didn't work out for them and in a war of attrition obviously
14 saw. We were—most everybody, I mean right down to the young kids that looked like
15 they were sixteen were saying, "Why are we here again?" You know, "Why don't we go
16 to a different place? What's the matter with him?" It was strange because about, you
17 know, I would surmise, two, three months later we were out in the field again with him
18 doing some other stupid things and the battalion commander who's a lieutenant colonel
19 had fought in Korea. He came down and literally chewed the captain out half the night.
20 And it pretty much told them in no uncertain terms, and I'll paraphrase here "If any of
21 these boys get wounded, if they even get a scratch, I'm going to come out here with a
22 forty-five and shoot you myself."

23 KC: Wow.

24 CS: Yeah, he was livid. Because this guy got people wounded, got them killed.
25 He'd done all kinds of nonsense stuff. Unfortunately for him he was a mess hall or
26 logistics, if you will, supply type person. But the Marine credo is everybody's in the
27 infantry first. So you get all that training first then you go off and specialize in your
28 MOS, whatever that may be. So, he really, he didn't have a chance from the get go and
29 yet he was in Vietnam so he had to get his ticket punched for infantry officer, company
30 commander and all that so he did.

1 KC: Okay, now, you say again, you're in this place for the third straight night and
2 the enemy, the NVA you believe it was—

3 CS: Yes.

4 KC: Opened fire. You're being hit with mortars. You said that it was, it was—
5 you were going for this guy's gun. Someone else's rifle, someone else's M-16.

6 CS: Right.

7 KC: When the mortar hit you. Tell me about that in as much detail as you can—or
8 as much detail as you care to, that you're comfortable with—about that, about that whole
9 scene. About being injured. You hadn't been in-country for a month yet and this happens
10 to you.

11 CS: That's correct.

12 KC: Can you take me through that?

13 CS: Yes, the sad thing I said about earlier about statistics is, you know what liars
14 figure and figures lie. But this one never seems to do either. The new guys consistently
15 get wounded or killed. That was a fact. The older guys, overconfident, they got killed.
16 That was a fact. This night when I went to go get, and I can't even remember the young
17 man's name—I actually I owe him my life because I was, you could say, crazy.
18 Temporarily totally insane, if you will. I was crawling out of the hole. I'd made it to the
19 hole before the mortar did. And I was crawling out and he was saying, "Where you
20 going? Where you going?" I said, "I'm gonna go kill those sons of guns." Pardon me if I
21 slip every now and then.

22 KC: It's okay. I believe you.

23 CS: I have a tendency to go to Marines in(??) pretty quick and I apologize.

24 KC: That's okay.

25 CS: But I'm going to go kill him. And, of course, I couldn't walk and I was
26 bleeding profusely. He grabbed me by my utilities and held on and wouldn't let me go.
27 And it's probably a good thing because what they were doing with the mortars were
28 walking them up and down the hill and then going side to side. Because they realized we
29 would ring the hill and, of course, the big cheese was always on top. So they'd walk it up
30 to the top and then they'd walk it down a little bit and go left and right, then they'd walk
31 it down left and right. A lot of times, as I said earlier, when I was talking to the young

1 men, when they do this, most people are going to be ducking even though it's on the
2 other side of the hill. You're going to be worried about, you know, shrapnel and
3 everything else. So while you're ducking, they're moving up on your position. And that
4 wasn't uncommon. That that happened many other times. So that's why I got a little
5 upset with him about, you know, where's your rifle, what the hell are you doing? What
6 are you thinking? You know, blah, blah, blah. But as I was running toward the hole, the
7 tube that had already popped, the mortar tube. And I heard the round coming in. And I
8 know it was going to be close. I was fortunate to get to the hole because the mortar round
9 landed sixteen inches from the hole. If I had not made the hole, it would have killed me.
10 There's no question about it. And the fact that I made the hole still messed me up pretty
11 good. I couldn't get my whole body in the hole. We didn't dig real deep because at night
12 the sound carries so much. So he was lying at the bottom of the hole. This guy was a
13 wreck. Let's just put it that way. He would have no way to defend himself. He had my
14 rifle, but he's lying in the bottom of the hole. If you remember some movies, you'd
15 probably saw VC or NVA or whatever they portrayed them as, came up and shot people
16 in holes. And bayoneted them and all that. But that actually happened. That wasn't just
17 the movies. That was really what happened, and what does happen. So I got in the hole
18 and I got hit and of course there was blood all over the place and he thought he was hit
19 because he could feel the warm blood and I guess he thought he was in pain. I'm lying on
20 top of him, of course, and I crashed in. I had to dive for the hole to get there. And his rifle
21 was blown to bits.

22 KC: The one that you brought with you?

23 CS: Pardon me?

24 KC: The one that you were bringing with you?

25 CS: Right, the one I was bringing with me. I set it near the edge of the hole as I
26 dove in. You know, I kind of dropped it near the edge. The mortar took it completely out.
27 It was just pieces here and there. And so it was a difficult thing, but I played a little
28 football at Monterey High School there in Lubbock. Getting to a point in time, for
29 blocking or tackling or whatever was, was a thing you trained on all the time. I guess it's
30 a good thing because I saw the point, I knew I had to get there in a certain amount of time

1 'cause I could hear the mortar whistling in and I said, "Okay, let's go." And I took off at
2 a gallop and, you know. The horse and I made it until we got to the hole anyway.

3 KC: Well, what goes through your mind when you realize you've been hit? You
4 say you've been hit in the head, you've obviously been hit in the, in the foot. I believe it
5 was your right foot you said?

6 CS: Yeah, my right foot.

7 KC: What's going through your mind? You know, you've been hit by a mortar;
8 you've been in-country for a month. What's going through your mind?

9 CS: Well, from my knee down I couldn't feel my foot and that concerned me a lot
10 because I always loved to run. The other thing was I had a concussion. I couldn't really
11 hear because of the explosions that close. My arm was minimal damage. My helmet was
12 blown off my head. I had a helmet on, thank goodness. I still have to this day, shrapnel in
13 my head.

14 KC: Wow.

15 CS: Well, I was asking the doctor about that and this is, this is, I like to tell this
16 story. This is funny. I said, "What about the shrapnel in my head? Aren't you going to get
17 it out or something?" He says, "Oh, no, It'll fall out someday." I said, "What do you
18 mean it will fall out?" He said, "You'll be combing your hair and it'll fall out." I said,
19 "My hair?" He said, "No, no the shrapnel." Well, it never really has and there's a certain
20 place, if I push a little bit on top of my hair, which I'm doing right now, I can get a
21 headache from it.

22 KC: Oh, wow.

23 CS: Yeah, so it, it's moving around in there and it's—you know a lot of people
24 want to have tattoos today and souvenirs and this and that. I have scars and whatnot from
25 (unintelligible) in I feel like so I'm satisfied with what I have.

26 KC: You certainly don't want any more.

27 CS: Well, I don't need them, no.

28 KC: All right. You've been hit. How long is it before they get someone in to—I
29 assume they medevac'ed you out. Is that right?

30 CS: No, they didn't do that. No, the Navy corpsman came over. By the way, if
31 anybody says anything bad about Navy corpsmen, please slap them for me will you?

1 KC: I'll be sure to.

2 CS: These guys are marvelous people. Under very strenuous situations. Not just
3 emotionally because you see people in pieces, but physically because they always expose
4 themselves to everything. And they do this with no desire for medals and notoriety or
5 anything else. He came over and the first thing he did was cut my boots and stuff off
6 because it was already blown to bits, too. What was left he cut it all off. He, he looked at
7 the wound, he wrapped it up, he stopped the bleeding and did all that which he was
8 supposed to do. He gave me a shot of morphine and said, "Okay, you just stay in this
9 hole." And he told the other guy, he said, "You get out of here. You go to another hole.
10 This is his and he's going to stay here." And I said, "Give me a rifle." He said, "You
11 don't need a rifle." I said, "Yeah, I do. 'Cause if they come back or come up the hill, I'm
12 not going to be lying here and just being fish bait for them. We aren't doing that." So
13 they gave me a rifle and, of course, I was medicated and that's one reason they didn't
14 want to give me a rifle.

15 KC: Sure.

16 CS: Anyway, so I was, I spent pretty much the rest of the night in the hole. They
17 were afraid to call in choppers because they felt the mortar guys were still out there
18 somewhere. And then, of course, they would mortar the choppers and that would be very
19 devastating for the crew and everybody to see that and, you know, all of that. And I had
20 no problem with that because I was kind of starting to drift a bit with the morphine. I was
21 still—my foot was still on fire. I could feel the heat, but I couldn't feel my toes or
22 anything, or anything from my knee down. I didn't even want to look at it. I was pretty
23 concerned about it. The corpsman came over about every hour or so and checked on me.
24 He gave me another shot of morphine. These are little syringe tubes they carry under their
25 little belts.

26 KC: Right.

27 CS: And you know, "How are you doing?" This and that. And I told them "Well,
28 it's—I guess the morphine is starting to kick in. It doesn't hurt quite as bad although it's
29 still, it's just burning up down there." He said, "Well, there's metal in there and it's hot."
30 I said "Yeah, I understand that, but don't we have any ice?" Which, you don't have ice in
31 the jungle.

1 KC: Of course not.

2 CS: So I lay there for a while and he came over one more time. I don't know what
3 time it was. It had started to rain. And he—the first thing he did was give me one more
4 shot of morphine and that really caused me to float. I mean literally float. I felt like I was
5 having an out-of-the-body experience. And he took the poncho and covered my face. And
6 the first thing I thought was, when you do that, they're dead. I sure don't feel like I'm
7 dead. You know, I reached over, grabbed myself, I pinched. I'm not dead, I don't think. I
8 don't know what that is, but I don't think I'm dead. So I lay there and it rained and rained
9 and rained. And then I eventually just passed out. Somebody came in the morning, took
10 the poncho off my face and I looked up at them and was hoping they were on the same
11 team. And they were, the chopper was coming from Da Nang. They got me out of the
12 hole and stuff. I looked around and saw all the blood and all that and I said, "Wow, what
13 a mess." I turned my body and I said, "I'm sorry for leaving such a mess." He said,
14 "Don't worry about that." So fortunately the captain never went back to that spot with
15 everybody else. The point was made I guess. But the embarrassing thing for me was there
16 was about anywhere from about one hundred and fifty to two hundred guys on that hill
17 and I was the only one wounded.

18 KC: You were the only one that was hit. I was going to ask you.

19 CS: Only one wounded. I never, to this day I can't really explain it. Although I
20 will tell you this, that wound saved me from going through with the other guys which I
21 would have preferred to do, honestly. A whole bunch of ambushes and firefights, and
22 battles, and whatnot where many, many, many more guys got hurt and killed.

23 KC: I noticed that after reading through your file they, the 1st of the 9th, A, B, C,
24 and D companies were all involved in just an intense battle in early July, part of
25 Operation Buffalo.

26 CS: Yes, that's right.

27 KC: And I saw you were gone at this time.

28 CS: That's right. And that was a very—I don't know if you've read that book, but
29 I can't, I can't read the book too long because I get mad, I get a little nervous, I get upset,
30 basically.

31 KC: Now, which book is this?

1 CS: Pardon me?

2 KC: Which book is this?

3 CS: It's called *Operation Buffalo*.

4 KC: Oh. Okay. I have not read that one.

5 CS: Okay. It's a, you know, if you're into the history of that kind of thing. It's a
6 good book. It's from everybody that I know, especially those guys in Bravo Company
7 who were in it. And we had a reunion last August in San Antonio. It's very factual.

8 KC: Mm-hmm. Keith Nolan, I believe is the author of that.

9 CS: There's been no—pardon me?

10 KC: I believe Keith Nolan was the author of that book.

11 CS: Yes, he is. And unfortunately, he, I heard he just passed.

12 KC: Yes.

13 CS: Which is a shame. But it was very detailed. There was no dramatic license
14 with a lot of it. He took interviews from everybody he could find that was involved, that
15 lived through it. And they were coming aboard the—I was on the USS *Sanctuary* a naval
16 hospital ship off the coast. And they were coming aboard by the droves. And we had
17 people who came in and would sit up in the middle of the night and scream and cry and
18 basically freak out, if you will, from their wounds and also from their memories kicking
19 back in. And then of course we would stand guard around their racks. We told them,
20 “Nobody's going to bother you.” And they would try to go back to sleep, but they
21 couldn't sleep. They had too much stuff going on in their head. Doctors would then come
22 over and sedate them and nurses and stuff. They would spend a better part of a week
23 sedated to try to help them try to get over this. The psychological impact, more than even
24 the wounds. The North Vietnamese were unbeknown sometimes to American press, very
25 brutal. They didn't just ban at you. If you were wounded in a lane there in the weeds, or
26 on a trail, or whatever, they wouldn't just ban at you. They would carve you up, they'd
27 put a grenade onto you and tie you up onto you and pull you off the grenade so it'd go off
28 and blow you up. They'd do all kinds of things. So, while I was on the ship I was very
29 upset because my, my buddies were out there getting hurt. And I'm here on this ship in
30 the lap of luxury, in essence, with clean sheets and three meals a day and nurses to look at
31 and all that. I was waiting to get back. I couldn't wait to get back, honestly.

1 KC: Well, describe for me—

2 CS: The Navy doctors thought we were crazy. You know, why do you want to go
3 back to that? What, what's a matter with you? And you tell them, "Hey, I got friends out
4 there." "Well, you think you could make a difference?" And I said, "Well, we'll do
5 everything we can, but if we go, we all go together. I don't want to hear stories about this
6 guy and that guy getting killed while I'm here. I can't handle that." So it was difficult, to
7 say the least. To leave the guys on the chopper that morning, out in the middle of
8 nowhere and realized I might never see them again.

9 KC: Describe for me, other than what you've already told me, you're experiences
10 on the *Sanctuary*. When you got there, what was the treatment like, what were the
11 facilities like, how were you treated?

