

ATTENTION: © Copyright The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. The following materials can be used for educational and other noncommercial purposes without the written permission of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. These materials are not to be used for resale or commercial purposes without written authorization from the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. All materials cited must be attributed to the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University

**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Stephen Sperman
Conducted by Jason Stuart
Date 16 July 2009, 23 July 2009
Transcribed by Emilie Meadors**

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.

The transcription of this interview was paid for by a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

- 1 Jason Stuart: This is Jason Stuart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University conducting an Oral History Interview with Mr. Stephen Sperman. Today is
3 July 16, 2009.
- 4 Stephen Sperman: Sperman.
- 5 JS: Sperman, excuse me, I'm sorry.
- 6 SS: It's okay. Everyone makes those mistakes.
- 7 JS: Today is July 16, 2009. I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections
8 Library on the campus of Texas Tech. Mr. Sperman is joining me by phone from New
9 City, New York. Is that correct, sir?
- 10 SS: That's correct.
- 11 JS: Okay, all right. If we could begin, if you don't mind, if you could tell me a
12 little background information about yourself. First of all, when and where were you born?
- 13 SS: Well, I was born in New York City.
- 14 JS: Okay.
- 15 SS: I was raised in the Bronx.
- 16 JS: All right.

1 SS: I went to the Bronx High School of Science, and I was pointed to West Point
2 from either the twenty-first or the twenty-second congressional district. I don't recall, but
3 it was Isidore Dollinger.

4 JS: Okay.

5 SS: As the representative. I spent my four years at the academy. I graduated. I
6 went to airborne school, so you know, I'm qualified with my five jumps down at
7 Benning. My first assignment was at Fort Devens as part of what became the 1st Brigade
8 of the 5th Mech, but at that time was an independent strack brigade. And I was the S2, S3
9 in the 3rd battalion of the 77th armor. Subsequently, I got married about that time to
10 Marian Gilman, and we were assigned to Germany.

11 JS: Okay.

12 SS: The next trip 4th of the 35th armor and there I learned how to be an air ground
13 liaison person. I took that training. I was a platoon leader, an executive officer, and
14 company commander of a tank company. And then I subsequently went to a brigade and
15 was the brigade adjutant. From there I went to—and along the way, you know, I got an
16 Army Commendation Medal and all that stuff. I went to Vietnam as part of MACV.

17 JS: Right.

18 SS: I was not assigned to an American unit, but rather as an advisor.

19 JS: Okay.

20 SS: I went to—when I reported II Corps, and it turned out that the assignment I
21 was going to have which was advisor to an armored platoon down in Lam Dong or—was
22 it Lam Dong or one of the border provinces? But the fellow who was there before me had
23 extended, so they saw my credentials, and they needed an assistant G3 Air.

24 JS: Okay.

25 SS: So, I was on General Ben Locke's staff on II Corps, and I worked for a fellow
26 by the name of George Finely who was class of 1960.

27 JS: Okay.

28 SS: And then he left after a few months. I don't remember how many months and
29 I became the G3 air advisor. I worked, you know, in the TAC for II Corps and alongside
30 of us was 2 DASC—Direct Air Support Center. So, we had all the VNAF O-1Es—not O-
31 1Es—A-1Es, I think they were.

1 JS: Yes, sir.

2 SS: Top driven aircraft which everyone liked because of the loiter time. But I also
3 handled B-52s and American air support out towards the border and throughout the corps
4 area which was about forty percent of the land area.

5 JS: Okay.

6 SS: Let's see. What else? We can go into that in detail. Then I put in my
7 resignation to get out of the military. The only thing that almost stopped me was I was
8 offered a tank company by General Peers who was my line of investigation. But, in fact, I
9 had left at that point. I got a, you know, staff on a medal from the Vietnamese and a
10 Bronze Star from the Americans then I went home.

11 JS: Right.

12 SS: And I don't know how much more you want to know about me after that.

13 JS: Right. Well, thank you for that overview. I think that will give us a good
14 place—give us a good outline as far as where to go with it. If we could—if we could
15 cover your early life as well as your education and talk a little bit about the Military
16 Academy as well.

17 SS: Okay, well, let's see. I went to a public high school, a public school,
18 elementary school PS 77. At that time, television was less of an influence, and there
19 certainly were no electronics, so growing up as a kid in the '50s, it was mostly playing
20 ball and being, you know, athletic. We played touch football. We didn't have pads or
21 anything. The high school I went to did not have a football team, but I played a lot of
22 baseball, and I was pretty good at that, but I wasn't good enough to make the Boston
23 Squad at West Point. So, I was always interested in the military. I was a boy scout, made
24 it up to Eagle Scout and the highest rank in Explorers which was a relatively new rank at
25 the time. I don't recall what it was. I was a member of The Order of the Arrow and the
26 chief, you know, a high rank gave me one of the arrows. I think I was a brotherhood or
27 something like that. Again, this is pushing the limits of my memory.

28 JS: Sure.

29 SS: I also was a counselor at a Boy Scout camp. I was a waterfront counselor.

30 JS: Okay.

31 SS: So, I learned how to—I was always a good swimmer.

1 JS: Right.

2 SS: I worked summers as a New York City lifeguard, a professional lifeguard,
3 and I had a paper route. Most kids had a paper route, but I had a pretty big route in which
4 the ride is substantial. The length of it after a while would kind of surprise me, but not
5 only with me, but my parents. Let's see what else. I grew up in a mixed neighborhood.
6 There was Jewish, Italian, and Irish. We were racially integrated at the time. We had
7 Puerto Ricans living on the block and blacks. In that neighborhood you had to learn how
8 to listen to people who spoke with heavy accents which came in handy in Germany and
9 Vietnam.

10 JS: Okay.

11 SS: Everybody had an accent just about. That was the first generation of people
12 that lived there.

13 JS: Right.

14 SS: The old working class, the hard-working people. My father was a machinist,
15 my mother was the bookkeeper but stayed at home when we were young. Let's see. I
16 have a brother who's two years younger than me, and I have a sister who's eleven years
17 younger than me.

18 JS: Okay.

19 SS: My brother was in the Army Reserves, never went to Vietnam. My sister was
20 not inclined to the military.

21 JS: All right.

22 SS: Let's see what else. Okay. You know, that's what pops in my head.

23 JS: Okay, if I could ask a few more questions on some of the things that you
24 mentioned. You talked about being interested in the military as a child—growing up as a
25 kid. What do you think that came from?

26 SS: Well, I think some of it was the Boy Scouts.

27 JS: Okay.

28 SS: Also, I loved history, and in fact, when I graduated from West Point I was
29 asked to come back which I obviously did not do and teach history and economics. I 'd
30 always study battles. I always thought they were more important than they were given
31 their place. The normal history people talk about the Civil War in school, and they gloss

1 over it, and I was fascinated by the American Revolutionary War which has never been
2 done justice.

3 JS: Right.

4 SS: In terms of what all was involved and how many people actually fought.
5 People still think that it was fifteen guys or fifty guys that fought the British.

6 JS: Right.

7 SS: At Concord. There may have been some people standing there in the square,
8 but after that there were various alarms that brought out literally thousands and
9 thousands, probably as much as fifteen thousand minutemen, as they are now called. At
10 that time, they were just militia.

11 JS: Right.

12 SS: So, you know, I was always interested in that and then when I went to science
13 I studied—I had two very good teachers. One of whom comes to mind by the name of
14 Ruth Gordon, and she always used to give me special projects, and I just developed that
15 knowledge. It just seemed to me that I wanted to pursue that career. They had the
16 program on West Point. I watched that also, but that was less of an influence than just my
17 natural inclination. So, I've always liked, you know, paramilitary things like the Boy
18 Scouts and et cetera.

19 JS: Yes, sir. All right. Well, did you have any relatives that served in the military
20 before you?

21 SS: Well, my aunt's brother was in the 101st and was killed in Normandy. That's
22 my mother's brother's wife.

23 JS: All right.

24 SS: One of my mother's first cousins was a tanker under Patten. He never got
25 overseas; he got TB. But the neighborhood that I grew up in—I can still remember BJ
26 day and VE day. I mean they were big celebrations with tables out in the middle of the
27 streets and people eating and celebrating and had everybody in that neighborhood was a
28 veteran. You know, my father was too old, but many of his friends were veterans and he
29 himself worked as in tarred shipyards building warships.

30 JS: Okay.

1 SS: So, there's always been that influence. Good friends, his brother was a navy
2 guy. I get seasick, so I had no interest in the Navy, but there's always a veteran around.
3 And at the time, it was not unusual. I mean now it's unusual, but back then it was not.

4 JS: Right, okay. And you talked about the Boy Scouts and that prepare. Could you
5 talk a little bit about—did it prepare you at all as far as future military service?

6 SS: Well, I think it prepares you to the extent of learning how to march, to that
7 extent, but it teaches you discipline, teaches you some rudimentary military organization
8 like, you know, a squad within a troop is similar to the squad within a platoon. I later
9 became an assistant scout master, so I had some leadership responsibilities there as a
10 patrol leader, I think is what it was called. I don't remember that, and I was active in the
11 explorers. So, to that extent it gives you some leadership responsibilities. You know,
12 making sure everybody had their stuff ready for a hike and all that. And when I went
13 away to camp, of course, I was the counselor, so there you're responsible for people
14 swimming. I was a waterfront counselor. I also had other responsibilities, you know,
15 within the mess hall for the young kids and all the rest of that.

16 JS: Right, okay.

17 SS: So early on I had those responsibilities.

18 JS: Sure, sure.

19 SS: It also teaches you a lot of basic things that eventually you'll need and more
20 when you're in the field. Like, I was always comfortable in the field when we were, you
21 know, out on maneuvers to the woods to present anything strange to me or difficult
22 because I spent a lot of time as a kid hiking and camping. And all these things help. I
23 mean, I wasn't a woodsman living in the city, but we spent enough time in camp up in a
24 ten-mile river which was along the—it was up in Upstate New York and also in New
25 Jersey. You know, to learn how to be—what's the word I'm looking for? To be
26 acclimated to living in a tent.

27 JS: Right.

28 SS: And roughing it if you will. That's the word I was looking for.

29 JS: Okay.

30 SS: And also getting your merit badges towards your discipline. You had to work
31 hard and meet all the requirements. And becoming an Eagle Scout, I don't remember

1 what my project was, believe it or not, but I know it was very difficult and took a lot of
2 time, you know. So, all these things later on, you know, being focused, doing what you
3 have to do, not being distracted from the mission if you will. All of them tend to help
4 you. Nothing prepares you for these barracks as a cadet. Of course, there they tear you
5 down to build you up and, you know, no matter who you are or what you say, you can
6 have an idea what you're in for, but once you're there it's sort of like combat and it's
7 different than you imagine.

8 JS: Right.

9 SS: So, that was the background. My father was a disciplinarian, you know, study,
10 crack the books, you know, do what you're told to do kind of thing. My mother was not.
11 But, you know, we had a good family life, a good solid family. It was a good
12 neighborhood. We lived with my aunt, so we always had someone around the house.

13 JS: Right, okay. All right.

14 SS: I don't know if that helps you.

15 JS: Oh, absolutely, yeah, absolutely. You mentioned this interest in history as a
16 kid. Growing up, did you pay attention to what was going on in the world?

17 SS: Oh yes, I always read the newspapers.

18 JS: Okay.

19 SS: We got the—at that time it was called the home news which is now The Post,
20 but we also had The Times. I can remember clearly the Korean War. I was very interested
21 in what was happening in Europe because my grandfather's family who had lived in
22 Poland, in Warsaw, had all disappeared, and they were probably killed in the holocaust.
23 Hold on one second.

24 JS: Sure.

25 SS: So, you know, to that extent, you know, it was somewhat familiar, although
26 the family wasn't close. All the immediate family on both sides of the family had come to
27 the United States in the 1903-1905 period.

28 JS: Okay.

29 SS: My mother's family, all from Odessa, and they all have red-blonde hair and
30 blue eyes. I had blonde hair and blue eyes as a kid so, you know, we were just like fully

1 Odessa people and when it came over stuck together. Of course, when the kids became
2 Americanized, they spread to the wind, so they don't do that anymore.

3 JS: Right.

4 SS: So, I was aware of that, and my grandfather visited us frequently. My
5 grandmother was ill; my mother's parents had both died so it was mostly my father's
6 parents. You know, they would talk about the old country and so I was interested there. I
7 was interested—I think my first memory was being fascinated like in the third or fourth
8 grade when they started to teach history about Marco Polo.

9 JS: Okay.

10 SS: I was just fascinated. But if you grew up then, in my neighborhood, your
11 next-door neighbors were from Italy. So, if you wanted to know anything about them you
12 had to figure out where Italy was.

13 JS: Right.

14 SS: I had to learn some words. There were Puerto Ricans on the block, and you'd
15 learn where Puerto Rico was. We had a lot of Irishmen with brose, so you learned where
16 that was and then we had refugees, you know, from Europe. So, like one of my neighbors
17 were Hungarian. So after awhile you, you heard the stories, you know, about where they
18 were from, where their people had fought in the wars and that and other things. And so,
19 when you live in that environment, you have a whole different perspective. Nowadays
20 it's called the melting pot, but then it was just a neighborhood where a lot of people
21 spoke funny.

22 JS: Right, okay. How was the dynamic in the neighborhood as far as—did
23 everyone get along pretty well? How did that work?

24 SS: Well, it depended. For the most part, yes, like I had a lot of Irish friends. But
25 in those days, it was not uncommon for the Catholic Church to rile everybody up against
26 Protestants, Jews, and other people so there would come along and you knew you might
27 get into a fist fight with some of the Irish kids who didn't know you, but you know, that
28 was just the one few times because the priest, the older priest had—what I used to do, in
29 retrospect, I would call up Father Coughlin school authority. I don't know if you're
30 familiar with Father Coughlin or not.

31 JS: Not really.

1 SS: The radio priest.

2 JS: Okay.

3 SS: So, he was not a good person. You know, but that all changed after awhile
4 and we dated Irish girls and Italian girls. Like I tell my wife, I married her because she
5 was Italian. But no, everyone got along with some exceptions like I said before, but it
6 was mostly—we had one German immigrant kid on the block who actually—this is
7 interesting—his name was Wilfried—I don't remember his last name—but he was in the
8 Hitler Youth in Germany. He tried to rile those kids up, but I was pretty big for my age,
9 and he had them circle me I guess like they did in Germany and saying bad things to me,
10 and I punched him. I guess they didn't do that in Germany. He banged his head on the
11 tree, and he ran home crying like a big baby.

12 JS: Right.

13 SS: That destroyed his mystique after that. I said to my Irish friends, “What were
14 you doing?”

15 JS: Right.

16 SS: I was nine, ten years old. I remember that's the first time they had done that.
17 And they just said, “We just wanted to see you beat him up.” That was the kind of
18 neighborhood it was. It was pretty much working class. And I said, “Okay, everyone
19 happy?” You know, and then we went and played ball.

20 JS: Right.

21 SS: And that was the neighborhood. You know, you played ball all the time. The
22 Irish kids all went to Catholic School.

23 JS: Okay.

24 SS: And everybody else went to public school, so you didn't see them to much.
25 As we got older, pretty much they all went to the Catholic high schools, and we all went
26 to various high schools in the neighborhood, or in my case, it was a high school that you
27 had to take an entrance exam for.

28 JS: Okay.

29 SS: So, you know, I traveled to the other side of the Bronx. But that was pretty
30 much it. I would say to answer your question, sometimes, you know, it was a little tense,
31 but nothing like it is. And as far as blacks, you know, go, there were very few blacks in

1 the neighborhood like one guy, a friend of mine, Melvin Deedy lived on our street and
2 when they built the projects, Mayor Lindsay—when they mechanized the farms down
3 south, we got a lot of black immigrants that came up north from mostly the deep south.
4 Then there were gangs. I got part of that in junior high school because I was—I guess
5 that’s big for my age. I stopped growing when I was fourteen, fifteen so I was 5’9”. But I
6 was 5’9” when I was eleven years old. Like I said, big and then not so big. But we had
7 gangs in junior high school, Italian gangs, and black gangs. I was the guy who was the
8 monitor, you know, herding everybody in.

9 JS: Right.

10 SS: So, sometimes that got a little testy, but I never really had a real problem.

11 JS: Okay.

12 SS: I mean, it was never racial for me. I never—hold on.

13 JS: Sure.

14 SS: I just told my wife that my sister, Beatrice, gave us a call.

15 JS: Okay.

16 SS: So, it wasn’t like that. In fact, junior high school was racially mixed because a
17 lot of kids from the projects were in, and I was in band class—I played the trumpet—and
18 it wasn’t like that. There’s always an element that will look for trouble.

19 JS: Right.

20 SS: But for the most part, there wasn’t. The gang element—those are the guys that
21 wound up being criminal.

22 JS: Right, okay.

23 SS: Like, they never were in school; you could always see them on the corners,
24 you know, standing there, you know, doing god knows what.

25 JS: Right.

26 SS: Eventually, you know, they all flunked out. The high school I went to, no one
27 flunked out. You had, like I said, it was only the top eight hundred people in the city
28 every year in New York City that went to that high school to be in a different
29 environment. That was mostly a Jewish school with Italians and very few Irishman, very
30 few Protestants, and some blacks, not too many.

31 JS: Okay.

1 SS: So, now it's almost all Asians and very few blacks and some Hispanics. So,
2 you know, it's just the whole different allure now than it was then, but again, it wasn't
3 racial. At that time, you didn't have affirmative action, so if you did better on tests you
4 went.

5 JS: Right.

6 SS: Now, they actually, from what I've been told, there are quotas within that
7 school. They make sure that it's more racially balanced. At the time that was not the way
8 it was done, so it was line up, take the test, then if you're number one you go and if
9 you're number three hundred and fifty you go. And if you're number nine hundred and
10 fifty you don't go.

11 JS: Right.

12 SS: I used to travel. I traveled on the subway, and we also had one of the guys
13 whose dad worked in that area, so he would take us, too. It was an excellent school.

14 JS: All right. Well, could you talk a little bit about the curriculum there? What
15 was the school like as far as what they're teaching?

16 SS: Well, it was science start to finish. I came in as a sophomore. It was, for
17 example, you took biology as a sophomore. That was regents biology which means you
18 took a regents test to get points for qualifications for it. You took math, geometry,
19 trigonometry, algebra, calculus; this is all the high school. If you took chemistry your
20 junior year, you took physics your senior year. If you took physics your junior year—
21 which I did—you took advanced radio physics which would be called now beginners
22 solid state physics because we dealt with transistors and things like that, PNP type
23 systems. All that was just coming to be in the late '50s. There was also a very good
24 English program.

25 JS: Okay.

26 SS: And it was a good history program. The history, as I said before, had Ruth
27 Gordon who was an excellent teacher, and they really went into things in detail. The
28 other fellow, whose name that I don't recall, you know, he was also a good teacher. There
29 was one other teacher, Louis Elenoff, who was one of these guys who taught very well.
30 So, I loved history as I said before and you know, it would work with you. It was the kind
31 of school where if they saw your interests, they would help you expand on it. They

1 wouldn't, you know, close the book at the end of the day and walk away. They would,
2 you know, ask if anyone wanted to do special projects or get extra credit then direct you
3 into your interests. So, that was it. He taught English, very rigorous. I had an excellent
4 Spanish teacher whose name was Muffin, and he made us speak Spanish, so that when I
5 went to West Point, I was in the advanced Spanish for about half a semester, but I wasn't
6 really able to converse. I had to put part of it down correctly. So, I went into the regular
7 Spanish, and I was like the number one or two guy. And that came in handy, you know,
8 later on. Because we learned Spanish culture dealing with a lot of money, Hispanic men,
9 who actually have a different sense of machismo than Anglos do. You know, it's a
10 different approach. A lot more easy to insult about certain things and a lot more immune
11 to criticism in other areas.

12 JS: Okay.

13 SS: So, that helped, so it was very good training. And then at the end, we all took
14 scholarship exams. I won a region scholarship which I could not use because the military
15 academy is not considered part of New York State even though it's in West Point, but it's
16 federal ground.

17 JS: Okay.

18 SS: So, they pulled a fast one and took my thousand dollars. But that was okay
19 because the military academy was paying me.

20 DS: Right.

21 SS: So, you know, it was just an excellent education. When I got to West Point I
22 would say that for the first year, pretty much on most things like math, English, I had
23 already had those things in high school. So, that gave me some breathing space.

24 JS: Right.

25 SS: In fact, on some of the subjects like math, I think some of the instructors were
26 learning it as they went or reviewing it as they went. They were teaching it improperly
27 according to the methods that I had learned which got me into a little bit of a head-to-
28 head with a couple of the professionals.

29 JS: Right.

30 SS: "Why are you doing it this way as opposed to this way? Do it the right way,
31 mister."

1 JS: Right, sure.

2 SS: You don't get to argue philosophically with majors that are teaching you math
3 or captains. That was pretty much it. It was excellent grounding, and if you didn't do well
4 Bronx Science, they would pick up the phone and get your parents on the line and make
5 sure you were doing your homework and all the rest. Teachers would stay with you and
6 coach you because when I came out of junior high school, some of the kids had already
7 been out of high school a year and had more exposure to that system. So again, you
8 know, if you're looking at it from a pattern perspective, it was rigorous, and you had to
9 be disciplined.

10 JS: Right.

11 SS: Which helped at West Point. It helped in the army, too, because when there's
12 a lot of activity going around you have to make quick decisions, you know, and it helped
13 in business when I went into business. It allows you to focus clearly and break problems
14 down into small parts and get them done. So, it was a great high school. It's still one of
15 the best high schools in the country.

16 JS: Okay, when did you graduate?

17 SS: I graduated in June of 1958.

18 JS: Okay.

19 SS: I had an old boy's paradise. On July 1, 1958, I was sworn in on the plane at
20 West Point.

21 JS: Okay.

22 SS: So, I was a senior, and then I was a plebe. I think I probably had two weeks
23 off.

24 JS: Oh, wow.

25 SS: So, you know then we'd do some at the plebe barracks which includes one
26 month of teaching you how to be a cadet in a cultural way. And then one month up in
27 Camp Buckner where you learn how to fire at that time all the weapons. I loved the VAR.
28 I always thought that—they just came out with that. We really could have used the VAR
29 in Vietnam.

30 JS: Right.

1 SS: You know, as opposed to, you know—well, as an advisor, we all had World
2 War II weapons. And I used to say, “Get the VARs up against AK-47s.” I carried a
3 carbine, an M-1 carbine which I actually have one here in the house. I got the NRA.

4 JS: All right.

5 SS: And let me tell you, carbine against an AK-47 is no match. But I guess they
6 gave it to the Vietnamese because it was a light weapon.

7 JS: Right.

8 SS: And most of the Vietnamese is light.

9 JS: Right, okay.

10 SS: So, did I answer your question?

11 JS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

12 SS: Sorry, I can't hear you.

13 JS: No, sure definitely. Well, one thing I want to talk to you about before we get
14 into the military academy itself, could you talk about how did you get an interest in going
15 to the military academy? How did it come about that you were appointed?

16 SS: You know something? I really don't remember. It just seemed to be a natural
17 progression. I always used to watch *Victory at Sea*. I always used to watch military
18 programs on my aunt's television. We didn't have a television until much later. When
19 you read history—like, I was fascinated with the Civil War.

20 JS: Right.

21 SS: All of the generals on both sides, not all, but most of the competent generals
22 like Lee, Longstreet on the south side.

23 JS: Right.

24 SS: You know, were West Pointers. Grant, Sherman, of course, were West
25 Pointers.

26 JS: Right.

27 SS: And so, you know, you see West Point, West Point, West Point, and it occurs
28 logically to you that if you want to be in the military, you would want to go to West
29 Point. Which is interesting because when I was in junior high school I had a guidance
30 counselor—and this is where sometimes guidance counselors can be, you know, not very
31 good. The guy's name was Jack Polong. I'll never forget this. We went down, you know,

1 “what do you want to be when you grow up,” kind of conversations. We were freshman.
2 We were about to leave junior high school. I said, “Well. I’m thinking of a career in the
3 military.”

4 JS: Okay.

5 SS: And his comment to me was, “Sergeants have a good life, and they make
6 good pay.” And I said, “You know, I know that, but I’m thinking of becoming an
7 officer.”

8 JS: Right.

9 SS: And going to West Point and I got one of those looks like, “Dream on,” Kind
10 of thing.

11 JS: Right.

12 SS: And he was very merit badge counselor, so I knew him, and he knew me that
13 I was an Eagle Scout so, you know, it was like, “I’ve got the dream and the vision, but
14 you know, you’re looking at it more practically, but, you know, if I get it, I get in. If not,
15 then I’ll become an engineer.”

16 JS: Right.

17 SS: But I did get accepted to City College Engineering which was a pretty good
18 engineering school at the time.

19 JS: Okay.

20 SS: So, I would say the first time I really said I wanted to make the military a
21 career, and I had no knowledge whatsoever the family life associated with that, was when
22 I was a freshman in high school.

23 JS: Okay. All right. What about the appointment itself? Could you talk about how
24 that, that came about?

25 SS: Yeah, I went to—I wrote a letter to Isidore Dollinger. Like I said it was either
26 the 21st or 22nd congressional district in the Bronx, and his office was in the south Bronx.
27 He called me in, and he sat me down and talked about my interests, and he said, “Well,
28 I’m going to be forthright with you. My principal nomination is a political paper and
29 going to someone.” He said, “But the Air Force Academy is just starting up, so if you
30 want that nomination, you have it. You’d be the principal. And no one has applied for the
31 Naval Academy, so if you want to go to Annapolis, you can have that.”

1 JS: Okay.

2 SS: I said, “No, I’ll think I’ll stick with West Point.” And he said, “Well, you
3 know, you sure? Because you’re basically not going to get in.” I said, “No, that’s been
4 the dream, and that’s what I want to do, so.” It turned out that the fellow was the
5 principal appointed and the political appointed had a punctured ear drum and also failed
6 the academics. Well, I passed, you know, so I was the next in line.

7 JS: Right.

8 SS: The third guy failed, and the fourth guy who was the fellow by the name of
9 Adams who was a classmate of mine, Bill Adams, in Bronx Science, he passed.

10 JS: Okay.

11 SS: So, Bill used to be on my case about, “Come on, give it up. I’ll go, and then
12 you’ll go next year.” I expected to see him the following year, but it turned out he went to
13 Queens College and became an Air Force ROTC guy.

14 JS: Okay.

15 SS: I saw him at a high school reunion a few years ago, which I ran the reunion,
16 as a matter of fact. I was really interested in getting him to go. He had retired as a colonel
17 in the Reserves. So, I said, “Look at that, you outranked me after all.”

18 JS: Right.

19 SS: But, of course, it was a different thing then when you’re a colonel in the
20 Reserves as opposed to being a colonel in the Reserves right now, which means being on
21 active-duty half the time. So, that was it. He was very candid with me, you know, what
22 that was. He asked me a lot of questions like you’re asking me. “What’s your interest?”
23 He said, “If you were watching *The Long Gray Line* on television.” I remember that
24 question. I said, “I watch it sometimes, but I’m more interested in, you know, the history
25 part of it is where I learn.” I knew nothing about actually military life.

26 JS: Right.

27 SS: As it turns out. I mean, you know, to me it was a way to learn the military
28 heart, but the way of life and all the rest of that was far into me. If he asked me something
29 like that, I probably wouldn’t know what to answer, but he didn’t obviously. He didn’t
30 know either. He later became a judge, and I would periodically correspond with him. He

1 was a very nice person. My father was not political; our family was not political. He just
2 did it on merit, you know, except for that one thing where he owed somebody.

3 JS: Right.

4 SS: He gave it away. I recall the system worked to my benefit.

5 JS: Right, okay.

6 SS: So, when I got accepted to West Point everybody in the neighborhood was
7 very happy.

8 JS: Right, sure.

9 SS: Because I was the first one to go to West Point probably in the general
10 vicinity.

11 JS: Right, okay. What about your family? What did they think about it?

12 SS: Well, my father was very proud. He had to scrape together three hundred
13 bucks for my uniforms, so money was always tight. He didn't say a word. He just stuck
14 to the task. My mother was very proud, also. At that time there were no wars on.

15 JS: Right.

16 SS: So, it was seen differently than it was now, but she had a concern.

17 JS: Sure.

18 SS: Because, you know, she knew that her brother had been killed in action, and
19 some of the other people like my cousin who would serve in Louisiana before he got
20 Tuberculosis and was discharged. He tried to bring me up to speed. At Bronx Science
21 what they did was prior to taking the test, I might add, is a fellow by the name of Wilbur
22 Ford—I think his name, his first name was Wilbur—the pitching coach who I played a
23 little ball with. He wasn't the pitching coach. He was another coach. A guy by the name
24 of Myzel. They helped me prepare physically—Ford did—and also, they brought me up
25 to Martsdale where one of the guys from West Point was taking a course at Columbia and
26 was a neighbor, and they talked to me about what to expect. So, that was my first real
27 exposure to what the discipline was going to be like and other things of that nature. So,
28 when I took the test that at Governor's Island. I was a pretty good athlete, but some of
29 these guys were really terrific athletes.

30 JS: Right.

1 SS: Some of them, you know, were very smart, and some of them were not so
2 smart. That was it. Everyone sat down at the big room, took the test. Everyone had to do
3 the same vaults and everything else, you know, to show that you had the physical
4 aptitude which I passed because I had been working at it, and that was it. So, if you
5 flunked, you were out.

6 JS: Okay.

7 SS: I don't know about the football players and all the rest, but everyone who was
8 in that system where a congressman or a senator was involved was sitting in that room,
9 taking a test, all the military academy.

