

**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Roderick Dwyer
Conducted by Jason Stewart
Transcribed by Emilie Meadors
Edited by Ayden Case**

1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University conducting an Oral History Interview with Mr. Rod Dwyer. Today is June 17,
3 2010, I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library on the campus of Texas
4 Tech and Mr. Dwyer is joining me by phone from Maryland, is that correct?

5 Roderick Dwyer: That is correct.

6 JS: Okay, why don't we begin with a little bit of biographical information about
7 yourself? First of all, when and where were you born?

8 RD: I was born the 18th of August, 1944 in Mineola, on Long Island in New York
9 State.

10 JS: Okay, alright. Could you tell me a little bit about your parents? What were
11 their names and what did they do for a living?

12 RD: My dad was Roderick J. Dwyer. He worked for the Long Island Lighting
13 Company for forty some odd years in the engineering department managing their budget.
14 He also was the treasurer for the school district for, I think, something like twenty-eight
15 years working for the school district. Dad had been born in 1912. He passed away in
16 1991. One thing about my father that I think affected all of us was at the age of four in
17 1916, he contracted polio. So for the rest of his life, he walked with the aid of crutches or
18 used a wheel chair. So he was a pretty tough minded individual. And I think that growing
19 up with him as a father may have toughened us a little bit, too. We certainly understood
20 that a lot of things in life were possible if you just stuck with it. My mom was Marian
21 Catherine Gunn. She was living in Mineola at the time she met my dad who was from the
22 next town over in Westbury. Both of their families had moved out to the island from
23 Brooklyn in the late twenties. They met about 1940 or '41. They got married in '42. Mom
24 was a secretary to the principal of a local high school and later worked in the Westbury

1 School District as a secretary administrative person. She was born in 1915 and she passed
2 away in 1987. I had two brothers, both younger. My brother Kevin is a graduate of the
3 Naval Academy, class of '68. He was a Navy fighter pilot who had three tours in
4 Vietnam. We were actually there together at one point. He knew it and I didn't. We can
5 talk about that later if you wish. My youngest brother, Bryan was born in 1959 so he was
6 quite young when Kevin and I were—there's a fifteen year difference between Bryan and
7 I. Thirteen between Kevin and Bryan. He was quite young when we were already out of
8 college and grad school and into the service.

9 JS: Right, yes sir. Well, did you grow up there in Long Island?

10 RD: Yeah, I grew up in Westbury. That was my home for—home of record for
11 really, the first thirty years of life. Went to the local Catholic school and then to a
12 Catholic high school in Mineola and then onto Boston College and State University of
13 New York in Binghamton. After Binghamton I went on active duty.

14 JS: Okay, well before we get into your time in the military, you could talk a little
15 bit more about growing up if you don't mind. Did you have any—first of all, as a kid
16 growing up, did you have any relatives that have served in the military? And if so, did
17 that have any influence on you?

18 RD: We did. Of course, my dad's generation, almost all of them went off to serve
19 in World War II. Obviously my dad for physical reasons couldn't do that, but his brother
20 Tom was a B-24 pilot, 15th Air Force in Italy, had 28 missions. He and his crew were shot
21 down coming back from a raid on Ploesti, the oil fields from Romania. Everybody on the
22 plane was captured except Tom. He lived for six weeks behind German lines in Albania
23 and Yugoslavia living with the partisans and then got air lifted out of Yugoslavia and
24 back to Italy. That's a heck of a story.

25 JS: Absolutely.

26 RD: In fact, for an Oral History Project in my senior year at BC I interviewed
27 him.

28 JS: I bet that was fascinating.

29 RD: It was wonderful, and the horrible thing is, the tapes were lost years later.

30 JS: Oh no, right.

1 RD: We tried to find them, but they're gone. It was pretty wonderful. My cousin
2 Tommy still has his father's diary he kept. So that's still there. My uncle, I always looked
3 up to him. He was my godfather. I would say, sure, his experiences and the experiences
4 of—almost all of those people in that village went off to serve. Tom was a bomber pilot,
5 two of his best friends were fighter pilots, and one of the guys who left the village was an
6 Ace in Europe. You walked down the street as a kid and you see all these guys and my
7 dad would say, "Yeah, he was in the Pacific, he was here, he was there." So it was part of
8 growing up that you served.

9 JS: So that was—so from your perspective then that was part of the influence on
10 your generation seeing these older World War II vets that had served and that kind of
11 engrained into your experience that that was something that a young man did?

12 RD: Yeah, I mean it wasn't a conscious or deliberate thing, it was just part of the
13 environment. And yet, I have some very good friends down here in Maryland who also
14 grew up in that same village. Roughly the same age as I am, maybe five, six, seven years
15 younger. They certainly took a different approach when it—when the Vietnam War grew.
16 Now, they didn't support the war. They opposed the draft, they lived in the same village I
17 did. So, you know, I think the environment—the environment was there how it affects
18 different people—it affects different people differently is what I'm trying to say.

19 JS: Right sure, sure. Again, as a kid growing up in this environment, did you also
20 pay attention to what was going on in the larger world with a US foreign policy and the
21 beginnings of the Cold War? Did you pay much attention to those types of things as a
22 kid?

23 RD: Well, probably not as much attention as I paid to the Brooklyn Dodgers.
24 (laughter)

25 JS: Right. (laughter)

26 RD: You know that the three most hated people in the twentieth century in
27 Brooklyn are Hitler, Stalin, and Walter O' Malley.

28 JS: (laughter) Right.

29 RD: Well, to answer your question more directly, yeah I think I did. I always
30 liked history. I liked military history. I was certainly aware of the war in Korea. I can
31 distinctly recall sitting at the kitchen table listening to a live radio news broadcast from

1 Korea describing a Marine attack that was taking place on a North Korean, or Chinese
2 Communist position. Everybody had the duck and cover drills at school. Whatever good
3 that would do, y'know in case the Soviet Union ever decided the throw a nuke at
4 Westbury. We did have an air base, Mitchell Field, not three miles away. That was active,
5 I would say, up until approximately 1960.