12 CS: Well, this is one time you'll hear other than Marines talk about Navy
13 corpsmen that the Navy did a superb job. We were treated with five-star class hotel
14 reservations. Dinners, lunches, and breakfasts were served if you were not ambulatory.
15 They were just great people. If anybody probably suffers from PTSD, I'm sure it has to
16 be doctors and nurses. Especially those who do surgery every day, all day. You see the
17 worst of manhood. And man's inhumanity to man. You see young boys who are older
18 men in time because of their experiences, and yet, you'll have to heal them in an effort to
19 make them productive members of society because they've got to go home because their
20 wounds are so bad. I just, well, I'll tell you. Like I've told you before, I try to make light
21 of things a lot of times. When I got off the chopper, four Navy corpsmen carried me out
22 on a stretcher. And they laid us down and there was a light mist going on. I had a sheet
23 over me and I had an IV bag I was supposed to hold and keep it above my body. So you
24 stopped and one corpsman came over to me and said, "You're going to find this kind of
25 funny, but I have to ask you this question." I said, "Okay." "Do you have any grenades,
26 pyrotechnics, or any ammunition or anything with you?" And I found this is a prime time
27 for a joke. So I whipped the sheets off and they'd cut all my clothing off, I had nothing on.
28 I said, "Hell, doc, I don't even have any clothes." And he laughed and everybody laughed
29 and they covered me back up and said, "He's okay, take him inside." They had assigned,
30 I made friends on that ship with a lot of nice people, therapy people, Navy corpsmen on
31 there, nurses, doctors. They sent me a yearbook, it was the year after I was out there, but

1 they sent me the yearbook and there's a sign on the ship I remember seeing when we
2 were coming in on the choppers. It says, "You find them, we bind them." And that was
3 24/7, 365, it didn't matter. All hours of the day and night. I have the, probably the utmost
4 respect for those doctors and the nurses and the corpsmen. Great people.

5 KC: What was the extent of your injury did you find out?

6 CS: I couldn't walk on my foot. It had been pretty much ripped in half. Several
7 pieces of shrapnel went into the foot. Couple pieces in the arm and they made a bigger
8 scar than what it was really worth. I guess they wanted me to have sewn there. They X-
9 rayed my head and they found more shrapnel. Any time you have shrapnel wounds they,
10 they look and X-ray your whole body because that stuff goes like buckshot. So they said,
11 "Your biggest problem is your foot," and I said, "Hmm, how many years of college did
12 you have for that one?" Sometimes they didn't like my humor. They were a little
13 sarcastic. Anyway, so the foot was pretty well torn up. And I didn't see it 'til probably the
14 second day or something when they unwrapped it to change the bandages. And they put
15 on me a hydrogen peroxide. I don't know if they knew this or not at the time, but that
16 kills cells. It actually kills germs and all that, too. So where most people have their arch
17 of their foot, I have an indented arch. It started out as a quarter sized hole in the middle of
18 my foot and now it's down to about a dime. But I have a scar across the whole bottom of
19 my foot and off to the right side and the left where it entered, where the shrapnel entered.
20 The doctor, Doctor Richardson, told me that when I had finally walked across the room
21 for the first time without crutches or anything he said, "You know, you made me lose
22 money today." I said, "How's that?" He said, "I bet you weren't going to walk again."

23 KC: Wow.

24 CS: So I said, "Thank you for telling me now versus sooner." So I had that fear
25 anyway. Crutches and wheelchairs and stuff, they bother me. I don't like them. I've since
26 been in one again because I had a motorcycle wreck, but I don't like them. I don't know
27 what that is for sure other than I think your ability to run and walk and do what you want
28 to do. It really curtails your activities. I had the upmost sympathy and respect for people
29 who are in them on a permanent basis. So the injury itself, while it bothered me I figured
30 out, well, I'm young, I'll get over this. I'm not invincible obviously, but I'll get over this.
31 I'm gonna, I'm gonna be okay and I'm going to work with that in mind as a goal. I have

1 to get that out there to those guys, I have to do that. Realizing actually somewhere in the
2 back of my mind, yeah, probably I might die, but that's maybe the way it's supposed to
3 be anyway. So I'll just take that chance.

4 KC: What was your routine, your daily routine like while you were on the
5 *Sanctuary*?

6 CS: Well, the first thirty days I was in the rack. They wouldn't let me get out of
7 the rack other than to go to the bathroom. And for a while they didn't do that, either. I
8 slept in every, god six hours or something. They'd come and give me a shot for an
9 infection. It wasn't penicillin, it was, and I don't know if it was streptomycin or
10 something else. He gave me a shot. "Wake up, wake up!" and I said, "What, what?" and I
11 said, "For what?" "Roll over. I've got to give you a shot." So you didn't sleep good. And
12 my, my rumpus felt like a pin cushion. They would bring you, I think, thirty days there I
13 ate jello. That's all they would give me was Jello.

14 KC: Wow.

15 CS: I had Jello. When you go to Vietnam the first couple of days you had
16 diarrhea. I mean it's constant. You lose ten to fifteen pounds within a week. And
17 obviously that would make you weak as to your overall strength and, of course, that
18 works on your psyche, too. So when I got on the ship I was already pretty thin from
19 humping up and down the hills and stuff. And then the Jello, well, it obviously kept me
20 alive. I had IVs going, too, of course. It wasn't like a hamburger or some steak or even
21 some C-rats. You know, it was kind of "We're having strawberry today." Oh, goody.
22 "We're having lime today." Oh, goody. "Oh, you get lemon today." Oh, wow! It was a
23 very easy routine compared to everything else. Very simple. I wasn't under any stress
24 really other than the guys that they were bringing in. The ward was full and then halfway
25 empty out and then it would get full again and you knew that all hell was going on back
26 on the land.

27 KC: About how long was it before you started to see guys from your unit or even
28 from your company come into the *Sanctuary*?

29 CS: I didn't actually see—I saw Bravo Company. I didn't see Charlie Company
30 guys. The Navy had another ship out there call the *Repose*. Some of them I was told went
31 to that. Others went to, like there was a big hospital in Da Nang. They went to the Da

1 Nang hospital. Some of them obviously didn't go anywhere other than home in a body
2 bag. I was very fortunate, I guess, that I didn't see anybody I knew. I didn't really want
3 to. That scared me. I knew I would have even stronger feelings than what I already had. I
4 when I finally got off that ship they took us into port and they—and I got a flight to, let's
5 see, I think I went to Dong Ha and then from Dong Ha to Quang Tinh. I was more than
6 ready to fight the NVA. I wanted to redeem myself. I wanted to pay them back for what
7 they've done to my friends. I was very vindictive. I was not a good person.

8 KC: Now, you were on the, on the hospital ship, on the *Sanctuary* until, when was
9 it, July of '67. Is that right?

10 CS: That's right. I got wounded on April the twenty-seventh. I got off July
11 twenty-seventh.

12 KC: Okay, so you were there a considerable amount of time.

13 CS: Three months.

14 KC: Three months. So the doctors obviously were dealing with a very, very
15 serious wound if you were there for that long.

16 CS: Well, he, as I mentioned, he'd advised me I lost him some money. He made a
17 bet that I wouldn't walk again. It hurt when I walked. It was painful, but I knew if I didn't
18 show him I could walk across a room in combat boots that I wasn't gonna go back. I
19 didn't want to sit behind a typewriter in Da Nang. I didn't want to do any of that. I
20 wanted to go back to the bush with my buddies and do whatever we had to do.

21 KC: Was there any possibility that you would have gone home as a result of these
22 wounds?

23 CS: I was too early in my tour. I was advised that if I didn't—I had to finish my
24 tour. So they would put me in some position somewhere. I'd have to stay in-country for
25 another ten months regardless. And I had no heartburn to that. I knew that was, you
26 know, part of the job so—

27 KC: Right.

28 CS: They just, I didn't really want to do anything else. I wanted to go back with
29 the guys for one night.

30 KC: When you see the guys—

31 CS: We are a pretty solid group. Even today.

1 KC: When you see the guys from 1/9 coming aboard the *Sanctuary*, what sort of
2 things were they telling you about the action? Of course, the ones who are able to
3 communicate with you. What are they telling you about what's going on out there?

4 CS: Well, this is, to me this is kind of a sad part. Whenever you get into an
5 atrocity I'm not saying war is a gentleman's endeavor, because it isn't. But I will say that
6 atrocities are not needed. Psychological warfare is part of atrocities, I guess. And they
7 told us some horror stories about that. They told us how, once again, leadership had
8 failed. Took them out in their positions. They weren't prepared to defend anything.
9 Strong amount lied to them, did all kinds of things. Most of which, those of us who had
10 been there for awhile on the ship, we were already smoking anyway, just playing the fire.
11 You know, we just got madder. We would go outside and lean over the rail and talk and
12 you know. You're a young man, it's almost as if you're intoxicated, you're talking about
13 roboto and I'm going to do this, that, and the other and yada, yada, yada. Not really
14 knowing that, you know, there's somebody out there that's got a bullet with your name
15 on it. Or got a mortar or an artillery round, or whatever, bayonet. You're going to have to
16 face that eventually. One way or another. So we talked a lot, this and that. And we knew
17 deep down inside we had to go back and do something about this. We could not allow
18 this to go on. So what the Marines did, I think would be what anybody did. I'm told the
19 Army did it, too. Yet they did an atrocity on our troops and we returned the favor. And
20 we made it very clear that if you want to play like this, we'll play like this. This is not
21 what we want, but we damn sure will do it. In actuality, as I'm sure you know from
22 listening to people talk about this, war is a very unpleasant environment. And when you
23 do the atrocities it gets nastier. Just as nasty as you can have a nightmare with. And they
24 did a lot of things that the press to this day still does not know. Nor would they probably
25 believe.

26 KC: You're talking about the North Vietnamese?

27 CS: Yes. Yes, I am.

28 KC: What sort of things are you—

29 CS: VC would hardly fight us, Craig, and it just, uh they would ambush you or
30 snipe at you or where we were in I Corps it was mostly—I don't know if you know this,
31 but Ho Chi Minh had been assigned the 124th B Division to shadow 1/9, and kill them,

1 everybody. And that was their only mission. So we had people following us anywhere
2 and everywhere we went. We had the highest battle league battle casualties and injuries
3 of any unit in the history of the Marine Corps. We also had the highest kill ratio because
4 we were always confronting them. So we took a lot and we gave a lot, but the VC were
5 kind of like ARVNs (Army of the Republic of Vietnam), you know, they'd be around for
6 a little bit, raise a little cane with you, and then they'd take off. We had too much
7 firepower. And that's one reason why it doesn't make sense. How could you lose a war
8 like that? Well, in my mind I don't think we lost it. We weren't allowed to fight it. I'm
9 not in favor of war, please don't misinterpret my—

10 KC: Oh, no, certainly.

11 CS: If you're going to have to do it, then do it to win, get it over with and be
12 done.

13 KC: Well, I think that's a good time for us to stop for today. Mr. Sawyer.

14 CS: Okay.

15

16

Interview with Chuck Sawyer
Session [3] of [4]
Date: July 17, 2009

1

2 KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Mr. Chuck
3 Sawyer. Today is 17 July 2009. I am in Lubbock, Texas, and Mr. Sawyer is joining us by
4 telephone from Phoenix, Arizona. Mr. Sawyer, a moment ago you were talking about
5 something you wanted to be sure to get on the record which was this mortar attack that
6 you witnessed early in-country at Phu Bai. So why don't you take me through that, if you
7 would please.

8 CS: Okay. We had been transported from Da Nang after we landed. A day later or
9 so to Phu Bai which is about fifty miles north of Da Nang. And they had barracks there
10 for us and barracks in sense of plywood, sheets on the floor and halfway up the walls and
11 then sandbags up to those plywood sheets and a tent over the top. Now, Phu Bai used to
12 get a lot of rain. Fortunately for us, there was a little rain, but not much. But when we got
13 inside these barracks, these sleeping quarters, we'd all been up for pretty much for a long
14 time, from the flight from Okinawa to Da Nang and then pretty much that whole next
15 night and everything standing guard. So we get to Phu Bai to these barracks and we
16 pretty much died on the scene. We just went to sleep. And they had a, a huge mortar and
17 rocket attack come in. I don't know if that was the North Vietnamese way of saying
18 welcome to the country or what, but it wasn't very nice. But we were, most of us so tired
19 that we, I personally just, I laid in bed. I said, "The heck with this I don't care what
20 they're going to do. I'm going to get some sleep." 'Cause I was exhausted beyond the
21 ability to even think straight. I was just totally worn out. I was a pretty young man. I was
22 like twenty-two at the time, but this was kind of a rude awakening for many of us to what
23 we were going to see a lot of later. Lot of mortars, lot of rockets. Artillery fire and things
24 like that. And it has a tendency to get your attention pretty quick.

25 KC: I'm sure it does.

26 CS: Oh, yeah.

27 KC: Now, you've said that you and the others who were with you, the other
28 Marines with you were, were just dead tired. Dead on your feet tired. And—

29 CS: Absolutely.

1 KC: And you hear these rounds coming in and you said that you were just so tired
2 you weren't even willing to move, but can you explain to me the environment that you
3 were in? What was taking place around you as you were trying to get to sleep?

4 CS: Mortars and rockets were coming in everywhere and what many of these
5 hooches had were bunkers outside. So you would run outside and get in the bunker. Well,
6 the difference between being, say, in the middle of the, of the sleeping area and the
7 bunker was, I don't know, twenty feet. If a rocket landed in between the two positions,
8 most everybody is going to be injured on both ends of that spectrum so it wasn't, it didn't
9 make a lot of difference to me in my mind at that time. And like I said, I was extremely
10 exhausted. I was kind of pead (??) up and whatnot. And I heard all this coming in and I
11 heard all the guys and grab their gear and run outside screaming mortars, rockets, and all
12 this. I just said the heck with this and I got to get some sleep and I just dozed off. And I
13 literally went right back to sleep.

14 KC: In the middle of this attack?

15 CS: That's correct. And I did that one other time, as well, on the night ambush
16 one time. And there were mortars and, I don't think there were any rockets that night, but
17 there was mortars coming in and I slept through that, too.

18 KC: Wow.

19 CS: Well, you get, you know, traditionally the Marine infantry, in northern I
20 Corps in Vietnam, and I'm sure the guys in Iraq and Afghanistan probably have similar
21 conditions. If you get three hours sleep in three days, you're doing mighty well. Because
22 you are on patrols at night, ambushes at night and your guard duty all day long. And
23 everything is being checked by others who have had, you know, their sleep. To verify
24 that you're still awake doing your job. So, even at twenty-two, three hours of sleep was
25 not enough for me. I guess I was a bum or something, I don't know. But it wasn't
26 adequate. And I could hear the explosions and they were around me. I didn't feel they
27 were threatening and that if I heard anything threatening I would have probably, I guess
28 rolled under the rack, I don't know. Kind of like when I was a child and they told us
29 about the nuclear bombs and they told us to get under a desk.

30 KC: What does sleep like this do to you over time?

31 CS: Pardon me?

1 KC: How do you, how does your body, how does your mind react to this lack of
2 sleep over time?

3 CS: You become robotic. You do things out of training and whatnot that you'll
4 receive and you really don't think clearly. I mean, when there's a firefight or massive
5 amounts of troops coming or whatever, your adrenalin rush is incredibly high and you're
6 doing things in reactionary mode. You're not necessarily thinking all that clear. And I
7 personally feel that that's one of the reasons for some of the things that the press around
8 the world reported about. One sided, if you will, I might add. Some of the atrocities,
9 some people were firing until they had no more ammunition. At anything and everything.
10 Because that was their defensive posture. That's what they felt was the right thing to do
11 to save their own life and the life of people around them. Later on you learn that you can
12 sure fire and you don't waist ammunition and you try to pinpoint certain areas that you
13 need to eliminate before they eliminate you.