10 JS: Right.

11 SS: So, it's a pretty American thing, if you will.

12 JS: Okay, well could you talk a little bit about just the life of a plebe at West Point
13 and what it was like?

14 SS: Well, I had a squad leader who, to this day, the guys in my squad feel he was
15 anti-Semitic, and I'm Jewish, but we're not religious people. And if you looked at me you
16 would not know I'm Jewish. You would think I'm German because people came from
17 Germany at one point. That's the name, Anthony Spire, and my wife was Italian. So,
18 when you look at us we're not—but they were convinced that one of the guys was a
19 major general and, you know, retired major general, the other guys were all very
20 successful, and he singled you out, and you weren't all that bad. But later on, when the
21 new peace barracks squad leader came in—a guy by the name of Mike Yeshua who was a
22 football player and later became a brigadier general—I was off the hook. He said,
23 “You're okay. I heard you were so bad, and you're okay.” He says it just to me like that.
24 He says, “The rest of you guys, no one has been on your case,” or words to that effect.
25 The fellow's name who was the guy who was after me a long time ago was Kenny
26 Sendora.

27 JS: Okay.

28 SS: Sendora was a guy from New Jersey, and he had me doing pushups over
29 bayonets and other arduous tasks, you know, all of them illegal.

30 JS: Right.

1 SS: Smacking me and, you know, hitting me in the chin to get me into the proper
2 brace position.

3 JS: Right.

4 SS: As it turned out, he was a coward because when he graduated, he managed to
5 do his—a couple of years in the Signal Corps in New Jersey and get out, never went to
6 Vietnam. So, that was it. The second guy I had was very fair and treated us all well. We
7 had a good squad. One of the guys, very important, became the major lieutenant general
8 in the Air Force. John Laundry became—John is someone you really should interview
9 because he's had a lot of combat experience in Vietnam.

10 JS: Okay.

11 SS: He became a major general.

12 JS: Wow.

13 SS: A couple of the other guys, you know, went to different branches in the
14 service, but those are the—so, to have eight guys and have two of them as flag officers is,
15 you know, really impressive.

16 JS: Oh, yeah, sure.

17 SS: That was it, but it was very tough, very rigorous. They break you down to
18 build you up. At the time, Peter Dawkins was the first captain. He was trying to stop
19 some of the hazing, but, you know, it's like one person watching too many people.
20 There's always some people that'll break the rules. And that was it. So, I lost a lot of
21 weight, got into physical shape, learned how to shine—put a spit shine on my shoes. I
22 had perfect brasses. I went from a sloppy New York kid to a spoony, you know, plebe. In
23 fact, later on, one of the squad leaders—this is interesting—was a second barrack utile on
24 the front line whose dad was a commandant. He would be the commandant of cadets later
25 on. He just said, you know, something like the same thing Yeshua would say like, “You
26 know, guys like you start out slow, but you keep on getting better.” He said, in effect, he
27 implied that it was something else going on with my first barrack squad leader.

28 JS: Right.

29 SS: The irony is that years later when I was a squad leader of these barracks, I had
30 his brother as one of the new cadets. Harry Throckmorton, I think, his name was. So, it's
31 like, you know the old folk circle kind of thing.

1 JS: Right, sure.

2 SS: At the time his father was the commandant. But I never got any—no one ever
3 said a word to me about going easy on them or anything else. You know, it worked out
4 just fine.

5 JS: Right, okay.

6 SS: But we would do things like crawl to Newbury, you know. You'd get up on a
7 partition that separated the bed and make believe you were swimming, you know, and
8 have to balance yourself on this high beam and put a penny on your forehead make you
9 sweat it to the wall. All of these things that serve absolutely no military purpose
10 whatsoever and are now banned. I, for one, just never understood why they would do that
11 other than to bring out the immaturity in some of the classman.

12 JS: Right.

13 SS: And some of their hate factor. But, you know, progress has been made, and
14 they don't do that anymore.

15 JS: Right.

16 SS: They shouldn't have done it in the first place, but that's another story.

17 JS: Right. All right, well, talking about the—

18 SS: After that, after these barracks was over, you immigrated into the Corps
19 Cadets, and you have to go around to up to your squad leaders room, you know, every
20 night. You have to recite the menu, and you have to tell them the news, and you have to
21 remind them of certain things. You know, you have to stand out in the hall and call the
22 minutes. You know, "Three minutes until formation, two minutes to formation." So,
23 everybody gets out on time. So, you basically go from being an individual to still being
24 an individual but being, you know, a cog with a certain function in the machine, if you
25 will.

26 JS: Right.

27 SS: Being a plebe means being a low-class citizen. I mean literally, you know, a
28 lower being, and that's what you are.

29 JS: Right.

1 SS: Then you work your way up. So, by the time you're a first classman, you've
2 forgotten all of those things that happened to you, but I didn't forget. I always had the
3 sense that this could be a better system.

4 JS: Right.

5 SS: And I said so, which didn't make me so popular.

6 JS: Sure.

7 SS: I never believed in hazing. When I was a barrack squad leader, I could never
8 to that to my plebes. I figured if I can't convince these people to do this, to do what they
9 have to do without physically terrorizing them then there's something wrong with them
10 and me.

11 JS: Right.

12 SS: I had a good squad when I was a plebe. You know, I was always surprised
13 later on when I was in the military that you don't have to terrorize anyone into doing
14 anything because that doesn't make a good soldier. It makes people who do what they're
15 told to do but not understanding why they're doing it.

16 JS: Right, okay. Well, as you progressed and went through your years there at the
17 Point, how did things change? How did things change as you progressed in your time at
18 West Point?

19 SS: Well, it's obviously you know all the basics. You know how to march. You
20 know how to do all these things. You know how to do the various squad movements. You
21 go to summer camp; you fire the weapons, you know; you have more of an experience.
22 You learn squad tactics; you go on squad and platoon and then company sized
23 maneuvers. You spend a lot of time training physically, you know, in the summertime.
24 And then during the year it's academics. The academics is very rigorous. If you don't
25 pass, you're out. You get turned down. I had one roommate who was always on the
26 border line of flunking something, and I got to coach him a lot. It's much easier when
27 you're a yearling, which would be your second year.

28 JS: Okay.

29 SS: You know, you start to be able to be a normal human being.

30 JS: Right.

1 SS: At that point, no one went home from the Academy when you were a plebe,
2 and now you're going home during Christmas—no spring break, but Christmas break.
3 And then you have leave in the summertime. All your classes have leave in the
4 summertime. Now, they pretty much would be on that, too. So, you know, you become
5 more and more of a person now. I would say cow year, which was your junior year is
6 pretty much repeating yearling year. Different subjects, more military history at that
7 point. The first two years are primarily academics—math, chemistry, you know, physics,
8 that kind of thing, English, Spanish, military topography, and graphics, how to draw a
9 map, how to read a map. And then your first-class year you're more oriented towards,
10 you know, fairly sophisticated subjects. Some electives, more elective now than when I
11 was there, but I elected to have—I actually studied nuclear active physics.

12 JS: Okay.

13 SS: Learned about the subcritical nuclear reactor and advanced political science
14 taught by Colonel Cannon whose other job outside of the Academy was helping design
15 and structure the United Nations expeditionary forces, so there was a steady stream of
16 Africans and Pakistanis and Indians. We had a Pakistani officer and an Indian Officer
17 come in and talk about their war that they had had at that time. And they were both San
18 Jose graduates.

19 JS: Okay.

20 SS: So, it was almost like a civil war. A lot of people don't know that India was
21 under the British. Pakistan, Bangladesh, which was Eastern Pakistan at the time. It was
22 all one big country.

23 JS: Right.

24 SS: So, you know, you hear firsthand that and, you know, to picture that was
25 flashed on—we had these projectors—about these Indian tanks lined up in the desert
26 somewhere all in a row of Pakistani tanks. “What happened here?” he said. “Well, the T-
27 74s he gassed.” So, they were all the formation, they all ran out of gas at the same time.

28 JS: Right, huh.

29 SS: He said, “We learned our lesson,” and it's funny because those are the things
30 you bring forth into the military. Whenever I was in Germany I halted my tank company.

1 I always used to bring up the tankers, you know, the fuel tankers, and top off the vehicle.
2 I'm not going to have my tanks, you know, run out of gas.

3 JS: Right, sure.

4 SS: Run out of diesel, you know, the case might be. So, that was very educational.
5 You also learned small infantry tactics and small unit infantry tactics. You go into that in
6 greater detail up to and including more emphasis on company and then battalion, you
7 know, when you learn tactics. So, they're really talking about tactics in your last year.
8 Some of the engineering courses you're taking are most sophisticated as I said before like
9 civil engineering courses—building bridges, strength of material, that kind of thing.

10 JS: Right.

11 SS: It's a very good, sound engineering education. It was good emphasis on the
12 military. Some electives that we had—I was lucky. They just started to introduce that.
13 Now, they have more electives, but the problem is then when you're eighteen years old
14 right out of high school you have one level of knowledge, but I was in classes with guys
15 who were three years older than me and already had three years of college. So, you're
16 sitting in a class competing with somebody who's had this subject and has already taken
17 tests on it, you know, written papers on it, and you're competing with them. So, it's a
18 little bit of—they've adjusted for that now over the years, too. But it keeps you on your
19 toes because you know there's always going to be someone in the class that's already
20 been there done that and you better study hard. You don't want to be the last guy.

21 JS: Right, sure. What about the structure of just a typical day? Could you talk
22 about that?

23 SS: You wake up in the morning from four to six, something like that. You get
24 dressed, go out to Beverly, come back, take a shower, formation for breakfast. Hang on
25 one second. I have a call waiting.

26 JS: Sure.

27 SS: So, let's see, breakfast. When you're a plebe, you sit up. You don't eat a lot.
28 You're down at the bottom. You've got cold beverages and hot beverages and a waiter
29 gives you the food and you pass it up kind of thing. You have to remember what
30 everybody's preferences are, but when you're an upperclassman they remember your
31 preferences and you always thought that was somewhat servile, but I don't know if they

1 do that still or anything like that. But you have breakfast, and then you have academics,
2 and then you have lunch. Again, you know, prior formation, and they hang flags out
3 outside the guard house. We had the old central area that tells you what the uniform is.
4 So, if it's raining you wear a raincoat, and if it's not, you might wear a uniform.
5 Normally, the uniform for school and for academics was gray flannel trousers and a black
6 shirt, black wool shirt. When it gets warmer it's not too good to have on.

7 JS: Right.

8 SS: And you'd have long overcoats for formal occasions, short overcoat. Plus,
9 you always wear your hat. You know, and in the summertime, you wear pants. So, when
10 you're in parade, the formal uniform was white. So, you had, you know, a short sleeve
11 white shirt. You make sure the uniform for the day hasn't changed at lunch. Then you
12 have academics in the afternoon, and then followed by athletics.

13 JS: Okay.

14 SS: Which, if you're not an A-squad player or B-squad varsity player, you were
15 involved in intramurals which are called euphemistically "intramurder." Hold on one sec.

16 JS: Sure.

17 SS: So, you're playing—I played soccer; I played lacrosse; I played triathlon;
18 what else did I do? I ran cross country; I ran track—440 and 880 guy. I hated track, but I
19 was very decent at it. If you run track, you have to really run track.

20 JS: Right.

21 SS: You just can't run track in the afternoon. I don't know if you ever ran track.

22 JS: Yeah, I did. I have.

23 SS: So, you really have to be in shape and to do an 880—that's a half mile—you
24 really have to practice for that. The problem was that if some of the guys couldn't make
25 the A-squad or the B-squad, the practice squad, they were there in intramurals running.
26 And then I played football for awhile. I was a tackle or a guard. So after awhile you play
27 just about every sport. They never had baseball which was unfortunate because I was a
28 decent baseball player, but I was a very good swimmer. I told you about my lifeguard
29 background.

30 JS: Right.

1 SS: I wasn't good enough to swim on the varsity team. Most of those guys were
2 six feet or more, but they were excellent. They swam in high school. Then your first-class
3 year you actually get to be the cadet in charge of organizing the intramurals. You worked
4 for an officer who's phenomenally responsible, but you do all the work. So that helps
5 later on. When I was in the army, when I had my tank company in Germany, I organized
6 teams, and we won a couple of division championships because, you know, you have that
7 experience, and you've been taught how to play all these positions and things of that
8 nature.

9 JS: Right.

10 SS: So, that worked out really well.

11 JS: Okay.

12 SS: So, you know, and then you have supper, and then you study. At that time
13 there were lights out at ten and it starts all over again. On the weekends you usually
14 parade Saturday.

15 JS: Okay.

16 SS: They would rotate; they would, at that time, have two regiments, now there are
17 four. And then you'd be free on Saturday after lunch to Sunday at six.

18 JS: Okay.

19 SS: You could get excused, you know, from meals at certain conditions.
20 Otherwise, you had to show up.

21 JS: Right.

22 SS: I was a member of the Jewish Chapel Squad. So, we got to go away every
23 once in awhile on long weekends, but other than that it was pretty much what it was. I
24 was at that point dating my wife.

25 JS: Okay.

26 SS: No one could get married while at West Point. You could have children, but
27 you can't get married. Some of the guys did have children. You know, so that obviously
28 changes your life somewhat. You could do more things. There were dances and there
29 were movies and there were social activities on the weekends. All of which are, you
30 know, in terms of today not very exciting, but the time was enjoyable then. Especially,
31 you know, you could imagine going through the same routine more times. And the other

1 thing is, is that you have to form up a class in sections, so that the whole class marches in
2 at the same time.

3 JS: Okay.

4 SS: You just don't wander into the building, you know, individually.

5 JS: Right.

6 SS: And then at the time, they sent us to one of the academic buildings because
7 there was only one entrance to get in, but the other ones were like—so, when you were a
8 first classman you just go to class. You don't have to march in some of your classes. But
9 by and large, even the academics are organized. They used the Sayer system, and
10 everyone recites everyday and in most subjects there's a quiz everyday. So, you cannot
11 get away with not doing homework and not studying because it will get you. Then there
12 were periodic general reviews and partial reviews, so that after so many weeks, you get to
13 do, you know, a review when you have to know everything you knew from the beginning
14 of that period to the last class you had. And if you didn't understand the work and you
15 were just trying to get by, by memory, that's when get caught.

16 JS: Right.

17 SS: So, it behooved you to understand what you were doing.

18 JS: Sure.

19 SS: And if you didn't understand there was any number of ways you could get
20 help. If you said to the instructor, "I don't understand this. I need help," they would sit
21 down with you. If they didn't have the time at the moment, they would schedule
22 something, and they would actually, you know, work with improving the math or
23 whatever it was. I probably had that do that maybe once when I was being taught
24 something I thought I understood, and I didn't. And then I realized it's just being taught
25 in a new way, as I mentioned to you before.

26 JS: Right.

27 SS: But, you know, other than that there was no reason there to flunk if you put
28 your mind to it. But some of the guys, you know, were just overwhelmed. We started out
29 with eight hundred people; I think we wound up with five hundred and twenty or so. So,
30 it's pretty much of a—what's the word I'm looking for? A grind.

31 JS: Right.

1 SS: And if you can't deal with it, you can't deal with all the other things you have
2 to do. Like keeping your shoes shined, study while you're shining shoes.

3 JS: Right.

4 SS: You don't make it. And you probably shouldn't because later on in the
5 military as you know, you got to do more than one thing at a time to be successful and
6 stay alive.

7 JS: Sure, yep. All right, one question I was just thinking about, speaking of sports,
8 did you ever get to go to any Army/Navy games?

9 SS: Every one of them.

10 JS: Every one of them, okay.

11 SS: Let's see, we had a good team then because we had Anderson who was a
12 running back, we had Dawkins who was a running back. We had Blanda who was a
13 quarterback starting. His brother was the Blanda, the pro. I think we won to three of the
14 four. They had Bellino at half back later on, so we lost those games. But yeah, we won
15 our share. I went to Notre Dame games. I also marched in JFK's inaugural parade.

16 JS: Okay.

17 SS: Instead of doing an eyes right, we did an eyes left. And there you were, and I
18 was all the way on the left end, you know, looking at the president and Jackie with their
19 nice tans just back from Florida. We're walking down the street with slush in our
20 galoshes.

21 JS: Right.

22 SS: We had frozen feet because we had to stand on the side streets before we
23 marched out the corps cadets first unit down the street because of the army seniority. I
24 think it was the Army Coastguard or something like that and then the Navy and later on
25 the Air Force. Yeah, and had my wife, my fiancée at that time come to Army/Navy
26 games and party in Philadelphia kind of thing. I bought my parents tickets, went to all the
27 football games. I got to really understand how to—since I played it, then I used to go to
28 practice sometimes and watch them. Every once in awhile when they needed someone to
29 accompany a reporter, a photographer or whatever it was, I would get the task because it
30 was a big ground game at the time, so it was like three runs and a pass. That was play. If

1 they made the fourth down, they'd repeat the pattern. They'd vary it the little bit. It might
2 be two runs, a pass, and another run, but they always got their three runs in.

3 JS: Right, sure.

4 SS: So, I've been to Army/Navy games, I've been to Air Force games. Yankee
5 stadium Notre Dame games, that was a tough game, but I think we beat them that year.
6 Yankee stadium—I don't remember what stadium it was. I think it was Yankee Stadium.

7 JS: Okay.

8 SS: But all the football games. I don't think I missed a game.

9 JS: Right, all right. Well, before we wrap up with the military academy, looking
10 back on your education and your training, what do you think about it? How would you
11 rate it?

12 SS: I'm sorry, what was the last part?

13 JS: How would you rate your education and your training there?

14 SS: Well, superb.

15 JS: Sure.

16 SS: I mean, you know, in terms of being a tanker, you know, I learned nothing.
17 Okay, but in terms of the important thing, which is leading men and understanding the
18 organizing principles, you know—if you can't learn it after four years at West Point then
19 you can't learn it.

20 JS: Right.

21 SS: You know, you get into leadership learned or leadership you taught or
22 something that you're born with. Well, the answer is both.

23 JS: Right.

24 SS: Some people are natural born leaders, but you can learn to be a good leader.
25 That doesn't mean you're a charismatic leader like some people are, but yes, they'll teach
26 you enough principles to understand that, you know, loyalty to your men means loyalty
27 back.

28 JS: Right.

29 SS: And taking care of them and some of the other things that go with that and
30 having an empathy. You know, not feeling sorry for them, but now if you've been in a
31 grunt in an instance in an infantry squad, and you've served as a gunner on a practice

1 with a tank at summer camp, and you've been a driver. You know, you've done all these
2 things. You have a better idea of what it is that your folks are going through or will go
3 through.

4 JS: Right.

5 SS: Therefore, you know, like I served with a guy in Germany who just when I
6 was a platoon leader company commander—I think he was from Vienna—he never got
7 that part of it. He was driving folks to the point where they were so exhausted in the
8 motor pool that they would be making mistakes, and I finally had to say to him, you
9 know, “Mike, Captain, we've got to give these guys a break. They've got to sleep.”

10 JS: Right.

11 SS: I said, “Even in combat, you sleep. It doesn't go like this for three, four days
12 in a row.” Then we'd let them sleep, and then they'd come back, and they'd get
13 everything done in a quarter of a time because they were clear and able to think.

14 JS: Sure.

15 SS: So, you learn things. You learn what sleep deprivation is. You learn that you
16 got to make sure your people eat, that they've got dry socks, that they are taking care of
17 themselves. You know, that they're shaving and they're, you know, they're keeping their
18 bodies clean and all of the above. Basically, results of what you do when you are in the
19 field in Germany. Because guys will tend to keep the same uniform on and become slobs.
20 You got to give them a chance. Slob is unhealthy and minds of a physical promises that I
21 care about.

22 JS: Right.

23 SS: So, you learn that part of a code. You learn the tactics very well. You know
24 what the tactics are.

25 JS: Mm-hm.

26 SS: You don't learn the specifics of your branch except if you're in infantry then
27 you've got a much better basis, but if you're an artilleryman or an engineer, to some
28 extent you learn, but you don't build a lot of bridges.

29 JS: Right.

1 SS: You crush rocks as we used to call them. If you're a tanker or signal corps
2 then no, you don't learn the trade part of it, but you learn the principal part. Does that
3 answer your question?

4 JS: Yeah, sure. Okay, well when did you graduate?

5 SS: June 1962.

6 JS: Okay. Could you describe the graduation ceremony?

7 SS: Well, JFK was our speaker, and he gave his voice of national liberation fight,
8 war's a national liberation of being promoted by the Russians. They would get proxies
9 like the Viet Cong.

10 JS: Right.

11 SS: Or the NVA on them and send them into, you know, countries that they were
12 trying to take control of. And he basically threw down the gauntlet in that speech. It's a
13 very important speech that no one pays attention to because it basically puts the finger on
14 JFK as being the instigator for, you know, combating the war in Vietnam when they're
15 sending advisors. In fact, one of the guys in '60 came back, you know, and told us he was
16 in Vietnam, he had just come back from Vietnam (talking at same time).

17 JS: Okay.

18 SS: And that they were building up the advisory effort. So, we knew what was
19 going on way before, but, you know, that was, in that sense, the philosophical basis to
20 why they were going to do it. They were not going to let the soviets and the communists
21 get a way with it anymore. Of course, no one was sure, you know, the battle would take
22 on proportions which it did because the whole theory behind communism is that that it
23 can never be rolled back. It's the wave of the future. So, if you stop it dead in its tracks,
24 well then, it's not the wave of the future. A lot of philosophical, you know, constructs
25 come down, you know, which is essentially what happened in Afghanistan. You look at
26 Afghanistan. Look who the soviets had. Subsequent to that, the soviet empire comes
27 apart. You know, until then they were very successful in everything they did.

28 JS: Right.

29 SS: So, he gave a speech, he only gave it for the first series of distinguished
30 graduates who were guys who had stars on their collars and who had been in the top five

1 percent of the class. I got my diploma from General Wes Moore, who was our super
2 intendent.

3 JS: All right.

4 SS: And later was my commander in Vietnam so it was again. Wes was very
5 impressive at that time. He was a young guy, very impressive looking. I later on met him
6 as part of the West Point Society of New York. He was the chief of staff. His wife was
7 the smart part behind the whole operation. She's much younger and she was a pip, but
8 anyway, that's another story.

9 JS: Right.

10 SS: And he gave out the diplomas, and he had signed them. It's up in my bedroom
11 on my wall. I think Stillwell was the commandant of cadets at the time.

12 JS: Okay.

13 SS: And then you graduate, and you get your diploma, and you're all packed up
14 ready to go. They shipped your military stuff to your next assignment which, in my case
15 was Fort Knox for armor school. You're taking the biggest motion there is in the army.
16 You've gone from cadet to second lieutenant. Of course, you worked your way all the
17 way up to the top now you're at the bottom and you got to work your way up again.

18 JS: Right.

19 SS: I don't remember who pinned on my bars, but I think my fiancée did, and
20 hold on a second. (talking to his wife, Mary) Mary, who pinned on my bars? Who pinned
21 on my bars? You and who else? (talking to Jason Stuart) My wife just pinned down my
22 bars.

23 JS: Okay.

24 SS: Fiancée at the time.

25 JS: Right.

26 SS: And that's it, you're a lieutenant. I think my father may have also helped, but
27 my mother may have had a finger in it. Then people will start saluting you, so it's an
28 experience. It's just a way of a segway when I had my first assignment after school, you
29 being saluted by World War II guys who were lieutenant colonels who were ripped down
30 to sergeants. You find that takes some getting used to. I mean, it doesn't take long, but

1 you understand that the one thing West Point gave you that you didn't know was that you
2 take responsibility.

3 JS: Right.

4 SS: And I always asked some of the sergeants, "Are you uncomfortable?" You
5 know, when I got to know some of the much older sergeants who had been lieutenant
6 colonels and majors in World War II. They said, "No." They said, "We don't want the
7 responsibility. That's why we're here."

8 JS: All right.

9 SS: "We do what we're told to do, and no one will do it better, but we don't want
10 the responsibilities you're going to have.

11 Js: Right, sure.

12 SS: "Because we already have them." So, you know, you get this different
13 approach and after a while of dealing with that you become comfortable with it, so that
14 doesn't even enter into your mind, it just—just look at the rank and find out about the
15 background of people in terms of what they could do and not do and deal with it. My
16 wife found it hard—because we were married at that point—being called "ma'am" by
17 someone who's maybe twice our age. But again, you get used to that, too, so that's it.
18 And, of course, you buy a car when you graduate from West Point. I bought a Ford
19 Falcon.

20 JS: Okay.

21 SS: Deluxe, I might add. You have your summer leave, and you go to your basic
22 branch school and then that's where you are.

23 JS: Okay.

24 SS: It's a very—it's a transition that has no aid in assistance. You have your
25 orders; you graduate; you throw your hat in the air; and you're on your own.

26 JS: Okay, all right. Well, speaking of your branch in the armor, how did you end
27 up in the armor? Was that your choice? Was that your number one choice?

28 SS: I was always a big fan of General Patton.

29 JS: Okay.

30 SS: I always felt that that was a decisive combat arm, at least in Europe because
31 then no one was thinking of, you know, fighting and you got the jungles because where I

1 was up in Vietnam was the plains, but no one was thinking of fighting in Southeast Asia.
2 I thought we had learned our lesson there with Bradley and Eisenhower who said, “Don’t
3 get involved in land wars in Asia.” But I felt the decisive arms, given the fact that there
4 were nuclear weapons to be used in Germany, armor was where it was at. I always liked
5 tanks because—I don’t know why. I cannot explain it, but ever since I was a kid I was
6 fascinated by tanks. I used to draw them when I was a kid. I used to like—I was
7 fascinated, and I always thought of Patton. Well, he had some personality issues but is
8 always probably the best general on the American side to come out of World War II in
9 terms of combat tactics.

10 JS: Right, sure.

11 SS: For innovation.

12 JS: Right. Okay, how much time after your graduation did you have before you
13 had to report to Fort Knox?

14 SS: I think it was sixty days if I remember correctly. Pretty much sixty days.

15 JS: All right.

16 SS: I think that’s what it was. I really don’t remember.

17 JS: Sure, sure. What did you do during that time period?

18 SS: Basically, I visited with my parents, my fiancée, swam a lot, relaxed, went to
19 different places, went and ate at restaurants, all the things you didn’t do. Put on a couple
20 extra pounds. But that was it. Also, you know, I did a little studying for school which
21 probably was a waste of time because the books they issued you were training manuals
22 and field manuals, and I didn’t have access to those.

23 JS: Okay.

24 SS: Because I was still too high a level for what I was going to go into at the
25 armor school, but that was it. It was just I loved to go to the beach, and we still to this
26 day. The whole family will go up to Cape Cod. We did things like that.

27 JS: Okay.

28 SS: So, it would decompression us a little.

29 JS: Sure, sure. All right, well, what about the armor school itself? Could you talk
30 about the training there?

1 SS: Well, your armor school, you know, most of the people in the class were
2 either West Pointers, my class, or distinguished military cadets, graduates, ROTC guys.

3 JS: Right.

4 SS: And it was taught by the NCOs. We did a lot of field exercise, a lot of night
5 firing, day firing, learning the hydraulics, learning the sites, that nature. They also
6 covered, for some reason or other because I think they could combine armored platoon
7 that was possible in the armor, so we learned how to fire the 4.2s under water. We
8 thought that was a great weapon. Hold on a second.

9 JS: Sure.

10 SS: So, you know, when I was—where was I? My wife just interrupted.

11 JS: That's all right.

12 SS: She wanted to know if you were legitimate or not.

13 JS: Right. You were talking about the training at the armor school.

14 SS: You know, at night, you know, some night maneuvers which they didn't do
15 enough of in Germany, I did more of that. And spending a lot of time going around to
16 different places, you know, in the area, you know, learning how to maintain the vehicles,
17 fix the track and that kind of thing.

18 JS: Right.

19 SS: But basically, a lot of it was academic stuff going over. Making sure we
20 understood was in the technical manuals more than the field manual. A couple guys never
21 even cracked a book. The sergeants went up, and they had everything memorized and
22 they would just spill it out. If you paid attention you could pretty much get whatever you
23 had to do.

24 JS: Right.

25 SS: But we didn't do well enough on the first tests, one of our classmate's dad's
26 who was a commandant at the school came in, and he chewed our butts. "I don't expect
27 these kinds of results again." And then we all cracked the books and studied, you know,
28 that was it. But we had had a lot of the tactics part of it at West Point, and it was boring.
29 But the tanking part was always interesting. At that point they didn't have the 762's on
30 the tanks; they had .30s, so we fired .30s.

31 JS: Okay.

1 SS: At least for the M48.

2 JS: Okay.

3 SS: We tried the M48 on the tour when we went to Fort Knox we finished how to
4 fire. So, you learned how to be a loader; you learned how to be a gunner; you learned
5 how to be a tank commander. All of those came in handy later on.

6 JS: All right. Let's see, was there other armor you trained on or only the M48s?

7 SS: No, you learned about PCs. When I was a cadet, I spent time—I forgot to
8 mention this, but I spent time in Germany with the 14th Armored Cav Regiment.

9 JS: Okay.

10 SS: So, I had had some experience with that M59, the old big, tracks before the
11 M113s.

12 JS: Okay.

13 SS: And I'd fire tank guns there. You know, we would graph them there. So, that
14 part and I had command above a platoon which part of the cav has a 4.2 so they would
15 fire in front of us. They'd have live fire exercises. We'd button up we'd go down range
16 and fire. So, to me, it was sort of like, "I've seen this. I've had this on all the orientation
17 training." And the 14th ACR was a very good unit up on the border—East German
18 border. So, that part of it I had seen before, and I'd been in the motor pools, and I'd done
19 this. So, to me, it was repeat, but, you know, it never hurts. Never as an officer are you
20 going to change a track, you know, change a track box or anything like that, but it's good
21 to know because you're watching people do it. And, of course, you have a maintenance
22 sergeant, motor sergeant. He's supervising some of the stuff, but all the tank commanders
23 know how to do it because they've done it a thousand times. It's one of these things
24 where I think sometimes, they give it to you because they give it to you not because
25 you're ever going to use it, but just so you're familiar with it.