6 JS: Okay.

7 RD: So we saw—It was mostly cargo and transport. We were aware that there
8 was an air base there. There were kids from the air base who were in school with us.
9 Yeah.

10 JS: Okay, well since you brought it up, I'd like to ask you a little bit more about
11 the Brooklyn Dodgers and about baseball. So, you grew up being a big Dodger fan? Did
12 you go to many games, and did you play some baseball yourself?

13 RD: I still play.

14 JS: Great.

15 RD: Softball. I'm an umpire now. I threw my arm out last year and had surgery in
16 January, but I'll be back playing next year. Yeah, I loved baseball. My real wish was to
17 be good enough to be drafted and play professional ball. I wasn't. Baseball was my first
18 love. We went into games in Brooklyn. I can remember going to Abbot's Field, oh, I
19 don't know, maybe four or five times to the polo grounds where the Giants played at the
20 Yankee Stadium. I remember watching Mr. Mantel get up left-handed and hit a line drive
21 homerun into the left center field bleachers 470 feet away. That ball was on a line, and it
22 never came down. It went into the seat, straight. The man was impressive, the man was
23 impressive. I actually had the autographs of the entire, I think it was '55 Dodgers team.

24 JS: Oh wow.

25 RD: Yeah, my nephews got them now out in Oregon. Anyway, we loved baseball.
26 Played football and baseball in high school. Played one year of baseball in college.
27 Played every chance I got in the summers. Then I took it up again about fifteen years ago,
28 only softball.

29 JS: Right. Just a little curious about that because I'm a big baseball fan myself.

30 RD: Are you?

31 JS: Yes, sir.

1 RD: Well, how are the Rangers doing this year?

2 JS: They're doing okay. I'll tell you, I'm not a Ranger's fan though. I'm not from
3 Texas. I have gone to see them play this year once, but I'm not a Rangers fan. I'm
4 actually a Cubs fan. I'm a little ashamed to admit that.

5 RD: Oh my God. Yeah, a man of great patience.

6 JS: Yeah, well it's about run out for this season already.

7 RD: I'd love to see them make the World Series, I really would.

8 JS: I would as well. Well of course a few years ago I thought the possibility of the
9 Cubs and the Red Sox a few years back. You know, I guess that was 2003 maybe?

10 RD: Yeah, yeah. I remember I guess feeling much the same way you did. Wow,
11 wouldn't this be a wonderful series.

12 JS: Right, anyway. I guess as far as the—getting back to your interview, could
13 you talk a little more about your education and what school was like for you. Were you a
14 pretty good student and what subjects did you like to study?

15 RD: Yeah, I was a very good student. History was my favorite. My father got a B
16 in my senior physics class in high school. I didn't earn that B, he did.

17 JS: How's that?

18 RD: Science drove me nuts. I still have to call one our—one of the boys to find
19 out how to work a DVD player. So some things don't change. School was tough, it was
20 demanding. I think high school was a great time. We worked hard in the classroom, we
21 played hard. We had a damn good football team. Very good baseball team as well. I went
22 off to BC (Boston College) in '62 and I got my degree there in '66 in history. I wrote my
23 senior thesis on formation of an independent American Army in France in the First World
24 War. I'd gotten into that topic a couple of summers earlier when I found a book on
25 Pershing(??) in the Westbury Library. It brought home to me for the first time how
26 complex and delectate a matter it was, to have an American Army in the field, rather than
27 American troops serving in British, and French, and Belgian units. Anyway, that got
28 me—that was my work senior year. Took a graduate level course in, I guess you would
29 call it storyagraphy?

30 JS: Right, yeah.

1 RD: That led me in conducting the interview with my uncle because we had to do
2 oral history interviews. Then I went off to Fingleton, where I got a masters in American
3 history in 1968. Most of what I did, most of the papers I wrote for grad courses—one of
4 my fellow students said to me, “I think you’re the only one who’s gotten a master’s
5 degree without ever writing a paper that didn’t touch on foreign policy or diplomatic
6 history.” Even in intellectual history course I managed to find a way—I think I wrote a
7 paper on Alfred Thayer Mahan and Big Navy Theory.

8 JS: Sounds familiar.

9 RD: Does it? I was going to ask you; you’re working toward a PhD in military
10 history?

11 JS: Right, yeah. Yeah, I am currently AbD right now and I’m in the process of
12 writing my dissertation.

13 RD: What’s the subject?

14 JS: I’m looking at a particular South Vietnamese general, ARVN (Army of the
15 Republic of Vietnam) General Vũ Văn Giai, who commanded the 3rd ARVN Division
16 during the Easter Offensive that was just absolutely annihilated, and looking at what
17 happened there and why. Looking at whether or not he was rightfully blamed for what
18 happened because he was the first ARVN general to be basically arrested and put on trial,
19 and put in prison for the rest of the life of South Vietnam because of what happened
20 there.

21 RD: Yeah.

22 JS: So looking at that, whether or not it was justified and what actually happened.

23 RD: Boy I would love to see that when you’re done.

24 JS: Well hopefully maybe in a year or two. I’m probably about a third of the way
25 through right now. But yeah, I’ll definitely have to keep you in mind about that.

26 RD: Please do. When I got out, I left Vietnam just a few months before the Easter
27 Offensive. I remember I was still corresponding with my commanding officer. He
28 described the flood of refugees. And we were south of Cam Ranh Bay.

29 JS: Wow, yeah that’s pretty far south. Of course, I know what was happening in
30 multiple—in three different regions, but still, that’s something. So that—now at the point
31 when you did your masters, you were already in the military at that point, weren’t you?