14 KC: Right. Did you receive any negative repercussions because you didn't get out
15 because you didn't roll out of the bunker?

16 CS: I received a lot of negative repercussions.

17 KC: Tell me about that.

18 CS: Mostly from the guys I was with. They were very upset with me. They
19 thought I was absolutely crazy. "What in the world is the matter with you?" And I said,
20 "Well, I'm tired and I need to get some rest and by golly I'm going to get some rest."
21 "Well, don't you understand you could be killed?" I said, "I certainly do, but I do feel
22 that it's out of my control." You know I could be in the bunker and be killed just as easy
23 as lying here in the rack. Well, they didn't agree with that and they kind of jumped all
24 over me. That's all right. I mean it was, it wasn't really in the negative sense. It was more
25 like, you've got to pay more attention and do what we all do because we're a team. And
26 in that sense absolutely they were right. Absolutely.

27 KC: It is something you tried to correct later on?

28 CS: I would get up and move. Yes. I definitely corrected it. I was able to adjust to
29 the amount of sleep that we would get. And that helped considerably. We would also
30 unofficially take times where if there was two of us on guard, one of us would go ahead
31 and get some, get a cat nap, if you will. And then, then we'd spell the other guy.

1 KC: Right.

2 CS: We were supposed to be, both of us alert, but if, if you have a small foxhole
3 and there's two guys in it, one guy can cat nap and he can wake the other guy up. He only
4 has to move his foot, just nudge him. And you know, he'll come awake and he'll come up
5 with your weapon and ready to do whatever's needed.

6 KC: Well, let's jump forward now to this time where you come back from the
7 hospital ship, from the *Sanctuary* after this wound from April of '67. Now, you went to
8 Phu Bai, is that correct?

9 CS: I went to Phu Bai initially, that's right. And then I went via helicopter up to
10 Quang Tin to rejoin my unit.

11 KC: Okay, so you're rejoining the unit, the 1st of the 9th up in Quang Tin. And this
12 was in—

13 CS: 1st Battalion, 9th Marines.

14 KC: This was what, July of '67? Is that correct?

15 CS: This was July the thirty first.

16 KC: July thirty first. So it was after the big battle that the 1st of the 9th had been in.
17 So just pick up the story there. Would you go back to your unit? What was it like, to go,
18 to be back up near the DMZ, to be back at Quang Tin, to be with these Marines again for
19 you?

20 CS: Well, actually when you, when you're in a war configuration, or war
21 environment, you feel much more comfortable with people you know than others that you
22 don't know. Even though they are fellow Americans or fellow Chinese or whatever they
23 may be, I was glad to get back. I felt like I was coming home and they were glad to have
24 me back. And I'd heard and read in the *Stars and Stripes* all about the stuff that had
25 happened with Bravo Company, Charlie, and Alpha and Delta, 2/3 and 1/4 and all the rest
26 of them in the Operation Buffalo. And although I felt fortunate that I wasn't there, I felt
27 very sad that my friends had to go through that and then I wasn't there with them. There's
28 a loyalty built in there. I don't know if that's with everybody. I know it is with me when
29 I, when I decide somebody is a friend of mine I'll go to the end of the earth with them to
30 do whatever is needed. So I, I felt glad to be back. I was welcomed back and they told
31 me, you know, watch out for this, be careful of that, these are the new things you're

1 doing yada, yada. And I took their advice and I was very fortunate in that we, we did
2 okay. We really did. I mean we had a lot of difficult times with artillery rounds coming in
3 and ambushes and this and that, but overall, it was like coming home. It really was.

4 KC: You mentioned that when you go back to the unit, your fellow Marines in the
5 unit are saying this is what's changed, this is what happened, this is what's changed,
6 here's what the enemy is doing now. What sort of things have changed? What sort of
7 changes has the enemy made that you were adjusting to now?

8 CS: Well, when I had left because of the injury in April we had not really
9 encountered, in my time, we had not really encountered a force to deal with after
10 Operation Buffalo, July '67. They came to fight and they, being the NVA, they stayed,
11 they had their own artillery gun and about the DMZ. They used that. They had mortars,
12 they had rockets. They had set up a very elaborate ambush where they would ambush a
13 company and leave a few people alive so others would come to get them and then
14 ambush the next one and the next one and the next one. So their techniques had changed
15 because they were very well at adapting to conditions better than we were for the most
16 part. As to tactics and overall strategy, sometimes it would take us three times as long to
17 do the same adaptation. And I obviously was not to happy with that, but when you get
18 into a big force of people, a lot of folks, you don't move necessarily real rapidly. And if
19 you are coming to, say, a jungle, it sounds like a herd of trucks coming or something.
20 Cattle with cowbells. Conversely when they moved, they could move people in two to
21 three-hundred-man patrols, if you will, and nobody would know they were there. They
22 were well at doing this and they, obviously the fighting French and fighting the Chinese
23 before that and other people who tried to dominate them, they developed more skills very
24 well. So one of the main points I guess is that they were aggressive. They would stand
25 and fight. They had their artillery behind them. There was even rumors that they were
26 going to bring in MiGs, things like that. And of course, the Marines' attitude seemed to
27 be, well, we'll take them on and of course we did. We lost a lot of people, they lost a lot
28 of people, but everything has really changed that the tone of the war changed from kind
29 of passive-aggressive to just right in your face. We're gonna come get you. We are going
30 to take you out. We're going to take over part of the country, whatever. We don't care
31 what our losses are. And of course, at times they did, you know, a lot of psychological

1 warfare. You'd find pamphlets all around. One of my picked up on z one time was one
2 that showed a picture of LBJ (Lyndon Baines Johnson) and it said, and it was all in
3 English, too, and that kind of stunned me. I had no idea that—well, I was twenty-three. I
4 guess that's another reason. But I had no idea that they had printing presses that would do
5 something like that. I thought it might be in Vietnamese or French, but not English. But it
6 said, "Hey, hey, LBJ how many kids did you kill today?" And, of course, I read it and it
7 made me mad and I put it in my pocket. I didn't want everyone else to see it. I just think
8 it's kind of stepped up for us, for our particular battalion. It got more aggressive, the
9 summation, I guess.

10 KC: Okay, now, you're in a position I think to answer this question perhaps. I've
11 heard other troops who were on the ground, other frontline troops who would say that
12 fighting the VC or fighting the NVA to a lesser degree was very frustrating because they
13 would strike, then they would move, then they would strike, then they would move and
14 they would never confront American forces front on. That is never a battle where
15 everyone stayed, stood their ground and was going to slug it out until the very end. Some
16 people would say that they would have preferred to have one of these full-on battles
17 rather than the kind of hit-and-run thing they were dealing with. Now, was this your
18 opinion or would you rather have had this full-blown battle like you were describing
19 when you got back.

20 CS: Well, I was pretty, pretty upset at the fact that I got wounded. And I was
21 upset also by the fact that my buddies had to go out there and do what they had to do
22 while I was on the ship. I didn't feel that was appropriate, either. I would have preferred
23 to stay and have medical treatment nearby and be able to just stand watch or something.
24 Obviously, the medical condition wouldn't allow that but—so I was, to be quite honest I
25 was pretty vengeful. I was looking for revenge and I wanted to, I wanted to kind of get all
26 the plan and the peripheral nonsense over with and I felt one way to do that was, believe
27 it or not I wrote a letter to Ho Chi Minh. And I'm sure it ended up somewhere else, but I
28 told him, "One football game for the whole country, loser leaves." And, of course, I
29 meant South Vietnam because that was the mission we were supposed to get them out of
30 South Vietnam, not take over North Vietnam, but just get them out. I never got a reply. I

1 thought that would be the most sensible way to do it. And by football, I meant soccer or
2 football, which ever he wanted, I didn't care. And we'll just winner take all.

3 KC: Well, that's pretty magnanimous of you.

4 CS: Yeah, I—so relating that analogy I wanted to have a battle and get it over
5 with. Either be a Dien Bien Phu for us or a, you know, a massive sweep where we just
6 nail them to the wall and say "Okay, you can die or give up and that's the name of the
7 tune." When you, when you go on patrols, Kelly, and you loose two or three guys here
8 and there for a sniper, or a Bouncing Betty or something like that it gets extremely
9 frustrating when you can't see or return fire on the enemy because they're gone. That's
10 what happened to me, when we got mortared. They hit us and they left. Now, that
11 traditionally is, is a VC trait, not a NVA trait. Unless it was a scout or something in front
12 on a regiment or a battalion or something, if they hit you, they're not going to, you know,
13 let off a couple of rounds and then just go home. They'll stay and fight you. And we, we
14 wanted to address that straight up with them and say "Okay, let's see who's got the best."
15 You know, "Let's stand toe to toe and punch it out." We were willing to do that. We
16 really didn't have the expertise that they did, the years of fighting and their leadership
17 people were, I think in some cases, better than ours. They knew what to do, they knew
18 how to anticipate the next move, where as we were reactionary. And in those conditions
19 you always end up losing more people than you should.

20 KC: Now, you mentioned that you thought that their leadership in some cases was
21 better than your leadership. In what ways, at what level was their leadership better than
22 the leadership you saw on the American side?

23 CS: Well, I think the level, if you're speaking of a rank type condition it would be
24 the field officers. So you would talk about captains, maybe majors. Our people, like I
25 mentioned, were reactionary. In other words, we'd get hit and they'd say "Okay, form a
26 line up, we'll do this, we'll do that." Or "Let's all get together and concentrate on this
27 position or that." The NVA had touches in Operation Buffalo. I don't believe in military
28 history, and I'm not an expert on this by any means, but that what they did was anything
29 new. And that was where they attack one company, pinned them down, and picked them
30 almost every one of them off. Left a few people alive to call for help, and then already
31 have another ambush set up for the next group of people who were coming into help

1 them. Pinned them down and held them and waited for the next group. And the more
2 people they seemed to draw into this, the more people they already had set up for the next
3 group coming. We were reactionary in that, you know, Alpha Company is being
4 ambushed, we got to get out there any help them. Okay, never thinking apparently that
5 this could be an ambush for us, too. They had elaborate ambushes set up all the time.

6 KC: Describe their ambushes to me. You've mentioned how it's changed here,
7 and you were going out on patrol as a Marine. Describe one of their ambushes for me.

8 CS: Well, they started way back when I guess '66, I guess. They came up with a
9 L-shaped ambush. The L shape would be if you're walking down the trail you are hitting
10 the lower end of the L and on either your left or your right flank would be the rest of the
11 L, the letter. And you'd have people with assigned positions. So when the gentleman in
12 the front of that L or in the smaller leg of that L would initiate the ambush. Then the guy
13 at the end of the L, the other end of the L, would also close off the backdoor. So now
14 you're trapped in between all these people and you'd have flanking fire. You can return
15 the fire to either one of you flanks, but you also have perpendicular fire coming down
16 from the small end of the L. That was kind of the unique adventure because now you got
17 bullets coming everywhere. And, of course, obviously they didn't leave it at that, they'd
18 always try to come around and out flank you on the rear, too. They'd move a couple
19 people to the rear and start firing at you. So now, now you have 360 degrees and even
20 though Chesty Puller said when he was surrounded in Korea one time, well, they got us
21 surrounded and he said, "Well, that's fine. We can shoot in any direction and hit
22 somebody." Yeah, maybe. Maybe in a foothill environment or something, but in the
23 jungle, no. You can't see that far. You can hear where it comes from and generally put
24 out indicators of total dissatisfaction with that idea, but that doesn't mean you are going
25 to get them.

26 KC: Right.

27 CS: So the L was one thing. The aggressiveness, the detailed planning of these
28 things, to move in three hundred people in an area which was, I'm going to guess, five
29 hundred meters away from the major base, and not be seen, and we had aircraft flying all
30 the time. And we had people out there, we had recon out there. To do that kind of stuff,
31 set up elaborate ambushes and slaughter people when we had all the air travel in the

1 world, all the artillery, naval gun fire, satellites, you name it. We had the technology, but
2 once again, just like in Iraq, you can defeat the technology with minor things. Bombs,
3 mines, suicide bombers, things like that. _____ (??) is very similar, that hasn't changed
4 much I don't think.

5 KC: How long were you back with the group up to toward Quang Tin?

6 CS: Let's see, we stayed in Quang Tin for, well, after I came back I think we were
7 there for about a month. And then we moved back to Dong Ha and then we moved from
8 Dong Ha to Gio Lin. So we were constantly kind of on the move wherever there was a
9 need. And we moved, the Marines moved units around quite a bit so that, that you
10 wouldn't get stagnated or overconfident or whatever about your individual area. And also
11 to expose you to the different techniques and strategy and stuff that the people in that area
12 were using against you. We moved quite a bit.

13 KC: There was definitely a very, very real value in doing this, but did you at the
14 time or have you since thought that maybe if they left us in one place, we would have had
15 a better chance of learning more about our enemy? Trying to find ways to counter what
16 they were doing.

17 CS: Well, that's a really, really good point. I think the idea was to keep you on
18 alert at all times. As if you really need that. If somebody's trying to kill you, you're
19 usually pretty keyed up. You listen to everything, you see things at night when they're
20 not there, you, you know, all kinds of things happen. One of the biggest problems we
21 have or had as to eliminating the enemy in any area was a policy that was directed right
22 out of the White House. It came right down to us in such things as "Don't return fire,
23 they'll know where you're at." "Don't fire until you're fired upon." And you know you
24 could be a grade schooler and understand how stupid that is. That's just idiotic. And in
25 these defensive postures, in Quang Tin and Gia Lin and Khe Sanh and Camp Carroll and
26 Cam Lo and Dong Ha and the rest. Although we did patrols and we did operations and
27 whatnot, mostly they were defensive. So that means you sit and take whatever they are
28 going to throw at you and then you turn around the next day and have a big operation and
29 go get them. And, of course, they're not there, they're gone. They're long gone. They,
30 they did American Indian tactics from the 1800s that the U.S Cavalry had a heck of a
31 time with and the U.S Marines did later in Vietnam. Very similar. So you have to find

1 their home base and go get them and destroy them, that's the way you take care of that.
2 And my, when I became the squad leader, that was one of the things I recommended to
3 my squad, "Let's go to North Vietnam. According to this map is a Buddhist shrine here at
4 this particular location, let's go blow it up. Let's leave a calling card and say, 'Hey!
5 We're here! What are you going to do?'" I felt take it to them. Don't stand there in a
6 defensive posture and wait to get killed. Time is against you and the odds are definitely
7 against you, as well, and I think we did too much of that. And, of course, Washington
8 didn't want to involve Russia and China and all this other stuff. They were already
9 involved. They were supplying ammunitions, technicians, fighter pilots, you name it.
10 They had—we actually had encountered a Chinese advisor who actually got killed. He
11 had papers on him and said as much. He was an officer in the Chinese army.