26 JS: Right, okay.

27 SS: So, I had, had the army orientation training for months and that supplemented
28 what I had in the armored office as basic, and that was it. There wasn't much of a social
29 life. Well, we got a break after school before airborne school, so I went back to New
30 York and my wife—fiancée came down and visited. That was it. We'd go swimming in
31 the officers pool.

1 JS: Okay.

2 SS: Officers club pool and drink.

3 JS: Right.

4 SS: Even that got boring after awhile. When you're a cadet you can't drink, so
5 you can't go to a bar and get a beer. It's a big deal, but after a couple of weeks of that, if
6 you don't like beer, don't drink beer.

7 JS: Right.

8 SS: But everyone loves Michelob, and that was it. You'd make some very good
9 friends, but everyone understands, you know, it's going to be over. When you take your
10 final exam, everyone passes; no one fails. Some guys went onto airborne, which I did.
11 And some guys went on to ranger. I was supposed to go to ranger school, also, and they'd
12 send people up to the ranger school, and they got ahold of the armor guys and they said,
13 "We want you to postpone ranger school because we're building up in Vietnam. We need
14 to train rangers."

15 JS: Okay.

16 SS: "You guys in armor are going to get a tab, but you're not going to be
17 rangers," which is the truth.

18 JS: Right.

19 SS: So, you know, I don't remember how many people said, "Okay, we'll
20 postpone it." So, I put myself down for postponing it, but a year later I was in Germany,
21 so I never got to go back there which is a minor regret. You know, I should've probably
22 just said, "I'm going." Looking back now with some maturity they could have just
23 expanded the school instead of not giving us the training. Because again, that training
24 would have been excellent in terms of map reading, which always is a bugaboo no matter
25 what position you hold. You know, the more expertise you have in maps the better off
26 you are.

27 JS: Right.

28 SS: And that was it, so we finished that up and then we went to our first
29 assignment.

30 JS: Okay, all right. You talked about the build up going on in Vietnam at the time.
31 Had you paid much attention to what was happening in Vietnam?

1 SS: Well, the big thing that happened when I was in Fort Knox after I was waiting
2 to go to airborne had nothing to do with Vietnam. It had to do with—but it did play a
3 later part—it had to do with Cuba.

4 JS: Right.

5 SS: Because I was involved with helping load the trains because we learned how
6 to do that. The loading trains send tanks down to some point of embarkation. Years later,
7 I was at an AUSA event and ran into—when I was at Fort Devens, a year or so later—I
8 ran into General Wheeler who came over with a bunch of sergeants and lieutenants there
9 and asked us what we had done, you know, for the Cuban Missile Crisis. He asked me,
10 and I said, “Well, I loaded tanks at Fort Knox.” He said, “Yeah, well, some damn fool
11 had used a sixty ton crane to put the tanks on a ship, and then after they loaded the ship
12 some other damn fool realized that there were no sixty ton cranes in Cuba to get them off
13 the ship.”

14 JS: Right.

15 SS: So, that meant that I wound up and a bunch of other officers had wound up in
16 Little Creek taking embarkation officer school. But that’s my Fort Devens experience. So
17 anyway, what happened was that was the big thing, and they had maps of Cuba and all
18 the rest of that. I was assigned to the S3 just before I left, and I was asked—because I had
19 that infantry background—to go down. (talking to wife) No, hon, I’m okay. (talking to
20 JS). I don’t remember the name of the unit, but it was the 1st Air Mobile Assault Artillery,
21 and they were using observation helicopters with machine guns on them.

22 JS: Okay.

23 SS: And I was sent down—they were talking about expanding it. Well, it
24 eventually became the 1st Air Cav.

25 JS: Okay.

26 SS: And to come back and give the S3 an evaluation. So, I went down and spoke
27 to the infantry company commander. I said, “What are you doing?” He explained to me
28 that what they were doing was they were serving as grunts for the air force, the army air
29 force at the time, and the pilots. The guys were cleaning the machine guns and loading
30 them up and that the pilots would fly these things, you know, twenty feet in the air and
31 fire at targets. And then they’d go back to business, and the grunts would clean their

1 weapons for them. I said, “Well, what do you do about the air assault?” He said, “Well,
2 we haven’t practiced any air assault.” I went back to the S3. I can’t recall the guy’s name.
3 I can see his face, but I can’t recall his name, maybe in a little bit.

4 JS: Okay.

5 SS: And I said, “Well, you got some pilots that know how to fire machine guns
6 off helicopters.” And he looked ahead like CH-34s with rockets on them.

7 JS: Okay.

8 SS: And I said, “But the infantry guys have never done an air assault in their time
9 down here.” I said, “Well, I guess they’re going to do an air assault.” That’s what
10 happened. I don’t think we were in Huey’s, but it may have been Huey’s but some other
11 helicopter, but—did you ever do nap-of-the-earth flying?

12 JS: No.

13 SS: Did you ever do that?

14 JS: No, sir, I haven’t.

15 SS: Okay, well that was the first time anyone had, you know, I had done a nap-of-
16 the-earth flying which is you fly around the hills, you know, like fifteen feet above the
17 treetops, and we practiced air assault. So, I was involved with that. And some of the
18 things that this captain was doing was really not good. Moving his guys across fields the
19 open instead of following the wood line. Things like that—and that’s where that West
20 Point training came in, you know, advancing my squad’s fire support. All these things
21 that were basic that I learned at West Point came back. In other words, infantryman—I
22 was a better infantryman than this guy was because he had never maneuvered his unit
23 because these guys were using them as plunkies.

24 JS: Right.

25 SS: And later on, of course, that unit that became, you know, the nucleus of
26 among, I guess, other units of the 1st Air Cav, and we spoke up. But what we knew that
27 there were people being assigned to Vietnam and coming back, but strictly as advisors,
28 not that many. It wasn’t the coal farm.

29 JS: Right, okay. And this training you were just describing here, was this at Fort
30 Devens?

31 SS: No, it was at Fort Knox.

1 JS: Okay, okay. You were still at Fort Knox, okay.

2 SS: Yeah, Fort Knox.

3 JS: All right, sorry about that.

4 SS: The name Soto Platoon, there's something like that stoner comes, but I think
5 stoner was the machine gun. The platoon—the company had a name, but it was an orphan
6 down at Fort Knox. It didn't belong there. I don't know what it was doing down there.

7 JS: Okay.

8 SS: It's basically with the, you know, an infantry platoon that was air mobile.
9 Once we started working, you know, with them and I wasn't the only one obviously.
10 They picked it up pretty quickly and they got the aerosol part down. At the end of the
11 exercises they were maneuvering, you know, properly. But again, unrealistic because
12 they weren't up against four to five positions and no one was shooting at them, but that's
13 the best you can do in those circumstances.

14 JS: Right, right.

15 SS: As far as the choppers, I mean, those were like light observation bubbles,
16 those bubble things.

17 JS: Sure.

18 SS: That obviously wasn't—not wound up as Vietnam. They armed the Hueys,
19 but they gave the pilots the opportunity to walk the tracers in on the target, learn how to
20 fire.

21 JS: Right.

22 SS: You know, it's difficult firing and keeping your plane steady. It looks easy
23 when you see it on television. Not so easy in person.

24 JS: Right.

25 SS: And that was it. When that finished, I went to airborne school, had my five
26 jumps, managed to bang my knee and my hip up, but not severely. I came home, went to
27 Fort Devens, had went from balmy Georgia to snow about six feet deep at Fort Devens.

28 JS: Right.

29 SS: I got married in March of 1963.

30 JS: Okay.

1 SS: And I thought I was going to get a tank unit, but they had been drawn down
2 by Vietnam.

3 JS: Okay.

4 SS: So, I wound up being the assistant S3.

5 JS: All right.

6 SS: I had been the S3 at Fort Knox and they said, “We need an assistant S3.” I
7 said, “Well, I want to be a platoon leader.” “I’ll give you the headquarters platoon, you
8 know, the staff platoon.”

9 JS: Right.

10 SS: So, I get some command experience. Then the S3 became the S4 and the S2
11 left to go to Vietnam, and I was the S3 and the S2.

12 JS: Oh, wow.

13 SS: You know, training that unit had—you know, we used to go out in the range.
14 What they had done is they had this thing that you couldn’t fire the main guns, but we
15 would fire the single COAC shot.

16 JS: Okay.

17 SS: And teach them how to do that. The unit was part of the 1st brigade. It had the
18 old red diamond which became the 5th Mech.

19 JS: Right.

20 SS: The unit was the 3rd of the 77th Armor. It had a really fine World War II
21 history. My commander was Colonel Wheeler who was a Virginia guy who landed in
22 Normandy.

23 JS: Right, okay.

24 SS: The exec was an Army aide by the name of Stimpson. He didn’t know jack
25 about tanks, but I’d already been through that trail.

26 JS: Right.

27 SS: The S4 was a guy by the name of Carson Young. He is not a combat guy
28 either. I think his name was Carson Young. Anyway, it was a good experience for
29 myself. I had a classmate up there with me. His name was Tom Clang. In the middle of
30 this thing after the Cubans, they realized they had no embarkation officers who knew

1 how to load LSTs because that had gotten in the way of all knowledge after World War
2 II.

3 JS: Okay.

4 SS: So, they sent Tom and I down to the Marine Corps, a little creek landing force
5 training unit.

6 JS: Okay.

7 SS: And we had to learn to load ATA's, AKA's, LSTs, LSDs. We'd been doing
8 assault on some beach and then Hurricane Dora came along. We sat in an LST. If you
9 ever sit in an LST after a hurricane, don't. Because you will get seasick traveling to the
10 dock.

11 JS: I imagine so.

12 SS: Even the Navy guys were getting queasy. So, I was the embarkation officer at
13 the LST, and we went down to whatever the marine base was there. I forget the name—
14 Lejuene or whatever. We did a beach landing. Things came out and rolled up the beach,
15 and that was that. We had to drive back. We didn't put too many tanks back at that point,
16 but it was a good experience. And later on, you know, it came up, you know, the
17 connection between. I understood the Cuban thing and all the rest. We had a whole
18 battalion down there that worked real well. I don't remember who the commander was at
19 that point. I don't think it was Wheeler anymore. It was someone else whose name
20 escapes me.

21 JS: Okay.

22 SS: We had a good time. The navy posts are much better than army posts. There's
23 bowling alleys and places to eat. The fleet was out, you know; the carriers were out, but
24 the pilots were around. There were no antagonism. Everybody was, you know, same
25 thing. And then we went back to Fort Devens.

26 JS: Right.

27 SS: When I got back to Fort Devens, I got orders to go to Germany.

28 JS: Okay, all right.

29 SS: I was also there when the news of Kennedy was killed came in.

30 JS: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that.

1 SS: It came in over Twix that he'd been shot. We had details of the nature of the
2 wound, and the S2 sergeant, a guy by the name of Kuhn—Sergeant Kuhn, K-U-H-N—
3 showed me the Twix, and we both looked at each other and said, "He's dead." The
4 wound, you know, on the Twix is said that part of the back of his head is blown off. So,
5 you know we immediately got hold of the battalion commander and went on alert
6 because we didn't know if it was an assassination by the Russians, somebody, or
7 whatever was coming.

8 JS: Right.

9 SS: There were big services. We all went to Catholic services, memorial services.
10 And they were held in the gym by the chapel of the battalion—of the brigade. And that
11 was it. You know, so here I was at this inauguration, and there I was getting news that he
12 had just been shot. That was eerie.

13 JS: Right.

14 SS: Then with Johnson, you know, with an unknown fact that no one knew what
15 was going on. So, you know, I did my tour, and that was my one year stateside. Then I
16 got assigned to the 4th Battalion of the 35th Armor in Eielson, Germany. I was a platoon
17 leader of the 2nd Platoon. I did all the things platoon leaders do. I went on the field with
18 them, tank gunnery, passed both times that it took the tank gunnery. Every tank who had
19 to go through the woods. I still have my zippo lighter with the carbon in it that I passed.
20 And also, you know, I anointed both positions in case the Russians attacked, and the cap
21 came through us.

22 JS: Right.

23 SS: I did that. I worked with the Germans. We lived on economy a couple years
24 until they built officers quarters and after there was a rotation. There were people there
25 who had been there because of the Berlin build up.

26 JS: Right.

27 SS: So, it was ancient history, but they rotated, so I moved up to executive officer.
28 I got a new company commander and the VMA guy, this guy was an OCS grad, Jack
29 Ballard, and he was very good. He had a maintenance background, so he knew this stuff
30 like the back of his hand. He taught me a lot, you know, as an executive officer what my
31 duties were and all that. When he rotated, I became a company commander. The battalion

1 won the John S. Wood memorial trophy which was the best battalion in 4th armor
2 division, and we won the best company and the best battalion, which, you know, was
3 nothing really special but made my guys feel very proud of themselves. When I sent
4 them, I used to say, “You win it, you got a three-day pass.” What we used to do is we had
5 permission to do this quicker than a deuce and a half’s and bring them up to Nuremberg.
6 The rules were no BD—don’t get arrested.

7 JS: Right.

8 SS: And if you do, you’re never going on a three-day pass again. I never had a
9 problem with anybody. One of my black sergeants wound up marrying a prostitute he had
10 met that way. And that was, you know, created quite an uproar in the battalion because
11 mixed marriages were frowned upon to say the least. But the woman didn’t have, you
12 know, a record or anything. Apparently, she was just freelancing at that time.

13 JS: Right.

14 SS: And, you know, she wasn’t a (inaudible). I met her later on; she’s a very nice
15 lady. She used to bring a potato pie when he was in charge of quarters. It opens your
16 mind up a lot. Then we got an influx who people from France when Duval kicked the
17 Americans out of France, and we had to train them on and on. What started to happen
18 though was we started getting requests to send tank gunners to Vietnam if anyone would
19 volunteer. Because a tank gunner had the same skills set as the door gunner on choppers.

20 JS: Right.

21 SS: These guys all became door gunners.

22 JS: Okay.

23 SS: So, my gunner on my tank volunteered and told us that we really would have
24 stayed here. It took a while longer than plenty of fighters to do because, you know,
25 you’re up for E-6 because he was an E-5. “No, no, no. Got to go to Jackson.” So, he left,
26 and we had a bunch of guys. The older sergeants, no one volunteered. They’d already
27 been to Korea, or in a couple cases, they had some World War II sergeants, and they
28 knew what it was all about, so they weren’t running to get shot at.

29 JS: Right.

30 SS: But the young guys, like myself were like, oh, you know, our chance to wet
31 our whistle here and see what it’s all about.

1 JS: Right.

2 SS: So, that was a constant problem. And then what happened was we were
3 getting less and less repair parts to fix the tanks. So, instead of having three platoons with
4 five tanks, you know, we wound up with two platoons and, you know, ten tanks. And that
5 created some problems for maneuvering and all the rest. Instead of replacing engines at
6 so many thousand miles, you replace them when they fail.

7 JS: Okay.

8 SS: Which is not good because if you were going to fight Russians and it failed
9 and you were, if you will, mussel to mussel, that's not a good idea.

10 JS: Sure.

11 SS: We all came to conclusions that the Russians weren't going anywhere and
12 neither were we.

13 JS: Right.

14 SS: And that force grew smaller and smaller, and, of course, Vietnam got bigger
15 and bigger. I would get orders for guys to my unit to be assigned to Vietnam. When my
16 tour as company commander was over and I became the brigade adjutant.

17 JS: All right.

18 SS: And then I got my orders for Vietnam.

19 JS: Okay, all right.

20 SS: That's the way I went.

21 JS: Okay. Well, before we get into Vietnam, we've unfortunately just about run
22 out of time for today.

1 **Interview with Stephen Sperman**

Session [2] of [2]

Date 23 July 2009

2 JS: This is Jason Stuart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University
3 continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr. Stephen Sperman. Today is July 23, 2009.
4 I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library on the campus of Texas Tech,
5 and Mr. Sperman is joining me by phone, once again, from New City, New York. Okay,
6 Mr. Sperman, last time when we left off, we were just about to begin talking about
7 Vietnam. Why don't we pick up there? First of all, could you tell me when did you
8 receive your orders to go to Vietnam?

9 SS: Well, let's see. I had finished the tour as company commander of a tank
10 company in Germany, the 4th of the 35th Armor, which was stationed at Eielson. My next
11 assignment was as the brigade adjutant.

12 JS: Okay.

13 SS: For the 1st Brigade of the 4th Armored. At that time, I was the one giving
14 faulty orders from Vietnam, so it was also in the period of time when my four years were
15 up as my obligations for West Point. So, there was a standing joke that if you submitted
16 your resignation it was like volunteering for Vietnam. You had to submit your resignation
17 basically to get out to start the process. Anyway, so I was called and said, "Well, you're
18 going to really like the next orders that were taking away the fact." Twixing you was
19 what it was called.

20 JS: Okay.

21 SS: It was just over a teletype, and they were my orders to go through MACV in
22 Vietnam. So, that's how I found out. I was the one who cut my own orders, if you will.

23 JS: Right, right.

24 SS: You know, I'm not sure of the timing, but at that point Johnson had extended
25 us for eighteen months somewhere in there. None of this was, you know, a surprise. I
26 went back, told my wife, and we started figuring out how we're going to pack everything
27 up, put in storage and where she would live. She stayed with her parents. She lived in a
28 place called Parkchester in New York in the Bronx. I went to Vietnam via Monmouth—
29 Fort Dix, I'm sorry.

30 JS: Okay.

1 SS: Fort Dix. And I got on a plane and as it turned out the guy who was also a
2 company commander with me in Germany and whom I was friendly with, Jim Dickey,
3 who later became a brigadier general class of 1963 was on the same aircraft. He had been
4 A to Comm to come to General Higgins, and so I hadn't seen him in a while. So, we
5 shared the same room at Dix, got on the same plane and actually went to the same corps
6 area. I don't remember where he wound up. I think he wound up down south, so I went to
7 Vietnam and was processed through Kotler Compound, K-O-T-L-E-R, which was in
8 Saigon. I'll never forget, there was some college kids that got up, and he said, "Look to
9 your left, look to your right. You know, only one of you will come out of this thing alive
10 or not wounded," which was totally inaccurate. Now, why they did that I have no idea
11 whatsoever, but I thought that having this young fellow who was just a brat doing this
12 kind of briefing was inappropriate. Eventually when I processed out, I happened to—Jim
13 and I had a dinner with Major MacAfee who had been our battalion XO in Germany. He
14 cooked up a couple of steaks over a makeshift grill in Saigon and said to them, "This isn't
15 right. You're sending guys out. We have this kind of nonsense going on which is political
16 more than military."

17 JS: Right.

18 SS: So, I got on a 130, and I was assigned to Pleiku, II Corps. And as we landed
19 at Ban Be Tu, and there was supposed to be a break when we got off the plane while they
20 loaded some cargo and just took a physical break. It was the first time I got shot at. As we
21 were walking back to the plane, someone opened up on the aircraft some distance away
22 and there were like two or three of us running after the plane which kept its ramp down. I
23 had all our baggage onboard, so we had to make that plane. Anyway, we got on the load
24 master, whatever, and pulled us on board on the ramp and off we went to Pleiku. When I
25 got to Pleiku, I reported to MACV, I think the executive officer of the team was Colonel
26 Cannon. And basically, I was told, "Well, the fellow who you were replacing down in
27 Lam Dong Province who had a rough puff platoon which consisted of some tanks or
28 armored vehicles of one sort of another. He's extended his tour for six months, and we
29 have no position for you, but looking over your MOSs, I see that you're an air-to-ground
30 guy, and we need an air-to-ground person in the staff." I said, "Well, whatever you need,

1 that's what I'll do." So, I reported to a fellow by the name of George Finley who was
2 West Point class of 1960 and I was the assistant—became the assistant G3 Air.

3 JS: Okay.

4 SS: And we were in the tactical operation center of II Corps which was also
5 twinned with two DAS director air support center. The only guy I remember
6 commanding that unit was Herb Rapley who was a really interesting fellow in that I
7 actually got to fly with him. He had been in the Eagle Squadron in World War II as a
8 very young man and had flown in World War II, Korea, and now he was flying in
9 Vietnam. So, I told him, I said, "Wow, you seem not to want to miss any wars that come
10 by, huh?" We both laughed. We got to be friendly. I learned how to do that job. I worked
11 with the sergeant that I had. The one guy I remember was Steve Biro, B-I-R-O. What we
12 would do was we did the strategic bombing, the B-52s. We actually got all the
13 intelligence for the Vietnamese. Some of which was okay, some of which was just based
14 upon hearsay and rumor and really not usable. What we did is we got a lot of electronic
15 intelligence up from American sources and put the targets together. A lot of the B-52
16 bombing took place along the tri-border area, which was Laos, Cambodia. And I also
17 worked with the VNAV, the Vietnamese Air Force which I thought was an outstanding
18 group of people. In fact, generally speaking, the Vietnamese army was much maligned,
19 and they did a good job. I mean, considering the equipment they were given, which was
20 old World War II stuff, and what they were faced with, they were more than on their
21 own. We had the 22nd Division at Bao Chi, Can Tum, which was north of us was in the
22 24th Special Tactical Zone. And I can't remember the unit that was down in Ban Be Tu to
23 it in that area, but I would have to guess and say it was probably the 23rd Armored or
24 something like that.

25 JS: Okay.

26 SS: And we coordinated closely with them. Interestingly enough Americans
27 preferred the VNAV to fly air support in some missions because they had the old A-1E
28 navy planes with the folding wings.

29 JS: Right.

30 SS: And it had a lot of loiter time.

31 JS: Okay.

1 SS: So, they were able to loiter over the targets. At my job as the assistant and
2 later on into the G3 Air about three or four months into the tour, Finley left to go home
3 and I took over as—I was a captain at the time—took over the responsibility. You know,
4 I worked with putting ordinance on targets. At that time, you know, now banned, but we
5 used white phosphorous, a lot of white phosphorus, and a lot of napalm. People think that
6 napalm is used to burn people out which is not really the case. Napalm was used at least
7 by me and the people I worked with in the II Corps was that some of these positions were
8 dug very deep, and napalm would suck the air out of the position, and in effect suffocate
9 people who had dug in very deep underground. You know, this was a very big step in
10 protecting the troops that were going into contact. And so, we provided different types of
11 support. We provided troops of contact support. We would be able to route aircraft
12 targets. We had HNI at nights. A lot of it was done by spookies. You know, are you
13 familiar with the spooky (talking at same time) with the cannons?

14 JS: Yes, sir.

15 SS: Well, they actually—most of these were Gatling guns. I think the cannons
16 came later.

17 JS: Okay.

18 SS: If I remember correctly. I think they had 105s on them at some point. Let's
19 see what else. We did the B-52s which I had mentioned. We tracked the—I ran the first
20 raid in from Thailand which didn't do very much damage but scared a lot of people. But
21 after a while we had to panel and track. What happened was I developed a system
22 whereby if any Special Forces or anybody reported fortifications out, you know, on the
23 border area because there were—what a lot of people don't realize is that the Vietnamese
24 had cyber units, and they'd come before the main units came. That we were fighting
25 North Vietnamese, as the Viet Cong had pretty much been decimated by the Koreans and
26 the 1st Air Cav at that point. These were North Vietnamese and were two divisions on the
27 border. One was La Loi, who was like their George Washington, and the other one was
28 Nun Trung or "Yellow Star."

29 JS: Okay.

30 SS: Just going back forty years. You may have more knowledge about that than
31 me. But these are professionals, and they would go in and clear these sites out. What I

1 would do is anytime a B-52 got diverted or I was able to get hands on a cell, I would
2 bomb these fortifications, and I remember being called down to Colonel Cannon's office
3 and being asked, "Why are you bombing positions where there were no people in them?"
4 Basically, I said to him, "Well, if they think enough to repair them and maintain them,
5 then I think enough to bomb them into smithereens." I always felt that this was very good
6 strategy and also contributed to the fact that, when Tet came, they really didn't have
7 those prepared positions to get into, you know, with Tet where they prepositioned
8 themselves in other places and basically hid out in bunkers. So, that was it. We had a lot
9 of contact, as you would expect. I did flying. I used to fly out over the VC, you know,
10 controlled areas. Although there were any VC there at that point, it was strictly jungle
11 and the Vietnamese. One of the things I did discover when I became the G3 air one time,
12 we plotted all the flights and we looked at the map one time and I said, "How come we
13 never go south of this area right here?" It was a line literally on a corps border.

14 JS: Okay.

15 SS: About three clicks and one of the Air Force people there said to me, "Well,
16 we don't over fly high DAS, and they don't over fly to DAS." And I said, "Wait a
17 minute, you're telling me there's something between six and seven kilometers of board
18 area on either side of this corps line that no one has flown?" Then I said, "For how long?"
19 and it was like, "Since recorded memory." So, I said, "Why don't we do this? Why don't
20 on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays you guys overfly it and on, you know,
21 Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursdays or whatever work something out?"

22 JS: Right.

23 SS: "We'll coordinate our end," and anyway, we found out that that's where the
24 Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese in the southern portion and the northern portion
25 really had I Corps north of us. They figured out that there was no overflying and had used
26 to store a lot of ammunitions and supplies and things of that nature. So, the Air Force was
27 happy. They had a lot of secondary explosions and other things. It all convinced me that
28 sometimes, you know, by following the rules—and the other guys know what the rules
29 are—you can do severe damage to yourself. The other thing that came up, you know,
30 before I talk about some of the tactical things that happened was that one day I was
31 sitting there, and we were piecing together maps.

1 JS: Okay.

2 SS: We were dealing with the Special Forces and there were whole series of
3 camps on the border that we were responsible for air support for. Pri May, Pri Trang, Dak
4 To, Dak Pek come to mind. There were others that I'm sure there, but I don't remember. I
5 couldn't fit the map together.

6 JS: Okay.

7 SS: I had two maps. So, I called down to Saigon and I said, "There's something
8 wrong with these maps that you guys are sending the map service. They don't fit." They
9 said, "Well, when the army map service did the Mercator projections of the world, they
10 had to figure some place where we would never fight and to put the maps together so
11 they put the map together in Vietnam." I don't know if too many people know that. So, if
12 you had a 1:50,000, it was okay for what it was, but if you tried to join, you know some
13 of these maps up, we had a problem. Depending on what you were looking at, the
14 coordinates might not be exact. You know, if you looked at a 1:50 or 1:25 if you could
15 get them, it was better, but if you looked at a map that you put together of those—and
16 you can't bomb off a 1:100,000, so there were some issues. And what happened was, we
17 didn't know really where the Special Forces camps were. I mean, we knew where they
18 were, but we didn't know the coordinates down to the eight, you know that we wanted.

19 JS: Sure.

20 SS: To get pinpoint bombing. I spoke to—we were collocated with the radar. It
21 was the bongo sight and then they were up on a hill and they were all sandbags going by
22 the airport. I don't remember the fellow's last name, but his nickname was Rusty, a
23 lieutenant, and he served the radar. So, I said to him, I said—I explained the problem. I
24 said, "This is why you guys keep missing." I said, "What can we do to locate these
25 better?" And so, we talked, and we came up with the idea that we knew exactly where the
26 bongo site was because that had been surveyed in. He sent out Air Force crews with—I
27 don't know what these things are called—the overlite comes to mind. It's like a
28 surveying instrument.

29 JS: Okay, all right.

30 SS: And we had them sand on top of the bunkers in the special forces camps, and
31 we had a fighter aircraft out of one of the bases who had a transponder fly over the

1 command post and do that, you know, three, four, five times, whatever it took until we
2 had location. And then I used my old—hello?

3 JS: Hello?

4 SS: Hello? Yeah, it sounded like someone else came on the line.

5 The Phone Man: Hello, Mr. Sperman.

6 SS: Yes.

7 TPM: Hi, the phone man. I got a trouble report for your line, so I was going to be
8 working on it. Do you need to continue speaking?

9 SS: Yes, sir.

10 TPM: Okay. You had trouble with the noise, right?

11 SS: No. Well, there's noise on the line, but I'm getting billed by other phone calls.
12 (Audio cuts). Hello?

13 JS: Hello.

14 SS: Hey, Jason.

15 JS: Yeah.

16 SS: You got to talk louder. I'm sorry. That was the phone company. I had a
17 problem on the line that he's going to try to clear.

18 JS: Not a problem.

19 SS: Okay, so what happened was we used polar coordinates and trigonometry,
20 and we located the exact dead center, if you will, of the command post. And then what I
21 had the Special Forces guys do is use range binding and also layout targets.

22 JS: Okay.

23 SS: Because what would happen would be when you started getting the monsoon
24 and you have a lot of ground fog up in the mountains where we were, you know, they
25 couldn't see the targets to bring in direct air support visuals. So, what we used was the
26 version of what we would call the combat sky spot, which was the, you know, dropping
27 in by radar.

28 JS: Okay.

29 SS: The only thing that ticked me off over the years with that when I read the
30 book on John Paul Van by Halberstam.

31 JS: Oh, *A Bright Shining Lie*?

1 SS: Yeah.

2 JS: Yeah.

3 SS: That whole II Corps crew that had staff guys there. They mentioned that, you
4 know, technique that had nothing to do with it. It's Rusty and I that came up with that and
5 that was in place a long time and it proved to be devastating to the North Vietnamese
6 because when they got attacked—and they always did get attacked—all the special guys
7 would have to do is call in and say, "Fire Bravo 123." Or "Alpha 10." And we knew
8 exactly where to, you know, drop the ordinance and we could do it right through the
9 clouds and didn't even see the targets. So that was a pretty good way to do it. Nowadays,
10 I know that they used GPS, you know, for similar purposes, but obviously we didn't have
11 GPS.