1 RD: Yeah, I had gone through ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) at Boston
2 College. I had gotten my commission along with my degree in 1966. The Army had
3 granted me a two-year deferment to get my master's degree. So off I went to Binghamton
4 for a couple of years. Just about the time I was finishing up my thesis, I got orders that I
5 would report to Fort Benning in November of 1968. I got those probably in April of '68.
6 It was a very generous two years, two plus years that they gave me. The thesis, by the
7 way, it was a derivative from the honors thesis in undergrad. I still shutter when I think of
8 it. The critical role of shipping in the formation of an independent American Army in
9 France in the First World War. It got shoved. I don't know—sometimes, you know, you
10 can get into a microcosm and by God, I sure as hell did with that.

11 JS: Yeah, but I imagine it's an aspect that hadn't been explored very much prior
12 to that.

13 RD: You sound just like my thesis advisor. He's a great guy, Larry Evans. I think
14 he's probably passed away now. But he was a Brit who'd been to—I think he got his PhD
15 from Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He was a hawk on the Vietnam
16 War. He taught at the University of British Columbia, and you probably know, UBCs
17 (University of British Columbia) a fairly liberal institution. He came to Binghamton, I
18 think it was in '67, and he became my thesis advisor. He was not the only hawk, there
19 were two or three in the department. They were the definite minority at that school.

20 JS: Right.

21 RD: That was—Binghamton was, and still is, a most liberal state school heavily
22 populated student population. A very heavy urban New York City area. Some of them
23 were appalled that I was an Army officer.

24 JS: Right, that's something I certainly would like to talk to you a little bit more
25 about.

26 RD: Go ahead.

27 JS: Well, before we get into that though, if we could back up just a little bit to the
28 point of where you got into ROTC and the decision to actually follow through with it to
29 actually be in the military. First of all, was ROTC, was it a requirement there?

30 RD: No.

31 JS: It was not, okay.

1 JS: Oh no, no. My dad suggested to me that I look at it—back then in '62, people
2 weren't thinking in terms of any armed conflict, but it was an idea that, "Hey look, you
3 do owe your country something." Part of that environment we grew up in, I suppose. He
4 said, "You get your degree, go through ROTC and get a commission, you serve,
5 conditions would be a little bit better than if you were an enlisted man." I thought about it
6 and thought about it. A lot of guys did join freshman year. Boy, they dropped out really
7 fast. It was boring. It was boring. I don't know why I stayed. I sure thought it was boring.
8 At the end of sophomore year, you had a decision to make. Because at that point, you
9 either stayed in or got out and if you stayed in, you took an oath and you were in-essence
10 a buck private in the reserves. So, there were about I think between fifty and fifty-five of
11 us who stayed in the program and got a commission. Things got a little more interesting
12 in junior and senior years, but I would still look at that program today and I'd just shutter.
13 I don't think it really prepared us for very much to be good officers. Our oldest son went
14 through ROTC at Saint Joseph University in Philadelphia, graduated in 2001. I look at his
15 ROTC program and thought, "Wow, this is really a good program to train soldiers and to
16 train leaders." There were constant field exercises, constant competitions, physical
17 competitions. We never saw that. We had one day a week of a one hour class and then a
18 drill for an hour or so. When you got to be juniors and seniors, I think the require—class
19 requirements increased to two or three hours per week and probably another two to three
20 hours of drill or administrative work or whatever. Then summer camp for six weeks at
21 Fort Devens. The summer between junior and senior year. That summer camp was six
22 weeks. It was like Army basic. We lived in World War II barracks which were, hey, they
23 were only twenty-five years old at the time. They'd been built around 1940. And that was
24 very much basic training. You lived like—you lived just the same life, I think, as any
25 enlisted man in the Army did. You went through a lot of physical conditioning, a lot of
26 training on the M-1 rifle. Lots of marches, lots of physical work. Cleaning the barracks
27 until you could eat off the floor. You would get off from noon on Saturday to about five
28 o'clock on Sunday if everything had gone well during the week. The food was good. I
29 remember that distinctly. The food was good, we ate a lot of it and lost weight. They did
30 treat us towards the end—y'know they recognized, "Okay, these guys are going to get
31 commissioned." They had a great spirit of comradery. One of our TAC (Tactical

1 Officers) officers had a PhD in psychology from Fordham University in the Bronx. I ran
2 into him later in Vietnam. He was a province senior advisor somewhere else in II Corps. I
3 actually didn't see him physically, but one of my friends was being transferred from our
4 province Ninh Thuận, up to his as a police advisor. So I wrote—wrote him a letter and
5 told them about my friend Hank and getting a good man. You know, that kind of thing. A
6 letter of introduction if you will. Yeah, so we got the commission and I think that most of
7 the fellows in the class—that was Class 66. Most of the guys went to Vietnam. I recall
8 two good friends, one of whom went to Korea and the other whom spent his time
9 overseas in Italy. As I think of the other fellows—oh yeah, yeah. And another guy who
10 spent his entire tour of active duty in the Pentagon. That was really because of his
11 knowledge of computers. Most of them went to Vietnam in one form or another.
12 Transportation, infantry, artillery, intelligence, whatever. That was '66. Where do you
13 want to go from there, Jason?

14 JS: Well, I've got a few questions, but let me follow up with that real quick. Did
15 you learn the fates of most of those guys? Did they all make it back?

16 RD: No, they didn't all make it back, but almost everybody did. You know, it's
17 funny you ask we've—I've been working with another classmate and fellow ROTC mate.
18 A bunch of us have to establish a veteran's memorial at Boston College. Last year the
19 memorial was dedicated.