12 KC: Now, you encountered this while you were in Quang Tin?

13 CS: No, we encountered that after we went to Camp Carroll, which was an Army
14 artillery base which we supplied perimeter security.

15 KC: Okay. Now, were you a part of the, of the squad or the action which he was
16 killed? You were there?

17 CS: We were—what had happened was we were at Camp Carroll doing perimeter
18 security and a convoy went up this Route 9 going toward Khe Sanh and the Rock Pile.
19 And unfortunately, many of the roads in Vietnam are in valleys and river beds, similar to
20 other places in the world. And they had a hilltop that they had this Chinese advisor on
21 and a bunch of troops and they had some other people closer down to the road, and they
22 sprang an ambush. The convoy had I think it was a tank or two in front and a tank or two
23 in back and then troops and whatnot in the different vehicles along the way. They took
24 out, with rockets, RPGs (rocket-propelled grenades) they took out the tanks, so they
25 closed the front and back door and then they just started picking them off. They'd left as
26 they did during Operation Buffalo. They left some people who had to call in help and, of
27 course, air cover came and suppressed some fire and this and that. And then we came out
28 of Camp Carroll up that same road and went up, climbed up this mountain to the top and
29 these people had been pretty much obliterated by the Navy and Marine air cover that we
30 had. That's where we found the Chinese advisor.

31 KC: Wow.

1 CS: So it was a matter of, once again, reactionary. Not necessarily proactive. Why
2 didn't they have air cover while they were going down the road? Well, there were ten
3 million convoys in the country every day. Kind of hard to do that, you know. But we got
4 up on the hill and then we took over the hill and, of course, we got attacked for about the
5 next three or four nights. They hit us pretty good, too.

6 KC: Is that right? What were they hitting you with?

7 CS: They were hitting our positions. We just took over the hill. We weren't going
8 to get back to them and let them ambush any more convoys.

9 KC: Rockets, mortars, small arms?

10 CS: Small arms and mortars. They didn't have any rockets and they were just
11 across the valley from us. You could hear them as they could hear us. You know, I
12 thought, you know if could just see somebody I could take a shot. Maybe take them out.
13 Because you could hear the tubes, you know, the mortar tubes when they pop and make a
14 distinct sound. Personally because of my injury, I wanted to get some mortar guys, I
15 really did. I thought, you know, maybe I ought to just go over there myself. I had second
16 thoughts of course, but—

17 KC: Thankfully you did, I would think.

18 CS: Anywhere we went where we took a hill, if we were enforced and were in
19 this particular case, they wanted to either harass us or take the hill back. And, of course,
20 their—even the NVA had this tradition where they would stand and fight you, but usually
21 not unless the odds were in their favor. Meaning they had like a 5:1 or 10:1 ratio. Then
22 they would come at you with everything. But because these were valleys, they would just
23 sit and mortar us and we'd just sit there and not return fire and we were under directions
24 not to return fire, they'll know where we are at. Well, the question has to be, "Why are
25 they mortaring us if they don't know where we're at?"

26 KC: Seems non-sensical.

27 CS: Pardon me?

28 KC: That seems non-sensical.

29 CS: No, it doesn't. It doesn't even begin to make sense. So they knew you were
30 there and—

31 KC: Were you able to call in any sort of air support?

1 CS: Well, we called in some artillery and we had air over that, meaning above
2 that in case we needed it. But unfortunately, when you do this kind of thing and they're
3 mortaring, you know, they pop like six, eight, ten rounds something like that and then
4 they stop. They pick the tube up and move. So wherever you may have heard it or
5 thought it was, they are gone already. Or they had holes that they dug and they got in the
6 spider holes and you couldn't see them. So ineffective response, late response that was
7 kind of traditional. I mean it just went to the territory. They knew it was coming and
8 they'd go hide somewhere and they'd, sometimes just to let you know as they did with
9 their artillery pieces at times, in North Vietnam, if you return fire, called in an airstrike,
10 whatever they'd bring it back out and fire one round to let you know that you didn't get
11 them. It, that became extremely frustrating.

12 KC: I bet.

13 CS: Yeah, oh yeah. That's another reason why I wanted to go to North Vietnam.
14 They had a gun up there on tracks, railroad tracks and the recoil would take it inside a
15 mountain. When we came back with our prisoners to Yolin, the five ladies that I think I
16 mentioned to you, they opened up with a 120mm, which is a pretty big gun. Artillery
17 piece and fired at us. And when we got back to the camp I told the captain, I said, "I want
18 to go get that gun." And he basically said, "No, you can't do that. It's in North Vietnam
19 and you're not going over there. They've already bombed it and everything else and they
20 can't get it. Once they fire a round, the recoil of that gun would take it back inside the
21 cave in the mountain. So you might cause a partial collapse or whatever, but they had
22 forty thousand people there working like ants, clear it all out, and you can come back out
23 and fire again." I said, "Well, the difference is we're on the ground. So when they come
24 out to do that we blow it up. That's the difference. We can take care of this. If you just
25 give me permission I'll go do it. I'll bring you some belt buckles or whatever you want,"
26 you know. It's a very frustrating situation even talking about it. Still you can probably
27 hear in my voice I'm kind of upset about it.

28 KC: Yes, absolutely.

29 CS: People were dying left and right. Both sides, you know, not just our side. And
30 nothing was really being gained one way or the other.

1 KC: Well, speaking of that you said that you took this hilltop and you were there,
2 you were being hit with mortars and small arms for three or four days. Did it ever stop?
3 Did you ever drive them off? Did you're outfit just move off the mountain?

4 CS: They decided, I don't know why, but they decided to break away from us.
5 And they broke away and then after a day or so, we left the mountain.

6 KC: Okay.

7 CS: And I would probably assume based on history, they probably took it over
8 again, but there was no more major ambush on Route 9 because they knew we'd respond
9 dramatically. And also Camp Carroll had 175mm guns. Bigger than the 120 I was just
10 talking about. They could fire down that same route and impact whatever position you'd
11 call a_____ (??). Now, when you're in an ambush situation, you usually have your CO
12 or one of the officers get on the radio and call in support. They have to do that in a matter
13 of minutes, otherwise, it's too late. You can't sit down and get the map out and say,
14 "Okay, I think we are here." No, you have to know exactly where you are, otherwise
15 people are going to take you out.

16 KC: Interesting. You mentioned a little while ago that you became a platoon
17 leader. Is that correct?

18 CS: I became a squad leader.

19 KC: Oh, I'm sorry. A squad leader.

20 CS: Squad leader, right.

21 KC: When did that happen?

22 CS: I think that was in September. I believe it was September of '67.

23 KC: Why did they choose you? Do you know?

24 CS: Pardon me?

25 KC: Why did they choose you to become a squad leader? Do you know?

26 CS: Well, I think they liked my craziness and my aggressiveness. I have played a
27 little bit of football and a lot of other sports. I'm very competitive by nature. Even at my
28 age now, and I'm sixty-five. I just feel that if you're going to lead people, than you'll lead
29 them. Especially with the training we've received and that is aggressive. You go; you go
30 take it to whomever. If you're in a fight with somebody, you don't stand there and try to
31 block all his shots, you have to return some. My idea is you return more than he could

1 ever throw back to you. That actually puts him on the defensive and then you take control
2 of the situation. I also am a people person. So I believe that you have to take care of your
3 people first. Their mail, their food, their beans, their bandages, and bullets, the whole ball
4 of wax. You do that first and you make sure they get what they need so they can do their
5 job and then if they do have a problem or they get injured or whatever you make sure
6 they get what they need there, too. And between the two, I think I'm only guessing here,
7 but that's probably the reason they chose me.

8 KC: What was it like for being responsible for all the men in your squad on, say,
9 one of these patrols?

10 CS: Well, it's something that has stayed with me throughout my life, Kelly. I've
11 had twenty electricians and engineers work for me in another career. I've had six to eight
12 other electricians in my last career now that I'm into. And I take that responsibility
13 extremely serious. I do it mostly because of Vietnam and what I learned from that is take
14 care of your people and they'll take care of you. In Vietnam, it was a matter of survival.
15 In the civilian world where I work it's a matter of getting the job done and everybody's
16 happy and nobody's injured and whatnot. So in Vietnam it bothered me initially, it felt
17 like a huge waste, but at the same time I was allowed to have certain controls, which I
18 never had before. Which I really appreciated because then I could adapt and move and do
19 things that we hadn't done before. And I felt almost like I was able to freelance and do
20 almost anything I wanted to do as long as I stayed within certain guidelines. I didn't go to
21 Hanoi or something like that which as I told you, I wanted to do, and I wanted to go north
22 and go take it to them. My squad abruptly just told me one day we aren't going to go to
23 North Vietnam because we were going out on a night ambush and they didn't want to go.
24 So there was like nine or ten of them and I said, "Okay, I guess we won't go, then."

25 KC: Do you remember the first mission that you were on, the first patrol you went
26 on as a squad leader?

27 CS: Wow. No, I really don't, but I do know this that I did things dramatically
28 different than a lot of other squad leaders. Things like I wasn't, say midway in the string
29 of individuals a lot of times where you are supposed to be with the radio. Sometimes I
30 took point and that was usually a bad position and I already assigned somebody in case
31 something happened to me to take over the squad and take care of business. I would stop

1 more than other people would and listen and look and just sit there and just be observant.
2 I never totally trusted my eyes and ears enough even though they were highly keen to
3 what was going on around me. I had the well being of all these people on my mind all the
4 time. Because of that I moved slowly, deliberately, but with a plan A and a plan B to get
5 us in, get us out.

6 KC: Did you ever lose any of your Marines while you were a squad leader?

7 CS: No, I didn't and I'm very proud to say that. Nobody got injured and nobody
8 got killed. I have been on several other patrols with other people where that did happen.
9 Where they were in charge. I felt bad about it, but I was not in position to control the
10 situation. I mean I offered my advice, but it didn't seem to matter. Things did happen,
11 obviously. And to me it's a very sad thing as I believe I mentioned to you my father was
12 a fighter pilot in the Air Force. He spent thirty-three and a third years and they had such,
13 obviously multiple leadership positions. And I learned a lot of things about people from
14 him that I utilized and I saw lacking in Marine officers and Marine leadership that
15 bothered me tremendously. I still to this day considered pretty much of a rebel in some
16 aspects because I don't always adhere to doctrine. Just because it's written doesn't mean
17 it's correct. I question friendly fire and I got all kind of trouble for that.

18 KC: Well, tell me about that.

19 CS: Well, we went out three different times and our own people fired on us with
20 artillery. Fortunately for us, they couldn't shoot too well. It basically infuriated me to the
21 point of the sergeant came over and told me to take out the squad and set up for an
22 ambush that night and this and that. I told him I wasn't going to do it. And he looked at
23 me stunned because he was one of the guys who recommended me for the squad leader
24 position because it used to be his squad. And he said, "Well, we're going to go see the
25 captain," and I said, "That's fine, we better do that." I went in and the captain said—they
26 had me wait outside for a second and the sergeant explained what was going on. And
27 then they had me come into the tent and the captain's sitting there at his desk and he says,
28 "You know, I have two choices here with you. I can either shoot you right back here or I
29 can send you to the brig in Da Nang. Which do you want me to do?" I looked at him and
30 I said, "Well, sir, you do whatever you think is appropriate, but let me tell you what's
31 been going on because obviously you're not aware." So I told him and me, I don't know,

1 I was so frustrated with all this stuff going on and other people getting killed and
2 wounded all around us and their own people shooting at us as well as the NVA. And I
3 said, you know, this is just too much. I didn't lose my mind or anything, go crazy, and I
4 didn't just up and down and scream. And I have kind of a slow temper, but when it
5 ignites it's pretty hard to put it out. And not only was I obviously very insubordinate, but
6 I was ready to fight anybody. I was livid. Pretty much, as a Vietnamese who say _____
7 (??), that means very, very crazy. It finally got to me, I guess and he didn't do anything
8 and one of the reasons he didn't was I told him, "No matter what you do I will tell you
9 what's going to happen. In three days there will be a colonel from the Air Force here and
10 you're going to have to explain to him why and what happened. And believe me, he's not
11 going to be happy and you are going to be in a world of shit."

12 KC: Now, you told this to your captain?

13 CS: Pardon me?

14 KC: You told this to your captain?

15 CS: Yes, I did. I threatened him.

16 KC: That normally doesn't go over very well in the Marine Corps.

17 CS: Well, no, not at all. And actually that was kind of a final ace to throw on the
18 table and I didn't want to do it, but I wanted him to know, know matter what you do,
19 there's going to be a hearing. You and all the other people that are responsible for all this
20 friendly firing controlling it are going to be a world of shit. And knowing my dad, that's
21 exactly what he'd done. He would have gotten in an F-4 at Bergstrom in Austin and
22 flown over to L.A, gassed up, gone over to Hickam at Hawaii, then over to Guam, and
23 then right into Da Nang and caught a ride up to where we were. Which at that point was
24 Dong Ha and would have been chewing his butt up one side and down another. My dad,
25 he got chewed out by MacArthur in World War II, so he knew how to chew. So I was
26 pretty comfortable with that. I mean, I'd knew I'd gone way to far, but I was—my people
27 were my biggest concern and I was more than willing to, if I had, as we all had made up
28 our minds to die for each other, then we would do that. And that included the captain
29 shooting me, which I thought was kind of funny. I don't think he could have shot me at
30 fifty yards. He couldn't shoot that good.

1 KC: So what was the result of this? What happened? You did not go out on the
2 patrol?

3 CS: No, we did not.

4 KC: Did someone else go on the patrol for you? Another squad?

5 CS: Yeah, another group went out. Our whole unit did not and, of course, I was
6 relieved of the squad leader position at that point. My squad was informed what
7 happened. They were not too happy about it. They were pretty upset. And then I was
8 transferred to 1st Platoon. I was in 3rd Platoon initially. And I became a fire team leader
9 which is a, like a second level down from squad leader position. And I stayed in that
10 platoon for about a month and then they transferred me out—well, not a month, two
11 weeks, I guess. Then they transferred me back to Phu Bai to airbase security which is just
12 primary security around an airbase at Phu Bai.

13 KC: Do you feel that this was a result of your insubordination with the captain?
14 That they were trying to get rid of you and move you to the back?