12 JS: So, this was sort of a predecessor then?

13 SS: We get a lot of that. I never got out to the camps. George Finley got out to the
14 camps one time, and, you know, they're always trying to get you to drink the rice wine,
15 and no one would drink the rice wine. But our General Lee who was our commanding
16 officer one time, drank the rice wine, and so did the padre, the Catholic priest who we
17 had assigned. They both got amebic dysentery.

18 JS: Oh, boy.

19 SS: After that, we were warned not to drink the rice wine, you know, which it
20 probably saved a lot of guys some really bad news because I know the Catholic priest
21 probably weighed about 260, 270, and after the amebic dysentery, he probably weighed
22 about 180 or 170.

23 JS: Wow.

24 SS: It's really difficult to treat.

25 JS: Sure.

26 SS: So, we did that. Let's see what else? I spent time visiting, you know, the
27 Vietnamese units down in Ban Be Tu, Dar Loc province. I used to go up to Bia Gia,
28 which was the 22nd headquarters. The last flight I took to Bia Gia, the pilot took off with
29 the breaks now working on the aircraft, and we were up until we burned off fuel. I
30 actually destroyed my ears in the process, for which I got a disability. But we wound up
31 landing at Phu Cat Air Force Base because the runway was so big and when we found out

1 what happened we were going to discuss it with the pilot who sorted two or three of us
2 coming after him and basically he put our life at risk to just get a flight in. We actually
3 ran into the Hop's Center and disappeared on us. I called the Vietnamese over the radio
4 and they said deep down in myself and one other person, we're taken up to Bai Gia where
5 we did what we had to do. We also used to brief visiting generals. One time, one
6 particular in mind we had General Johnson who's the chief of staff come in. He had Air
7 Marshal Key, and Key brought his wife who was an actress of some sort, a very pretty
8 woman. This is a funny story, and I was standing in the back, we had our overlays, and
9 George was going to do his presentation. This is before he left obviously. Upstep, say the
10 guy who had been our housing officer in Germany—this major was as dumb as a rock,
11 but he was as brave as a lion. He had been one of the guys who had climbed the cliffs at
12 Point Ta Ha.

13 JS: Oh, wow.

14 SS: Okay?

15 JS: Right.

16 SS: So, the fact that he was just stupid, I mean literally, an ignorant man in the
17 classical sense of the word and had been made a housing officer was lost on everybody
18 because here he was in Vietnam and there were thinking combat and all the rest of it and
19 I'm looking at them saying, "This is the guy who made everyone scrape the floors with
20 knives so they could clear quarters in Germany," but the Germans had used too much
21 glue on the tiles and were known not to have two or three sergeants around them all time
22 to remind him of what he was supposed to be doing and all the rest. If they open his
23 mouth, he usually did something wrong. So, I'm looking at this guy and he's talking
24 about getting the trains running from Saigon up to Quin Yon. And he's going on and on.
25 General Johnson is nodding his head and so is Key and everyone else, and we're standing
26 in the back and we're looking at him like, "You've got to be kidding me?" If we could
27 run the train up to one of Nha Trang or one place like that, but going further up was just
28 impossible. And he finished and everyone left and then we took our overlays, and he had
29 missed his overlay, which is typical. We put his overlay down and then we put ours on
30 top of it, and the engineers at Phu Cat Air Force Base right across the railroad line.

31 JS: Okay.

1 SS: So, the standing joke there for a long time was that the other major was going
2 to get that hair line to get that railroad in, but first they had to teach the locomotives how
3 to fly.

4 JS: (laughing)

5 SS: No way was he getting over that fifteen-thousand-foot runway with, you
6 know, with three or four feet of concrete or whatever the heck it was.

7 JS: Right.

8 SS: So that was it. I spent time up in Can Tum with the guys there. I believe
9 you're doing a paper I read online about the Vietnamese Army?

10 JS: Yes, sir.

11 SS: Hello?

12 JS: Yeah, I'm here.

13 SS: Is that correct?

14 JS: Yes, yes sir. That's correct.

15 SS: Well, I got to tell you, those guys had been fighting for thirty years finally
16 with a number and barely spoke any Vietnamese. But when you went up to the 24th STZ
17 and looked up and saw the mountains which were towering over the camp and knew that
18 there was just no way that you could possibly cover all those mounds and that someone
19 could sit up there on a mountain and see everything you were doing for miles. That those
20 guys, you know, would carry the World War II weapons. The fact that they didn't all
21 desert was just amazing as far as I was concerned. Because it was just a difficult position
22 to be in, you know, easy to cut the road going up there because when we went up there,
23 we went up by chopper, which brings up another point. One of the things we discovered
24 early on, and we worked with a Vietnamese general who commanded the corps was
25 General Bien Locke.

26 JS: Right.

27 SS: Big tall fellow, very political. But as far as we could see he was doing his job,
28 you know, as both the forces commander in the area, but also, you know, responsible for
29 the province chiefs and all the rest which is essentially a political thing. We had
30 determined that no convoy that had air cover was ever attacked.

31 JS: Okay.

1 SS: So, if you could put up a, you know, an O-1E, an observation craft, and fly
2 over the convoy, for whatever the reason, the Viet Cong in that area—they weren't north
3 Vietnamese or whatever that was left of the Vietcong. There was no main force battalions
4 except on the coast, and the Koreans were in the process of destroying the last of them.
5 They wouldn't attack because they were afraid that the air support was on the scene
6 quickly.

7 JS: Right.

8 SS: So as a result, no convoy left out of Pleiku to go to Can Tum or anyplace
9 other than have some air cover.

10 JS: Okay.

11 SS: So, that's the way when I took R&R in Hawaii and on the way back is an
12 interesting story. The pilot bounced the plane on the runway and almost killed us all. He
13 thought he was taking some ground fire from somewhere. I just think he made a bad
14 landing and so did the pilot I was sitting next to. He was walking out of the aircraft
15 someone tapped me on the shoulder, and I turned around and there I was looking into the
16 eyes of General Peers who was the 4th Infantry Division Commander and had done the
17 My Lai Investigation subsequently.

18 JS: Yes, sir.

19 SS: And Peers said to me, "You're in II Corps?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said,
20 "You're an advisor?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Well, you're now my aide."

21 JS: Wow.

22 SS: He said, "Arrange for a plane to take us back to Pleiku. Here's some other
23 things I want you to do. I'll be back at such and such a time." So, I'm figuring, "Oh, I'm
24 about to go into Saigon and stay with the family of one of the guys I advised and here I
25 am going back to Pleiku." This was short one day of my arm.

26 JS: Right.

27 SS: And so, I did what he asked me to obviously, and they got the plane. There
28 were a couple Koreans that were on the plane with us going to wherever they were going,
29 but they stopped, and we went first to Pleiku. And then in the process Peers started
30 talking to me about what I was doing, and me being me, I said to him, "Well, I have one
31 problem with the 4th Infantry Division." I said and I explained what had happened was

1 that the troops in contact by the 4th Infantry Division who had a company of CIDG
2 attached, and I looked at the map, you know. We had the FACs come back and reported
3 what was going on. I said I knew exactly where the North Vietnamese were because at
4 that point we had a pretty good idea of what their standard operating procedures were.

5 JS: Right.

6 SS: I said, "They were on a hill here and when you guys moved back they came
7 forward." I said, "I had two cells of B-52s coming in." I said, "I knew exactly where you
8 guys were. I knew exactly where they were and if they weren't exactly where I thought
9 they were, I'd spread the bombs, so I was going to get them." And what happened was I
10 woke up that morning and went up to see the BDA—bomb damage assessment—and the
11 strike had been cancelled. I said, "Then I heard that your unit had gone down that valley
12 where we were going to bomb because we thought that was the perfect ambush site. And
13 it had taken really severe casualties," and, you know, I was going on and explaining, you
14 know, where we were coming from, and he said, "Captain, I am the person who ordered
15 that strike to be cancelled." So, I'm sitting there like, "Oh my god, you know, I just told
16 the general he doesn't know what he's doing." And he said, "Let me explain to you
17 why," and he explained that when they did the head count at the CIDG, one of the guys
18 was missing, and he goes on. We didn't want to create an impression that we would
19 bomb one of their people, you know, in disregard. I said, "General, even before you tell
20 me what happened I'll tell you what happened because we work with the CIDG." He
21 waited until dark, he looked up in the sky, he took his bearings, and he went home.

22 JS: Right.

23 SS: He said, "That's exactly what happened." I said, "Well, it would have been
24 good policy if someone on your staff had thought to call us and ask us what we thought
25 and if we had checked back through the Vietnamese to see if this guy had gotten home, or
26 at least to a Special Forces camp. You had to have taken all those casualties." So, we
27 talked further about it. He was a very measured man. We landed. It turned out that his
28 actual aide to camp was a fellow by the name of Dorney, Chris Dorney, who had been an
29 underclassman in my company at West Point. He said, "General Peers wants to offer you
30 the tank company on the road between Pleiku and Quin Nang," I think that's route
31 nineteen. I don't remember anymore. Anyway, I said, "What's the deal? The general

1 never offers you anything directly? It's only through the aides?" He said, "Yes, that's the
2 story." He says, "You never tell the general no." I said, "Thanks for telling me after the
3 fact." I said, "Well, I had already reassigned my commission, I'm going home." I said,
4 "That's probably the greatest honor I'll ever have in the military being offered that tank
5 company. I almost considered withdrawing my resignation at that point, but my wife and
6 I had made commitments, you know, that were really just too difficult to break." I said,
7 "Well, tell the general that I have resigned my commission, and that I'm going home and
8 that other things have been set in motion like a job, et cetera, that I really can't at this
9 point turn down." And that was that. The funny part of the story was he said, "Well fine,
10 we'll get you back to II Corps." He said, "Put me on the general's chopper." And for
11 some reason there's a two-star flag on the runners of these choppers, and they forgot to
12 cover the flag. So, here comes the general's chopper coming into the MACV II Corps
13 headquarters, and everyone thinks General Peers is coming. And so, they all roused
14 themselves down, they were all standing there, and then I get out with my bag. "Where's
15 the general?" and I said, "It's just his chopper." I explained what happened. "He flew me
16 over." He said, "But the flag, it's not covered." I said, "Well, we were in a hurry, so I
17 guess they forgot." I said, "Well, maybe he was about to go somewhere and then decided
18 at the last moment to do that." So, they covered up the flag and they went back after that.
19 People would look at me like, "Who the hell is this guy?" That was it. We had other
20 experiences. One of the things we put into place was going in dust patrols.

21 JS: Okay.

22 SS: We have O-1Es just go up and fly around at night, you know, before
23 nighttime and early in the morning. Later on, during Tet, Herb Rapley wrote me and said
24 that the Dawn Patrol had caught a North Vietnamese regiment literally marching up the
25 road to Pleiku and literally slaughtered them. They had gone through the—it's in the
26 center of town. There was a huge—I don't know if you're aware of this or not—POW
27 camp in Pleiku.

28 JS: Okay.

29 SS: And they were looking to liberate the prisoners that were there, and they fell
30 short. So that was like, you know, they stack them like cords. One other thing now, my
31 memory starts refreshing. Another sort of interesting story, when I was there, before that,

1 we were getting probed and there were a number of things going on that were just
2 unusual. And we thought there was another PAC in the offing, but if you know the area
3 around Pleiku, all the trees had been stripped ages ago when its planes, you know, Lake
4 Bien Hoa, and that's where the mountains start and the woods. But a lot of the area is just
5 very similar to the Midwest; it's just flat. You can't bring anything up. You can whack at
6 people from the hills which they did to us, but you can't march troops out because they're
7 in the open. And it's just a killing field. So, we figure that they were hiding in the border
8 areas and all the rest. So, the 4th Infantry Division sent out a patrol, and they were on the
9 right and the Special Forces who never coordinated anything with anybody—I'll tell you
10 a story about that.

11 JS: Okay.

12 SS: They put out a Special Forces patrol for one of the camps on the left, the
13 south. So, one on the north and one on the south. It was just one of these accidents of
14 war. The right one engaged the left flank of the North Vietnamese regiment who was
15 moving forward and the one on the south engaged the right flank of this unit. The North
16 Vietnamese thought that they were up against the 4th Infantry Division because of the
17 spread of the two patrols.

18 JS: Right.

19 SS: Again, not coordinated with each other. The reason we knew that is all of a
20 sudden, their mortar people started firing mortars between the two. We said, "Hey,
21 there's no one there. They must think there's someone there; they haven't figured out yet
22 that there's probably about twenty guys that they're faced with. So, what happened was
23 we started firing behind them and they moved forward to engage, and this is one of the
24 reasons why I was bombing those prepared positions because that's what they would do.
25 They would go in; they would hide; and they would keep their campfires down. It was
26 the only time they lit up their campfires when they were in Cambodia in the house. And
27 so, they moved forward to engage, but there was no one there and they got caught out in
28 the open. It was one of the few times and it was quite a few hundred of them who were
29 KDA, and that was it. But it was so far out towards the border that, you know, you could
30 count them, you could take pictures, but that was about all you could do. I'm sitting,
31 mounted to a desk and, you know, still working on targets and all of that. In comes a

1 reporter for the *New York Times*, a woman, with a photographer. She said, “I understand
2 you’re the person that can get me on an airplane.” I said, “Who might you be?” She
3 explained, and I said, “Where are you going? What do you want to do?” I said,
4 “Normally, you want to go into the direct air support center.” And she said, “No, they
5 sent me to talk to you.” So, I said to myself, “Well, hot potato.”

6 JS: Right.

7 SS: She said, “I hear that you engaged.” This is just before I left. In retrospect it
8 was preparation for Tet. They were just moving forward.

9 JS: Okay.

10 SS: She said, “That you would just kill the whole series of North Vietnamese and
11 for once there were bodies that you could take pictures of.”

12 JS: I said, “Well, what do you want to do?” She said, “I want to go over there and
13 fly over the area and take pictures.” I said, “No.” She said, “Why?” So, first of all they’re
14 shooting at people who are taking pictures. And every night, you know, when there’s no
15 air cover, they go and they retrieve their debt. I said, “There was a promise they had
16 made to their people that they would bury them, and they would bury them with their
17 heads attached. That’s a Buddhist thing, I guess.

18 JS: Right.

19 SS: Long story short, she just got really infuriated at me. She said, “Well, I’m
20 going to go to the 4th Infantry Division and maybe they’ll let me take pictures.” I said,
21 “Ma’am, you can do whatever you want, but I’m not endangering any of these forward
22 air controllers.” I said, “Trust me, they’re dead and they’re not very happy about it right
23 now.” Their command was so—and about a week later I’m going home, I get on my
24 flight and who am I sitting across the way from but the same reporter. She said, “Oh, Mr.
25 II Corps won’t give me my airplane and won’t allow me to get my pictures.” “Let me tell
26 you what’s going on.” I explained to her that there’s a big attack coming. I’ll never forget
27 what she said to me. She said, “You guys are all the same. Every time the budget in
28 Washington comes up for review, you start talking about attacks and need more money
29 and need more people.” I said, “Look lady, between you and me I don’t give a, you know
30 what. The budget—I don’t even know they were having a budget because I don’t get the
31 newspaper here to read in the first place.” I said, “And I’m going home.” I said, “But if

1 you think that the North Vietnamese who are the ultimate professionals are going to get
2 caught in the open with five hundred men moving a unit forward and their doing it
3 because that was just an accident or bad luck on their part, good luck on ours.” I said,
4 “They don’t have something in mind with all this probing and guys where we spotted
5 with binoculars, you know, trying to figure out where to attack and all the rest of it.
6 Something big has happened.” So, you know, as a result, she missed probably the biggest
7 story of her life, and I luckily missed Tet because Tet—the place we were at the
8 compound, the MACV compound, where I lived, you know, slept anyway—I didn’t do
9 much living in there—was under fire almost throughout Tet. Everyday and pretty heavy
10 stuff, too from what I understood from the guys. Where we used to walk out in the open,
11 you know, you had to walk through trenches hunkered down, so, you know, that took
12 care of that. Let me go back to one and give you an example of how things were.

13 JS: Okay.

14 SS: One time we had some electronic intelligence that one of the North
15 Vietnamese units were signaling back to Hanoi. And they had very top prize Russian
16 Equipment. One of the types of equipment they had sent out—I don’t know what it’s
17 called, I’d forgotten, but it wasn’t a radio message like I’m talking to you on the phone. It
18 was like a very quick transmission. We had figured out how to find out where they were.
19 So, this guy, which was unusual, had a pattern. He’d start at the bottom of the hill; he’d
20 send a message; and then he’d walk up to the top, and they would send them another
21 message. Then he walked down to the bottom of the hill, send another message, and then
22 they’d go home and disappear. So, the Special Forces guys saw that, and they sent a
23 patrol out. I saw it and I said, “Well, this guy is like clockwork. I’ll do a combat sky spot
24 and I’ll put a five-hundred-pound bomb, you know on the top of the hill and then we’ll
25 figure he’ll run down to the bottom of the hill and we’ll get them down at the bottom and
26 then we figured out how the distance.” It was sort of like a funny thing, one of the more
27 humorous exercises. He’s going to be—he won’t be doing that again.

28 JS: Right.

29 SS: And I go to sleep, and I get awoken in the morning and, you know, panicky
30 sergeant, “Are there anymore bombs on this target out by such and such?” and I said,

1 “No, there was just one on the top and another one on the bottom.” He said, “Okay, you
2 wounded one of the Special Forces guys.” It turned out it was superficial.

3 JS: Okay.

4 SS: The first thing I did in the morning was I went down to the B-Camp which
5 was located right near us. I saw the major who turned out to be a West Pointer, and I
6 explained what happened and he was about to climb all over me and I said, “Well, stop.
7 You get notified of all these targets. Every single one of these targets is Twix to you; it’s
8 not just B-52s.” I said, “But it’s also the combat guys spots and attack air.” I said, “You
9 get every one of them that are preplanned.” I said, “When there’s in contact, you
10 obviously don’t get that.”

11 JS: Right.

12 SS: Anyway, he said, “I never get them.” And I’m standing in front of his desk
13 and he’s got maps all over. And I look down, and I see the Twix. I said, “It’s in your
14 box.” He said, “What are you talking about?” Because most of the stuff that was urgent
15 came in with a red mark or a secret and all the rest of that. So, I looked and there were all
16 my B-52 targets, there were all my combat sky spots, there were all the other things that
17 we were doing, and they were all just piled together by whoever was doing his work. And
18 I said, “Major, if you use every single one of these targets.” I said, “Let me tell you
19 something, if you guys had gone.” And then we looked at him map. I said, “If you’d had
20 sent that patrol out and that box, let me show you where the next B-52 target’s coming.”
21 And the next B-52 target was right on that box where they were. I said, “There’s got to be
22 a better way to do this.” And he said, “I’ll take care of it from here.” And that was the
23 end of that, and we never had that kind of problem with the Specials again, but
24 nowadays, it’s a lot better coordinated, but in those days sometimes these things really
25 did fall through the cracks. And then that was that. One other thing happened before Tet
26 that was interesting.

27 JS: Okay.

28 SS: Is that we were rocketed by 120mm rockets. You know, one rocket, two
29 rockets, that’s one thing, but this was like a barrage of rockets that started falling on us
30 and what happened what the voodoo was going north to do some photos in North
31 Vietnam.

1 JS: Okay.

2 SS: And the guy had the presence of mine of dropping the flares over where the
3 rockets were being fired from. It put them off their game if you will.

4 JS: Right.

5 SS: And then we did the can of battery fire and all the rest. It saved our lives
6 because these guys were pretty close to zeroing in on us. I think if that had another three
7 or four minutes, they would have obliterated the headquarters and the compound, but
8 they didn't.

9 JS: Right.

10 SS: It was a close call, so whoever that voodoo guy is, I can tell the guys, myself
11 included, owe him big time.

12 JS: Right.

13 SS: I don't know, there are probably other sources. Let me stop and see if you
14 have any questions.

15 JS: Sure, sure. Okay so—

16 SS: I can't hear you.

17 JS: Can you hear me now? Is that better?

18 SS: A little better.

19 JS: Okay, I'll try to speak louder then. One of the things I wanted to ask you
20 about is you were talking earlier about the specifics of your job. Could you talk a little bit
21 more about how a target would be selected and what type of intelligence would go into
22 that?

23 SS: Okay, well there were lots of intelligence. There were ground intelligence
24 from patrols, the specialists sent out patrols from the camps. We were friendly with the
25 Montagnard's, so there would be human intelligence from them. In fact, I even have a
26 Montagnard bracelet and all that. A lot of it was electric agent. It was electronic
27 intelligence, but they were using radios.

28 JS: Right.

29 SS: A lot of it was forward air controllers, targets being spotted. You know, that
30 was primarily it. If you saw fresh digging or, you know, you could see fortification, but
31 no one around. You could figure they were in there somewhere. The Vietnamese had

1 intelligence that they would give us, and it all came together at my desk and what we
2 would do basically—and we also got photo type stuff. A lot of information came from,
3 and I don't know where the Air Force got it, what the nature of the aircraft was, but they
4 would do infrared.

5 JS: Okay.

6 SS: So, you could pick up the campfires even if they were smokeless and
7 subdued. And all of it came together and basically you wouldn't target anything that
8 wasn't confirmed by at least two or more sources of intelligence.

9 JS: Okay.

10 SS: In other words, if someone said, "I think they're there," that didn't warrant a
11 target, but if you saw an electronic intelligence; you saw, you know, visual signs of
12 habitation of construction, or you saw, you know, that the North Vietnamese had been in
13 one of the villages and that gotten quarters or usually forced them to do their quartering. I
14 mean, all these stories about the North Vietnamese carrying these things down around
15 their backs. You know, I'm sure they did, but they also were impressed by the natives,
16 the Montagnard's, because the North Vietnamese didn't like the jungles very much
17 either. They're city boys up in Hanoi and all the rest of those places. Here they were in
18 the jungle, and they were having the same problems with the jungle that everyone else
19 was. And that's eventually why they went to the roads and everything because they
20 couldn't get anyone to do the quartering. So, we would have—sometimes you would
21 actually see an elephant with, what do you call it, marks on its back. The wild elephants
22 didn't have any marks on their back and there were elephants with backpack marks on
23 them so you had an idea that somewhere near by, you know, there were people who were
24 using them to transport heavy equipment, so that was it. Then what we would do was we
25 would get requests for targets from the provincial chiefs and some of these subdistricts,
26 and you would, in effect, prioritize the targets. One of the things that we always did is
27 we, you know, one of the policies I instituted was always have some aircraft up in all
28 parts of the corps so that in case there were troops in contact, you could just divert, you
29 know, whatever was flying and get immediate assistance. A couple of times that worked
30 very well where one time a North Vietnamese unit was moving south for Tet or prior to
31 Tet and was intercepted at Lam Dong by the platoon. It probably could have been the

1 same platoon I was talking to you about which was going up the road on just the regular
2 patrol, and it cuts this North Vietnamese, the battalion, the regiment and a half. Of
3 course, they didn't know they were there, and someone got nervous in the North
4 Vietnamese side and opened fire on them. And once one guy started firing they got it
5 from both sides, but they weren't in an ambush. They just happened to be, you know, in
6 the middle of the unit.

7 JS: Okay.

8 SS: So, it wasn't coordinated, and we immediately got FAC up and diverted all
9 the, you know, air there. We launched the spooky who was ready to go, you know, for the
10 night, so you got the Gatling's up, you know, firing into, you know, the woods. The FAC
11 that was sent down—when we were talking to him, you could hear the bullets pinging off
12 his aircraft. I mean rounds just actually hitting the aircraft. They put that fellow in for the
13 Medal of Honor. I don't think he got it; he should have. I think he got the Distinguished
14 Service Cross or whatever the Air Force version is.

15 JS: Okay.

16 SS: So, we would divert all of the aircraft, so the plan basically was to have
17 coverage in the corps area all the time except all of the Americans who did their own air
18 coverage, but to always have air support available. And then what we would do is at night
19 we would do artillery HNI. But out at the border we would have a spooky just essentially
20 cruising the border, and we would have big arguments with these guys because the Air
21 Force likes to fire their guns. And we would say, "Come back with the ammunition and
22 you don't need it, but they always wound up needing it." So, what we used to do is we
23 would give them old—well, we knew there were, you know, bunker complexes. "If
24 you're going to fire, fire it here, but don't go firing in the jungle, you know, for no
25 particular reason other than to see your rounds kick up trees."

26 JS: Right.

27 SS: So, there were problems with that, but potentially that was the process and
28 that was done the night before and the targets were given, and we would also give targets
29 to the VNAF. Out of the targets were done by my counterpart where he would supply air
30 support for the Vietnamese units that were moving out, and we would have back up for
31 them incase they need it. So, we would do that. Alongside me was a guy, a major who

1 was a rotary air craft chopper Huey guy who did helicopter support, so if they needed to
2 fly, you know, to an air assault somewhere we would provide that. We would pretty
3 much have it well coordinated so that the day before everything was in place. The B-52
4 targets, when I got them, were really hard intelligence, usually from the Americans
5 confirmed by Specials on the ground.

6 JS: Okay.

7 SS: And then what I would do is I would actually put the coordinates to the boxes
8 and code them. I would go down to—there was a, you know, in the middle of nowhere—
9 what the hell is this thing doing here? But there was something called a tropaspheric
10 scatter-site with a big antenna. And people think it's the listening, but that's not what it's
11 for. What it's doing is—I would go into a booth, which was a scrambler, and that
12 tropaspheric static antenna, instead of having a beam that was very small would throw a
13 beam into the troposphere and it would bounce off the troposphere and come down in
14 Washington, Cadena Air Force Base, in Okinawa where the B-52s were and the
15 Pentagon. I had about twenty or thirty people that wanted to know about these B-52
16 targets, and I had a statement in the B-52 target that it wasn't bombing any religious
17 shrine or anything else. Every once in awhile people talk about Johnson and the war, but
18 every once in awhile we would get a, you know, a response back saying, "Cancel target
19 so and so," and it would be signed by the White House. So, I assume that somewhere in
20 the White House—not the president obviously, but somewhere in there—there was
21 somebody who was looking over our shoulders, you know, targeting stuff. And
22 eventually the North Vietnamese obviously figured that out; they were not stupid. One
23 time, they were half in South Vietnam, half in Cambodia, and it was where the border
24 curves, and I just sent the target and the bottom I just think, "Permission requested to
25 bomb, that portion of the target that's in south Vietnam." Because I knew they were
26 going to refuse it. The Air Force said, "We can't possibly do this." And I said, "He gave
27 us permission to bomb the target in South Vietnam." I said, "You just bombed the target
28 in South Vietnam. Let me worry about a couple of bombs falling into Cambodia."
29 Because we would have infrared pictures of the North Vietnamese in Cambodia around
30 their campfire very brazen. That's the kind of thing we would run. We also supported,
31 you know, every once in a while there'd be a request that a Special Operations group was

1 coming back out of Laos or Cambodia. And so, we would provide air support for them
2 just for the pickup.

3 JS: Okay.

4 SS: But once they were over the border they were on their own. There were places
5 in Laos that we knew. A friend of mine flew out of Laos with Air America. I'll tell you a
6 funny story that happened. We had this Colonel Scroggins. Scroggins was one of these
7 guys that when you had the action with the five hundred guys that were killed, you know,
8 the North Vietnamese regiment?

9 JS: Right.

10 SS: He was up there as the forward air controller. He brought one of the lieutenant
11 colonels who was an intel guy to sit in the back seat. They both but each other at the
12 Silver Stars. That's the kind of guy he was. He used to give these forward air controllers
13 court marshals, audible fifteens for no good reason. So, one of the things the never did,
14 they never flew themselves home. And he was adamant about that. But it turned out he
15 took a forward—he took an O-1E, and he decides to fly himself home, and he's not were
16 he's supposed to be. We really got nervous, and we put out search parties all along the
17 route, and then I got a phone call—radio call, if you will—from Special Forces guys in
18 Laos saying, "Do you know such and such an aircraft, such and such? It's run out of fuel
19 and its here in Laos and wanted to know if we wanted to fuel them up and send them
20 back." And so at that point the DAS was involved. "Yeah, send it back." What happened
21 was Scroggins did not listen to his own, you know, mantra and had a bad compass on the
22 aircraft. Instead of flying east he had flown west over into Laos.

23 JS: Right.

24 SS: And was running low on fuel and landed at a Specials camp. They fueled him
25 up, and he flew back, and he was given an article fifteen by the colonel who used the
26 exact same words that Scroggins used to use, "Error is an unforgiving element and blah,
27 blah, blah, blah, blah."

28 JS: Right.

29 SS: So, we worked with the specials there. We never did any work in Laos. The
30 Americans periodically, eye force victor, which was in Nha Trang—

31 JS: Okay.

1 SS: Would call, you know, or we would talk to them over the radio, telephone,
2 and coordinate targets. The only time we ever had a problem with eye force victor was
3 we had a fellow there that had a really low regard for Vietnamese for no good reason.
4 One time he called up, and he was demanding a target, and I said, “Well, we can’t. We’ve
5 got troops moving in that area,” and he got some more and more irate, and he did this all
6 the time. He said, “I’m ordering you to do that.” I said, “You can’t order me to do
7 anything. You know, I’m speaking for the commanding officer of II Corps, General Bien
8 Locke.” I said, “I may be an American, and you and I could be in the same unit, but right
9 now I’m in the Vietnamese army, dude.”

10 JS: Right.

11 SS: And he said, “Well, you tell the little yellow people, you know, to do what
12 their told to do.” And I said, “That’s unforgivable.” And we reported him, and we said,
13 “Hey, we cannot—” I talked to my commander who was the S3, and we got that guy
14 removed from, you know, that position because it was, you know—I said to the guy,
15 “Look at their country. They can do what they want and eventually we’re probably going
16 to leave. This is the way we usually operate.”