20 JS: Oh wow.

21 RD: Yeah, it was really beautiful, it was very moving. It was particularly
22 gratifying. A lot of people from BC went into the service one way or another. I mean, the
23 55 or so of us who were commissioned in ROTC, that's fine. There were a whole lot of
24 folks who went into the Marines, into the Navy. One guy three or four years ahead of me,
25 was Marine General Shay, a four star. He really laid it out on the line I think in 2008 at
26 BC—Every November 11th, there is a veteran's mass and ceremony, and he was the guest
27 speaker at that particular time in 2008. He said it best, I think. He said, "It's nice to come
28 back to Boston College again." The last time I came back was after I got back from
29 Vietnam, and I was treated as a victim." BC threw—for example BC threw out the Army
30 ROTC department, kicked them off campus. To a lot of us, that was really, really hurtful.
31 The attitude of the administration was, I think, captured by what General Shay said. They

1 looked at us like were poor diluted so and so's for having served. And yet they would
2 turn and glorify the service of alumni in World War II. Yeah, Studs Terkel *The Good*
3 *War*. And it was—to get the memorial established up there was a real struggle. Because
4 there was little support at first from the administration. This thing was done and funded
5 entirely by BC alumni veterans. And when the—when the university president realized
6 that we were going to raise more than half a million bucks, suddenly this became a
7 wonderful university project.

8 JS: Right.

9 RD: Anyway, the thing is done and that's what matters.

10 JS: Yes, sir. Could you describe the memorial?

11 RD: Yeah, I can even send you a link so that you can see the pictures. I can't e-
12 mail you pictures myself because I've got a virus in my computer and you would get one
13 hundred thousand copies of the pictures. It is a wall approximately the height of just
14 above your knees. It is a curving, undulating shape. It has on it every name we could find
15 of every BC alumnus who was killed in the service of his or her country from World War
16 I on.

17 JS: Oh wow.

18 RD: It's not just Vietnam.

19 JS: Yes, sir.

20 RD: Up to and including losses in Afghanistan and Iraq. (talking at once) In our
21 ROTC class, I think we only lost one, John Call. There were others in our class who were
22 killed in Vietnam, but they weren't in ROTC unit. They went through OCS or Marine
23 OCS. There was at least one Silver Star in there. One guy, I think it was Marine,
24 defended an LZ until all his men got out and he didn't. The guy we lost in the ROTC
25 class was a friend. Ironically enough it was not a good friend at first. In fact we couldn't—
26 most of us couldn't stand him because he seemed like such a priss, but we got to know
27 him better in junior and senior year. In fact, he and I lived on the same hall in the dorms.
28 Nice guy once we kind of figured out where each other was, you know in terms of—
29 “You know, John, I don't think I ought to have a glass of Sherry, I prefer a cold beer.”
30 His brother—he had an older brother, Tom, who uh—a lieutenant colonel and advisor to
31 a Vietnamese infantry battalion. I've been with Tom several times at the BC veteran's

1 ceremony. He comes every year. He didn't go to Boston College, but he comes every
2 year. He's a good fellow. He's got some interesting stories about his time with the
3 Vietnamese infantry battalion.

4 JS: I bet, I bet.

5 RD: John—his brother John died in, oh such a sad way. He was—what was he?
6 Medical service? He wasn't a doctor, but he was basically in an admin position out of a
7 base in a town called Duc Pho.

8 JS: Okay, right.

9 RD: One of the things I had to do periodically was to clean off, clean out a
10 helicopter landing zone. You know, y'know they'd burn off grass that had grown up
11 there. This is where the choppers would take off and go out on an operation and get the
12 troops out. This is where they'd bring them back. Apparently, what happened was that
13 some trooper had dropped a grenade in the grass and I don't know whether they were
14 burning it off or what, but John was standing next to it and it went off. One of our
15 classmates was there in Duc Pho with him. They had become very good friends and
16 John's radio, his RTO (Radio Transmission Officer) raced to Paul Delaney told
17 Lieutenant Delaney, "Lieutenant Cole's been injured seriously. A grenade got him." And
18 Paul raced to find John and by that time John was put on a helicopter and flown to
19 Saigon. Paul got on another helicopter, and they chased the first one. John was dead by
20 the time they got to Saigon.

21 JS: mmm, right.

22 RD: His body went to Graves registration unit in Saigon down by Tan Son Nhut.
23 That unit was run by another classmate from BC. Another ROTC guy. He said he saw
24 John's body and he said it was—it was pretty bad. That was something we don't think
25 anybody ever told his brother. Just didn't serve any purpose. We lost another guy from
26 the class who was a Navy pilot. But he didn't die in Vietnam. They were off in a training
27 exercise off north. It was a two-seater. I think it was an A-6 (Grumman A-6 Intruder). He
28 had some kind of engine problem, and he had his back-seater bail out but before Tommy
29 could get out. The thing rolled and crashed, and his brother, who was a couple years
30 ahead of us at BC, his brother was one of the two driving forces behind the memorial.

1 JS: Were most of the guys that were involved with getting the memorial, were
2 they of the Vietnam generation?

3 RD: Yeah, a lot of World War II and Korean Vets, too. Cause they came to see it
4 as—if this could be put—if this could be done then it would be—for them it would
5 overcome what they saw as years of BC having turned its back on their service.

6 JS: Right.

7 RD: Or ignoring their service, whatever. One of the nicest things about getting the
8 memorial established hasn't been—I mean, it's been getting together, of course, with so
9 many of the guys, but it's more than that. Finding out—when the—at the the dedication
10 with so many families there, who had lost somebody in World War II or in Korea. Yeah,
11 there were a lot of Vietnam vets there, you bet. I say General Shay, It's Jack Shean(?).
12 He was the guy who spoke also not only in 2008, but at the dedication in 2009. Once you
13 could see the older people coming up, there were crowds around these listings for World
14 War II. People are still finding out—one of the guys up in Boston will shoot me a copy of
15 the Boston Globe article now and then it comes up about, "Hey, so and so's family came
16 to Boston, found their brother's name." And it turns into a good occasion. (very long
17 pause) Anyway, I'm not sure what else to say about that memorial except I'll be going
18 back up this November, too.