15 CS: Absolutely and they show you the inferiority of the leadership to me.
16 Sweeping carpet under the rug here and then moving it over there, moving it over there.
17 That doesn't solve the problem. My squad was impacted by what happened. They knew
18 they were frustrated to death with friendly fire just as much as I was. What are you going
19 to do? Move the whole squad and then pretty soon the whole platoon, the whole company
20 because it's, and you know it's very infectious when you have a morale problem. It's a
21 serious thing, you have to deal with it. You have to face up to it and they didn't want to
22 do that. So they decided to move me, which I didn't like, actually I hated it because once
23 again, I'm leaving the guys and I didn't want to leave the guys. I had too much respect
24 for them and what we were all trying to do was basically just make it through this.

25 KC: Well, tell me about your time with base security, perimeter security there at
26 Phu Bai.

27 CS: Well, we basically ran patrols and ambushes, usually at night. And during the
28 day we would sit on bunkers and watch the farmers work their rice paddies and try to
29 watch them closely because sometimes they would be trying to pinpoint by stepping off
30 where your bunker was. And then at night, of course, you'd receive mortar fire or once in
31 a while rocket fire. That was on the opposite side from where I was when I was in the

1 infantry. So that was on the—let's see, the east side of Highway 1. The west side was
2 where I was when I was in the infantry. So Phu Bai had a big air strip mostly for cargo
3 and things like that and helicopters. And there was infantry there and then there was
4 airbase personnel. They allowed civilians on the base, which I never understood. I still
5 don't. Anytime you do that you're opening yourself up to somebody and pinpoint
6 something and blow it up and you know, sure as rain that usually happened.

7 KC: That's right? You saw this, then?

8 CS: Yes, I did. I saw it many times. I saw people counting off paces and whatnot
9 and I'd make a note of who they were and then that night or maybe the next night we
10 would get hit and that particular position would be blown up. Or that helicopter or that
11 fuel dump or whatever it was. And then I would start looking for them. And, of course,
12 they're nowhere around. So once they did their work they moved onto another facility in
13 some other place. And when I brought this up a couple times, such as Da Nang in
14 September, or not Da Nang, excuse me, Dong Ha in September of '67. I saw this lady
15 counting off from the fuel dump toward the main gate. And I ran over to a lieutenant and
16 said, "She's stepping off the fuel dump." And I was told to mind my own business. I
17 found that stunning. I still do and in fact I encountered a gentleman on the internet one
18 time and asked me who the officer was. I said, "Man, do you know how long it's been? I
19 probably didn't even recognize his face." This happened all the time and it was right
20 under everybody's nose and nobody, or very few seemed to catch it. To me I don't
21 consider myself that intuitively smarter or anything, I just, you know I watch, I look, I
22 listen, I ponder, I you know, I try to think. Sometimes I think they were in molasses the
23 way they thought and moved.

24 KC: Well, this must have been, obviously was very different duty for you from
25 being in the infantry. From being put on these patrols and sweeps and things like this.
26 How did you find this new duty?

27 CS: I'm sorry, how did I what?

28 KC: How did you find it? What was your reaction to it? How did you adapt to it?

29 CS: Well, I think I was extremely upset initially because as I mentioned I had to
30 leave the unit again. After I got there, because of my experience and whatnot I was
31 hoping to set up and build bunkers and set up a secondary line of defense and, you know,

1 basic things like that. Most of the people that were there were new people from the
2 United States who have had no combat experience whatsoever. All new guys with
3 different ideas and visions of grandeur for some of them. And so we had to kind of set up
4 training scenarios. We would simulate running patrols and what you do and you don't do.
5 We get a lot of bunker building. We build some huge bunkers, ninety percent of which
6 were in the ground because I felt that was the best thing. The less you see, the less you
7 know. I think pay more attention to your surroundings. Be totally _____ (??) of
8 everything. Butterflies, flies, snakes, lizards, ants, everything. Everything that moves,
9 everything that crawls, anything that flies over your head, pay attention. What is it? And I
10 hope that that helped. You know, because I left those guys—let's see. I joined them at
11 Thanksgiving Day and by the twenty-fifth of April, I was back here in the States. I'd
12 finished my tour. So my adaptation was pretty easy really because it was basically the
13 same thing. It was guard duty, running patrols and ambushes at night. And watching
14 farmers and making sure that they were okay or that they weren't watching us too much.

15 KC: Did you have much time where you weren't on patrol or you weren't on
16 guard duty?

17 CS: At the air base, it was being in the air base, it was a lot different than being in
18 the infantry so that you did have more time. You actually had racks again, as I told you
19 we had at Phu Bai again before, when I first got there. And we were able to sleep
20 probably six hours, almost six hours every day which was like, boy, I've gone to heaven.
21 This is unbelievable. All I got to do is keep these guys alive, you know. Make sure they
22 pay attention to what they are learning and stuff. It was a totally different environment.
23 We had, the gunny had gone over and acquired, as Marines do, some things that belong
24 to other folks and one day we had a barbeque. I don't know where he got the hamburgers
25 and stuff, but he got hamburgers. And we were having barbeque, hamburgers, and soda
26 pop. And I'm sitting there going, "Boy, would, wouldn't my squad love to be here now?"
27 My god.

28 KC: That's different.

29 CS: The disparity between the two was like night and day. Dramatically different,
30 you know, just basically the same, but dramatically different.

1 KC: The frontline troops generally have a very negative opinion of those who are
2 in the rear. They have a number of different names for them, one who stands out more
3 than others usually. What was it like for you to go from being on the frontline, from
4 being on these patrols, from being in the infantry to moving back to a base? Did you have
5 any difficulty adjusting to that or to dealing with the people?

6 CS: Most of the people that were introduced to me, lieutenants and captains and
7 gunnery sergeants and whatnot, they already knew of my background. And apparently to
8 what degree they labeled me as a troublemaker, I don't know, but they knew that I was in
9 the infantry and that I'd been wounded and, you know, that I've done a lot of activity. I
10 think they pretty much, I didn't have any bad feeling toward them because I felt, really,
11 that I still feel this way, too, Kelly, and that is everybody has a job to do. Not everybody
12 can get the best job, but if you're in the field and that's your job, that's what you have to
13 do. If you're in the rear with the gear kind of a thing, then that's what you have to do.
14 Everybody's function together allows the entire organization to function as a whole. So I
15 really had no hard feelings for those people and I only had, I had one sergeant who came
16 from the United States and joined this air base squadron and he and I had quite a few
17 words too, quite a few times because he was an idiot, quite frankly. He thought his three
18 stripes meant he was Jesus Christ and I had to kind of tell him that that wasn't the case
19 and that he'd better watch it.

20 KC: What kinds of issues were dividing the two of you?

21 CS: Well, one of the things he did was we had a *mamasan* like the Japanese, or
22 the Americans had, but the Japanese after World War II. A mother of children in her
23 probably mid thirties and she came into different hooches and whatnot and would offer to
24 shine shoes or anything to make a little money. The people were basically in a war
25 environment, starving. A lot of times they didn't have any food. They'd beg for food and
26 you know, we'd give them anything we'd had, try to help them out. But also to get their
27 good will, you know. So I heard her in this tent where the sergeant was and she was kind
28 of crying and whatnot and I went rushing in there and he's trying to rape her. And I
29 obviously did what I had to do and that is grab him and turn him around and kind of slam
30 him up against the wall and then tell him, "Hey, no. And now that I have this information
31 on you, you better straighten up or otherwise I'll report this and you're going to the brig."

1 So that kind of stuff, I never, I never cared for that. We never had that even in the
2 infantry. Even though we captured people and whatnot, we obviously had to kill people.
3 We didn't do that. That's not necessary. I don't believe we should fight as Marines, as
4 Americans. I don't think anybody should do that. Attila the Hun and Leaf Ericsson and
5 all those people in history, Alexander the Great, did that and everybody feared them.
6 Well, you can still put fear in your enemy by doing other things. You don't have to do
7 that. So I was adamantly against that. He thought it was his right, I guess, to do this, you
8 know. And this, this changed the perception of many people that I work with, as well as
9 the Vietnamese that were around us. All of a sudden, I was a pretty good guy. I didn't do
10 it for that, I did it 'cause it was wrong, you know, and he was dead wrong and I really
11 should of nailed him to the wall. I didn't hit him or anything, but I did slam him into the
12 wall and, of course, I asked her to get out of the room. You know, and she got out and all
13 that, but it, it was a sad thing. He was abusing his rank and whoever he thought he was.

14 KC: You were at the air base in Phu Bai for the Tet Offensive 1968. Tell me
15 about that.

16 CS: That was pretty dramatic. It was pretty sad. I think Hue was thirteen, fifteen
17 miles away from where we were. And Hue was overrun by the NVA.

18 KC: Right.

19 CS: And then the Marines sent a bunch of people that were in Phu Bai and they
20 brought up some more from Da Nang who had not really encountered the NVA who had
21 dealt more with booby traps and things like that, to go up and take Hue back. And in the
22 interim at Phu Bai we were like a supply depot. We were getting rocketed from the A
23 Shau Valley, mortared from five-hundred yards outside the fence. A lot of things going
24 on all at the same time. Rain, like hammered goo. They, because of my experience put
25 me in charge of the north gate, or the base. And I had a bunch of Army cooks and a
26 bunch of other people that they'd brought up and told me to set them out and get them
27 lined out and put up the defense barrier here and secure this area. And so I did that and
28 there was talk that they had captured a tank in Hue, the NVA had. And they were coming
29 toward Phu Bai with it and of course a bunch of ground troops as well. I had a young guy
30 who'd just come from the States who was a machinegunner, M-60 machinegunner. And
31 initially it was just him and I there and then all the other Army guys came up and I said to

1 him, I said, "You know, if they come with the tank and you open up with that gun, you're
2 going to be the first thing they want to blow away." And he said "Yeah, I know." I said
3 "Okay, are you ready for that because, you know, a gun against a tank is like throwing
4 rocks, it's not going to do much. Unless you hit the track and break it, then you can either
5 immobilize them or have them so they can only spin in one direction. Realizing the turret
6 spins around the gunman. If we can immobilize them, then we have a better chance of
7 doing something with them. That's what I want you to shoot at is at the tracks." So I went
8 over to the hole where he had a machinegun set up and with M-60s the rounds come in,
9 it's a belted machinegun. They come in on the left and exit on the right. He'd set them in
10 from the right and they had them reversed so that the projectile, if it would have been
11 able to fire at all would have come back toward you instead of going out the barrel. He
12 was a little bit shook up.

13 KC: Sure sounds like it.

14 CS: And that kind of unnerved me a little bit. I said "Now, this is your MOS,
15 right? You do sixties, right?" He said "Yes." I said "Then what's wrong with this picture?
16 Please, please tell me because I'm seeing things that make me a little bit nervous."

17 KC: Wow.

18 CS: So, we got, we got lined out and we were able to withstand rocket fire and
19 whatnot. The tank, thank goodness, never came. The mortars and rockets continued. They
20 were suppressing us as best they could to resupply anything in Hue. We did receive a
21 radio call that three friendly trucks were coming down the road, and that we were to
22 support them in any way they needed support. So, of course, everybody got up on their
23 guns and stuff in case they were going to be attacked and we were able to support them.
24 Nothing happened, thank goodness. They came in, however, and they were covered
25 trucks, maybe like you've seen in World War II. Unannounced to us, they were full of
26 bodies.

27 KC: Oh, wow.

28 CS: The sad thing for us and it, it still stays with each of us there. We had to take
29 all bodies out and count them because they didn't count them when they put them in.
30 Rigor mortis had already set in and it was pretty gruesome. Many of these guys had been
31 shot right square in the head, like they were a target or something and somebody already

1 had them scoped out. They never had a chance. I don't know if that was from trying at
2 close range or, you know, a sniper or what. It was pretty devastating and then we'd heard
3 all the losses and what was going on up there and street fighting. It was pretty brutal for a
4 lot of the guys in Hue, it really was. Back in Phu Bai we were basically okay. No big deal
5 and anytime I wrote my parents I never really discussed what was going on. My mother
6 was a nervous anyway. My dad had intelligence reports as to where I was and what I was
7 doing so he knew. I talked about the countryside, you know, "It rained a lot today and the
8 sun's out. It's really looking nice. They have banana trees here and we just go cut down
9 the whole branch and eat bananas all day and then we climb trees for the rest of the day
10 like monkeys." You know, I tried to make light of everything because I didn't want her to
11 worry too much. She read the paper, watched the news so she was pretty upset and during
12 this time, very upset. Because at this time Phu Bai and Hue are really close together—
13 they're not, I mean they are thirteen miles or so apart that they live close enough to really
14 bother my mother. I wrote her a letter, "Everything's fine. Plenty of food and shelter and
15 you get a rocket or two every now and then, not a big deal. Nothing new. They hadn't
16 assaulted the base. They probably won't. So I'm fine."

17 KC: Did you have any idea of the size or the scope of the offensive in '68 at the
18 time?

19 CS: You're kind of breaking up, Kelly. Can you say that again?

20 KC: I'm sorry. Did you have any idea of the size and the scope of the offensive
21 there in early '68, while at that time while you were at Phu Bai?

22 CS: Well, the first day or two we start receiving a tremendous amount of rockets
23 and our camp had informed us that every major facility in Vietnam was being attacked.
24 And I thought to myself, "Okay, we are kind of going to get the toe-to-toe work that I've
25 been wanting for a long time. Let's get after them." And of course, they weren't after Phu
26 Bai they wanted Hue because it was an old imperial capital. And it had political
27 significance. And Phu Bai the village was really not much. The base, like I said, was
28 more cargo storage area, Air America, stuff like that and it wasn't a major concern for
29 them. However, if you went south to Da Nang because the airfield and all the fighters and
30 the cargo planes and everything else and that was a major port for the United States to
31 support mostly Marine activity and the corps. So we realized when he told us that every

1 major facility was under attack, we went to full alert, of course, and we stayed on that for,
2 I don't know, two, three weeks. And that was, they moved me as I mentioned out to the
3 north gate and it was pretty, pretty intense. The feelings you could machete your way
4 through the, through the emotional intensity, if you will. And when those trucks came, of
5 course, that just reinforced it. We were all pretty shook up by that. It left a lasting
6 impression. Reading history now and whatnot I see more, a bigger picture than I did at
7 the time because generally when you're in the combat area you're more concerned with
8 your local area. You're not really worried about what they are doing 200 miles away.
9 That's not a factor for you unless you're coming your way and then has notice, okay. But
10 other than that, it was like, okay, they hit Saigon, hit Nha Trang, they hit Cho Doc, they
11 hit all these places and they had initial success, but nothing ever lasted. They ended up
12 losing whatever they gained. And eventually, the Viet Cong, further south than where we
13 were for the most part, they were pretty much wiped out after that. So, although we
14 accomplished something on the field, politically after Westmoreland and LBJ told
15 everybody it was under control, it was pretty much the downturn for the country in the
16 war, the involvement in the war.