17 JS: Right.

18 SS: You know, we can’t have that coming out of somebody who’s working with
19 the Vietnamese.

20 JS: Sure.

21 SS: Other than that, everybody was extremely cooperative in eye force victor. We
22 would—sometimes there were demands on the same resources, but we always worked it
23 out. And the Vietnamese supported the American troops with the loiter times, so it
24 worked out, but it was a process with previous day, you know, we prioritize the targets.
25 We find out what flights were available from the two DAS. We find out how many FACs
26 were available. We put the FACs up with the aircraft. We’d target them and hand them
27 over to the DAS. The DAS would do the assigning and that was the deal. So basically, we
28 picked the targets; we picked the ordinance; we suggested the aircraft, and the two DAS
29 took care of the details. It was a very collegial practice. In fact, my desk was literally, you
30 know, the two desks were face-to-face connected. Do you understand what I mean?

31 JS: Right, yes sir.

1 SS: Jason?
2 JS: Yeah, I'm here.
3 SS: Jason?
4 JS: Hello, yes?
5 SS: Are you there?
6 JS: Yes, sir. Can you hear me?
7 SS: Yeah—
8 JS: Hello?
9 SS: Hello?
10 JS: Hello, I'm here.
11 SS: Oh, you're here, okay.
12 JS: Yes.
13 SS: You got me so far?
14 JS: Yes, sir.
15 SS: I'm sorry. I didn't hear you. I got nervous. The two desks were face-to-face,
16 and I mean going to two desks was handing the targets over the desks and back and
17 fourth and back and fourth. Usually, it was for Rapley. They never gave that to a captain.
18 It was always a colonel or above, a lieutenant colonel or above. And I never had a serious
19 issue whatsoever with the Air Force or the VNAF or the Vietnamese.
20 JS: Okay.
21 SS: Ever.
22 JS: All right.
23 SS: We were all in it together.
24 JS: Right, okay. When you talked about the restrictions particularly on the B-52
25 bombing mission, you talked about not being able to bomb into Cambodia. Were there,
26 were there other restrictions as well?
27 SS: Well, Laos also. You couldn't bomb Laos, at least at that point in the war
28 in '66, '67. No. I can't recall any restrictions. In fact, if anything, the air force would push
29 us to find targets for B-52s.
30 JS: Okay, all right.

1 SS: Mostly five-hundred-pound bombs. Every once in awhile we'd order up
2 different ordinance. Sometimes we would order up a thousand- or two-thousand-pound
3 bombs. What I came up with is I used to ask for a point initiating, base detonating fuses.

4 JS: Okay.

5 SS: But what happened, we discovered was that a lot of these bombs would hit the
6 top of the canopy and explode up in the top of the trees. So, the point initiating base
7 detonating the bomb had enough time to get down below the, you know, top of the trees.

8 JS: Right.

9 SS: Some of these trees were like really huge, not like you have here in the states.
10 And that, you know, was more effective. There were some issues about the fusing, but
11 nothing that really sticks on my mind. Almost invariably, we got the kind or ordinance
12 more later on. In the beginning, there was a little tightness on certain types of ordinance,
13 but afterwards pretty much got it. There were no restrictions on white phosphorous, Willy
14 Pete; there was no restrictions on napalm. Sometimes we ordered up CBUs—cluster
15 bomb units.

16 JS: Okay.

17 SS: There was no restriction on that. They didn't like to use that too much
18 because a lot of the bomblets don't detonate, and they were being used as booby traps.

19 JS: Sure.

20 SS: And also, five-hundred-pound bombs that didn't detonate when we used the
21 booby traps. So, if you were involved in something more close in to the coast where there
22 were people and a bomb didn't detonate, we usually followed that up and tried to get the
23 bomb out, and we'd blow the bomb up and didn't want to recover the ordinance.

24 JS: Right.

25 SS: At that point that wasn't an issue and blow the bomb up. But most of the
26 stuff, you know, detonated. The only time I recall one thing where civilians were
27 involved, one of the great myths of the war was that civilians were killed left and right.
28 Well let me tell you every province chief, down to the subdistrict, had a radio, okay. And
29 the one time we were in support of the Koreans, a plane came in, dropped the bomb, and
30 the bomb hung up for whatever reason. And as he was pulling out, the bomb released. So,
31 picture this. He's supposed to drop the bomb on his target, the main force battalion which

1 the Koreans wiped out. In fact, they were so pleased with the air support, they sent us
2 pictures. Only Koreans could do this with guys with the North Vietnamese—I mean
3 VC—with their arms, you know, dismembered and stuff. Anyway, so this bomb went
4 flying off into a field somewhere and nearly wounded some guy and killed a water
5 buffalo. Let me tell you, it wasn't ten minutes when that district guy wasn't on the phone
6 to the province chief who wasn't on the phone to tactical operations center saying he
7 expected us to pay for that water buffalo.

8 JS: Right.

9 SS: I mean, within the half hour if you will.

10 JS: Sure.

11 SS: When this was all taken care of. You know, the restrictions were don't bomb
12 in populated areas obviously.

13 JS: Right.

14 SS: And other types of things, but we would have what are called FFZs—free fire
15 zones. And the province chief would clear that zone and tell anyone who's in that zone,
16 you know, if you're there, you're soon to be a bad guy. And anything in these free fire
17 zones would give you no permission from the province chief, but if you had to take on a
18 target sometimes, and it wasn't troops in contact, these targets were cleared by the
19 Vietnamese through the province chiefs which basically meant that if there were
20 compromise, and they had the time, you know, they were telling the people to leave. But
21 we worked so that there wasn't that much time for them to communicate, and a lot of
22 times the aircraft was in the air when we were clearing the targets. You know, it's cat and
23 mouse game.

24 JS: Sure.

25 SS: So, it worked out pretty well. One of the things we discovered that I
26 discovered anyway, was when I was up flying with one of the forward air controllers is—
27 are you familiar with napalm at all?

28 JS: Yes sir, a little bit, but could you—?

29 SS: Napalm has two detonators on both sides. So, these guys were reporting
30 explosions with just a second detonator of the napalm. So, a lot of the stuff that they were
31 sending off to Saigon was overstated.

1 JS: Okay.

2 SS: But that was pretty much it. We cut that out, you know. Those don't count
3 anymore, and a lot of the killed by air, if they didn't see the bodies, you know, we didn't
4 count it. So, if he's in II Corps when I was there, we tried to give an accurate picture back
5 to MACV and Saigon as to what the status was. Like I say, I think that one of the reasons
6 that Pleiku was not terribly hard hit in Tet was because we caught that regiment moving
7 forward and because the RFPS on the dorm patrol were available in their positions with
8 their tanks and, you know, caught the regiment coming up the road and pretty much
9 slaughtered it.

10 JS: Right.

11 SS: I was told later on that the courthouse where I taught English to the kids had
12 been with a high water point that was on a hill, and they had stacked the bodies like
13 hardwood in there. So, some of these things where the planning seemed a little bit
14 cautious turned out to be, you know beneficial in the end.

15 JS: Sure, sure. All right, another question I wanted to ask you about, when you
16 were working with, in particular with the ARVN, how would they?

17 SS: I can't hear you.

18 JS: When you worked particularly with the ARVN, how would they call in for air
19 support? Was it generally through an American advisor?

20 SS: It depends. Let's say if we had a FAC open target, and we needed air support
21 whatever was in the area he had the right to market and provide air support to the troops.

22 JS: Right.

23 SS: And then what we would do was we would work with the desk and basically
24 tell somebody, "Hey look, we had a target here that we were going to blow up, you know,
25 a supposed bunker or something. You know, you're going to have to wait until tomorrow
26 to divert the target." Once there were troops in contact, everybody on the Vietnamese
27 side and on the American side, all the resources were poured into supporting them. There
28 was never an issue. A lot of that was not the G3 air's job at that point other than, you
29 know, to decide what targets were not going to get hit. But once you're in contact, the
30 direct air support center, they just supply whatever is available and as much as is

1 available. Sometimes we would make suggestions, but these are all professional guys. In
2 fact, some of the FACs were B-52 pilots.

3 JS: Okay.

4 SS: That were accused of being truck drivers by the fighter pilots were FACs, so
5 it's interesting comment. One of the guys said to me, "Why do you hate B-52 pilots?" I
6 said, "Let me tell you what these guys do." They would fly north of them and this guy
7 flew a 105, a thud, they used to call them.

8 JS: Right.

9 SS: He said, "I didn't see him, but I thought I saw them." He didn't see him
10 visually, but he had them on his radar. He said that he called up and he told the B-52 that
11 he saw, on the radar, that he saw me on the radar. The guy on the radar says, "Watch
12 this." And he writes, F-U-C-U, on his radar.

13 JS: Right.

14 SS: He was really infuriated because the pilots really think well of themselves.

15 JS: Right.

16 SS: The other place we used to get a-list intelligence from—I would get a report
17 of everything that was flying north and all the types of configurations of Vietnamese
18 would throw up against the fighters, you know, and the B-52s. Most of the stuff like the
19 air-to-ground missiles had nothing to do with us, but some of the anti-aircraft stuff later on
20 from what I understand started, you know, appearing on the border. But while I was there
21 it was mostly their version of the .50 machine gun, and there's something they had with
22 like a little heavy, I just don't recall 12.57 and whatever the heck it was. There was firing
23 at them and a mass fire. You hear all these stories about, you know, the Viet Cong with
24 the little learning how to fire. They may have gotten lucky occasionally and shot down an
25 aircraft, but by and large, it wasn't things like some low life. It was a mass fire.

26 JS: Right.

27 SS: They were getting pretty good at that.

28 JS: Okay, all right. Well, earlier you were talking about the bureaucratic issue of
29 overlapping tactical areas of responsibility and where there was that one strip of land
30 where neither group were bombing that area.

31 SS: Right.

1 JS: Were there other bureaucratic issues like that that came up?

2 SS: Well, the only other time it got to be—well, that wasn't strictly an air force
3 internal thing.

4 JS: Okay.

5 SS: Okay, and like I just said, it was just by accident that I discovered it. Because
6 looking at the plot one day where we didn't erase it. There was some issues in
7 determining areas of operation.

8 JS: Okay.

9 SS: But a lot of times the Vietnamese would be fighting in an area and the
10 Americans would ask for an area of operation where the Vietnamese were and basically
11 take over the Vietnamese fighting. You know when we would say, "Hey, they're doing a
12 good job, let them do their thing." But, you know, from our perspective there wasn't any
13 problems. General Lee who was commanding our team—

14 JS: Okay.

15 SS: In fact, he grabbed me and made me do PT; everyone had to do PT. If you
16 were with General Lee, you did PT which was good for me. But he pretty much—he was
17 one of these guys who was laid back, but he ran a tight shift, so there was no—the only
18 time I could ever think of something that happened—the only time something weird
19 happened is when the captain who ran the mess was promoted to major.

20 JS: Okay.

21 SS: He was making everyone salute. And one thing you don't do in a combat zone
22 is salute because that shows you who the officer is.

23 JS: Sure.

24 SS: And he did that to me one time, and he said to me, "Everyone salutes me. I
25 just got promoted." I said, "I'm going to tell you one thing Major. I'm going to salute you
26 once for whatever reason you want me to salute you." I said, "But we're standing on the
27 side of a hill." And I said, "There's someone watching us, and they keep seeing you be
28 saluted, you're going to be the target."

29 JS: Right.

30 SS: So, that was it, but other than that, that was the only weird thing that ever
31 happened. I mean, we would —there was a big base area, there was a hospital further

1 down. In fact, that was the hospital where they were firing at us. That the rounds
2 overshot, and I think one or two of the nurses were wounded and were fired at. No one
3 was killed or anything like that. There was a big engineering base where the VC sappers
4 got into the wire one time and saw this building that everyone's going in and out of and
5 thought it was an important building and blew up the building, and it turned out that that
6 was where they stored all the deck cards for their IBM computer. They blew all the spare
7 parts, wrecked the kingdom come, which had absolutely no effect whatsoever on a war.

8 JS: Right.

9 SS: But other than that, everything came through the tactical operation center. In
10 fact, one night, I was in the tactical operation center, you know, briefing the patrols that
11 were going out, and I heard this voice behind me. It goes, "Rururururu." And I
12 recognized that voice. I turned around and it was this fellow who was a cook in my tank
13 unit. His name was Handel or something like that, and he was the lieutenant. When I was
14 the brigade adjutant, I'd been on the OCS board, and we had turned him down because he
15 didn't have the disposition to be an officer.

16 JS: Okay.

17 SS: I turn around and he's this brand-new second lieutenant in the engineers of all
18 things. I said, "What are you doing?" He got all nervous when he saw me. He said, "I'm
19 leading a patrol out through the wire." I cringed. That was the one thing I saw later on
20 towards the end of my tour, was the quality of the type of officers we were starting to get
21 were not professionals. They were basically guys—I mean, they were good people, but
22 they didn't have training like we did.

23 JS: Right.

24 SS: They were just thrown in there, and I just shook my head to myself. And sure
25 as hell he didn't notice that when they attacked the engineers, they obviously saw him
26 working his way through the mine fields and just to make sure what they'd done over a
27 period of nights, which he didn't recognize, was they had basically put the pins back in
28 the mines.

29 JS: Okay.

30 SS: So, they just essentially walked through the wire, blew up the building and
31 walked back out. There were gone even before anyone reacted. And I just said to myself,

1 “Well, you know, I’m not surprised. Everyone, but this guy who was just oblivious would
2 have noticed freshly moved earth or something like that. But other than that, I know there
3 were some issues within the Vietnamese unit. We had some Vietnamese who had been
4 part of the Buddhist protests.

5 JS: Okay.

6 SS: I don’t know if you’re familiar with that.

7 JS: Yes, sir.

8 SS: Like Major Su had been a leader of the protest up in Wei. He was in the TAC,
9 you know. They didn’t like it. There was some friction there. Colonel Klum was the S3. I
10 still have a picture of him in the newspapers with one of the—what was his name? He
11 was a conservative guy. I can’t think. I’ll think of it in a minute. So, there was some
12 frictions in the Vietnamese part. Everyone thinks of Vietnam as a country, and there may
13 be a people, but they were not at that time, at least a country again, in the sense of the
14 word as we used it. I mean, Canadians speak English and Americans speak English, and
15 British speak English, but they’re not—they speak the same language, but they’re not
16 countrymen, do you know what I mean?

17 JS: Sure, yes sir.

18 SS: What we used to say is that if you were north of II Corps that the people go
19 over the mountains, if you will.

20 JS: Okay.

21 SS: They were often Wei and some of these other places. More towards the North,
22 they were really very different than the Southerners.

23 JS: Right.

24 SS: And so, there were some frictions, you know, in the tactical operation center,
25 to that extent, but not to the point where it interfered with us or it interfered with
26 business. I guess it would be the same, you know, friction that exists between some guys
27 from Mississippi and a guy who’s from Maine.

28 JS: Right, sure.

29 SS: I mean, literally. But, no, no. I don’t recall anyone ever—and I’ve been down
30 to Saigon to the TAC a couple of times to get, you know, three stars, rules of engagement
31 and all that. No, I never, never was told not to do something.

1 JS: Right, right. Okay, you mentioned frictions between the Vietnamese
2 themselves. What about the frictions between say the ARVN and the Montagnard's?
3 Were there problems there, or did they get along pretty well?

4 SS: Well, first of all the Montagnard's were mostly working with the Americans.

5 JS: Okay.

6 SS: And one of the reasons I always thought they work with the Americans is
7 because the Vietnamese considered them more as savages.

8 JS: Right.

9 SS: But we had a couple of Montagnard's working in our TAC, but whenever you
10 saw Montagnard's when you're working with the Vietnamese, they were working doing
11 medial work. Like sweeping, cleaning, you know that kind of thing.

12 JS: Okay.

13 SS: The province chief of Pleiku was a Montagnard, if I remember correctly. The
14 Vietnamese did not like the Central Islands. They were up there because they were
15 assigned there. Some of them brought their wives who lived in the village. The village
16 was very rudimentary. Pleiku itself had open sewers and, you know, was the typical hut.
17 Even Major Su, when I went to his house, lived in a house that he would not have lived in
18 had he had lived in Saigon, okay. So, my experience was that almost all the
19 Montagnard's worked with the Americans and the Specials. I really don't recall them
20 working with the Vietnamese which would say that they didn't get along well.

21 JS: Right.

22 SS: But the people that they really didn't like were the Chinese.

23 JS: Okay.

24 SS: You know, there weren't a lot of Chinese in Vietnam, there weren't a lot of
25 Chinese in the armed forces that I ever met. One time I asked. They didn't feel the
26 Chinese were loyal, but that was it. I'll tell you where there was some friction. One of the
27 guys that I advised was a Roman Catholic.

28 JS: Okay.

29 SS: They moved in separate circles then the Buddhists. They worked together, but
30 it was a whole different probe like this. This fellow's name was Nguyen Tuan, which is
31 like a John Jones kind of thing. And his father, his uncle, his father's brother, his uncle

1 was the archbishop, one of the archbishops in Vietnam. He was a different class than
2 some of the other guys, just different. But I know he became—when Saigon fell, he was a
3 military attaché in South Korea, I think. But I never saw any open friction between them.
4 The only time I ever saw open friction was over just personality stuff. You know how
5 some people rub you the wrong way?

6 JS: Sure, sure.

7 SS: One of the Vietnamese said to me one time, he said, “We’re in this for the
8 duration; you’re in this for one year. You’ve been working with someone for years, and
9 they keep doing the same thing over and over again. It gets on your nerves.” I had a
10 fellow who I advised, Captain Ku, and I’d always have to be careful how to write his
11 name because I left out a critical mark that meant penis, and I had to say it correctly. He
12 was a Dalat graduate, and he was basically, you know—Su used to get on his case
13 because he was more interested in falandering at times than doing what he was doing.
14 And he would tend to let us, you know, do his work because being typical Americans,
15 you know, that’s what you do, and we finally told him, we said, “Look, we cannot do
16 this. You have to do your own work.” And we forced him to do that. There’s a funny
17 story there. When his wife came up, she found some letters under his bed, and when she
18 kissed him, she actually bit through his lower lip as a punishment. She was sweeping up
19 his room and we had to send him to the medic because he got an infection on his lip.
20 That’s why we say, you know, “Behave yourself.”

21 JS: Right.

22 SS: But he was a young guy, and he was feeling his oats. When he did his work,
23 he did his work. I used to go with him to the various sites. I used to feel that most of the
24 reason I went with him was to provide the air transportation and get him on a plane. The
25 business was conducted in Vietnamese which I didn’t understand. I understand fragments
26 here and there at the time, but I’ve never been to the language school. And then I would,
27 you know, at the end come in and basically ratify or not what had been discussed. But
28 other than that—and that was all minor stuff. The only time I saw the Vietnamese get
29 really upset about something was when an artillery guy fired on our checkpoint and
30 eventually wound up killing one of the guys I knew from Can Tu by the name of Vinny
31 Barego. To this day, I’m convinced, and so are the Vietnamese, that this lieutenant—

1 because it was flat. You could see for miles—well not miles, but a couple miles anyway.
2 Saw that chief coming down and thought it would be funny and he got too close to the
3 chief. He was just trying to scare them. The sergeant who was with Vinny, you know,
4 was unscathed so, you know, the blasts were far away, but Vinny got caught with a
5 couple pieces of shrapnel. And one of my sergeants who had been called up because of
6 the special MOS fairground.

7 JS: Right.

8 SS: Well, the World War II guy had a heart attack. That morning I went in to see
9 so I could see Collins. “Where’s Collins?” “Collins is in the hospital.” He had a heart
10 attack because it was stressful work. Lying in the bed across the way was Barego with
11 one of his classmates, a guy by the name of Sherman Mayor. We were talking, and I said,
12 “Let me go over.” I said, “I know the guy,” and I found out that it was Vinny, and I had
13 just seen Vinny. I had just done a Can Tu like a week or two before. He was so proud that
14 he was going to get his combat infantry badge because they had taken some fire on the
15 landing zone. The sniper had taken a couple shots on them Barego eventually passed on
16 which totally wasted death, wasted life. You know, I mean just terrible. Here’s another
17 interesting story. While I was there the hospital was like four Quonset huts put together.

18 JS: Okay.

19 SS: And a kid runs by me without a leg. You know, he has a crutch and he’s
20 running. I’m talking to Collins, and in the next bed was one of the SAR guys that we had
21 supported who had come down with gangrene who was a doctor. He was not too happy. I
22 grab hold of one of the physicians who was on the floor. Because I’m thinking, “Oh shit,
23 I did this, or we did this in attack.” He said, “No.” he said, “The North Vietnamese did
24 that.” He said, “All the young men were out in with the CIDGs and said the old people
25 were there and they wanted the children and the old people to be quarters, and they said,
26 ‘We’re not going to be porters.’ They set up mortars at one end of the village and
27 machine guns and the other so they ran them back and forth and they said, ‘Well, if
28 you’re not going to basically be quarters you’re not going to be.’”

29 JS: Right.

30 SS: They were going to try to wipe out the village and they didn’t have the balls
31 to go in there and face these old men. The attack was interrupted and the whole, one

1 whole Quonset hut, it's like the hospital for this village that has just been wiped out by
2 the North Vietnamese.

3 JS: Right.

4 SS: People's army my foot.

5 JS: Yeah.

6 SS: You know, that was one of things, but to answer your question it gave you a
7 good sense of at least the North Vietnamese felt of the Montagnard's.

8 JS: Sure.

9 SS: They were there to be pack animals. That was about it. Have you ever met
10 any Montagnard's?

11 JS: Yeah, as a matter of fact we had a Montagnard graduate student here. Did you
12 hear?

13 SS: Working with any Montagnard's?

14 JS: Yes, we had a Montagnard graduate student here at the university that comes
15 in and does some work with us sometimes.

16 SS: Well, then you know they look like Indians.

17 JS: Mm-hmm. Right.

18 SS: They look like Indians from India.

19 JS: Right, yes, sir.

20 SS: It's a racial thing with the Vietnamese, some of them. The people we were
21 with who were, you know, dealing with them, dealt with them in our presence properly,
22 but as far as socially or whatever, they never mixed with them or anything.

23 JS: Okay.

24 SS: You know, the Vietnamese can be very driven by their cultural norms.

25 JS: Right, okay. Speaking of Vietnamese cultural norms—

26 SS: I can't hear you.

27 JS: Speaking of Vietnamese cultural norms, I wanted to ask. I remember you
28 talked earlier about the rice wine and going to drink rice wine with them and then that
29 creating the problems with people getting sick. But were you guys given any sort of
30 cultural training or how you were supposed to behave with the Vietnamese? I guess—

31 SS: The rice wine was the Montagnard's.

1 JS: Oh, okay, okay.

2 SS: The Vietnamese, yes, they come from compounds. I guess we were there a
3 few days, whatever it was. You know, don't sit with your feet up. Don't show the soles of
4 your foot, you know that kind of thing. Understand the cultural differences. Don't go
5 talking to their women. It's very structured, but also understand that the women really run
6 the show with we found to be true.

7 JS: Right.

8 SS: That kind of thing. We got to talk to their women. You've got to be kidding
9 me. I guess for the guys in the big cities, I mean, we didn't see any Vietnamese women
10 except if one of the guys who had his wife up there invited us to dinner which they would
11 do very rarely. We brought our own food to be cooked. So, I think Nguyen had us over to
12 his house such as it was one time. He had a very nice wife, and his sister-in-law was there
13 taking care their kids, and Su had me over once. In fact, Su was interesting. He first
14 invited both of us over—myself and George Finley.

15 JS: Okay.

16 SS: And then basically he dismissed me because they were going to have some
17 whiskey or something. I don't know. And since I was the junior officer—

18 JS: Right.

19 SS: And Finley and I were both captains so, you know, I don't know how he did
20 it, but he sort of let me know that it was time for the senior people to speak to each other.
21 So, I got in the Jeep and I went back, you know, and that was that. But he would also—
22 when I was going to Hong Kong on R&R, he had no compunctions whatsoever of
23 coming over to me and giving me a list of cosmetics his wife wanted—Sako, not Sako,
24 some name like that. I don't remember what it was, but it's cosmetics for Asian women.

25 JS: Right, okay.

26 SS: And it was a list like, it was one hundred dollars. One hundred dollars was a
27 lot of money at the time, and I looked at them and I said, "They can't all be for her,
28 Major Su." And I figured she was going to sell it or do whatever, but I said, "Well, I'll
29 take care of it." He had the money. I said, "No, don't pay me." I said, "Let me, when I get
30 back and we'll true it up." And so here I am, coming through customs with a pair of
31 cufflinks, which I didn't have a CCO on and the only thing I bought in Hong Kong, I

1 bought my wife a bunch of stuff and had it shipped home. Cosmetics Shashino—that's
2 the name. They guy looks at me, and he says, "What's this all about?" He was just
3 laughing, and I said, "Vietnamese." And he said, "Okay, go ahead."

4 JS: Right.

5 SS: And so, he gave her Shashito and he also didn't have any problems with me
6 teaching his kids English. You know, there is that caste system among their officers.
7 There was at the time, anyway.

8 JS: Right.

9 SS: You know, as far as I was concerned, I could talk to Finley if he was a captain
10 like I work for him and he was on the majors list, so I knew where he was going. I think
11 he stayed in and became a colonel. But Su, you know, he was the senior guy and
12 therefore he was treated differently than he treated me. All the rest of them, the young
13 guys treated us, you know, the same.

14 JS: Okay.

15 SS: So, does that answer your question?

16 JS: Yes sir, yes it does.

17 SS: The only other time we sat down with all of them—we had a big party up in
18 the BOQ that had this huge table. They served rice cakes and other stuff that we didn't
19 eat for it to get dysentery. We brought the whiskey. They had 33 balmy bob beer, and the
20 Vietnamese have a low tolerance for whiskey. I will tell you that. Somehow or another
21 we got, you know, we got bottles of—Have you ever heard of Seagram 7?

22 JS: Yes, sir.

23 SS: It's a blended whiskey. They love that, and they love scotch.

24 JS: Okay.

25 SS: And that was our contribution to the party, and we ate the fish cakes which
26 were harmless, and they were still partying on.

27 JS: Right.

28 SS: To see all the lieutenants and captains together outside of the TAC, you know,
29 guys we only knew from their work that they were doing in the field was different. You
30 know, they would throw you a punch, cracking jokes which had to be explained to us and
31 all the rest of the stuff and then we left. And everyone got up, and we had to shake

1 everyone's hand and, "Thank you very much," for bringing whatever we brought. So,
2 after awhile we knew if we wanted something, we would just get some booze from the
3 BA, that was another Quonset hut. And if we could get the air force guys on a run down
4 to Saigon to bring back some whiskey that was a sign of appreciation that was
5 appreciated.

6 JS: Right.

7 SS: That was about it. I didn't socialize that much with them.

8 JS: Okay.

9 SS: Because we were naturally told to stay on the compound. Lee's comment was
10 that he didn't want anyone going down into Pleiku because he knew who we were. We
11 were young guys. He said—I'll never forget this because we were standing right next to
12 me. He said, "Pleiku's the only place in the world where you can get VD by just flying
13 over it."

14 JS: (laughing)

15 SS: He wanted no part of it. And we had a driver. That reminds me we had a
16 driver. This guy had legitimate kids all over Iowa or someplace.

17 JS: Okay.

18 SS: We sent him down to wash the Jeep, okay?

19 JS: Okay.

20 SS: There was an inspection or something, I don't remember. And the guy came
21 back with VD. And it turned out that the Vietnamese, as I said, who, you know, were
22 very business oriented people, at least the ones that we knew, had figured out that these
23 guys were coming to all these young drivers who were coming to get their cars washed.

24 JS: Right.

25 SS: Are also going to get their oil changed if you know what I mean.

26 JS: (laughing). Right.

27 SS: So, you know, that was it. And actually, they started a program of checking
28 the women, and I think I remember reading later on that they found out and whoever it
29 was got into trouble for it. But essentially camp follows wherever there's an army. That's
30 the deal.

31 JS: Right, sure.

1 SS: But, the Vietnamese—the officer’s wives that I met were very high class,
2 very cultured women, very intelligent, no dummies and very—what’s the word? Very
3 aware of their position.

4 JS: Okay.

5 SS: Very hierarchical kind of thing. That was it socializing. Later on, one of the
6 majors from the TAC came to the United States to attend class.

7 JS: Okay.

8 SS: And my wife and I had them, you know, with guests in our home, you know.
9 They said, “Well, we have no bedroom, no spare bedroom.” I think we had a baby at the
10 time, and they slept on the floor. We saved the money for the room. I said, “Whatever
11 you want.” And then we went down to the UN and that kind of thing. I brought them into
12 the phone company. I was working at the phone company. So that had been like ’70, ’71.

13 JS: Okay.

14 SS: And there they took a picture of him standing with me, you know, one of the
15 central offices, that kind of thing.

16 JS: Right.

17 SS: He was wearing a more expensive suit than I was. The only other guy I ever
18 saw after that was we had a Korean, Yung Ka Chung who was there to teach Taekwondo.

19 JS: Okay.

20 SS: He and I stayed friends for a number of years. I used my spare time to take
21 Taekwondo with him. You know, I can’t do that anymore, but at the time I was fairly
22 decent. I can tell you a story about the Koreans. One time I saw him standing in front of a
23 map taking down information, and I said, “Well, if you want to copy that we’ll give you a
24 copy. And he was basically being ordered and given extra pay for the work that was
25 involved to report back to the rock headquarters that the information that they were being
26 told was correct, for the II Corps area. And we said, “Well, don’t stand there copying.” I
27 said, “I’ll give you your order, you know, with all the map coordinates. You’re entitled to
28 it.” I said, “You can tell him what you want, but here.”