19 JS: Yes, sir.

20 RD: One good thing—one nice piece of fallout from that is that four of us got
21 together last year for three days. My wife and I are fortunate enough we have a small
22 place in Tappahannock, Virginia, on the Rappahannock River. It's small, but it will
23 accommodate four guys and their golf clubs. It's got a decent golf course so we—all four
24 of us had been commissioned together. Three of the four of us had served in Vietnam.
25 While we were down there, we consumed a copious amount of wine and beer. Made a
26 few phone calls to buddies. I'm just afraid if this thing expands too much, we're going to
27 have to move a camper into the back yard down there. It was great fun because one of the
28 guys I had not seen since the day we were commissioned. Yeah, forty-three years.

29 JS: Well, could you talk about the actual commissioning and what it was like?

30 RD: The commissioning? The ceremony? Boy, my memory of that is—I know it
31 was done in the Q forum which was the building on campus that at that time housed the

1 hockey rink. Of course, the ice was off, but it was one of the places where they held
2 ceremonies. In fact, we graduated out of there, too, a couple days later. My mother and
3 father and my youngest brother were there. I can't remember who spoke. I think it was a
4 general. Yeah, I don't know if he was command at Fort Devens outside west of Boston or
5 what, but anyway there were 50 some odd of us—at the same time we had classmates
6 who have finished the Navy program. They were also commissioned with us. I remember
7 the ROTC enlisted cadre lining up to give us our first salutes. You know the tradition,
8 don't you? The silver dollar?

9 JS: No, I don't.

10 RD: Oh, the first enlisted man to salute, you owe him a silver dollar.

11 JS: Yeah, I think I have heard that, right.

12 RD: That was a Sergeant major. Sergeant Major Cote, William Cote, C-O-T-E.
13 He was so sharp. He fought in World War II and Korea, and he actually held a
14 commission in the reserves as a Captain. I think he gotten a battlefield commission.
15 Absolutely no nonsense, as we became seniors, he unbent a little bit. We got to see not
16 just how bright and tough he was, but what a great sense of humor he had. But by God, I
17 think out of the fifty some odd people that got commissioned, he got silver dollars from
18 about forty-eight of them. (both laughing)

19 JS: Right.

20 RD: We carried a few extra silver dollars through the other folks whether or not it
21 was the first salute we got or not. If any of the cadre gave us the salute, we gave them a
22 buck. I remember giving my son when he was commissioned putting a couple of those in
23 his hand and said, "keep them in your pocket," I don't think he knew about it until then.

24 JS: Right, right. This was 1966?

25 RD: Yeah, June—I can probably find the date. It was around the 11th or the 13th.

26 JS: Okay, that's fine.

27 RD: Forty-four years, almost to the day.

28 JS: Yes, sir.

29 RD: Interesting, just realized that.

1 JS: Right. Well, because it was 1966 and of course, Vietnam had the gun by that
2 point, did you—were you paying attention to what was going on then? Did you know
3 much about what was going on in Vietnam?

4 RD: We knew some, surely, we did. We lost some cadre to uh Vietnam. One of
5 the majors, I just thought he was one of the—Major Clark, just one of the sharpest
6 officers, nicest guys. He went over as, I believe an artillery advisor. He was an advisor, I
7 know that. We corresponded a little bit. He was pretty busy. The best of my knowledge
8 he survived fine. He probably had a couple of tours. I remember him writing back to me
9 in my senior year? Probably senior year. Saying, “Hey look, don’t be too consumed with
10 this; this is a war for the professionals. Now you go on, get your degree and teach. Do
11 your service.” I think what Jim Clark was trying to say then, his view of things there was
12 that it was still a relatively small war. It puzzled me because in ’65, that was the year that
13 the 1st Marine Division went ashore at Da Nang. He had a cousin, a lieutenant in the
14 Marines who was with them. In fact, he had been a senior at Boston College when I was a
15 freshman. We all came from the same village, so Billy had a car and he’d be driving me
16 and his brother Terry back and forth on holidays between Long Island and Boston. So,
17 there was a conflict there. We saw the war growing, no question about that. And I think
18 by the time we were seniors, we knew that the odds were very great, increasingly greater
19 that we would see service in Vietnam. The training at Fort Devens was, I would say,
20 about fifty percent or sixty percent conventional training in terms of fixed lines of
21 defense, infantry operations, say, based on Korea or World War II, but there was an
22 increasing amount of small unit tactics, emphasis on jungle. There’s no jungle up there in
23 Fort Devens, but it was pretty bloody hot and muggy and plenty of forest and scrub to go
24 through. Why do they always have the ugliest bases? Even if they’re beautiful they have
25 a pocket of ugliness waiting for you and that’s where you’ll train. I distinctly recall I
26 think I had this in the questionnaire, too. There was one mission trained on, they made
27 me a scout. We tried to lead this platoon through the woods to attack this objective. I
28 guess I did a pretty good job as a scout spotting any snipers or finding the objective, and
29 this that or the other. Because in the After action review the senior NCO (Non-
30 Commissioned Officer) had been the observer said that I was a natural born jungle

1 warfare expert. I remembered my blood ran cold when he said that. “Holy shit, what does
2 that mean?” It’s 1965 and I think I know what that means. (both laughing)

3 JS: Right, this was during the summer camp?

4 RD: Yeah, it was during summer camp.

5 JS: Well after you got your commission and graduated, where did you go at that
6 point? Was it the infantry officer’s basic, or?

7 RD: No, I went off to graduate school.

8 JS: Oh, it was graduate school at that point, okay.

9 RD: Yeah, and then in November ’68, yes, I did go to infantry officer basic. At
10 that time—now the Army has a good idea that any intelligence officer—I was
11 commissioned in intelligence which gives rights to all sorts of jokes about what takes and
12 what doesn’t. The Army rightfully believes that if you’re going to work in intelligence,
13 you better understand some other aspects of the Army that you’re supposed to serve as an
14 intelligence officer. So, at that time every intelligence officer had to, before he went to
15 intelligence school, had to go through one of the three combat armed schools or engineer
16 or signal for the two combat support branches you could go. I wanted infantry, I got
17 infantry and then went up to Fort—that was at Fort Benning in Georgia in November of
18 ’68 to early February of ’69. Then finished up at Benning and went to Fort Holabird in
19 Baltimore. At that time, that was the headquarters of Army intelligence since moved to
20 Fort Huachuca, Arizona, and Fort Holabird is no more.