17 KC: Why don't we take a break there for today?

18 CS: Okay.

Interview with Chuck Sawyer
Session [4] of [4]

1

2 KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Mr. Chuck
3 Sawyer. I am in Lubbock, Texas, and Mr. Sawyer is joining us again from his home in
4 Arizona. Mr. Sawyer, when we left off last time you had described your time in Hue-Phu
5 Bai in charge of security. Or not Hue-Phu Bai, but Phu Bai in charge of security
6 including the Tet Offensive. What I'd like for you to do now, if you would please, is kind
7 of pick up the narrative from that point. What was it like at Phu Bai in the aftermath of
8 the Tet Offensive? And how did that affect you and those who were with you?

9 CS: Well, as I mentioned earlier, I was in charge of the north gate's security. And
10 the biggest thing that happened I think that I can remember was we had an awful lot of
11 trucks going through going away, full of Marines. Probably more than I've ever seen any
12 time in my life. Of course, I had to, you know, talk to them, stop each truck and talk to
13 them and make sure that they understood what they were going into as far as the current
14 intelligence of the moment, if you will, via radio that I was receiving. And I just,
15 personally I felt very sad because I wasn't going with them. I wanted to go with them.
16 The other guys that were there with me were happy to be staying where we were. I
17 understand that, too.

18 KC: Sure.

19 CS: And as statistics there sound, we lost a lot of people in the way of recovering
20 Il Castle City and the old imperial castle, if you will.

21 KC: And this—

22 CS: And that was kind of devastating because obviously on our return trips, the
23 trucks were loaded with dead Marines. Dead Americans, not just Marines, and that was
24 kind of sad. That was pretty sad, but I realized something that there was no way in the
25 world that we had, to this point in time, put this much effort into anything as to taking it
26 over, taking it away from the North Vietnamese. I found that kind of impressive because
27 it inspired me in the sense of, well, maybe now we are going to get serious and get to
28 work and get this thing over with. Unfortunately, that didn't happen. We went back to
29 almost the norm after that dropped off and we continued to play games with them as they
30 did with us.

1 KC: A few things—

2 CS: And we did, you know. Ho Chi Minh says nothing about this will be a war of
3 attrition. Well, obviously people, the leader he planned it that way. He and General Giap.
4 And that's exactly what it was and so they were just biding their time, hitting us when
5 they could when they wanted to and we were in a reactive mode and as such you really
6 don't want to come into battles that way. I mean, we won the battles, but not the war
7 because the overall philosophy was working right as he had planned it.

8 KC: You had mentioned that you were trying to brief these trucks as they were
9 going north to Hue on what intelligence you were getting. What kind of intelligence were
10 you getting in February and March of 1968 about what was going on up there?

11 CS: Well, one of the main things I _____(??) was they've taken over the city,
12 it's not going to be an easy job to get it back. Because of certain restrictions that were
13 placed initially, they were not allowed to fire on the imperial palace, if you will. And of
14 course, the NVA knew that, and the local VC who was working with them knew that so
15 that's where they congregated. And they could return small arms fire, but no artillery, no
16 air strikes, no tank fire, anything like that. And they were in the commanding position
17 pretty much of shooting fish in a barrel type philosophy and that caused a lot of injuries
18 and deaths. I also was getting activity on the radio about the road, if it was clear or not.
19 There was an Army Green Beret camp up the road about ten miles or something. They
20 were informing us as well as how things are up to that point. So it was very basic
21 information. Nothing strategic or dramatic, otherwise it wouldn't have come over radio at
22 all.

23 KC: Sure.

24 CS: It was just, you know, stay alert and realize it's not going to be easy. Don't,
25 don't keep your heads down because that's what they count on you doing and then they
26 come and get you. So pay attention, stay alert, be prepared for the worst, hope for the
27 best.

28 KC: As a combat veteran yourself, were you able to provide any sort of advice or
29 any sort of encouragement to these men or they just simply moving through too quickly?

30 CS: For the most part they were moving through too quickly, but many of these
31 guys, and I may have mentioned this last time were used to booby traps and

1 confrontational situation that lasted maybe five minutes or so and I told them up here
2 that's not what happens. Up here what happens is, especially if it's the NVA and it was,
3 they will stand and fight you toe to toe, man to man, hand to hand, whatever it takes. So
4 like I said, be ready for the worst. Prepare for the worst, you know, pray and hope for the
5 best, but these guys aren't going to pack up and run on you. They came here for a specific
6 reason and that's to take it over and hold it, and of course kill you if you try to make any
7 changes. Some of these guys, unfortunately because of the body counts coming back,
8 we're not really prepared for that. They were at a disadvantage for them out there, I
9 thought. To bring these guys out of Da Nang and south of Da Nang and Chu Lai and
10 wherever up here to a different kind of fighting situation. It put them at a distinct
11 disadvantage right away.

12 KC: The battle to retake so much of Hue lasted deep into or at least into March of
13 '68. How aware were you of what was going on up there? What kind of reports were you
14 getting back? What kind of things were you as an enlisted man getting back from the
15 battle?

16 CS: Well, me personally, via radio like I said. Things that were kind of, any
17 important information they weren't transmitted on the radio. Secondly, our lieutenant
18 would come up every now and then and talk to us and inform us as to what intelligence
19 was holding. Thirdly, any time it appeared to be a lot of activity, like around the gate area
20 where we were or out on the air strip. Rockets and I think we had a few mortars, but not
21 many. Rockets would rain in like literally raindrops because they wanted to curtail that
22 because they knew that any activity here was support for any activity in Hue. So as long
23 as the rockets kept coming in, we knew they were trying to keep us pinned down so we
24 couldn't do anything further to assist up there, which our main concern was our own
25 facility. And everybody else was similar to that. It was a pocket type defensive structure
26 where the guys in Hue that were there they might resupply, they might not. They might
27 get food, they might not. In Phu Bai it was a similar situation because of rockets, but not
28 ground assault. I was, honestly, I was stunned that they didn't hit Phu Bai. I think they
29 could have taken it over. If they've put a thousand men on us, we'd have been probably a
30 forgotten set of individuals at this point in time.

31 KC: What kind of rockets were they hitting you with there at Phu Bai?

1 CS: They weren't SAMs (surface-to-air missiles), but they were basically ground-
2 to-ground rockets and they were coming out of A Shau Valley. Some people call them
3 122s. I honestly I don't remember what they were, but I know they were not as precise as
4 things are today. In particular they would aim in the general direction and then they'd
5 adjust the fire as we do and most countries do with artillery and other things. But they
6 would miss the runway, they'd hit in the middle of nowhere, they maybe were aiming for
7 you, but they couldn't ever seem to pin it down close enough. So yeah, they were scary
8 and yes, if they saturated an area with the rockets then you had a serious problem, but
9 they were trying to keep points. Like blow up part of the runway or hit a plane on the
10 runway or something like that. They quit some at the north gate, but they didn't do any
11 harm because they were short a few times and long a couple other times.

12 KC: How long did these rocket attacks last in terms of days or weeks?

13 CS: I think I went out there—let's see the first few days of February and I didn't
14 come back until probably the end of March, something like that. And Phu Bai was almost
15 a daily event where we had rockets coming in. It really, you know, it didn't really bother
16 me that's why you get kind of used to it, it's almost like, well, it's two o'clock it's time
17 for some rockets. You know, you just don't—because I knew the guys in Hue were
18 having a hell of a time. Like I mentioned, trucks were coming back with all these bodies
19 of these kids and stuff and I'm thinking, "Well, what the heck is a rocket compared to all
20 this?" You know. But it went on for me for about two months, I'd say. Close to that. But
21 it's not as nerve wracking when you know it's due or overdue, but you know it's going to
22 happen. The nights unfortunately were the worst times, of course, because now sound is
23 keener at night because everything else is quieting down. People in movements and
24 whatnot. And it's intensified in the darkness. So we could hear, we couldn't see flashes,
25 but we could hear the rockets go boom, boom, boom. And that means three of them
26 launched.

27 KC: Mm-hmm

28 CS: And just listen to the whistle and you can tell how close it's going to be. We
29 pretty much, we took a bit of a beating but, as far as I remember I don't remember any
30 major hits or much of anything.

1 KC: Were these rocket attacks, were they timed, were they, like you said, “At
2 2:00 it’s time for a rocket attack.” Were they much more sporadic and more varied in
3 when they would launch these attacks?

4 CS: They were very sporadic, but if you went like three hours and you didn’t have
5 a rocket attack, you were overdue.

6 KC: Mm-hmm

7 CS: So when I say 2:00 that was rhetorical really in—

8 KC: Sure, sure.

9 CS: Terms of hey, we are overdue. We haven’t had one all day. I hear it’s two
10 o’clock, what the heck is a matter with these guys? We’re counting on them to, you
11 know, keep our energy up. Keep our adrenaline running. Most of the time they didn’t let
12 you down. I was in a few places like further up on the DMZ in Gio Lin were when they
13 hit us with recoilless rifle fire, it was ten AM. At five PM and you could set your watch
14 by it. They were very punctual. So you learn to kind of count on it and anticipate it and,
15 okay, here comes the rockets, okay. The bigger concern really for us at Phu Bai was a
16 ground assault because we really didn’t have enough people. They stripped that base of
17 just about all ground forces to support Hue and Da Nang and other places. It could have
18 been very easy pickings if people wanted us.

19 KC: Well, that brings me to another question that I have. You have these regular
20 or irregular, however you want to define that, these rocket attacks coming in. You said
21 that the nights were generally worse than the day. Describe for me your typical day
22 during one of these rocket attacks. You said it’s lasted for almost two months while you
23 were there. What was it like? What kind of—do you fall into a routine or are there certain
24 things that you do to prepare yourself? How do you go about you’re quote, un-quote,
25 “regular life”? Describe for me what it was like on a daily basis during these rocket
26 attacks.

27 CS: Well, you try not to get into a routine because I always felt, especially on the
28 gate up there. We were—you could have been off three-hundred yards looking at us with
29 binocular scopes or anything. If you’re on a daily routine then obviously somebody if
30 somebody’s watching you, they can figure that out.

31 KC: Mm-hmm.

1 CS: Accordingly attack via either the ground rockets, mortars, whatever. So I
2 tried not to do anything on a regular basis. One of the things I did was I mentioned I had
3 a young man from the States who'd just come in as a machinegunner.

4 KC: Mm-hmm

5 CS: He was left in this hole pretty much to the right of the main gate and with a
6 little bit of camouflage and stuff around him to, if tanks or troops or anybody came to
7 open up the M-60. I would go over to him at night or over to him in the morning and stuff
8 because I had a different position. And talked to him and see how he's doing, what's
9 going on and that kind of thing. To my left, as I'm facing north, I had about six or seven
10 Army guys. Mostly the NVA and the VC could move in on you and get pretty darn close
11 and you would never hear them, never seem them. That was our biggest concern was not
12 being stormed. All of a sudden, basically out of the blue, had no night vision or anything.
13 We had starlight scopes in those days. I didn't have one so it was just your eyes, your
14 ears, your senses. You know how you can feel sometimes something's wrong?

15 KC: Mm-hmm

16 CS: That's all we really had. Every now and then somebody would come up to the
17 gate and bring us a bunch of chow and more ammo and, "How are you doing? What do I
18 need to tell the lieutenant," or the captain or whoever? And I said "Well, we need this, we
19 need that. These guys need some more rain gear, you know, because it rained the other
20 day and they all got wet and we don't want them getting sick or falling asleep and having
21 health issues." So, there was no fixed routine. I tried to vary my routine. I told them the
22 same thing. I said, "Don't get up every morning, run over somewhere, to the same spot,
23 go to the bathroom. Don't do that. Because I have a feeling we are being watched and I
24 don't know that, but I have a feeling we are. If you have a regular routine then they'll
25 know at ten o'clock everyone goes over and pees or whatever." Well, you left you
26 weapons behind. Bad idea. We had no fixed routines basically. It was just sun up to sun
27 down, trying to stay alert, trying to stay awake a lot of times because at night most of us
28 didn't sleep. During the day you might catch a nap. I might say, "Hey, I'm going to doze
29 for a few. Keep an eye on the gate," and this and that. And then I'd doze off and then I'd
30 wake up.

31 KC: Now, were you here at the north gate for this roughly entire two months?

1 CS: Yes.

2 KC: That's a long time to be up there in those kinds of conditions. What does that
3 constant state of readiness do to you physically and psychologically?

4 CS: Physically it wears you down. Psychologically, as I think I've mentioned
5 before, I always wanted to just have it out with them. Winner takes all. I was of that same
6 mentality at the time I was on the north gate. Please realize when you say what you just
7 said about these conditions compared to what the guys in Hue were going through, what
8 other guys out in the bush were going through. Really, this may sound a little dramatic,
9 but the truth of the matter is when you're in the infantry, you're in the worst possible
10 position and everybody that was during Tet was in the worst possible position. I was at an
11 airbase where we had food all the time, we had ammo, most all the time. About anything
12 we needed we had. I had about twenty guys who were on hot standby to come back us up,
13 which was a comforting thought. Of course, that didn't count about for a couple weeks
14 after this whole thing started. I didn't think about contingency plans. So really I feel
15 fortunate to be where I was at the time. It was not necessarily the most comfortable
16 situation, but it was far from what the infantry was going through. The infantry took it on
17 the chin and got up and came back and knocked the dickens out of the NVA and the VC.
18 I didn't, like as I mentioned before, leaving my squad and, you know, going off to Phu
19 Bai when they ended up in Khe Sanh and all the struggles that were going on out there.
20 And we heard about that all the time, too.

21 KC: What were you hearing about it? What was going on it Khe Sanh?

22 CS: Well, they were doing sporadic attacks around Khe Sanh at the time. They
23 really didn't hit Khe Sanh hard then. For awhile they were hitting a hill trying to take
24 over higher positions to bombard the base. We lost, let's see, three guys that were in my
25 squad were killed. Khe Sanh was supposedly going to be in another Dien Bien Phu
26 according to what the Vietnamese were saying. And we were saying "Yeah, well, I don't
27 think so." I wanted to be with the guys that I spent more time with than anything else.
28 The escape duty was, yeah, I mean it was okay. It was nothing special. I wasn't trying to
29 be a hero or anything. I just would have preferred to be with them as bad as it was. It was
30 just to me, the right thing to do. Khe Sanh was under siege, supposedly. Forty-thousand
31 people around the base. They had forty-thousand people around Con Thein when I was

1 there. I remember that. They were going to obliterate us, but they never came. So, being
2 surrounded doesn't mean it's over.

3 KC: Mm-hmm.

4 CS: And the people that I knew that were in 1st Battalion, 9th Marines that were up
5 there on a hilltop. I knew that they were surrounded, too, but they weren't giving up.
6 That's just not the nature of the beast. It just doesn't happen. So, I missed them. I wanted
7 to be with them, but I had a job to do down there and I felt that, you know, unless I'm
8 ordered to go up there I can't go up there on my own. There's no way to do that. I prayed
9 a lot for those guys. I still do.