29 JS: Right.

30 SS: That was an interesting experience dealing with those guys, but he was a cool
31 guy.

1 JS: Right.

2 SS: He taught me how to eat Kim Chi. Have you ever eaten Kim Chi?

3 JS: Once, I didn't like it too much.

4 SS: Yeah, and you don't want to be around people after you eat it.

5 JS: Right.

6 SS: But that was their K ration, C-ration.

7 JS: All right. well along this line speaking of the Vietnamese again for a moment.

8 SS: Jason, you have to go closer to the mic.

9 JS: Can you hear me now?

10 SS: Nope.

11 JS: Sorry, I'm practically yelling.

12 SS: Okay, well try again.

13 JS: Can you hear me now?

14 SS: Better.

15 JS: Okay. Speaking along these same lines with the ARVN, you mention much
16 earlier about them having a much malign reputation. I wonder if you could comment a
17 moment on why you think it was that the ARVN tended to have this negative reputation
18 among Americans.

19 SS: Well, I think it's because of the way the war ended.

20 JS: Okay.

21 SS: Tony Larsen, who was a classmate of mine, was Westmoreland's 4th Corps
22 briefing officer during Tet.

23 JS: Okay.

24 SS: And then later, stayed on, married a Vietnamese girl got divorced when he got
25 back to the States with her, but he was one of the last guys to leave Vietnam. He'd
26 worked for Elgord Funker.

27 JS: Right.

28 SS: And he explained it to me that he said what happened was they were given
29 just enough money to keep the F-5, whatever the plane was at the time, flying and their
30 troops equipped or to pay, but they couldn't do both, pay them. But they tried to do both,
31 and they didn't either. So, they didn't pay the troops and they didn't maintain the

1 equipment. They maintained some of the equipment and paid some of the troops, but it
2 didn't maintain all the equipment and pay all of the troops. The result, you know, since a
3 lot of these fellows were not volunteers—they were draftees. They had homes to go to,
4 they had rice to plant. I mean, they were farm boys so a lot of the guys that we knew
5 about. I think when the North Vietnamese finally attacked, at the end according to Tony
6 who went up to Phu Cat Air Force Base to see what was going on, went back and told
7 Funker. He said, "They're so demoralized that they just rather the Vietnamese army is
8 going to make the Polish stand against the Germans and look heroic." And if you know
9 anything about that war, you know, they didn't stand in fight because they were
10 outgunned.

11 JS: Sure.

12 SS: And so, these guys are outgunned. He said, "The North Vietnamese troops are
13 better equipped, better paid, such as it were, better fed, and they're going to roll over
14 them." And they did. They brought down tanks and they gunned us. So, I think
15 everyone's lasting image is not of the general fighting outside of Saigon and battling the
16 North Vietnamese to a stand still, which everyone seems to forget.

17 JS: Right.

18 SS: But of, you know, troops, you know, running, screaming out of the
19 mountains, if you will and down from the plains. Almost like the Iraqis you know. When
20 mad, putting up a little resistance and then running. The problem was they didn't have
21 ammunition.

22 JS: Right.

23 SS: So, there was this New York representative—I can't remember her name.
24 She's dead. But I always, you know, said that you could put your finger on a problem that
25 the Vietnamese army had started with her. Because we abandoned them. I mean, I'm a
26 member of Counter Force.

27 JS: Okay.

28 SS: I don't know if you're familiar with the organization.

29 JS: Vaguely.

30 SS: That's how I found out about you.

31 JS: Okay.

1 SS: They'll tell you. You know, you can't fly a plane without spare parts. They
2 take a lot of maintenance. You can't fly helicopters without maintenance, and you
3 certainly can't fly without fuel.

4 JS: Sure.

5 SS: Draftees won't fight if you don't pay them.

6 JS: Right.

7 SS: And that was the problem.

8 JS: Right, sure.

9 SS: So, that answer your question?

10 JS: Yes sir, yes sir it does.

11 SS: But where we were, you know, they fought. One of the divisions had a couple
12 units in it that were not well led, but that was the exception.

13 JS: Okay.

14 SS: I don't recall any Vietnamese unit while I was there cutting and running.

15 JS: Okay, all right. Another question that I meant to ask you earlier, did you talk
16 about just your daily routine?

17 SS: Hold on, my wife unintentionally (talking to wife).

18 JS: Hello?

19 SS: Hello? Okay, I think it was the phone.

20 JS: Okay.

21 SS: So, now I can hear you better. I'm on my regular land line. The other thing
22 was fading, and I figured that was the problem.

23 JS: Right, okay. Yes, sir.

24 SS: Now I can hear you clearly. Say it again?

25 JS: Another question that I meant to ask you earlier. If you could just talk a little
26 bit about your daily routine. Like what a typical day would have been if there was such a
27 thing.

28 SS: Well, we were on six off one. Sometimes we were to be on thirteen off two.
29 So, you would, you would get up in the morning, five o'clock, eat breakfast, go up to the
30 tactical operation center, get a report of what happened at night, sit down with the
31 Vietnamese, you know, go over what they had, start reading the intelligence, speak to, in

1 this case Nguyen and ask them if they had anything that was new and, you know,
2 verifiable as I mentioned before. Start looking at all the requests from the province chiefs
3 for targets. Looking at all the requests from the forward air controllers, where they
4 thought they had seen enemy activity of some sort or another. And put it all together and
5 then sit down, you know, with my counterpart which after awhile just let me do it by
6 myself, and then we made them do it, as I said before. And then we would work our way,
7 you know, “These are circumstantial information. We really don’t want to go after those
8 targets.” Most of it was—you know, most of the provincial targets tended to be—hold on
9 one second.

10 JS: Sure.

11 SS: We bought a new car, so the alarm just went off, but anyway. So, we had to
12 take stuff out of the car, but now she’s putting it back in. Okay, so then we do the targets.
13 You’d asked if there were any troops in contact. You find out where the spookies had
14 fired, you know, if they had fired or if they had seen anything. You get a general picture,
15 and then you’d work with the Vietnamese, take a look at the situation map, see if there
16 are any operations and see if the specials had told us—I think it was the 5th Special for
17 this group that we were with—if they had, you know, look to see if they had anything
18 going on. Check to see if the camps out on the border had, you know, any activity. A lot
19 of times it was dead quiet there, you know, when they packed these camps they didn’t
20 linger very long because they knew what was coming at them very quickly and it was
21 always looking like it’s heading for cover of the weather. And then you would send the
22 targets to set the targets up. If you got a report from the 4th Infantry or, you know, one of
23 the division headquarters that they had, you know, they were in contact with troops then
24 you would lay in a B-52 target if it was appropriate. It was fairly complicated because
25 you have to pull back troops from the target area. Disengaging troops is not the easiest.
26 And of course, as you disengage, they figure that something’s coming, so, you know, the
27 process is done carefully. And then sit down with the DAS guy—in this case, Rapley—
28 go over the targets and what we wanted and talk about the ordinance and then, you know.
29 They would then—we would assign target numbers, and then they would go call them
30 into Phu Cat or Cam Ranh or whatever. I think B-57s came out of Bien Hoa, but the F-4s,

1 which we liked, came out of Phu Cat, if I remember correctly. I mean, this is going back
2 awhile.

3 JS: Sure.

4 SS: And, you know, we would design the targets and that would be for the
5 following day. And in the meantime, we would be getting reports from the FACs as to
6 what targets were hit from the previous days, the targets. So, it was a continuing thing.
7 The only time it slowed down was during a monsoon.

8 JS: Okay.

9 SS: Where basically you were left to do combat sky spots and that kind of thing.
10 The B-52 raids would come if we got very good intelligence that they'd patrolled or if
11 Specials had found a new bunker complex usually near the border. And then we'd bomb
12 those complexes. Very rarely were B-52s used when troops were in contact. It was one
13 occasion I mentioned that was bordered, but a couple of other occasions where we just
14 didn't want to go, the feeling that was, "Don't assault hills." But Americans assaulted
15 hills. Bomb the hills and then blow the cover away with a B-52 and then if there's anyone
16 in there from the concussion, then go on and assault them.

17 JS: Okay.

18 SS: Don't go assaulting hills when you can't see what the hell you're doing.

19 JS: Sure.

20 SS: But I mean there was a different approach. I'm an armored officer so I looked
21 at it one way, and I'm working with the air force, but infantrymen like to close and kill,
22 which I don't like. Our philosophy was more like the philosophy now which is kill them
23 outside the range of their weapons.

24 JS: Right.

25 SS: Don't go inside the range of their weapon. And then basically that was it.
26 You'd work twelve hours, so you'd be there from seven to seven, but usually you'd break
27 for supper or lunch such as it was. More often than not you'd miss a meal. I think I lost
28 about forty or fifty pounds.

29 JS: Oh, wow.

1 SS: I weighed like around 200. I went back to my cadet weight at about 150, 155.
2 When I got out of airborne, I weighed 189. I probably got up to about 193. I'm 5'9", but
3 it was all muscle.

4 JS: Right.

5 SS: I put on weight when, you know, I was in Germany which is easy to do. With
6 the exercise and missing the meals and all that I actually got down to, as my wife said,
7 the way I looked when she first saw me as a cadet, so you know, there was that. And, of
8 course, the food, you know, we had an officer's mess. We all chipped in money, and they
9 would buy food. Periodically, I was a trench commander. Part of the perimeter was mine,
10 so we'd have practice alerts. In fact, the one time we came into rocket fire I was acting as
11 the trench commander or I would say part of the perimeter, and I put in for CIB, and they
12 turned me down because I was an advisor. I figured, just talk about bureaucracy. I
13 couldn't get my air medals because I was an advisor.

14 JS: Sure.

15 SS: That was the bureaucracy. "What are you talking about? You're paying me.
16 I'm in the American Army." "No, you're assigned to the Vietnamese." Okay, I do the
17 enemy. For every one of the other purposes, I wasn't assigned to the Vietnamese.

18 JS: Right.

19 SS: That was annoying.

20 JS: Sure.

21 SS: In fact, you know one of my classmates was an advisor and he has the CIB.
22 "You got a CIB? They wouldn't give me my CIB." "I was assigned to a province." I said,
23 "I was assigned to a corps." I said, "You weren't even assigned to, you know, a combat
24 unit. You were assigned to," anyway. So, we laughed about that, and that was it.
25 Sometimes it would get very blurry like one time I did a B-52 target. They woke me up in
26 the middle of the night, and the 4th Infantry had requested a B-52. I did a perfect B-52
27 target, went to the tropospheric scatter site, and to this day I cannot remember the target.

28 JS: Okay.

29 SS: I did it while I was awake, but asleep.

30 JS: Right.

31 SS: I mean, that was scary.

1 JS: Sure.

2 SS: So, they ran you ragged, and eventually Wes Moreland ordered that people
3 get sleep. So, you had to enforce because when people are calling for air support you
4 don't want to, you know, deny them. And then you got to go fly because you want to
5 show the FACs that you're not afraid to go where you're sending them.

6 JS: Right.

7 SS: So, you do that and all of the above. You got to go visit the Vietnamese, so
8 they know there's a face and they know there's someone they can call if they need help.
9 And, of course, like I said, you just basically accompany your advisor. But that shows
10 them that he's got clout because he brought the advisor, and you also got them on the
11 airplane which was a major thing at the airport. And then the days would repeat
12 themselves and then rainy season would be very boring. There'd be very little action,
13 every once in awhile a camp would get probed, but once we figured out how to bomb
14 through the clouds and the air cover, a lot of that did not, you know, materialize when I
15 was there the way you did in the past. But, of course, they may have just been waiting for
16 Tet to make those attacks and essentially didn't want to waste the troops, which I suspect
17 in order to they are not going after the camps as opposed to more effective bombing
18 because a plane bombs then goes away. Everyone knows that. You know, it's very rare
19 where you could have planes loitering all the time. There were no—what do they call
20 those? Air hogs or whatever those things are, A-10s.

21 JS: Right.

22 SS: There's nothing like that, and you don't put them up in the rain. I mean, the
23 rain there is really rain, and the North Vietnamese army didn't move very well in the rain
24 either. I mean, you know, people talk, and they talk, but they never attack during the rain.
25 Because when it rains, nothing moves.

26 JS: Okay.

27 SS: How motivated you are if you were up to your knees in mud. You're not
28 moving. And the Germans found that out in Russia so they were motivated. But anyway,
29 and that was the day. And then sometimes I'd have to go to TAC and MACV for various
30 reasons. That was a break. I tried to look up some old acquaintances, you know, if I
31 could, but after awhile there's no time.

1 JS: Sure.

2 SS: Let's see what else. I had two R&Rs—one for Hong Kong which was just
3 because the R&R officer knew me. I was supposed to go to Hung Tao, and he says,
4 "How'd you like to go to Hong Kong?" I said, "How would I like to go to Hong Kong?" I
5 said, "What to I got to give you?" he said, "Nothing, bring me back something."

6 JS: Right.

7 SS: I brought back everyone something from Hong Kong.

8 JS: Right.

9 SS: And then I saw my wife in Hawaii.

10 JS: Okay.

11 SS: And that was a very nice week. We had a great time. An interesting story in
12 Hawaii, I went to Derussy, and I'm looking for a note, and there's no note from my wife,
13 and I couldn't get a room in the Hilton. And then they got a room for me, so I go to the
14 Hilton. Then finally, oh, they said, "Your wife is here. She said she's waiting for you." I
15 said, "Fine." "But we don't have a room for you captain, we couldn't give you a room." I
16 said, "Oh, where is she then?" I figured she was at a bar or something. They said, "She's
17 in the Maui Suite."

18 JS: Oh wow.

19 SS: They were really lovely, and I always use Hilton as a result.

20 JS: Right.

21 SS: She was in the Maui Suite overlooking the Mauna Loa. You know, out the
22 window, we had a three-bedroom suite. We had a one bedroom three room suite.

23 JS: Oh, wow.

24 SS: It was the smallest of the suites, but the next-door neighbor who had the
25 corner suite was Happy Rockefeller, at that time Governor Rockefeller's wife.

26 JS: Okay.

27 SS: So, it was very lovely. Then Peers on the way back, I told you that story.

28 JS: Sure.

29 SS: And then it repeated itself. Then as I was getting short there was a lieutenant
30 that came on board. He had a heavy German accent, and he used to teach English with
31 me. I cannot remember this guy's name. Just drawing a blank, and I had to train him.

1 JS: Okay.

2 SS: And he knew nothing about air ground support. So, you know, I spent time
3 teaching him, having him do targets, having him learn how to do it. One of the sergeants
4 that was there was very good. He worked with a bureau, had rotated, and had a new guy
5 come in. And that was part of the transition, and that was it, but it was a grind. You got to
6 the point where you look forward to flying to get away from it and go in flying wherever
7 you were going. But that was it. It was certainly a hell of a lot better than being an
8 infantryman.

9 JS: Sure.

10 SS: But even some of my classmates who came through Pleiku would tell me that
11 there would be months and months that they would be out with units.

12 JS: Right.

13 SS: Underground, never get you shot at, never, you know, never have any action,
14 never do anything. They were just in a quiet part of the country. And then periodically we
15 would get requests to have area of operations from the 1st Air Cav, which had come up
16 within Dien Bien province.

17 JS: Okay.

18 SS: And they were operating in the bunks on the plane. The Vietnamese told us,
19 they said, "Look, this place is infested with Vietnamese. The Viet Cong had infiltrated,
20 had gone north, and had come back, and it was like a base area. They were going to run
21 into a very steep resistance." When the chief of the G3 or whatever called from the 1st Air
22 Cav, it turned out to be my former company commander from Germany who was the
23 VMI guy, by the name of, I think his name was Michael Crumley. I never liked him; I
24 always thought he was a bigot. You know, but he was a very competent officer. He's just
25 a typical southern guy in the old fashion, not in the new fashion like you guys are. You
26 know, we coordinated; we made sure that he had his area. You could tell we had all the
27 rest of that and do that kind of thing. And away they went, you know. It was obviously a
28 lot of action in that area. But we do get the sit rev reports that they would send to Wes
29 Moreland, and it didn't really have much to do with them. They had their own air
30 support; they had their own artillery. We had one of the—in fact, a friend of mine, Don

1 Bowers, turned out he was in Pleiku at the same time I was. He was with the 175. Not too
2 many people know though, but we had a 175 battery in Pleiku.

3 JS: Okay.

4 SS: And sometimes when the weather was bad, we would have them fire out to a
5 supporter, but there's some issues with accuracy. We also had, for awhile until I said,
6 "We really don't need these guys." We had an Army/Navy gun liaison company run by
7 the Marines.

8 JS: Okay, right.

9 SS: And when we first had it, we would find the VC on forward positions when
10 the military crest to the hill, and they would take them under fire, and they did a good
11 job. But then the Viet Cong figured it out, and they went onto the reverse slope of the
12 hill. So, they wanted to do indirect fire, and you can't indirect fire with a flag trajectory
13 weapons. Well, we'll try it. So, what would happen would be they would do indirect fire
14 with these offshore guns and the rounds would tumble in the air. And if they landed, they
15 exploded, but more often than not they were duds, and then they wound up as booby
16 traps. So, that wasn't a good idea, and we finally said to the guys, "Look, we can't give
17 you any target. There are just no targets. You might want to go somewhere else where
18 you can fire in direct support of your troops because the hills, the mountains just don't
19 love it."

20 JS: Sure.

21 SS: It's not conducive. So, they left. So, it was just basically the 175 guys left, I
22 think. I don't remember exactly we didn't use them; we just basically used regular
23 artillery and spookies and attack air and B-52s. There was a pattern, and the pattern
24 would just keep repeating itself.

25 JS: Okay.

26 SS: I could tell you one story. I can give you a night operation. You would come
27 in, and you would brief the night officer. I remember the first time this major came in as
28 was an artillery guy. Every night I'd brief him, and it was basically a variation on the
29 scene, and I remember one night he said to me, "This is the most boring job I've ever
30 had." He said, "You keep briefing the same thing and nothing happens." He says, "I want
31 to tell you something major." I said, "You're going to earn your pay for a year in thirty

1 seconds of this job. Trust me on this one.” I said, “It’s the old story, you know, months
2 of—days of tedium and minutes of terror.”

3 JS: Right.

4 SS: And sure, as hell one night they attacked Holloway which was the army air
5 force base.

6 JS: Okay.

7 SS: Near Pleiku Air Force Base and it turned out that the barbers had cut the wire.
8 They were VC. And the only thing that saved the place was that they hit a tank, I mean a
9 fifty-five-gallon drum of gasoline.

10 JS: Okay.

11 SS: And lit up the whole area like a flare, until they got the sappers as they were
12 finishing the rest of the cutting job.

13 JS: Right, okay.

14 SS: The barbers had cut from the inside out. They wouldn’t cut from the outside
15 in, and these were the guys that cut your hair and then shave your, you know, the back of
16 your neck with a razor, something to think about.

17 JS: Sure.

18 SS: What happened to the count of battery fire? So, we had a meeting after words
19 and “What the hell happened here?” And what happened, and he didn’t listen to the
20 briefing was that we had counter battery radar.

21 JS: Okay.

22 SS: Located where these guys were firing from, they were firing mortars and
23 knew exactly where they were. At the same time, as I told you before, we had spookies in
24 the north and the south and the one in the north this time was over the general Pleiku area
25 and saw the flashes and immediately came over the area. The artillery guys got the
26 coordinates and the counter mortar battery, and everything was ready to fire. The major
27 panicked because he should have ordered the spooky out and the artillery to fire or the
28 artillery to stand down and have the spooky fire, but he did neither, so both of them. So,
29 the spooky is flying over and the artillery won’t fire because they don’t want to shoot him
30 down.

31 JS: Right.

1 SS: And he was gone the next day. They just relieved him of command, and that's
2 the essence of it. It's like a job where you cannot panic, and you've got to be cool, and
3 you got to be systematic. Even when things are out of control, so to speak, you've got to
4 be systematic, and you've got to do what you trained to do, and he didn't do it. And then
5 things would get quiet again.

6 JS: Right, yes, sir.

7 SS: So, I mean, it would be target, target, target, target, troops in contact. That
8 would concentrate all, and you'd be exhausted after that because everything would be,
9 you know, vected over the target, you know, the FAC would be there, and it'd be one
10 plane after another, one plane after another, one plane after another. And then there'd be
11 nothing, and you'd be bombing possible locations, food storage areas, you know, areas
12 where they were making salt because they couldn't carry the salt down with them.

13 JS: Right.

14 SS: Sometimes you'd bomb things by mistake. Like, one night when I wasn't
15 there, I got a report of campfire to this area, and I was in Saigon. One of my guys allowed
16 the target to go through, and we bombed all of the Montagnard's. So, hold on one second.

17 JS: Sure.

18 SS: Okay, so that, you know, we laughed about it, but we had to pay the
19 Montagnard's for the charcoal. We destroyed a year's supply of charcoal. You know, I
20 said, "How come you guys didn't know? How come you didn't tell me that kind of thing
21 would happen?" But otherwise it was a well-oiled machine. I guess you would call it that.
22 It was very smooth functioning. You know, you read stories of John Paul Van coming in
23 afterwards.

24 JS: Right.

25 SS: But that staff ran just like our staff. It was no different.

26 JS: Okay.

27 SS: I mean, it was very professional, and later on, what happened was they moved
28 the DAS underground. They moved the whole thing underground because after Tet it was
29 pretty obvious that it was sitting out there on the hill on that building was not a good idea.
30 Good aiming point if you were North Vietnamese.

31 JS: Sure, yes, sir.

1 SS: But that was it. Let's see what else might be of value. Get back to the
2 Vietnamese. See, I've always resented the fact that they got bad press, I think that,
3 speaking me personally, not for the military, I think that was just part of ad profit from
4 the left.

5 JS: Okay.

6 SS: You know, it's sort of like the same thing that went on with the Iraqi army.
7 It's that if you can convince everybody that you're supporting people who are useless—

8 JS: Right.

9 SS: Than it's easier to disengage.

10 JS: Okay.

11 SS: I think that played—and I'm not saying every Vietnamese unit was the best
12 unit in the world, but they had a military academy at the lot; they were turning out. At
13 least the military guys I saw were good guys. The lieutenants I worked with were good;
14 the captain was lazy, but he was good. The senior officers were good. I didn't know all of
15 them certainly, and you can figure that the guys we were working with were the better
16 ones because it's, of course, them. But they were as good as the Americans as far as I was
17 concerned. A lot were better because they had more experience.

18 JS: Right.

19 SS: But if you can convince somebody that you're working with a bunch of bozos
20 and they're just waiting to cut and run, and your son's life is being put in danger to
21 protect someone who won't fight for his own country then it's easier to walk away.

22 JS: Sure.

23 SS: And if I had a hazard to guess, that's where I think it went. It didn't come
24 from any advisor I know, and you can see through counterparts how loyal the guys are to
25 the guys who they advise.

26 JS: Right.

27 SS: And you're not loyal to people who are cowards and, you know, who run.

28 JS: Sure, yes, sir.

29 SS: Because they weren't.

30 JS: Right, well one thing I wanted to ask you that you'd brought up a little earlier,
31 you talked about how the, you know, the ARVN were in it for the duration as the guy

1 said and said you guys are only here for a year and then you rotate home. Did that cause
2 some tension there? I mean I would imagine that, you know, an ARVN officer's there
3 and then he's got an advisor come in, you know, one year at a time and then another
4 advisor comes in and another comes in. You're having to negotiate this relationship and
5 kind of teach the advisor some things that he may not know. Did that create tension?

6 SS: Like in my case I already knew—I had already been trained to do my job
7 from an American perspective.

8 JS: Right.

9 SS: And the guy who was there—Captain Finley trained me, okay. I worked with
10 a recruit, but he did less training. He just more filled me in on some of the particulars and
11 what the procedure was for getting a target approved down to the province level, you
12 know, that kind of thing and all of that. My experience was with the senior Vietnamese
13 officers like the majors and lieutenant colonels even though you were captain. They were
14 initially standoffish until they saw what you were made out of and how hard you were
15 going to work and what you knew, or you didn't know.

16 JS: Okay.

17 SS: And that may be a cultural thing also. But once they saw that you were
18 dedicated to them as people and as comrades in arms, if you will, and that you were
19 working hard doing all the rest of this, and you were trying to do the right thing, then they
20 warmed up to you to the extent that you warmed up to people when you were an
21 American or Vietnamese. And that was it. So, I would say for the first couple of months
22 it was sort of like, I'm advising who? You know that kind of thing. And then after that,
23 you know, when they saw me trying to learn what little Vietnamese I learned and have
24 now forgotten they would teach me how to speak and the diacritical which is critical, if
25 you will.

26 JS: Sure.

27 SS: You know, you got closer and closer until finally, you know, I would say
28 you're fully accepted. The guy who followed me—hello?

29 JS: Yeah, I'm still here.

1 SS: I had it a little easier because at that point, you know, I think—I was under
2 George three months or whatever it was, but he was with me, you know, a much longer
3 period of time.

4 JS: Okay.

5 SS: So, he had worked with them, and they felt confident when he took my place
6 that he could do my job.

7 JS: Okay.

8 SS: But if you didn't do your job, they wouldn't talk to you.

9 JS: Right, okay. Well, we're coming up on two and a half hours. Would you like
10 to take a break here?

11 SS: Yeah, I'll tell you a funny story about being a baby. There was a little lake up
12 in Pleiku.

13 JS: Okay.

14 SS: When they went there, there was truce. I think it was Bien Ho, I don't
15 remember the name.

16 JS: It says Bien Ho on the e-mail, yeah.

17 SS: Okay, that's the one in the e-mail. So, I had been working out and all the rest
18 of that and, you know, we actually were told, "Don't go past this point because there's
19 been a sniper out there."

20 JS: Okay.

21 SS: "But right now, everything's quiet if you want to go swimming." So, a couple
22 of us went swimming, and when there was a couple of Vietnamese boys standing there
23 looking at us, you know, pointing, laughing, and all the rest of the stuff. And we were
24 swimming. Finally I said to the guy I was advising, my counterpart, I said, "What are
25 they laughing about? What are they laughing about?" And he said, pointing to our peck
26 muscles, he said, "You guys have bigger breasts than most Vietnamese women."

27 JS: (laughing)

28 SS: So, they're looking at you so that was the day, I think that was probably the
29 pain and beauty.

30 JS: Okay, all right.

1 SS: I said, "Well, nothing bad here." But I think that was the only time I went
2 swimming.

3 JS: Okay.

4 SS: But so let's see, what other stories?

5 JS: In the e-mail that you sent you said when you call, if you do, remind me to tell
6 you about Colonel Scroggins and the air as and unforgiving element.

7 SS: I remember I told you about how he used to court martial guys, give them
8 Article 15 to forward air controllers.

9 JS: Right.

10 SS: But they made a mistake, and he would say the air is an unforgiving element.
11 And that was the story I told you about how they were told not to fly their planes home.
12 You know, when they were going home, not to fly themselves out.

13 JS: Right.

14 SS: And he got up in an aircraft, and he didn't tell anyone. We thought he was
15 meeting the C-130 and flying out and he flew himself out, but his compass was pointing
16 the wrong way, it was a defective compass. And we got a phone call, a radio phone call
17 from Special Forces in Laos that an aircraft had landed. At that point, we had determined
18 that he was missing, and they had all kind of search parties out along the possible route
19 that he would have taken because he had told the people at Holloway or Pleiku, which
20 ever air—I think it was Pleiku that he had left from.

21 JS: Okay.

22 SS: Where his flight path was, and we got a call saying that the guy had landed,
23 and they were sending him back. They had some gasoline at one of the gas trips there.
24 And that was a lieutenant colonel. This is the fellow who gave himself and the other
25 fellow and the other guy he was with the silver star that I mentioned.

26 JS: Right, right.

27 SS: When they came back, they gave him an Article 15. I mean, the Air Force
28 gave Article 15's out like it was water. I mean, I had never heard of anyone in the Army
29 advisor part ever giving anyone an Article 15. When Rapley, I think it was Colonel
30 Rapley or the other colonel, gave him the Article 15. At the bottom, you know, the last

1 statement was, “The air is unforgiving element.” You know as if to say the shoe is on the
2 other foot.

3 JS: Right.

4 SS: Scroggins was a small wiry little guy and sort of had this cartoonish quality
5 about him that everyone in the tactical operations center would just kind of hard to
6 explain that when you have someone who thinks, you know, more terry in the pirates
7 than a pilot, but that’s who he was. And then it was just like, you know, justice if you
8 will.

9 JS: Right.

10 SS: But we had, let’s see. Most of the other incidence we had, I’m just trying to
11 think of, you know, that was the only one that could have wound up, you know,
12 dangerous if you will, especially if you run out of gas and not find that airstrip. Other
13 than the specials out there, there weren’t too many places where you could land safely.
14 So, he was very lucky.

15 JS: Right. All right, another thing I mentioned a moment ago before I started
16 recording was if you could talk about teaching English in Vietnam.

17 SS: Right, well they asked for volunteers to teach English, and I don’t remember
18 if it had started before I was there or not. But basically the judge—there was a judge in
19 Pleiku. There was a local lawyer, if you will, for the Vietnamese.

20 JS: Okay.

21 SS: And he allowed us to use—he volunteered his courthouse, such as it was. It
22 was actually just a big room, and I wound up teaching all of the children of the various
23 officers.

24 JS: Okay.

25 SS: But then later on wound up, you know, with some of the civil servants or
26 some of the people who were looking to advance themselves that had to speak English. I
27 had some experience teaching, but, you know, basically very rudimentary. What I used to
28 do was I used to draw a profile of a face and show them where you would put your
29 tongue.