21 JS: Okay, alright. Before we get into that training, I didn’t mean to get you out of
22 order, but let me ask you a few more questions about grad school at that time period. I
23 know you mentioned that some of your professors being appalled that you were an Army
24 officer. Could you talk a little bit more about that? And/also, was there a protest
25 movement on the campus at that time?

26 RD: You know, one clarification I don’t think the professors were appalled. There
27 were students. —

28 JS: Oh okay, I’m sorry.

29 RD: Who were absolutely shocked. I remember one fellow in particular and one
30 of my classmates in grad school who saw an Army decal on my car. It was a used car.
31 That decal had been there when I bought it. I didn’t put it on there, but he said something

1 to me one evening and he said, “What’s this Army reserve thing on your side window?” I
2 said, “Oh, it’s been there.” “I thought maybe you were in the Army reserves?” I said,
3 “Well, as a matter of fact I am.” And he looked at me and he says, “Oh, what are you?” I
4 said, “Actually, I’m a lieutenant.” He said, “In what?” I said, “Intelligence.” I thought—I
5 think one of his fears was that I was a counter-intelligence operative on the campus. I had
6 to assure him. I said, “I’ll even show you the orders I have that give me stay or a delay.
7 No, I’m an honest to God grad student.” There were some others on the campus who,
8 when they heard that I was an Army officer in the reserves in intelligence, they stayed
9 away from me. That’s alright. They were undergrads and I think—at that time there was
10 such an aura of paranoia that the government was out to get you. I distinctly recall being
11 in the library one day, doing research, and hearing two male seniors talking about what
12 they were going to do or not to, when they graduated in a few more months. Discussion
13 going underground or going to Canada. These guys were so paranoid, but they’re so
14 afraid of the draft. Yes, there were protests to directly answer your question. There
15 certainly were protests, there were lots of them. I remember looking and being in the
16 student union building and being up on the second floor and going down into the open
17 atrium where there was a lie down of students who threw their bodies on the floor in front
18 of the desk where two Navy officers were—had to y’know come answer questions and
19 recruit. The whole idea of the protests being impossible for anybody to walk to get to the
20 desk without stepping on our bodies. As I look down, I’m looking at the two Navy
21 officers and they were just sitting there looking at each other laughing. Now, obviously
22 they’d seen this crap before and every once in a while, one of them would get up and get
23 a couple of cups of coffee or some cokes or something like that and the students would
24 make way so they didn’t spill their coffee or their coke on the kids laying down. But as
25 soon as he passed the sea would close back over. Yeah, they besieged the administration
26 building every once in a while. You know, it can get pretty damn cold in Binghamton.
27 Most of those attempts to seize the administration building never occurred until warmer
28 weather.

29 JS: Right. (Laughing)

30 RD: Man, one time we had wind chills of fifty below. And I can guarantee you
31 there were no outdoor protests that winter.

1 JS: Right.

2 RD: One of the kids who was up there at the time, as an undergraduate, was Tony
3 Kornheiser. I don't recall—I think he was—now I can't say I recall him from when I was
4 on campus. He was probably a sophomore when I was graduating.

5 JS: Well, what did you think of the protests at the time seeing all this? What did
6 you think of it?

7 RD: It seemed to me to be a far cry from Boston College. A nice, conservative,
8 Catholic, Jesuit institution in Boston. That hadn't yet thrown ROTC off its campus. So
9 just kind of a shock to go to a very liberal public institution. Came to understand that it
10 takes all kinds. Everybody's got different viewpoints and certainly the protesters were
11 vocal, but they were not the only ones on the campus. There were plenty of folks who
12 shared, I think, quietly shared the idea, "Hey, if we're called, we'll go." I have to say that
13 I think most of the ones that I knew better were strongly opposed to the war. I don't
14 know, I didn't argue with them after a while. I distinctly recall the very opening days of
15 grad school they held a reception for the new grad students with the department faculty
16 and watching an almost fisticuffs between a new grad student and one of the more liberal
17 professors. I thought it was childish. I was disappointed in grad student's arguments in
18 support of the war because I thought they were superficial. Watching the professor get
19 apoplectic and answering in almost equally superficial terms, this is going to be a long
20 two years. I may not keep my mouth shut. I was there to get a degree, that's all.

21 JS: Had you, yourself, formed much of an opinion of the war at this point? Did
22 you—I mean, you saw this and you had your opinions and all that, but what was your
23 opinion on the war at this point? Did you have a stance on it yet?

24 RD: In '66 I think I was still pretty much a wholehearted supporter. By the time I
25 graduated in June of '68 I had a lot more questions about it. By that time, we'd been
26 through Tet. Johnson, I remember watching Johnson on television at the end of March in
27 '68. "I will not seek, nor will I accept the nomination to be your president for another
28 term." I did not see Tet as—I saw Tet as a military victory for South Vietnam and
29 America. Did they have the element of surprise? Yes, in most cases they did, absolutely
30 no questions about it. But even then, I could see, "Hey look, the only thing they were able
31 to hold was the citadel in Hue. They were getting their asses kicked and shoved back out