10 KC: You mentioned that you heard that members of your squad, two or three
11 members of your squad had been killed up right in the case on area. How did you find
12 this out?

13 CS: I had a friend of mine who was—they had a program called in-country R&R
14 and you have three days and go anywhere you wanted. Well, he found out where I was
15 and he came down to where I was, Phu Bai. And he stood watch with me on the gate and
16 this was his time off and I said, "You don't have to be here. You know there's an NCO
17 club over there. You can go over there and drink beer." He said, "I can do that anytime.
18 That's no big deal." And he told me, and then he and I obviously quite a few years about
19 this stuff. He told me again about how they died and all that stuff and it really bothered
20 me I felt if I'd, I really felt this and I still do. That if I was there, that wouldn't have
21 happened. Because I told officers, I told everybody at certain times, you know, you don't
22 know what you are doing. That's not going to work, they're setting a trap, you know,
23 things like that and they would listen because I had more experience in the field than they
24 did.

25 KC: Mm-hmm.

26 CS: I'm not saying I'm the greatest infantry person around by any means. I am
27 saying that certain things are keys to what they were doing. And you have to pay
28 attention to that.

29 KC: Now, you were twenty-one, twenty-two years old, something like that at this
30 time.

31 CS: I was, at this time I was twenty-three.

1 KC: Okay, twenty-three years old.

2 CS: Yes.

3 KC: Okay, at twenty-three years old you have, you've heard the reports of your
4 friends being killed. You have mentioned that when these trucks are coming back from
5 Hue they were full of dead Marines. What does that kind of experience, this proximity
6 with death, what does that do to a person in your position? What did that do to you at the
7 time? How do you deal with this?

8 CS: Well, it's a fact of life that you have to face. You never like it. You don't
9 always understand it. I went from being twenty-one roughly when I got there to twenty-
10 four when I left and that's because my birthday cycled through those times not. I didn't
11 stay any longer than thirteen months. I came back as almost like a forty-year-old man
12 who'd been around a bit. I saw, I've seen a lot of death and destruction and homeless
13 people, people begging for food every day, little kids. I came back to America where we
14 really had no idea of poverty or death and destruction and I to this day give thanks that
15 we don't have those kinds of things going on here as they do and have had in Europe and
16 Asia, a lot. But it made me probably bitter, too, because I—two of those guys that died
17 everywhere I went if I went on something special or whatever they would always go with
18 me. And I liked that a lot. They did that as a volunteer. They didn't have to go at all,
19 nobody had to go. I feel sad about that. I feel angry about it even to this day. I wish that
20 they were around. I feel sorry for the lieutenant who ordered their deaths because
21 basically that's what he did. I don't know. It's just, it's war. That's that way it is. People
22 die, people live. Some get messed up mentally, some get messed up physically, and some
23 get both. It's not a pleasant thing by any means. In fact, the more people witness it
24 hopefully the less won't have to do it, but it's the culture in our country and other
25 countries in the world as such that you're not going to have a lot of people join the
26 services anymore or doing anything like that if they don't have to. I personally see the
27 draft coming back because of things like that. And I also see the country being almost
28 ripped apart by it because most people feel in an ideological sense we should be able to
29 talk these things out. So do I. The difference is it doesn't always work. And you're
30 dealing with terrorists or hijackers or people like that, they don't really want to talk. You
31 know, unfortunately the only thing they understand is force, threefold of what they've

1 given. The Navy SEALs taking out those guys who captured that boat captain and the
2 crew and everything. That's really all they understand. That's a shame because you
3 would think man has developed further than that, but we really haven't. We're still very,
4 what's the term? I guess in the early stages of Homo Erectus. That means coming out of
5 the cave and standing up. We have a long ways to go yet. I would hope for all children of
6 mine and my grandchildren and everybody's children that we don't have to do any more
7 of this, but the reality of it, that's not the case.

8 KC: Let me take you back to Phu Bai here when Hue has been retaken. What did
9 you, what did you learn about that? When did you hear about that? What was the
10 atmosphere like in Phu Bai and what was it like for you when you just discovered that
11 Hue had been retaken by American forces?

12 CS: Well, we were elated because for one thing we knew the trucks would stop
13 coming back with Marines. The other thing is that was, other than in Khe Sanh was kind
14 of one of the major missions and they failed. In the end they failed. And that's exactly
15 what we wanted to show pretty much the world. Anybody I think can open up an attack
16 and unfortunately Westmoreland and LBJ and others that told the people in the country
17 we got it under control, we're almost out of here. And then Tet opened up. The credibility
18 went to zero. Pretty much still at zero with the US government and the people that they
19 represent. We were still supplying food and ammo and Navy doctors and you name it, up
20 to Hue because there was still a lot of people injured and they were trying to somewhat
21 reconstruct the city so that people could move back in. A lot of buildings, a lot of homes
22 were blown up, burned up. They also found as you may have remembered, I think it was
23 a couple hundred scholars and whatnot they'd taken out and shot them all, put them in a
24 hole.

25 KC: Mm-hmm.

26 CS: We found out some of the atrocities which were kind of amazing because
27 usually the American press reported what we did was wrong, but very seldom what the
28 NVA or VC did that was wrong. Wrong in the sense that just being a little humane doing
29 all this. We were overall very happy at Phu Bai, but we also felt sad that so many people
30 died. So many of our people we didn't really think too much about the NVA. We respected
31 them as fighting organizations and whatnot, but as far as deaths they didn't mean

1 anything to me, nothing at all. It was a kind of a time of joy and sorrow combined. It's a
2 shame since obviously we are quarterbacking here from Monday morning, but since they
3 were going to win it all anyway that they couldn't have waited until we left. A lot of
4 people tie Tet as the turning point to initial or final victory for the NVA. If we'd had
5 stayed past '73 as a fighting force, I don't think 1975 would have happened. Now, how
6 many people had to die to prove that point? How many actually needed to and, you know,
7 that's another issue. That State department and president and people like that to figure
8 that out, but it was a turning point in the sense of credibility. They lost all their credibility
9 and that was pretty sad because that means the fighting man out there who's basically
10 trying to live day to day, he lost his credibility, too.

11 KC: You mentioned that when Hue was retaken, that security and just the overall
12 effort in that part of the war, and maybe this goes for the entire war throughout all four
13 corps, that things kind of returned back to where they were. That the Americans weren't
14 as aggressive as they had been before they were fighting in the same kind of manner they
15 weren't ordered to fight in the same manner they were to retake Hue and to react to the
16 Tet Offensive. There at Phu Bai what sort of specific examples can you give me of this
17 kind of returning back to the way it was pre-Tet?

18 CS: Well, they disbanded the, say, the squad and a half that I had up there. And
19 they sent myself and the machinegunner back to a base security position which was on
20 the north and east side of the base. They put two people up at the gate. Traffic return
21 civilians as well as military traffic return to the normal pace. We were back to guard duty
22 at night and sandbagging details during the day to fill more bunkers. Aircraft again were
23 landing and taking off at a regular basis. There was no concerted effort to change much.
24 It's kind of like two cats in a fight and they back up to lick their wounds.

25 KC: Mm-hmm.

26 CS: It's kind of the way I perceived it. We kind of back up and they backed up
27 and then, of course, Khe Sanh remained up—remained, excuse me—a problem. They
28 didn't really pursue the NVA. I don't believe we did enough of on the Ho Chi Minh Trail
29 to stop any further infiltration. And yet, as I think I've also mentioned, pilots reported at
30 night that the Ho Chi Minh Trail looked like Santa Monica Freeway. That to me says
31 something's wrong. "Why aren't we bombing?" Well when you ask people that question

1 they say, “Well there was so many different forks of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.” One of
2 them came down through A Shau Valley which was just west of Phu Bai a little ways and
3 the way it was really years before; I think it was year, year and a half before major
4 operations occurred in the A Shau Valley with heavy, heavy losses. I didn’t, I don’t
5 understand the lack of initiatives to go out there and get them. I mean, cautiously, yes, but
6 we just kind of went back to normal stuff and we ran night patrols and ambushes and we
7 didn’t usually venture beyond, say, three thousand meters out of our perimeter. That was
8 pretty much it. It’s kind of like, “Well, that’s that. You know, they took all their energy
9 and their people and everything and charged and we took care of the charge and now they
10 are going to go back a regroup and we are going to stand by for the next one.” The
11 defensive posture in this that I’ve mentioned before is that I sit here with my laptop
12 looking at General Patton on the screen.

13 KC: (Chuckles)

14 CS: For him, and for me we thought alike and I didn’t really know much about
15 Patton at the time, but defensive postures are a tribute to man’s stupidity. We’ve—as a
16 paraphrase, but that’s something you said in the movie. Something that I’ve read he’s
17 said in books. I think that’s true and I think we proved that in Vietnam. Conversely, in
18 Afghanistan and Iraq, we’re trying to take the offense. Keep them off their balance,
19 attack here, attack there, stop, attack, stop, attack. It’s kind of like a boxing match. You
20 can’t really ever let the other guy know what you are doing because then they could take
21 either basic measures or counter measures.

22 KC: Mm-hmm.

23 CS: We lacked initiative most of the time and after Tet it was kind of like we got
24 to re-group and re-arm and get our people ready. We’ll be ready next year when they do
25 this or next spring if they want to do a spring offensive, but never really were other than
26 in a defensive posture.

27 KC: Did you remain at Phu Bai for the remainder of your tour?

28 CS: Yes, I did. When I came back toward the end of March, back to regular duty I
29 had about a month to go and then I rotated back to the United States.

30 KC: Now, after everything that you’ve seen, from combat with the 1st of the 9th in
31 the Con Thien area, being wounded, dealing with all of the daily issues which a frontline

1 combat soldier has to deal with then witnessing the Tet Offensive from your vantage
2 point in Phu Bai. In the remaining time that you had left, did you ever stop and reflect
3 about what was going on, what your personal experiences were in this? Did you ever
4 have time to stop and think about what your role was in all this?

5 CS: Yes, I did. Yes, I have. Probably, yes, I will.

6 KC: Mm-hmm.

7 CS: I have read more books on Vietnam to get a bigger picture of it than just the
8 scope area I was in. But when I was there in my last month or so, I reflected a lot on the
9 people that I worked with, some of who had passed away. As to, "What am I going to do
10 when I get home?" as to how—because I had a lot of friends who were writing me and
11 actually we were exchanging some tapes at the time, too. "How am I going to explain
12 these things and the changes that I know they are going to see in me? What's going to
13 happen to me after I leave? Not that me leaving is a factor, but what will happen, what's
14 the final outcome?" When I went back to the States, I was in a unit that was in hot
15 standby to go over to case another Tet Offensive came up and I didn't really care for that
16 too much, but we had limited personnel so everybody had to like many of the young men
17 are now in Afghanistan. Two, three, four tours, you know, we had a lot of people with
18 two tours, some people with three. Very few with four. I'll say volunteered, they weren't
19 going to go back. I just wondered, "What have we proven and what have we not proven?"
20 The one thing we've proven seemed to me like we were inept, totally inept. Supposedly
21 the most technically advanced war machine you could put on the field and some of the
22 best troops you could ever have, and yet we couldn't beat these guys because of two
23 reasons in my mind. One, basically was the politicians who were putting their fingers in
24 the pie and making a mess. And two was because of all these, like Korea, all the
25 restrictions. You can't go here, you can't do this, and you can't do that. When I felt we
26 should have been taking the offensive to end this as soon as possible and stop the killing
27 on both sides. I felt sad again, because once again I'm leaving some of the guys. I didn't
28 like that. I also pondered, "Why me? Why am I still alive when these kids die?" You
29 think about the survival role, you know, "Why are you left here?" What is—it goes back
30 to, "Why are you here on earth to start with? What's the purpose of your mission here?"

1 And when I, when I got back to the States my biggest concern was I knew that the media
2 wasn't telling the whole story.

3 KC: Now, how did you know that?

4 CS: Well, because I'd been through so much of this that when they would start
5 doing a report on the six o'clock news—my family met me at the Phoenix International
6 Airport and we went home and we watched the six o'clock news and then we all went out
7 to dinner. My dad was very interested in my comments about what they were going to
8 show. And what they showed was a bunch of people jumping in a bomb crater because
9 they were under mortar attack. And I started yelling—not talking, yelling—"Get out of
10 there, get out of there, and get out of there!" By the time the last one came out a mortar,
11 and there was a camera man in there with them and he was panning, showing all the
12 guys. A mortar round landed in the middle of it and wounded everybody there. And of
13 course, some became fatalities.

14 KC: Mm-hmm.

15 CS: And that's why I was yelling, "Get out of there, and get out of there!" And
16 my dad said, "You don't take cover?" I said, "Yeah, but you don't jump in a probably a
17 registered crater and sure enough it's registered if they can put a round right in the middle
18 of it."

19 KC: Mm-hmm.

20 CS: And that's what they did. Those kind of things and the fact that, once again it
21 was. "Well, we are taking this offensive into A Shau Valley and we're going to wipe
22 them out, we're going to do this" A Shau Valley was one of the most armed places in the
23 world at that time, next to Hanoi. They had anti-aircraft guns in there, they had artillery,
24 they had rockets, they had mortars, and they had millions of small arms. It was a stopping
25 point to feed most everything up in I Corps. They weren't telling the whole story. It just,
26 you know, "They lost three guys today and that's the highest for the week." Well, not
27 necessarily because they don't always report how many that were lost, wounded, or
28 killed. My dad and I understood all that. You know I told you he was getting reports and
29 telling us reports.

30 KC: Mm-hmm.

1 CS: So he knew what was going on and I just told him, "It's sad, they can't, and
2 they can't really report the truth." Part of that is because the American people, as most
3 people have a saturation point with this kind of information. It's not something you want
4 to hear a lot of. If we had information on Iraq and Afghanistan at this point every day,
5 you notice it's not on the front page. It's hardly at all anymore. These things are going on,
6 but it's not that big a deal. The world goes on, we must go on, and so we don't want to
7 saturate you with all this stuff. Things might have been different. I feel the truth is what
8 really matters. You report the truth, you tell them that if they don't like it, well fine. Then
9 turn your head, go put your head in the sand, whatever. But you need to have the truth so
10 you make good, good solid decisions. And I don't think the military or the political
11 people in power were making good decisions. There were people dying every day
12 because of it.

13 KC: Let me take you back to your final few days in Vietnam. You said that you
14 had a chance to reflect on a lot of different things that you mentioned. One of the things
15 you mentioned was what you wanted to do when you got home. What did you wanted to
16 do when you left the Marine Corps?