30 JS: Right. Okay.

1 SS: And the first time I drew it, I drew what I thought was a fairly decent profile
2 and the class was in hysterics. One of my students, you know, who would come into the
3 class spoke a little better English, one of the older ones. And I said, “Why so funny?”
4 And he said, “Because Americans have such big noses.” You know, I didn’t realize, and I
5 looked at the Vietnamese and said, “They really do have small noses.” So, I guess, you
6 know, it was one of those things. Of course, I have a New York accent. I had a heavy
7 New York accent at the time, and I started to teach them English. Major Su, his two
8 boys—the guy I mentioned to you before he was fragged later on in the military
9 academy—his boys were there, and I consider that somewhat of an honor that we would
10 drop them off. And I wound up teaching about fifteen, twenty kids. They were very
11 studious. You gave them a lesson. They came back the next week and they really—they
12 knew the lesson. There was some better than the others, but they were very diligent. One
13 time, one of the corporals wanted to come down with me. Now, most of the time I got
14 someone to volunteer to come with me to ride shotgun, so we get the Jeep out of the
15 motor pool, and I drive myself. But when things, you know, sometimes you get a feeling
16 that things aren’t quite quiet if you know what I mean. They’re quiet, but like we had a
17 fellow who was some sort of intelligence guy, you know. They fired an RPG through his
18 window and killed him, you know. So, you know things aren’t as quiet as they seem. You
19 know, he came down. He rode shotgun with me afterwards, after that. You know, he said,
20 “Captain, do you realize that all of these people speak English with a New York accent?”
21 I said, “Could be worse.” And the fellow who replaced me—I can’t remember his
22 name—but he spoke English with a German accent.

23 JS: Okay.

24 SS: And I said, “If you teach this English class, you’re really going to confuse
25 them.” I said, “But I had never found out who took the class after I did.” I’m pretty sure
26 he did. I just can’t remember this fellow’s name. I’m blank.

27 JS: Okay.

28 SS: But very touching and when I left, you know, they had a little meal for me,
29 just basic rice cakes kind of thing and they actually gave me a plaque, which I have
30 hanging here in my room, my den, so to speak. It’s appreciation of the civil servants of
31 Pleiku.

1 JS: Right.

2 SS: So that was very nice. You know, the typical little black lacquered plaque,
3 you know, with a brass and grey thing on it. That was very good, and the kids were
4 delightful. There were girls, as well as boys. I think the youngest was like around six
5 years old. Now, I look at my five-year-old grandson and see how difficult it is sometimes
6 for him to sit still.

7 JS: Right.

8 SS: And just really now marvel at the fact that these guys sat there and soaked it
9 all up.

10 JS: Right.

11 SS: So, it was just a different time.

12 JS: Sure.

13 SS: I found out later on that when the North Vietnamese attacked during Tet,
14 basically the attack was stopped right at that courthouse, and it was destroyed. Now,
15 when I say courthouse I would say we would call it a glorified shack. It was constructed
16 professionally, if you will, but surrounded by the usual type of Pleiku dwelling which
17 consisted of whatever they found to make it. So, the houses were not built, if you will, to
18 the United States specs by any means whatsoever.

19 JS: Right.

20 SS: You know, with dirt floors. But this is the set of cement floor which was very
21 nice and periodically because of—there's another funny story. One time, the judge
22 wanted to see me. So, I came down during the day. Being a typical American, I see
23 people sitting on the bench there. So, I sit down waiting for them, instead of going right
24 in. He comes out, and I had been talking to some of the people. One spoke English and
25 they all began staring at me. I said, "Well, I've had this before." I said, "Why are you
26 staring at me?" He said, "Because you have blue eyes, and no Vietnamese has blue eyes."
27 I said, "Don't you see Americans all the time?" She said, "Sometimes, not a lot." That's
28 unusual. So, I walked in. He told me whatever it was he had to tell me. He was
29 appreciative of, you know, the girls and would I expand the class where there were
30 daughters being taught. Would I expand the class? Yes, I would. What did I need? I told
31 them, I said, "The thing we're lacking the most is books." I said, "I can supply the paper

1 and the pencils and things of that nature.” Anyway, we figured out a way to get, you
2 know, English Vietnamese books from the assistance people.

3 JS: Okay.

4 SS: And he said, “Next time, come right in.” He spoke very good English, and I
5 said, “Okay.” He said, “Because right now you were sitting there with all the prostitutes
6 who I’m waiting to send.” I said, “I was just wondering why they were all women.”

7 JS: Right.

8 SS: And I realized, he said, “There are certain things you do in the United States.”
9 Like you could see a bunch of people waiting, you get on the line, where in this case, you
10 know, I could have just gone in and knocked on his study such as it was. I had mentioned
11 before General Lee’s comment about Pleiku being the only place you could catch VD by
12 flying over it. So, it was off limits, and I was not—we were so busy we didn’t have much
13 opportunity to see life such as it was down there. But the caste system was alive and well
14 in Vietnam because everyone sort of knew their place so to speak. You could get a good
15 example with that with the judge being—what’s the word? The way he carried himself
16 and everything. Not too different than the United States where some people, you know,
17 confuse the office with themselves over a period of time.

18 JS: Right.

19 SS: But very nice people. The kids were delightful. As far as I know, they
20 continued to do their studies, so it was interesting that I didn’t realize that when I packed
21 all my stuff up, I had packed up the book I had used for my English to Vietnamese,
22 Vietnamese to English dictionary. I got home. I’m unpacking my stuff and then in the
23 bottom was it. “What the hell am I going to do with this?” And I kept it.

24 JS: Right.

25 SS: Years later when the boat people came to the United States, my daughter’s
26 piano teacher (talking to someone else). My wife just interrupted.

27 JS: Okay. That’s all right.

28 SS: She had a Vietnamese, and she didn’t have any material to teach them
29 English, so I gave her that dictionary, and I also found—I also picked up the smaller one,
30 but the big one was the valuable one I gave and that was produced by some American
31 agency, so it was put to good use.

1 JS: Right.

2 SS: Right until the end.

3 JS: It was interesting though that some of the boat people—there was a gathering
4 that I was invited to, and some of them were very young, you know. This group of people
5 were supposed to be all children, and I'm looking at a guy and I'm like, "He's got to be
6 about thirty years old." And I said to this woman, I said, "These are the children?" And
7 she said, "No. See this guy? See this one sitting in the corner here?" I said, "He's small,
8 right?" She said, "He's about thirty years old. That's why no one's talking to him." I said,
9 "He's pretending to be a child or a teenager." I said, "Whatever it is, but he's an older
10 guy." "How do you know?" I said, "He looks just like one of the guys I advise." I said,
11 "You can tell their age from their eyes. You can't tell it from their height." That's just an
12 American miscalculation.

13 JS: Right.

14 SS: And that was pretty much it. Let's see what else happened. I told you about
15 the Special Forces.

16 JS: Right.

17 SS: I can't think of anything at the moment.

18 JS: Okay, all right. In that case, I guess we should turn to the end of your tour and
19 leaving Vietnam.

20 SS: Well, I mentioned part of what happened where we caught this unit moving
21 forward to 4th infantry on their left flank and the specials on the right.

22 JS: Right.

23 SS: They mortared the center and with the reporter. I always felt that that was
24 probably the quintessential experience, if you will, in that here's a reporter looking at
25 something and having a disdainful attitude towards the troops and just trying to get a
26 story and a picture, which is their business, but not understanding what was going on.

27 JS: Right.

28 SS: And when I left, I wound up, you know, I had trained someone to take my
29 place. This guy whose name I can't remember. I think it began with a B, and I know I'll
30 hang up a couple of days from now, and I'll remember the name.

31 JS: Right.

1 SS: And what I would do is I would actually let him, you know, do the job and
2 shadow him in the last week or two. Watch what the targets, you know, were and how we
3 selected them and all the rest of that. Two or three of us were called up. We weren't told
4 what was going on, and we asked to be with General Bien Locke, and Bien Locke
5 actually had a ceremony and was standing in this big room on the top of the building
6 outside his office. Bien Locke came in. Bien Locke was very tall for a Vietnamese. I'd
7 say he was about 6'3, 6'2, 6'3, that kind of thing. He came out, and they started talking in
8 Vietnamese, reading something. He walked down the line, and he shook our hands, and
9 he pinned the staff honor medal on all of us which is, I think the equivalent of
10 accommodation medal.

11 JS: Okay.

12 SS: And that was very nice, that was a big surprise. He gave us our orders in
13 Vietnamese, which bless the Vietnamese; they had kept count of all the strikes and all the
14 hours in the air and everything else. No one had said anything to us. It was myself and
15 one or two other guys who were leaving. It was very nice; we had some Bomiba, excuse
16 me, at the end. And then I packed up my stuff, and I flew out. I think I had just my gear,
17 and I had bought a stereo deck—which one of the pilots who had gone to Hong Kong had
18 brought back along with two speakers which I still have. The guy makes good stuff if you
19 were able to see it. I shipped that out, and I stayed at Major Nguyen Tuan's house. He
20 was one of the guys I advised. He was not directly assigned to me, but you know, he was
21 the intelligence guy. We became very friendly. I was treated very nice. There was
22 Vietnamese food and all the rest. If I remember correctly, Kotler Compound just where I
23 had, you know, processed in from. As far as the debriefing, there was none really to
24 speak of. Although I did speak to some guys, you know, who were coming in-country.
25 You know, that were new advisors just informally. But there wasn't very much of a
26 debriefing. It was just get on a plane and go out, and you go home. When I was on the
27 plane, we hit some turbulent weather and a tray fell down and broke my nose. So, I was
28 sitting next to a guy and the guy is looking at me and he said, "Sir, there's blood
29 streaming all over your face." And I said, "Oh, look at this. I don't get, you know, injured
30 while I'm in Vietnam, but I'm on a plane I get my nose broke."

31 JS: Right.

1 SS: So, the stew came in and fixed me up. I said, “Well, just do what you can, I
2 just don’t want to look terrible when I get home.”

3 JS: Right.

4 SS: Because my wife will be very upset, and I had also was carrying with me,
5 which I still have, a German .98 which was given by the people in Ban Be Tu.

6 JS: Okay.

7 SS: As a present, it was a captured weapon, and we had done some air support for
8 them, and they said to give this to air person. So, that was very nice. In fact, I was sitting
9 there the night I was stripping it. The VC had painted it with camouflage paint to protect
10 it, and I was sitting there stripping it when we got rocketed, as I mentioned to you.

11 JS: Right.

12 SS: You know, and that was about as close as I came to getting really killed. No
13 one bothered me with the right, but it was different times. When I went to Oakland, they
14 treated the officers very differently than the enlisted guys. They really vigorously
15 searched the enlisted guys for drugs and everything, you know, of that nature. I guess it
16 was the BART, the Bay Area Terminal, something like that.

17 JS: Okay.

18 SS: But the officers, you know, were processed right through which, you know, in
19 retrospect was—I don’t know you or the rest of the guys, I served and never done drugs
20 in my life, but it was probably not a good way to handle it because everyone should have
21 been rigorously searched just to show them, to show everyone that they were serious
22 about it. So but they trusted the officers, you know, for our word which, you know, at that
23 time what I would have certainly expected them to do.

24 JS: Right.

25 SS: And I got on a plane with a hockey team. And so, I’m wearing my khakis, my
26 summer tans, and I got my medals on my chest, of course. My ribbons not my medals.
27 I’m carrying my rifle, and I’m walking to the plane with all of these hockey players.

28 JS: Right.

29 SS: And no one wants to get near me. It was the funniest thing. These guys, you
30 know, they look so small on the ice, but they were all big.

31 JS: Right.

1 SS: And even then, you know. I just handed the .98 to—by that time I had cleaned
2 it up and everything and it looked like it was ready for business and it is. But I gave it to
3 the stew, and she put it, you know, where they put the luggage.

4 JS: Right.

5 SS: In the stew compartment. And I had the papers for it and everything, so it
6 wasn't an issue.

7 JS: Right.

8 SS: And then I sat down and one of the hockey players sat down next to me who's
9 an American it turned out and started talking. He said, "What was that all about?" He
10 said, "No one wanted to get near you." I said, "Do I look that harmless?" At that time, the
11 bandage had just been a small bandage on my nose and certainly they saw people who
12 were banged up in their game. And he said, "No." He said, "The Vietnamese soldiers
13 returning have a reputation." And I said, "That reputation is what?" And we had a
14 discussion about that, and I said, "Oh, well that's, to myself, that's something that will be
15 interesting to see. That everyone thinks we're baby killers and all the rest of that." So, I
16 got off the plane and it was, you know, army chartered so it didn't pull up to a terminal.
17 We walked down and it was a charter plane as it turned out, which I didn't know. We got
18 off and I think I was the only soldier. You know, there was the team and some other
19 people. I can't even remember the airline and my family was waiting for me. And that
20 was it. I had a job at that point with the ARVN. I knew a guy, a lieutenant there that was
21 a West Pointer. And actually, Merrill Lynch months later had offered me a job, but after
22 being told specifically to send the responses to my home, they had sent it to Vietnam. So,
23 I had taken a job with Merrill Lynch over anything else, you know, but I worked for
24 them. It was interesting. I played on their basketball team although I'm not a good
25 basketball player. There were two guys practicing Tae Kwon Doe.

26 JS: Okay.

27 SS: In the gym and they were doing it wrong. So, I said, "Can I show you
28 something?" And they said, "Sure." I start showing them the moves which Chung had
29 drilled into us over and over again.

30 JS: Right.

1 SS: You know, and they were saying thank you and then they turned back to look
2 at my team, they were all looking at me like, “Who the hell is this?” Because, of course,
3 my physique is all muscled and everything else like that.

4 JS: Right.

5 SS: Now, you know, here I am doing all these moves with karate. I can’t do one
6 of them now.

7 JS: Right.

8 SS: So, it was another one of the, you know, Vietnamese, you know, war kind of
9 mystique items and then came Tet. And so, I corresponded with guys I knew, had a pretty
10 good idea what was going on that one of the—either the dawn or dusk patrol. I think it
11 was the dawn patrol that caught the Vietnamese marching up the highway, you know,
12 towards Pleiku and the ruff puff platoon had been alerted. They had light tanks that we
13 had given them and between that and the air force it just wiped out pretty much that
14 regiment.

15 JS: Okay.

16 SS: Then come up the road and they had made it all the way through to the
17 courthouse and destroyed the courthouse, trying to free the prisoners and the POW camp
18 we had. And then I got, you know, letters back saying that the Vietnamese had dug in
19 some of them, you know, who had escaped the slaughter that dug in down in the
20 Montagnard village and was still sniping at the compound.

21 JS: Okay.

22 SS: And, of course, they didn’t want to bomb them because you’d kill innocents,
23 so they had to go in there and dig them out. That was no fun.

24 JS: Right.

25 SS: Then things when back to normal such as it was and then slowly, but surely
26 everyone that I knew rotated out of there. I corresponded with them to some extent. One
27 of the guys I roomed with was an engineer, Marvin, who was a heavy equipment guy. I
28 tried to call his family, but I didn’t, so he sent me a letter telling me he was very
29 disappointed that I didn’t call his family, but, you know, I was one of about six thousand
30 guys on the line trying to make a phone call in Oakland and that kind of thing. He was the
31 only guy I knew that at the time one of the cigarettes were all he had coupons. They used

1 to smoke the cigarettes to get the coupons out of them. He had Emphazima. I said, “What
2 are you doing?” And then basically I got on with my life. We had a child who had some
3 serious health problems—our daughter, when she was born, she passed away. I had two
4 more children, two daughters. One of whom is a doctor the other one is a housewife and
5 one’s an optometrist.

6 JS: Okay.

7 SS: I was broker for three years. I just didn’t like it after a while. I was doing
8 well. The third man in my office, but when you get to be a stockbroker or a commodities
9 broker you realize how humble—you should be humble because there’s always
10 something going on you don’t know about. The people that know about it will, you know,
11 will buy or sell accordingly. At that time, the information wasn’t as free flowing as it is
12 now. I was recruited by a human resources fellow when I was taking my MBA at Iona
13 College to work for the phone company. So, I joined the management development
14 program and rose up the ranks to be, you know, if you will director and then they had a
15 higher grade of director. I started out with the operators. There were big morale problems
16 there with the softball and basketball teams and sort of cleaned house, and I did a good
17 job, so I got a good rep there, and I got promoted. My MBA is in financial information
18 systems, so I had a computer background. I was doing some mechanizing work, you
19 know, these tedious forms that these folks had to fill out that came to the attention of a
20 couple of the officers. I was brought down on the operator services mechanization staff
21 and worked with AT&T and eventually, the course of that wound up in corporate finance
22 and got promoted out of corporate finance at AT&T, worked on the messenger, you
23 know. My handy work is every time we pay the bill, and you see FCC line charge, you
24 can think of me because I had a hand in that. It was called a customer end user line
25 charge at that point. That was a subsidy that was in the line that the large companies were
26 paying for economic reasons. It’s called externality, but they managed to get out of
27 paying that and put it back on folks like you and I. So, that’s why long distance is cheap
28 and local service is more expensive than it should be for a number of reasons. Then I was
29 given a choice to stay with AT&T or go back to my home company, New York Tel. I
30 went back. I was the forecaster on the operation staff. I had thirty-some odd people
31 working for me for a long time. And then the marketing people wanted me in marketing

1 and that's where I wound up. I was responsible for introducing caller ID and caller ID
2 with name.

3 JS: Okay.

4 SS: First, it was just number. I did a lot of work in that area. And then at some
5 point, I guess on the twenty-ninth year I was there, or twenty-eighth. No, I think it was
6 closer to twenty-nine years. They decided not to do any new products.

7 JS: Okay.

8 SS: They haven't done a new product since I left, so they illuminated a group. I
9 was offered the job by one of the vice presidents, but I was offered a job by Belcore,
10 which was Bel ads, whom I'd worked with, and I took that job.

11 JS: Okay.

12 SS: And then I retired from Belcore in 2002, and I've been retired ever since.

13 JS: Okay.

14 SS: I did look out in Belcore because they were own by the SAIC, so I bought the
15 stock and, you know, pure dumb luck they had bought the dot com business from the
16 government for thirty million, and they sold it for twenty billion or something like that.

17 JS: Wow.

18 SS: So, we all own stock of the company, we did well, but that was it. I married
19 all the time to someone I met when I was seventeen, and she was fifteen.

20 JS: Right.

21 SS: We dated through West Point, so we were married quite some time, still good
22 looking, still tolerates me. You know, and I have two grandsons. A five-year-old by the
23 name of Ryan Benjamin Oder, and a little guy who's fifteen months old, Shawn Even
24 Oder who has my mother's red hair and my blue eyes. They are all combinations, and we
25 babysit them. So that's my new job, babysitting.

26 JS: Right.

27 SS: And doing my investments and, you know, I could go into gory detail, but
28 that's, you know pretty much it. When I was—one thing that is important and I will
29 mention is that I was one time talking to a guy, he said something, by the name of Pete
30 Hanson, and I said, "Are you a Vietnam Veteran?" Because he used this slang

1 expression, I don't remember what it was. He said, "Yes." "Where'd you serve?" he said,
2 "In Pleiku." He was with the air force when I was there.

3 JS: Wow.

4 SS: I said, "Pete, we've worked all this time together, and I don't know if you're a
5 veteran." There's something wrong with that. I called human resources because the
6 company had annually had everyone identify themselves as Vietnam Veterans for some
7 report they had to do. I went down and spoke to her. At that point, you know, the phone
8 companies always been technologically advanced because you had access to the main
9 frame, and they were keeping stuff on the computer. I said, "How many people do you
10 have registered?" Because in my neighborhood there was one hundred people. Well, I
11 knew more than one hundred Vietnam vets myself, and I said, "What do you do every
12 year with this?" She said, "I erase it and start all over again." "Why?" "See, well people
13 may have left." I said, "Well, how many people leave?" She said, "It's the same people
14 year and year over." I said, "How many did you start out with?" "Oh, about two
15 thousand." "What are you down to now?" "One hundred." "Did it ever occur to you they
16 think they registered once, why fill it out twice?"

17 JS: Right.

18 SS: Well, this is an older employee who was basically retiring, and I was really
19 aggravated, and I don't get aggravated very often, but this aggravated me. I was talking to
20 another guy, Luke Maggliaro, who was a veteran. I said, "You know, I'm not much for
21 activists, but it's time that we did something about this."

22 JS: Right.

23 SS: And we put together a group and I went to the union. I knew guys in the
24 union, and I said, "I want to form a group, to be management union." I said, "No
25 management union bullshit." I said, "Everyone walks into this meeting and they're
26 veterans." I said, "So I need you to come up with a couple of guys who are good men,
27 good veterans and will all work, you know, for the betterment of veterans and the
28 company giving management a union." So, it gave me a couple of names interviewed,
29 picked a couple of guys. I don't know which one. There was another guy from another
30 department. We put together a board and we then presented ourselves as one of the
31 special interest groups of the company that spotted a diversity program.

1 JS: Okay.

2 SS: And we were recognized, and we got them to give us money and we self-
3 identified all of the veterans in the company and told them that we'd be in this directory.
4 A copy of which was left at the wall when we finished it. And we identified something
5 like around seven or eight thousand veterans.

6 JS: Oh, wow.

7 SS: Some didn't want to be in the directory, some did, but the phone company
8 had always hired veterans around the time of the war for a number of reasons. Some,
9 whether you left for the phone company to go to Vietnam, if you were drafted, there was
10 a job waiting for you. But they also, like in my case, they wanted to hire you because
11 they knew you wouldn't be drafted, you were ready to serve. So, we did that and the one
12 major thing that we did—well, we did a lot of things. We brought the traveling wall up.
13 Although, dealing with the guy who runs the wall—what's his name? He's still running
14 it; he was one of the creators. Do you know the name?

15 JS: Not off the top of my head.

16 SS: Yeah, that was, you know, he wanted a donation which we were able to give
17 him, but it was really very difficult dealing with him. Sometimes you're wondering,
18 "Well, is this about you or is this about the wall?" But we worked everything out. We had
19 a traveling wall up in Bryant Park so that the public could see it and thousands of people
20 viewed the wall. That's the park opposite the public library in New York City.

21 JS: Okay.

22 SS: And as a result of that, one of the employees came to us and said, "Well, my
23 husband was a Vietnam vet. His name was Hanes, and I don't know where he's buried.
24 He had come back, and he was a changed person. He was clean as a whistle and he, you
25 know, did drugs and drinking and all of that and then he disappeared. We know he's
26 dead, but we don't know where he is." So, we took it on as a special project. Durkin and
27 Maggliaro did a lot of work. Even Jim Durkin who was with the Purple Heart Society
28 later on actually was the treasurer I think and then Luke Maggliaro, a guy I mentioned
29 who was lieutenant commander in the navy as a pilot. He's still a good friend of mine.
30 Durkin went to move to Virginia pretty frequently. Anyway, we eventually found
31 someone who knew this guy's street name.

1 JS: Okay.

2 SS: And we found out what happened to him, where he had died. He had
3 apparently been in a fight and when he hit the ground his head hit the curb and died of a
4 fractured skull. And since no one knew him, they kept his body for months; they brought
5 him out to Rikers Island or whatever that island is out there.

6 JS: Okay.

7 SS: And they buried him into the poor man's grave.

8 JS: Oh, wow.

9 SS: We knew where the casket was located, and we started talking to various
10 people in the city. We found an undertaker in Brooklyn who would go out and get his
11 body donated to casket. We found out where he was buried in this pile, and they stacked
12 him so many across and so many high and they covered him—all the unknown. So, we
13 exhumed what there was of him. I spoke to the attendant, and we, you know, pretty much
14 got all of him, and we gave him a casket and we had a ceremony. And the VVA provided
15 Color Guards and his family and company at that time. They would never do it now, but
16 there were Vietnam veterans in a company. In fact, Sidenburg is a Vietnam veteran, the
17 chairman of Verizon. I know him personally. But we got the body, and we flew the
18 family up from South Carolina. They were just an interesting bunch because they kept
19 saying, "I can't believe that white guys." They actually said this to us. "That white men
20 would do this for a black man." I said, "We're not doing it for a black man. We're doing
21 it for a veteran."

22 JS: Right.

23 SS: "His color is not material." So, they were coming into the ceremony, and we
24 were waiting for them outside and we had agreed to put them at ease, and they walked
25 over. We introduced ourselves and said, "Oh, you really are black, aren't you?" and they
26 said, "I know we're really white."

27 JS: Right.

28 SS: So, they relaxed. And it turned out the family's reconciled because they didn't
29 understand what had happened. They thought the wife had, you know, just cast him loose
30 and it wasn't the case at all. She had done everything a human being could do. But his
31 two daughters were there, and we went out to—we got a plot in the national cemetery. He

1 was buried out there. We got the chaplain to say a prayer and all that. But here's the
2 interesting thing. When the Cortez left to go to the funeral, the New York City Police—
3 and we didn't have any idea they were going to do this, closed the highway.

4 JS: Oh, wow.

5 SS: It's this whole procedure where they close the exits, they leapfrog ahead.
6 They closed all of the New York City exits and then the Long Island Police closed exits,
7 so this guy was representing all of the veterans who had come home and fallen on bad
8 luck, and he got a hero's send off, if you will. We flew out to the cemetery. Police gave
9 us an escort all the way, picked up the escort on in the island with different policeman,
10 and we buried him. I think the one fellow who was there, and actually subsequently took
11 a little more credit than he deserved which was nothing, was Rowan, the head of the
12 VVA right now.

13 JS: Okay.

14 SS: I remember him being involved and it was like riding on a motorcycle, and I
15 said to one of the guys on the island, I said, "What's he doing here?" He was the head of
16 their chapter. He said, "He does this all the time." I said, "Did he help at all?" He said,
17 "Well, I kept him informed." I said, "Okay." And that was it, but the work was done by
18 Durkin and Maggliaro with some supervision from me. You know, at least we got that
19 one right.

20 JS: Sure, that's really great.

21 SS: Later on, when I left the phone company I worked for, Belcore as I
22 mentioned, and did the network monitoring assistant and that had a pretty big group
23 (talking to wife). And that was it, pretty much. I mean, that was the important thing that I
24 almost forgot.

25 JS: Sure.

26 SS: I don't show anyone my medals and don't talk about Vietnam except when
27 I'm with a Vietnam veteran.

28 JS: Right.

29 SS: Because there's still people here that don't understand that they acted as
30 agents who've over the North Vietnamese what they did.

31 JS: Right.

1 SS: That's something else.

2 JS: Sure. Okay, well, just a few more questions before we wrap up. One of the
3 things I wanted to ask you. I know you had talked about you kept up with what was going
4 on during the Tet. Did you follow the war through the media all the way to the end?

5 SS: Oh, yes. In fact, I did have a classmate there, Toby Larson, who was a
6 briefing officer for Westmoreland during Tet, and I heard from them.

7 JS: Okay.

8 SS: When he came home, he was working for the Army Intelligence. He was
9 working out of the embassy for some intelligence group and he was the one that told
10 Bunker that the Vietnamese Army, or one of the people that told Bunker that the army
11 was disintegrating. Remember the name of the representative who screwed with the
12 budget—her name was Bella Hapsive. If you knew New York politics everyone knew that
13 she was a communist or, you know, a communist sympathizer. Well, people did call them
14 that at the time, they were left-winged. But she was just an old left-wing radical from an
15 area of Greenwich Village that's always been like that. It still is. You know, so I followed
16 it here. I did not participate in that march that they allowed the Vietnam veterans to do in
17 New York City. I thought it was just disorganized, but I left people out of my staff. I had
18 a number of people that worked for me who were Vietnam Veterans just by habit. I
19 decided to take the day off and hold on one second.

20 JS: Sure.

21 SS: Where was I? That was a call waiting for a pick-up.

22 JS: Sure.

23 SS: So, I had a very good idea what was going on, and, of course, my sources
24 weren't so good, but when I went to my West Point reunion some of the guys were still
25 involved had a pretty good idea from that just like now their advisors, civilian advisors in
26 Iraq in my last reunion. You know, I got more insight into what was going on there which
27 turned out to be accurate than the newspapers were reporting. You know, I have no trust
28 in reading the analysis of the newspapers no matter who the analyzer is. But if I read it
29 with an eye towards the facts, as I did then, I draw my own conclusions based on my
30 military knowledge. You can screw with the interpretation, but you can't mess with the
31 facts.

1 JS: Right.

2 SS: Then if you keep your eye on what is actually taking place, you can usually
3 get a good or bad picture if you know the business as a professional. I knew the business.
4 So, yeah, it's just like right to the end when I got that I had corresponding with Tony.
5 When he was saying there's not enough money to keep the planes running—I think they
6 had F-5s or something like that—and the tanks running. Buy ammunition to pay the
7 troops. He said, "They try to do both, but then end up doing neither." Knowing the
8 Vietnamese and knowing that, you know, these guys were draftees and that they weren't
9 being paid, they would have to go home and help with the farming and all the rest of that.
10 But the rice planting, which they would do periodically even when they were paid.
11 They'd ask for leave during that period of time. You know, things were not going well,
12 and they didn't.

13 JS: Right. Okay, well when you left, when your tour—

14 SS: I can't hear you.

15 JS: When you left and when your tour came to an end, did you have a sense that
16 the war was going well, going badly? How did you feel?

17 SS: I always say to people that when I left, we were winning.

18 JS: Okay.

19 SS: And we were. The Koreans had destroyed the two main force battalions that
20 decided to stand and fight, wiped them out to the man. In fact, the appreciation for the air
21 support, they sent us pictures of hands sticking out from rubble with no bodies attached.
22 It was just typical Korean stuff. There was the Caprock division, and I think the
23 Caprock—and I don't know if there was another division there. I don't recall what
24 caprocks sticks or Capital ROK—R-O-K division was there. I think that was the only
25 one. I'm scratching my head here. You can't see. But yeah, and after Tet, any military
26 person knew that that was the decisive military victory.