1 there because they were once. Their willingness to come out and make a stand also made
2 them vulnerable. They took a hell of a beating. Psychologically, however, boy, I think
3 that was when I first began to realize that this country was not willing to take the kinds of
4 losses that they had seen in World War II. Not that these were the kinds of losses. It was
5 big. I also realized that, “Hey look, that’s probably where I’m going to wind up in
6 another year or two, once I get through infantry school and intelligence school I’ll
7 probably wind up in Vietnam.” It was a scary thought. I wondered about the tactics that
8 we had used and more about why, why had the enemy had such an element of surprise on
9 its side? What the hell were we doing or not doing to discern the enemy’s intentions?
10 And I think I became much more disillusioned over the next couple of years before I got
11 to Vietnam. As I realized, the country just was not willing to back this war. And yet we
12 were going to continue to fight it. If we weren’t going to back it, why were we spending
13 blood and treasure? Of course, I think the overall impression in the media was that we
14 were losing it. That we had poured half a million troops in there and we had light at the
15 end of the tunnel, that awful phrase, and then we got, you know what kicked out of us to
16 Tet. I became a lot more cynical. I certainly wondered about the way we had approached
17 the war seemed to be we had such technological advantages, such firepower advantages.
18 Yet these people were not going to quit. We were doing something wrong, but we just
19 couldn’t find the right buttons to push to make this happen the way we wanted it to
20 happen. I think by the time we—by the time I got to infantry school, it was a matter of,
21 “I’m going to learn everything I can to stay alive.” It was, by that time, a very real thing.
22 It was personal. And the infantry training at Fort Benning I thought was excellent. Parts
23 of it could be boring. Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy, I look back on it and what I really
24 remember are things that were geared towards fighting in those kinds of environments. It
25 was all built around infantry tactics in Vietnam. Small units, Small units. That was good.
26 It didn’t pay to be disillusioned because you knew you were going anyway so you might
27 as well suck it up, learn everything you can, stop your bitching and get on with life.
28 You’re going to have a job to do, you’re going to have men to lead. You better—you
29 can’t lead them if you got a losers attitude. Your main job, I figured, was try to help me if
30 I ever wound up with men under my command in a combat situation. I wanted to be as
31 effective and helpful as I could. The main thing I wanted to be sure of is if I took good

1 care of them. We'd figure out a way to do whatever we had to do. I wanted to make sure
2 that they got home. As it turned out I never really had to worry—do that. I didn't know
3 that at the time. In contrast, Fort Holabird, the instructions up there—with the exception
4 of the first two weeks of the post when everybody took a Southeast Asia orientation
5 course. My training in intelligence was totally conventional warfare intelligence. I was
6 trained and the MOS was 9668 Area Studies Officer, and it was a classified MOS, but it
7 basically was Agent Handler, recruiter in handling.

8 JS: Okay.

9 RD: Okay, we can sure use some good intelligence in Vietnam, but the whole
10 tactics (??) were geared towards Europe, the Cold War, Japan, penetrating China,
11 penetrating North Korea, Jesus. I think the guys who were at Holabird training in combat
12 intelligence, 9301 was their MOS, they had a six-week course. I had a six-month course
13 or almost six-months. I think the combat intelligence guys—all there. They told us that
14 some of these guys had been with us in infantry school. They said, "Yeah, our stuff is all
15 geared to Vietnam cause we're all going over to be staff officers—staff intelligence
16 officers at Battalion level or higher." So, theirs was much more practical. I think we had
17 about two hundred or so lieutenants in the infantry company—in the IOBC class. I think
18 about fifty of us went on to Intel. The rest went—I think almost all the rest of the guys,
19 the infantry officers went to Vietnam. I know we lost, by my calculations I think we lost
20 four or five out of that two hundred. That's not too bad, but that was 1969. Drawdowns—
21 well, at least the level of force was stabilized. Maybe drawdowns had started. Lost one
22 guy over there who's been a good friend in infantry school. He died up in Cantu
23 Province, Pleiku. I think that was December 7th of '69. I did not really know the other
24 guys in our class that I know we lost. I found their names on the wall and compared them
25 to a list, a class list that I saved from Fort Benning, but I can't say that I knew the other
26 fellows well. I can't recall their faces, but Tom Gill I remember. Almost everybody in
27 intelligence class with me went to Vietnam, almost. One guy got Okinawa and another
28 guy got the Philippines. My best friend got Japan. I'm trying to remember; I think
29 somebody got Thailand. I got Germany and that was the stroke of luck, unbelievable
30 luck. I think everybody else went to Vietnam. I saw one of the guys who had gone to
31 Vietnam. I ran into him again in Germany, Phil Brown from West Virginia. Totally had

1 gotten—he had broken his ankle so badly playing basketball in Vietnam that they had to
2 get him out of the country for the operations. When they finished, they sent him to
3 Germany where he met a really nice gal who I think was a widow. Her husband had been
4 killed in Vietnam. They married to the best of my knowledge, Phil stayed in. Yeah, I ran
5 into Phil in Germany probably the summer of 1970. I had just gotten orders, I think it was
6 around the 4th of July, 1970 I had gotten orders, alert orders that I would be levied in
7 September and I'd be sent to Fort Bragg for training and then onto Vietnam in the
8 Phoenix Program.

9 JS: Alright, before we get to that, I got to ask a few more questions about your
10 training up to that point. Did you feel that the training that you had been through, the
11 infantry officer's basic course and the intelligence course, Southeast Asian orientation
12 course, did you feel that it had prepared you pretty well as far as being an officer in the
13 military and the jobs that you would be doing later on?

14 RD: Okay, I'm going to refer back to the questionnaire on that. I want to be
15 consistent. Let's see, here it is. This is in part three of the questionnaire, I think. Like I
16 said, ROTC basic, that was World War II conventional training. It's not much emphasis
17 on jungle warfare, but some. Benning, extremely practical, very Vietnam oriented, heavy
18 emphasis on leadership at the platoon and company level. The instructors almost all
19 veterans from Vietnam. I thought, like I said in the questionnaire, I think now that was
20 excellent leadership training. The Southeast Asia orientation course was helpful because I
21 think it got into a little bit more of South Vietnamese culture, history, geography; but it
22 was only a couple of weeks. The area studies officer course was hell—I never worked as
23 an agent officer recruiter. And even when asked in Vietnam if I would take it on, I
24 declined. It just was—the training, yeah, you could take the training, the concepts of it
25 and adapt those concepts to a Vietnamese context. In the training itself at Fort Holabird,
26 there was very little emphasis that I can recall on Vietnam. It was almost all on
27 penetration, recruitment, in a Cold War European context. Now, obviously there were
28 operators in Vietnam in the various services in intelligence branches who did recruit. I'm
29 sure they were using many of the same concepts and they had been adapted and adopted
30 to the Vietnamese situation. But I did not feel that training at Fort Holabird prepared me
31 to serve as a case officer for area studies officer in Vietnam. That would have had to take