17 CS: Well, when I first came back to the United States I seriously thought about
18 staying in the Marine Corps. Being on hot standby didn't provide a real level of comfort
19 to that. I was able to change my job status, my military occupational specialty to military
20 intelligence which I found extremely interesting, informative, and sometimes very stupid,
21 but I thought, "You know, I could do a career in this easy. This would be kind of
22 interesting. Yeah, I'd have to go to combat. Yes, I'd have to get exposed again and all
23 this stuff, but I wouldn't necessarily be in and with the grunts all the time so it wouldn't
24 be near as bad."

25 KC: Mm-hmm.

26 CS: I seriously thought about it. My father and my mother didn't even for a
27 moment want me to consider it. I knew also that if I had re-enlisted, two things would
28 have happened. One, I would have got a, an additional stripe and a duty station probably
29 anywhere I wanted. Well, this was 1968-'69. I would have probably gone back to
30 Vietnam, volunteered to go back and get that over with because otherwise it would hang
31 over my head until the duration of that war.

1 KC: Mm-hmm.

2 CS: So, I weighed that as to, "I wonder what my life expectancy would be if I
3 went again into that crunch machine." And I realized that I probably wouldn't come back.
4 And I did want to have a family someday. I did want to do other things with my life. I
5 really didn't know what, but I wanted to go out and work and kind of try to forget some
6 of this stuff. Which, you know, that was a joke. That was a pipe dream from a young
7 man. Chronologically young, anyway.

8 KC: Why do you say that?

9 CS: Why do I say that?

10 KC: Yes.

11 CS: Certain images, sounds, smells are burned into my brain, as they are
12 everybody that served in Vietnam. You'll never get rid of them no matter what you do.
13 Some people went to drugs, some people went to alcohol, and some went to both. You
14 can't, you can't get rid of them. Your mind's eye is a camera that is ongoing and
15 unforgiving. The first truckload of dead Marines, I can see it if I close my eyes. Very
16 unnerving, anxious, anger, frustration, all these emotions just swell up out of you. You
17 have to deal with that and sometimes that's hard to do. And one way I found to do that is
18 to talk to people who have either been there or have some grasp of the subject matter.
19 One reason I'm doing this interview with all of you is, not only for the history and
20 information that hopefully others will gain and learn from, but also it's therapy. The more
21 you can get out this stuff, the less it stays in you as a cancer does.

22 KC: On that topic, what type of, did you face any sort of difficulties when it
23 comes to adjusting in the peacetime world in the United States? You've gone from
24 peacetime world to the often times, the chaos and extreme circumstances in the war back
25 to the peacetime world again. Were there any difficulties that you faced? Were there any
26 specific instances or issues? Or how did you adjust to all this once you came home?

27 CS: You know, this is a real good point, Kelly because now you're actually
28 offering periods of transition for these guys. They didn't really offer us much of anything
29 other than thirty days' leave to go home and then report to your next duty station. Thirty
30 days. Here I am, sixty-five years old. I still have memories that sometimes still haunt me.
31 You need a period to try to get some of this out of your head. You really can't do that so

1 you, as I did, I came home, I got married, I had a child. My wife and I had a child. I
2 focused strictly on my career and my job and my family. You know, I tried to push the
3 rest away and like many people, I tried it with alcohol. And that, of course, puts my
4 marriage on the rocks. My wife was good enough to stay with me and help me through
5 that and I'm glad she did because not only did it save me, it saved us, it also allowed us to
6 have two more children and for that I'm blessed. But there was no real transition back
7 into it. You had to make your own transition or do whatever and many, unfortunately,
8 many of these people who came back didn't do that. They got into a bar scene or they got
9 into, say, the American Legion and VFW—and I'm not being sarcastic about those
10 organizations, they're very good organizations—but when they sit around and talk about
11 war all the time, I don't know how good that is for people who are trying to forget it or
12 get it washed out. Going there a few times, have a few beers, talk to the guys, talk about
13 some things and then try to let it go. Get on with your life. There's people unfortunately
14 with the same PTSD scenarios and whatnot from World War II, from Korea. They're still
15 quietly suffering somewhere or they and their families are quietly suffering. That's
16 throughout America, that's not just any given place. Veterans, one reason they join other
17 veterans' groups is so they can talk to people who have a better understanding of it.

18 KC: Mm-hmm

19 CS: And they serve a great purpose, for that very reason. But there really was no
20 transition. I just made my own up and tried to go with it and so far I've done okay. I'm
21 going to be hopefully retiring in about ten, eleven months. Then I can go do what I really
22 want to do.

23 KC: Which is?

24 CS: I want to take a lot of photography of nature, of the southwest. Natural,
25 beautiful mountains, prairies, I want to come back to Lubbock and see the exhibit that
26 you guys have for the Vietnam War. I'd like to bring my family. I'm a real history nut so
27 a lot of places where, say, Wyatt Earp), Billy the Kid, Jesse James, Doc Holiday, Wild
28 Bill Hickok. I want to go to these places and I've been to some of them, but I want to go
29 to these places and actually take pictures of buildings, headstones, things like that and
30 actually touch them so I can say, "Yes, I was here and I've been there. He was there long
31 before, but I was here, too." That's kind of a strange thing.

1 KC: No, certainly not.

2 CS: Well, that's something I just would like to do before I pass on to my next job.

3 You know, Marines don't die, they become guards.

4 KC: (Chuckles)

5 CS: Up in heaven if you're lucky.

6 KC: Tell me this, Mr. Sawyer: did you follow the war at all once you came home?

7 Did you follow it in the news?

8 CS: Yes, I did. Every day and, of course, the people I work with had a lot of

9 questions for me.

10 KC: Mm-hmm.

11 CS: I would try to answer them the best I could, but—

12 KC: What kind of questions would they have for you?

13 CS: Well, first of all, things like, "Is that true?" Secondly was, "I thought we were

14 winning this?" And I would answer with a response of, "They only showed you a small

15 catch full here of what's really going on. They're not showing you everything" I watched,

16 I think it was Linebacker II when Nixon initiated the bombing of North Vietnam.

17 KC: Mm-hmm

18 CS: And they were a whisper away from total surrender and then we stopped the

19 bombing. Well, my concern then as it is even to this day, "How many hundreds of

20 thousands of more people die because of that?" War is a nasty business and I think when

21 you talk to—what's the general's name who did Desert Storm? Schwarzkopf.

22 KC: Mm-hmm.

23 CS: You need to get in there with the biggest hardest punch you have and let them

24 have it and end it. And then get out. That's what we should have done in Vietnam and the

25 bombing was just a good example of it. Bombing by itself I don't believe accomplishes

26 everything, but it sure can put the fear of God into you quickly. B-52s were devastating.

27 When they came through an area, they moon surfaced the earth where they obliterated,

28 they saturated their bombing. I can imagine, only in my mind what that looked like in

29 North Vietnam. So, there were questions about, "Why aren't we winning? Is this true?

30 What would you do?" Yada, yada, yada. And I said, "Well, you know it's up to the

1 president and I wish he'd take the offensive and go get them and get this over with." And
2 of course, we never did.

3 KC: What was your impression of the peace accords of 1973?

4 CS: I'm sorry. I heard the Peace of '73?

5 KC: Yes. What was your impression of that when the United States and North
6 Vietnam or the United States essentially decided to leave the war and its participation?

7 CS: I think severe anger is probably the best description. We'd lost an awful lot of
8 people. Did we do that for a purpose or did we just go in and drop pretty close to sixty-
9 thousand people, that's just on our side. Or a million something in the Vietnamese south
10 and north bowl who were unaccounted for, many of them because they were blown to
11 smithereens. That's an awful lot of people just to say, "Well, the hell with it. Let's get out
12 of here." When I saw on TV the evacuation of '75 of the people off of—what people,
13 some people say was the US embassy but it was some other building in Saigon. I felt like
14 we were putting our tail between our legs and running and I didn't like it because we had
15 fifty-eight thousand plus who had already died. We had a Marine guard at the embassy
16 who was one of the last guys to get killed. And the NVA would not give us his body for a
17 long time, too, as a taunt to Marines and the American people. I don't believe getting into
18 a fight without a goal to win it and I don't believe getting into a fight without the will to
19 win is a good idea. I think it's a big mistake. I'd much prefer sitting and talking with
20 somebody as much as I may dislike them distrust them, whatever. I would prefer to do
21 that, but the world we live in doesn't allow that. I think we look terrible to the SEATO
22 (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) nations. Which Australia's one of them. Thailand,
23 the Philippines, the Chinese, I'm sure, looked at us like, "Yeah, they're still paper tigers
24 just like they are in Korea. They'll fight so long then they quit. So you can always win a
25 war against the Americans with attrition. Technology has changed that a bit in a sense of
26 attrition may be very short, but I think the concept is true to form. We just don't want to
27 have a protracted fight with anybody just as we're right now going through Afghanistan
28 and Iraq. I'm not saying that's the answer to winning and winning's not everything. What
29 I am saying is there's better ways to do this and surely we can come out of the cave and
30 figure out something better than what we are doing. Because the fifty-eight thousand
31 young men whose names are on the Wall are pretty much forgotten other than their

1 families and (??). All the young men who have died in Iraq pretty much forgotten.
2 Afghanistan pretty much the same thing. Ten years from now they'll talk about this in the
3 history books and that's the only note they'll be. That's another reason why what you're
4 doing is so important because they can actually hear people talking about it who were
5 there and experienced these things. And it might give maybe a little bit more of a touch
6 on their soul to say, "You know what? We don't need this anymore. We don't need to
7 have people dying for nothing. We need to have a plan if we're going to do this and it has
8 to be our last resort."

9 KC: Mr. Sawyer, I have just one last question for you today and then I'll let you
10 add anything else that you would like to add. And it's a pretty broad question. Feel free to
11 interpret this and answer this in any way that you'd like, but can you tell me how your
12 experience in the Vietnam War, how has it most affected your life?

13 CS: Well, I think the biggest thing for me, from Vietnam, I learned a lot of things
14 in Vietnam. One of the things I learned is communication is critical. Making sure
15 everyone gets the word and where they're going and things like that. I've since gone off
16 into the electrical world where that is critical for safety. I think one of the overriding
17 factors from Vietnam in my life is actually I don't like chaos and disorganization. It
18 drives me crazy. And there was a lot of that in firefights and then artillery and mortar
19 rounds coming in and things like that. People were running for cover, doing this, that and
20 the other and very seldom did we ever instantaneously respond to the situation. We were
21 somewhat prepared for it, but not always in a sense of, "Okay, that's what you want to do
22 then fine, this is what we're going to do." In my life now, when things get chaotic, I step
23 in and take complete control from anybody and everybody. The other day, I was coming
24 home from work and there was a car wreck, a car and motorcycle wreck on the street.
25 And I used to have a motorcycle so I have empathy for riders quite a bit. I came up to it
26 and there was a bunch of people there and I looked down at what was going on and there
27 was probably about six people around everybody, the bike individual, and the two people
28 that were in the car. And then I stepped back and realized that traffic's backing up by the
29 carload and it's a mess. That's just something that's always bothered me about Arizona.
30 They do not ever put an officer out to expedite traffic. They're busy taking information
31 and doing their reports. So I went out and started directing traffic. Well, somewhere in all

1 that it slowed down and the traffic cleared out a little bit. I went back over to the site and
2 here's the bike laying over still on the ground, the individual is sitting on the bike at this
3 point and somebody goes to pick him up. I said, "Don't touch him. Leave him alone,
4 don't touch him." And they looked at me like "Who are you?" I said, "You know we
5 have a problem here. Is that car still running?" "Yes." I said, "Back it up." "What, what
6 are you talking about?" I said, "His bike is leaking gas, now back it up." So they back—I
7 took complete control and I didn't, I could hear myself saying these things and doing
8 these things, but I hardly could believe it was me. I just started barking orders at people.
9 "Do this, do that. Has somebody called an ambulance yet? Go, go do it right now. You
10 know, here's a cell phone whatever. Go do it." And I took control of the situation and
11 when it was all said and done and I finally, I drove away, I thought somebody else is out
12 there. I just dreamt this. I really didn't though, but I thought I had. I actually stopped two
13 policemen who were coming up, the first two to arrive on the scene and I made them stop
14 because they were coming up too close to scene. And I didn't see that they were
15 policemen because the sun was starting to go down. I made them stop and they got out of
16 the vehicle and they said, "Oh, you don't have to do that." They saw me directing traffic.
17 And I said, "Yes, I know." I wanted to say something else, but I didn't. I just went back
18 to directing traffic. Control of a chaotic situation is something that is paramount to my
19 own sanity and I think that is directly related to Vietnam. Same thing with my family. I
20 have three boys and my middle son, who's going to be thirty-eight next month at this
21 time has two children and sometimes they are totally disorganized on how they do
22 anything. They don't show up for dinner reservations on time they don't, and he knows
23 this stuff drives me crazy. I have structured and restructured things such that they're
24 always on time because we plan ahead for at least thirty to forty minutes, so we set our
25 reservations accordingly and then he shows up on time. It's organization and structure
26 and when I see a lot of it going bonkers to me, I step right in and take over and get things
27 straightened out. I've done that most of my life apparently. According to my mom and
28 dad I was pretty organized even when I went out to just play, but Vietnam intensified that
29 dramatically. The Marine Corps intensified that and my life, now, the same thing I started
30 a data record database, if you will, up where I work. Now we have all the information
31 that management ever needs anytime they need it and it's just a matter to me of being

1 organized and I accept that freely because that's the only way I can keep my sanity, I
2 think.

3 KC: Very good. Is there anything else, Mr. Sawyer, you would like to add to this
4 interview?

5 CS: There's one other thing. I would, I've said this on and off, but I'd really like
6 to thank all of you at Texas Tech for doing this. This is a tremendous service to the
7 American people, to the university, the credibility of the university, and each and every
8 one of you. I don't know if you know the impact this has on veterans, but it's amazing.
9 Many of the guys that know that I'm doing this want to get on and listen and hear what's
10 what. I've encouraged them to get on regardless; don't wait for whenever I get up there.
11 There are other people with their stories. Go listen to them.

12 KC: Mm-hmm.

13 CS: I said, "You'll learn a lot about people, you'll learn a lot about, hopefully,
14 how man can progress to the point where we don't have to go to wars anymore." I'm not
15 anti-war. I love my country, but at the same time I think we're stepping in sometimes
16 where we really didn't belong.

17 KC: Well, Mr. Sawyer, I want to thank you, number one, for the kind words about
18 the work we are doing here. We are all certainly very proud of our efforts and our
19 mission and the things we've accomplished.

20 CS: You should be.

21 KC: But none of this would be possible without people like you who contribute
22 their time now and obviously who contributed the time and the sacrifice all those years
23 ago. I want to thank you very much.

24 CS: Thank you.