27 JS: Right.

28 SS: I mean, that was 1968 and nothing really happened for the next five to seven
29 years until we started pulling out. We could have pulled out our ground troops left and
30 right of the airman and kept the air support in, and they would have done just well. But
31 you can't fight guys who are bringing in tanks and you can't get your tanks, you know.

1 You can't get parts for your tanks, and you can't get your planes off the ground. If you
2 get your planes off the ground, it doesn't matter if you don't have your tanks working.

3 JS: Right.

4 SS: You can destroy armor with aircraft.

5 JS: Sure.

6 SS: I know. Tanks are my profession.

7 JS: Right.

8 SS: But if you can't get your planes off the ground, you can't do that. And if you
9 can't get your tanks to move you certainly can't do—you can't fight them in close. So,
10 once I heard that I got a pretty good idea that this doesn't look too good. And my sense of
11 the politics of the United States was that the, you know, the sentiment it turned against
12 the war that the Americans—as I told the Vietnamese one time, I said, “Americans play
13 games with one exception that have time limits.” I said, “Baseball always ends on time,
14 to nine innings, almost all the time.”

15 JS: Right.

16 SS: I said, “But football, they play for a certain amount of time, basketball they
17 play for a certain amount of time, and the Americans used to think end it.” I said, “You
18 guys were fighting forever, so you're not used to things ending.” I said, “But eventually
19 Americans can get tired, and they say, ‘When is this going to end?’” I'm sure you have,
20 but they didn't read protracted conflict or any of these other tomes at the time when the
21 theory of protracted war.

22 JS: Right.

23 SS: By the other guys just staying in there, they were winning even though they
24 had lost.

25 JS: Right.

26 SS: Because the Americans basically wanted to get out.

27 JS: Yeah.

28 SS: It was the final quarter. I mean, that's the way the thing worked out, and in
29 doing so we abandoned an ally. Now when the West Point 200th-year Bicentennial came
30 and they wheeled out Walter Cronkite, you know, whoever received the Association of
31 Graduates Award many years ago, you know, who just recently passed away. There were

1 some of us who didn't want to stand up and give them a standing ovation. We're giving
2 nudges, you know, like stand up, so I happened to be there in Radio City Music Hall
3 where the celebration was held later at the academy. One of the advantages of living at
4 West Point is they need fillers, you know. I'm always available to go do something, to
5 represent the class and my class at West Point. But I felt that he was the typical World
6 War II guy who the only good war that we had ever fought was the war that they fought.

7 JS: Right.

8 SS: And they treated us accordingly. I have, you know—what I do with World
9 War II guys now, including my brother's father-in-law, is they start in about World War
10 II. And I say, "Where did you fight?" And almost invariably, the guys who are the
11 biggest mouths, they never were in combat. In fact, my brother's father-in-law was a
12 dental tech in the United States throughout the whole war. I said, "You can't talk about
13 combat then."

14 JS: Right.

15 SS: So, you know, one of my friends, a master chief in the navy, headed his
16 American Legend post. He said, "The World War II guys have gotten to the point that all
17 they want to do is come down here and have a free meal." I said, "Well, they're old." I
18 said, "We'll get old, too," I said. So, I have the greatest respect for the guys who fought,
19 and I met some of them, but, you know, Cronkite and the rest of that crew didn't. And the
20 World War II guys when we came home did not do what they should have done in
21 showing respect for the men who had fought. I will carry that thought to my grave. I'm
22 totally convinced that they may have fought a great war and done a great service, but they
23 did not, you know, honor other veterans. Which is ironic because a lot of guys who've
24 fought in Korea and Vietnam also fought in World War II, but I had a conversation that
25 we were at a reception one time.

26 JS: Okay.

27 SS: The guy starts mouthing off—he's a post commander of some organization
28 and I said, "Where did you fight?" And he wouldn't answer the question. I said, "Where
29 did you serve? Where were you in World War II?" And he huffed and puffed, and his
30 wife said to me, "He was a quartermaster in the United States." So, this is my impression
31 here, I guess, in a broader picture is I felt that, as veterans, we were not given our due by

1 the World War II guys who were running the show in the United States when we came
2 home.

3 JS: Right, yeah.

4 SS: So, I get off my box at that point.

5 JS: All right. One more question about the end of the war. Could you talk about—
6 give me a sense of how you felt with the fall of Saigon on April 30 of '75?

7 SS: Well, I felt terribly disappointed. I felt we had betrayed, you know the
8 Vietnamese, and I was really concerned about the guys I knew, you know, the people I
9 had become friendly with, you know. I knew Su was dead, but I didn't know where the
10 guy and I still don't know what happened to the guy I was advising, Lieutenant Bay,
11 who, you know, we got very friendly with. He was a good man. And a couple of the
12 majors that were in the TAC. Colonel Cu might show up some place in a news article
13 somewhere. I think he got out and then finally I heard from a Tuan, who was serving as
14 the military attaché to South Korea. He came to the United States, and in fact, he visited
15 in the United States in 1970 when I was working for the phone company. They took him
16 on tour of the building, and he got in the newspaper and all that. So, he wound up in
17 Florida with his family, and we tried to help get him a job with the phone company or
18 somewhere. I know I introduced him to some people. I don't know whatever happened.
19 They moved, and I lost touch with them, but that family had married well a lot out of —
20 they married a couple of Americans. That's why they wound up in the United States. One
21 of the sisters—his wife was with the Vietnamese beauty, and his sisters were very pretty.

22 JS: Okay.

23 SS: And his sisters were very pretty, so they were just a very handsome family.
24 And so, they had married Australians and all that. So, I knew he was okay, but the rest of
25 them, you know, like all the kids I had taught who would have been adults in the English
26 language classes, no idea what happened to them. I felt so badly.

27 JS: Sure.

28 SS: Because I knew the way the communist ideology goes, is that they were
29 members of the ruling class and they were going to be severely executed if they were
30 high enough or set to what, you know, the word was getting out about the re-education
31 camps if they were young enough. I'm sure that's what happened. Plus, we moved

1 subsequently, although my name has always been out there in the phone directory, but I
2 never heard from any of these guys. I never heard anything further. Tuan was older than
3 me, so I have no idea what happened to him or his children, but I assume they were doing
4 well in the United States. He was a sharp guy. So that was pretty much it. I just felt that
5 we had betrayed them.

6 JS: Right.

7 SS: And I still think that. People say, “Well, we fought so long. We fought so
8 whatever.” And I say, “Yeah, but at the end we weren’t there when we were needed.” I
9 said, “Ford could have provided air cover. It’s no big deal flying off of the aircraft
10 carrier.”

11 JS: Right.

12 SS: You know, let them go with that, but they still took Saigon out of the one
13 Vietnamese unit that fought, that had supplies and fought right to the bitter end and
14 stopped them. So, they were at that—you know, everyone gets that feeling that the North
15 Vietnamese were invincible. They weren’t.

16 JS: Right.

17 SS: They were good, but they weren’t that good.

18 JS: Yeah

19 SS: But when the other guys are fighting, and they don’t have any bullets for their
20 weapons, you look pretty good. You can’t bomb them because the planes can’t take off
21 the ground. Plus, what Tony told me is at Phu Cat they lined up all the people that they
22 found at the airfield that was still there and they just severely executed them. So, you
23 know, that sent a message to everybody that these guys were going to—the political
24 cadres were going to do what communists and political cadres have always done.

25 JS: Right.

26 SS: Just the replay of the Soviet Union and its early use when they killed all of the
27 whites and executed all the kulaks, so nothing changed. It was just different people
28 killing different people. So, I was concerned. You know, we donated some money for the
29 boat people. Most of whom, from what I could see, a lot of them were Chinese. Because
30 the Vietnamese hated the Chinese, and they didn’t let them serve any armed forces at Cho
31 Lan and Saigon was all Chinese. Of course, they were all the middlemen businessmen.

1 JS: Right.

2 SS: And they ran them out of the country. So, yeah, it went pretty much the way I
3 thought it would go if we lost. If nothing else, it was unfortunate that I was right.

4 JS: Right.

5 SS: I still think there's one of the supreme ironies of seeing American warships
6 making ports of call in Saigon. My brother-in-law is in the telecommunications, is much
7 younger than I am, with a much younger sister who works at a big phone company. He's
8 visiting Vietnam. This is a funny story.

9 JS: Okay.

10 SS: He said, "How the hell did you get Andre in Hanoi?" he said, "Admiral
11 Zumwalt has a consulting business, and he's friends with the North Vietnamese Navy or
12 Army or whatever it was." I said, "Wait a second, you're talking about the Admiral
13 Zumwalt?" "Yes." I said, "Are you kidding me?" He said, "How would you like an
14 autograph picture?" I said, "I'd love an autograph picture." I was thinking it must be his
15 son or someone else. He comes back with a picture of the Admiral with deep respect
16 Zumwalt. I go and I'm like, "I can't believe it. This is just the ultimate statement on the
17 war." They ended up buying Chinese planking for an airfield, you know, to bomb the
18 North Vietnamese. I said, "This is unbelievable." I said, "Do me another favor." I wrote
19 down Luke's name and Gene Kulligan's name who is the Master Chief. He's the brown
20 water guy—he's the gate warden. Now, that's someone that you guys really ought to
21 interview because he's one of a kind. He's one of four survivors out of Aboku Hani.

22 JS: Oh, wow. Okay.

23 SS: You don't see many of those guys around.

24 JS: Right.

25 SS: Anyway, I said, "Next time you see the Admiral, ask him if he'll do that."
26 And I wrote a little history of each one of the guys. Luke was one of the pilots that, you
27 know, lifted guys off of the embassy. In fact, there was a picture of his chopper, you
28 know, with people climbing on board, you know, on top of the embassy.

29 JS: Right, okay.

30 SS: He was also involved with the flight up north when they tried to rescue people
31 who were prisoners of war.

1 JS: Right.

2 SS: No one in the Camp Taison or whatever it was called.

3 JS: Sante, yeah.

4 SS: And Gene, of course, you know, landed people under fire, but wounded any
5 number of times. Zumwalt did that, and they had lunch with both of these guys, and I
6 gave him those pictures. I got to tell you, if they'd been given a pound of gold, they had
7 to trade it in for those two pictures for Zumwalt.

8 JS: Wow.

9 SS: And I told them how he got them, and I said, "You see? Everyone's got a
10 price. Even the old Zumwalt." I said, "But the war's over, he's making the best of it."

11 JS: Right.

12 SS: In fact, the Vietnamese had a very high regard for him as a warrior. And they
13 sold it to business, but I said, "What the force of arms won't do, Coca Cola will." I said,
14 "The collapse of the Soviet Union did not really give the North Vietnamese enough time
15 to rearrange the thinking in the South any more than what happened to China." There was
16 still some elements that understood the entrepreneurial way. Except now, in Vietnam, the
17 North Vietnamese Army and the party, own a lot of the businesses.

18 JS: Right.

19 SS: So, it's the old state capitalism, just in a different form.

20 JS: Right.

21 SS: In fact, my sister was at a wedding in Thailand. They have friends who are
22 different connections, and she took a tour of Vietnam. They can't go up to the central
23 highlands. I guess they're still having problems up there, but she went up to Saigon and a
24 couple of other places. And I said, "Well, Central Highlands they're based on what I read
25 in Counter Force for some member, life member." I said, "They've been logging that,
26 you know, just ferociously." I said, "The Montagnard's have just given them a hard time
27 and the Vietnamese are still city people, and the Montagnard's are jungle people and they
28 can, you know—if they don't want to put their resources out there, they can stay up in
29 those mountains forever. Once you get in the hilly part of that terrain, nobody gets you
30 out." I said, "You need a million men to find three." So, that was pretty much it. Vietnam
31 still pops up every once in awhile. He hasn't been to Vietnam in a while, but when my

1 sister went there, I get a—I'm at my daughter's house, and she hands me a tube. And my
2 daughter hands me a tube and says, "This is from Aunt Joy." And it's got Vietnamese
3 stamps on it because my sister was helping out with the babysitting when the guys were
4 young. I look at it, and I said, "Oh, what the heck is this?" She opens it up and it's an oil
5 painting, a copy of a picture of my grandson done by a Vietnamese artist.

6 JS: Oh, wow.

7 SS: They did a beautiful job. He had used a picture, a formal picture that was
8 taken of him. And so, I had it framed, and it's hanging in the house. Every time I look at
9 it, I think of the fact that at one point, Tuan and I were going to import Vietnamese art
10 into the United States, but unfortunately as you said, Saigon fell so that business came to
11 an end very abruptly.

12 JS: Right, right.

13 SS: Although, now that I have, Ben Van Etten. There's another guy you guys
14 ought to talk to.

15 JS: I believe we have. The name sounds familiar.

16 SS: Ben Van Etten was an Air America pilot.

17 JS: Okay.

18 SS: He was a friend of mine. I know him from Germany. But he and I were in the
19 Thai jewelry import business. That was, you know, when I was in the phone company it
20 was really just a good idea that it didn't have the resources or that he didn't stay there all
21 that long, so the business came to an end. But we made some money on it, a little bit.

22 JS: Okay, all right.

23 SS: By the way, Thai gold isn't gold, so be very careful.

24 JS: Okay, all right.

25 SS: Well, like five percent gold.

26 JS: All right. A moment ago, you were mentioning being a lifetime member in
27 Counter Force.

28 SS: Right.

29 JS: Could you talk a little bit about the organization?

1 SS: Well, you know, I'm trying to even think of how I found out about it. I don't
2 even remember how I found out about it. But it was before the internet. It may have been
3 something in one of the—I'm a life member of the VFW.

4 JS: Okay.

5 SS: And then a life member of the VVA. It might have been through one of those
6 two—probably the VFW. I just thought it was a good idea, you know. I've sent money in
7 the past, you know, to doing some good, you know, and helping. At one point, it was
8 helping guys get to the United States, but they still maintain the faith. A lot of them with
9 the tribesmen which I always thought. So, when it came time, they were having money
10 problems I had been sending my money in. What I remembered if you will, you know, on
11 a yearly basis I just wrote them a check, you know for life membership. You know, I
12 periodically get the newsletter just saw another one, now it's on email, which saves
13 money, asking for people who had been advisors to train advisors who were going to
14 advise the Iraqi Army. I mean, Americans don't get it that the combat forces are leaving,
15 but the military assistance will still be there for quite some time.

16 JS: Right.

17 SS: You know, and then the possibility of combining the Vietnam group with the
18 Iraqi group advisors. My feeling was, yeah you should do that because we're all getting
19 older. The last World War I guy is about to go.

20 JS: Right.

21 SS: There's a lot of you at one point when you're eighteen to twenty-five and
22 thirty-five, but there's not too many of you when you're seventy-five or eighty-five or
23 ninety-five. So, I thought that was a good idea, but it turned out to be too complicated for
24 whatever reason. So, I keep track. I haven't done very much active. It seems to be, you
25 know, more of the guys who were Special Forces advisors or worked directly with the
26 Vietnamese units, you know, that were more involved with them to some extent than I
27 was afterwards. I kept contact, but I wasn't that involved, you know, to figure out from
28 what I said. And I think part of it has to do that they spoke Vietnamese. I didn't.

29 JS: Right.

30 SS: So, most of the guys I dealt with were, you know, English-speaking, you
31 know, folks. But, you know, I support the cause every once in a while, if they need

1 something. They haven't asked recently, but I think supporting Cambodians, which I had
2 nothing to do with myself, going to veterinarian school was a good idea. I tried to get—
3 before he died, Wayne Downing who's a classmate of mine, General Downing, I tried to
4 get him to be a member. I figured if he would be a member that would be a big booster. I
5 don't know if he ever joined or not, but there was Wayne Downing, and I think Jim
6 Kimsey was an advisor who's the chairman of AOL, quite wealthy. He's also a
7 classmate. I gave him one of the Counter Force. What I do, do is when I find out a
8 classmate had reunion as an advisor, I will get their address and have county. I would
9 send him some Counter Force stuff or send him it by email. But again, I think the idea
10 that they're working, you know, with the Army now, you know, to teach them advisory
11 things, what you do, and you don't do—although I didn't know if the experience is
12 completely transferable—it was a great idea.

13 JS: Okay.

14 SS: You know, so that's pretty much it with Counter Force. I think I've been with
15 Counter Force since the beginning.

16 JS: Okay, wow, alright.

17 SS: Hold on one second.

18 JS: Sure.

19 SS: Go ahead, I'm sorry.

20 JS: Okay, but before wrapping up I just wanted to ask you some of those general
21 questions about the way the war was handled and that type of thing. For these you can
22 say as much or as little as you'd like. First of all, some of these you've kind of touched
23 on already. I kind of get an idea of where you stand on them, but could you talk a little bit
24 about just the way, from your perspective, of the way the war was handled? Your opinion
25 on that.

26 SS: You mean militarily?

27 JS: Yeah.

28 SS: Well, I think militarily, you know, the one thing we didn't do when we did it
29 when it was too late was you don't go after their supply lines. I think what happened was
30 we handled it militarily well, although I really thought that the Special Forces camp
31 should have been bigger and more reinforced and made into fire support bases, you

1 know, made larger out on the border. Big areas of jungle should have been cleared. I
2 thought they were too small.

3 JS: Okay.

4 SS: At least that was my experience. But I also thought that the pacification
5 program was good. I thought that the Phoenix program was excellent, although it's non-
6 American if you will, but some people you just have to kill. I mean their committed
7 ideologs and you have to do that, and I think, you know, that's the problem. The current
8 prison has in his Gitmo. "Hey, you've got guys that really, really believe what they
9 believe and they're not going to change no matter what you say or do to them. And
10 they're dangerous," and I think that was the thing we faced in Vietnam. You know, it's
11 like the time when I was just a fellow from the CIA came in to speak to people in the
12 North Korean camps. I told you this that he later sent me an application to the CIA when
13 I got home.

14 JS: Okay.

15 SS: I think I mentioned that. They were trying to turn people, and he had a big,
16 long conversation with me about, "What do you think about, you know, maybe getting a
17 whole unit to, you know change sides?" And I said, "They're not going to do it." He said,
18 "Why?" I said, "Because the whole problem with this war is, is that we're who were are,
19 we're Caucasians and they're Asians. In the end, I said for the Nguyen in the middle,
20 that's all he sees. He sees us as not belonging here."

21 JS: Right.

22 SS: So, that that was one issue we never really addressed is building up the
23 Vietnamese Army sooner, stronger, faster, and letting them do the fighting. And then
24 what I would have done is secure the borders. If that meant going into Laos and putting
25 troops up there and feeling those trails, it wouldn't have been that hard because the its
26 mountainous territory, and if you hold the mountains and they have to come through it—
27 and there's just some certain places you have to come through—I'd do that. But we were
28 respecting a border of a country who was a country in name only.

29 JS: Right.

30 SS: So, that was the political part of the fight. So, as long as you allow people to
31 go all the way almost to Saigon unmolested if they go down through Laos and Cambodia,

1 and they're not respecting the borders, you lose. Because they never, you know, ran out
2 of men or material, but what if they want to pay the price? Whereas you're sitting
3 basically in a strategic defensive position by only defending your turf. So, I think that
4 was the classic mistake here is that we were bound by our own rules that we respect other
5 people's borders. Although I can tell you for a fact that the government of Laos and
6 Vietnam and the government of Nam Pen had no more control over that border area than
7 I did. I mean, that was just owned rock stock of barrels by the North Vietnamese. One
8 incursion that Nixon or whoever it was, you know, did it to Cambodia which was long
9 overdue, you know, was greeted with political turmoil in the United States.

10 JS: Right, right.

11 SS: You know, and that was the game. That was a communist understanding of
12 our legalistic society. "Oh, you can't do that. That line between my neighbor and I can't
13 be crossed." It should have been crossed because the war was a war where under hot
14 pursuit you could go anywhere where the enemy is if he's shooting at you, but they didn't
15 and that was the strategic era. As far as tactically, no, anytime when I was there, anytime
16 the North Vietnamese were engaged they were defeated and the Vietnamese and the Viet
17 Cong were—at the end of my tour there was just no more main force battalions left.
18 There were a light infantry and light infantry can't stand up under artillery and air strikes,
19 it just can't. You know, even our light infantry can't do that. So, you know, that was, I
20 think, the strategic mistake. You know, as far as the equipment, the Vietnamese were
21 underequipped. I mean, I was equipped the same way the Vietnamese were. I was
22 carrying a World War II Carbine with an automatic selector on it and thirty-caliber
23 rounds. The Americans were firing M-16s with 7.62. What's that say?

24 JS: Right.

25 SS: And it eventually later on, they were equipped. But once you equip guys with
26 high-capacity firing weapons, then you better have the supply and you better give them
27 money to buy ammunition. Because you press the trigger and away you go.

28 JS: Right.

29 SS: And we didn't do that so, you know, we lost that. So, politically we were
30 defeated, militarily we won. In the end, war is an extension of politics.

31 JS: Right.

1 SS: And that means you lose, and we lost, and we lost Vietnam. Now, whether or
2 not the capitalist ideology will carry the day in Vietnam is another story. Because these
3 guys were fighting for a failed 19th Century economic philosophy.

4 JS: Right.

5 SS: You know, just doesn't work, and it won't work in the country either because
6 that's not the way people are, unfortunately or fortunately depending on your view point.
7 We do what we do because we do it for ourselves and our family. You know, that's it.
8 Now I talk to friends of mine at my high school reunion who are leftists, and they'll say,
9 "58,000 people killed." And I'll say, "500,000 people, both people killed." I said, "You
10 guys walked away. Why'd you do that?" And I had one classmate who boast to me about
11 that I've never said anything to him up until this reunion, our 50th. He boast to my about
12 being a draft dodger, and I finally said to him, "Monty, do you understand what you
13 did?" I said, "You dodged the draft. Somebody else went in your place." I said, "Because
14 they were filling quotas."

15 JS: Right.

16 SS: "Your draft would have had to come up with X amount of people. If you
17 disappeared, which you did, they came up with someone else. So, someone else maybe
18 dead or hopefully alive because you didn't—." You know, draft dodgers, when a guy
19 tells me they do that, years ago, I used to just turn my face and walk away. Now I explain
20 to them, I said, "You've got someone killed or you put someone in harm's way." And
21 you know something? No one has ever said that to these guys.

22 JS: Right.

23 SS: So, that's where I come from. I'm just saying don't bother me. I won't bother
24 you. But you bother me, you know, I'm going to tell you what you did.

25 JS: Right.

26 SS: You were young and naïve, and you were taken advantage of. We just saw in
27 this election if you can get young people galvanized, they will do things that are not
28 necessarily in their best interest. I mean, I'm not going to be paying off, you know, any
29 debt that this crew in Washington runs up—I got another twenty, thirty years if I'm
30 lucky. But my grandchildren will and my nieces and nephews who voted for Obama will.
31 I said, "Hey, don't say a word. When your taxes go up because you're earning money,

1 this is what you voted for.” I said, “When Saigon fell, this is what you guys want?”
2 “Well, we didn’t want that.” So, they thought there would be a benign, you know,
3 Vietnamese government. I said, “It’s not that—in the United States we argue about
4 whether or not you’re left or right or the center. We’re all within the constitution.” I said,
5 “Vietnam the argument was not that.” I said, “The argument was black or white.” I said,
6 “It’s our way or your way and if it’s our way, you go. And you go means you leave the
7 country, or we kill you.” And Americans didn’t understand that. I think they have a better
8 idea now after seeing what happened and that’s why a lot of people who were, you know,
9 anti-Vietnam War turned out to be hawks later on because they understood that they were
10 philosophically taken. So, that’s where I come out on that.

11 JS: All right.

12 SS: And some still believe they did the right thing and that, you know et cetera, et
13 cetera.

14 JS: Okay, just one or two more questions. You kind of touched on this one a little
15 bit, but what do you think of US Policy towards Vietnam today in the growing
16 relationship we have with that government?

17 SS: I have no problem with it. I think that we should be more insistent on, you
18 know, human rights to those people who fought with us and I think they should be more,
19 you know, open to allowing us to assist people who had suffered, you know, because they
20 served with the Americans because apparently, they ostracized them, that’s what we want
21 to do. But, you know, in just humanitarian support and I think we got pretty much all the
22 Amerasians out. But in terms of engaging with them, yeah. Because that’s the only way
23 you can effect any change. You know, I’m still concerned about the Montagnard’s who
24 are being taken advantage of, you know, the folks that we served with up in the hills.

25 JS: Right.

26 SS: You know, so if you’re at least dealing with somebody you can have some
27 say, but pretty much I think that until the generation that fought the war is gone in
28 Vietnam, it’d be less inclined to do things that we would be, you know, we would see as
29 humane. When that generation goes, I think things will change, and that’s the investment.
30 I think that long-term strategic we’re doing the right thing.

31 JS: Okay.

1 SS: It has a short-term course, but long-term strategic was right.

2 JS: Right, okay.

3 SS: And I think it also kind of like sticks a little pin in the Chinese who I don't
4 like. I mean, the Chinese and Vietnamese—the Vietnamese kicked their butts the one
5 time they had a fight along the border. You know, the Chinese hadn't fought in a long
6 time. I don't care how good an army is in training. Until you have people who have
7 combat experience in your ranks which we will have because of Iraq, you don't have a
8 fighting army. And I think, you know, as time goes by and the Vietnamese army, you
9 know, guys my age, are no longer fighting that that army, you know, loses some of its
10 potency also.

11 JS: Okay, all right. Well—

12 SS: To answer your question, long-term good.

13 JS: Okay, all right. One more question about Vietnam today. I know you
14 mentioned that I guess it was your sister that went back to Vietnam?

15 SS: Yes.

16 JS: Have you given any consideration going to Vietnam? Have you ever though
17 about it?

18 SS: Well, it's the one area I'd be interested in going back to for what I understand
19 it's off limits in Pleiku in the Highlands.

20 JS: Right.

21 SS: No, I guess the more I look at it, you know, the one guy I was really friendly
22 with lives in the United States somewhere, and I didn't look him up. I did try to look him
23 up, but I couldn't find him. I have no desire to see what it is. You know, and I also kind
24 of feel that I go back, and someone finds out that I'm the B-52 guy (both laughing).
25 Infantry is one thing, but, you know, B-52, you know Napalm, white phosphorous for our
26 one year in II Corps. I think there maybe still some hard feelings, although you never
27 know.

28 JS: Right.

29 SS: I just have no desire. You know, if I knew that, you know, a couple of guys I
30 knew were there, I'd probably consider it. But right now I'm just too busy babysitting a
31 five-year-old and a fifteen month year old with my wife than, you know, then going back

1 there. We lived in Europe, we traveled all over. We didn't have kids. We went to Hong
2 Kong. We went to Hawaii. I've been to South Africa as part of my job working for
3 Acordia putting in software, and I was supervising a group that was doing that. So,
4 you've seen all the wild animals up close. I don't have to see anymore human wild
5 animals.

6 JS: Right.

7 SS: Been there, done that. Like *Candide*—in the end, it's better in your own
8 backyard. I hate to sound like a xenophobe, but I have absolutely no desire to go back.

9 JS: All right.

10 SS: There, I've said it, and I'm glad.

11 JS: (laughing) Right. Okay, well before wrapping up is there anything else you'd
12 like to say? Anything else we should cover?

13 SS: No, I think I've pretty much chewed your ear for a few hours here. If you're
14 interested in those other people, you know, just check the records, see if they've
15 volunteered. But I would definitely say Eugene Culligan, Master Chief Culligan.

16 JS: Okay.

17 SS: Command Master Chief, excuse me. He's worth a talk to because he's had a
18 unique experience. Ben Van Etten is someone you must speak to.

19 JS: Okay.

20 SS: Because he's Mr. Rotary Wing. I flew with him in Germany, and I email him,
21 so I've got those guys. And Luke had some very interesting experiences of flying off of,
22 you know, flying on these missions. I think he's got the Silver Star.

23 JS: Okay.

24 SS: I know Gene was wounded any number of times because one time he worked
25 for me at the phone company. I came in, and he was taking shrapnel out of his, you know
26 stomach. I asked him what was going on, and he explained that every time the VC would
27 fire at the armored plating in the grounds would shatter. They would get pelted by BB-
28 type fragments. You know, he's not a Kerry type guy. Kerry was a swifty and had some
29 questions about what he really did or didn't do, but Gene landed troops, and that's
30 dangerous. The other guys could run away. These guys couldn't.

31 JS: Right.

1 SS: So, I would say the possibility of those three guys, feel free to contact me.

2 JS: All right.

3 SS: Through email. I'll send you the email addresses, there's three of them.

4 JS: Sure.

5 SS: That's it. I still think if I had to sum it up, we did the right thing, but we did
6 not understand what exactly the politics, the political part of this was. That Vietnam
7 served any purpose when we went into Iraq. We learned that lesson, that you've got to
8 get the politics right first. I think Perot really had his finger on that one before anyone
9 else did. Like I said, you have to have a discussion about a war before you enter into a
10 war. And you just can't do like we did in Vietnam. You escalate over, you know Gulf of
11 Tonkin or whatever it does when most of us in the military knew that we had thousands
12 of advisors there in the first place. So, I think that the society is more open, more
13 knowledgeable, and you need to explain more. I also think as Iraq has shown that if you
14 do it the right way, that the American people will support you, you know, and they will
15 stay the course. We've done that in Iraq, and we'll do it in Afghanistan, you know, if he
16 explains it the right way. He says, "This why we're here, and this is why we must stay.
17 This is why we must finish the job."

18 JS: Right.

19 SS: But making it an "us against them" fistfight doesn't work anymore. So, that's
20 the lesson learned. Politics first, combat second, but both of them just to the other side of
21 the coin.

22 JS: Okay, all right. Well, Mr. Sperman, I want to thank you for your time and for
23 telling your story.

24 SS: My pleasure.