1 on a whole new—I think that would have required an additional course of study if you
2 want. Now, the stuff at Fort Bragg, however, where we were in a class. I think there were
3 twenty-six of us. We were all being trained to work in the Phoenix Program. That was
4 obviously Vietnam centered. I thought that on the whole that training was very good.
5 Gave us the general overview, gave us a feeling for what it was like to operate at a
6 district or a province level. Working as an advisor. We got a lot of language training,
7 three hours a day, and every day for I think six to eight weeks or more. The Vietnamese
8 instructors in the language courses were themselves, in a number of cases veterans of the
9 conflict there. Some had worked in intelligence work over there. Most of them, however,
10 were civilians who had come to the United States and were working for the Army there
11 and a lot of them were running restaurants inside of Fort Bragg.

12 JS: Right.

13 RD: So, we would hit their restaurants at night and it was good food, very good
14 food. I thought that the training at Bragg was very helpful. Although, I had to laugh. I
15 remember one day the lunch break, we picked up a copy of the Army Times. And by
16 God, don't they have an article in there about our class, MASA-01. Twenty-six, "quote"
17 "unquote" "handpicked volunteers serving in the first class the Army has ever trained to
18 operate in the Phoenix/*Phụng Hoàng* program. We looked at each other, "Whoa, did you
19 volunteer?" And the class leader did, Major Philips, but he didn't volunteer for this
20 program, he just volunteered to be an advisor. He had already served a tour of duty in
21 Vietnam with the 173rd Airborne Brigade. He said to me one time he was going to go
22 back to Vietnam, he would not—he would prefer to serve as an advisor than to serve with
23 an American unit. You know, by now the drawdown had started and I think the morale
24 problems may have been a factor. It might also have been that he recognized that by 1970
25 the emphasis or the American emphasis on the war had shifted away from big units to
26 small unit and counter insurgency warfare. By now General Abrams had taken over from
27 General Westmoreland and Abrams had a very different view on how that war should be
28 fought.

29 JS: Right.

30 RD: You've probably been—seen Lewis Sorley's book.

31 JS: Oh, yes sir, yes sir.

1 RD: That's a very valuable overview, I think.

2 JS: Oh absolutely.

3 RD: Anyway, have I answered your question on the training?

4 JS: Yeah, yeah you have. One other question about training. Memorable moments
5 or funny moments? I know you talked about a few in the questionnaire, but could you
6 talk about some of those moments that kind of stick out in your mind from training for
7 the actual interview?

8 RD: I remember the night at Fort Bra—Fort Benning when they took us out to
9 practice night defensive, practice night defense. They would put us in bunkers, trenches,
10 and we'd have M-60s. We'd often—y'know they'd bring a squad up, a couple squads up
11 put them in a line. They'd operate the M-60s and you'd be shooting at targets that were
12 illuminated by flare. This is probably, see, we started in November. This is probably late
13 December, early January. We're all getting a little bored. Somebody started shooting at
14 the flares. All up and down the line, every one of them. Turned those machine guns up
15 and started shooting at the flares, the hell with the targets. And these—the cadres were
16 going ballistic. They were running up and down behind us, "Put down that weapon. Put
17 that damn gun down. Get the hell out of the line." Then they bring up another group to
18 take over and we tell them—hell we didn't have to tell them they'd seen what we were
19 doing. So, they'd fire off another round of flares and this new group shoots up at the
20 flares, too. Oh my God, mutiny, mutiny. I remembered being, having our asses chewed so
21 badly on that bus back from the training area. They ran us pretty good for the next few
22 days, but we all left. It was time, guess was it Ranger week? I don't know, the
23 combination of infantry training and IOBC (Infantry Officer Basic Course), is what they
24 called Ranger week. You went out for a week, and you lived tactically. You went through
25 helicopter assaults, you were attacked by the Op (Opposition) forces, and you had night
26 maneuvers. You also, at one point, we had this—we actually captured the opposing—the
27 captain who was running—the cadre captain who was running the Op forces. We didn't
28 humiliate the guy, but he kept telling us, "No, no guys, it's off-problem, I've got to go
29 back to my unit." "Oh no you don't, oh no you don't. Take him down to headquarters and
30 let them grill him down there." "Guy's it's off-problem, off-problem." That was the
31 phrase "Off-Problem" When the cadre officer said that or an NCO, you're supposed to

1 relax. Yeah, bullshit. “You guys have been making our life miserable for a week and now
2 you’re going to say off-problem because you want to go back and talk to your boys?
3 (laughter) Oh, take him down, make him sit on his butt down in company headquarters
4 just to get a little of our own back.” My friend, Tom Gill. I just remember that day in
5 training when we were going through all the climbing this and crawling under that, and
6 whatever. We came to this—I think they called it the Ranger tower. You went up cargo
7 nets thirty-five feet up to the tower with your M-16s swung over your soldier. You got up
8 there and you were to grab this note that slanted down, tied down. If you put a—think of
9 a zip line only there was no zip on it, it was hands and feet. You grab it with your hands,
10 swing your legs out, cross them over the line and then you go down hand and over hand.
11 Well, Tom was just in front of me and he’s a big fella. He reaches up and he’s got
12 everything. He’s got his feet over the line and his hands over the line and the M-16s off
13 his soldier. He didn’t have it swung the right way. As it slips off his soldier he lifts off
14 and grabs for it. He fell thirty-five feet and broke his arm badly enough so that he
15 couldn’t finish with our class. I tried to get down to him and, “Hey, just keep going.
16 We’ll take care of him.” He wound up in another infantry school class. He had to go
17 through the whole damn thing all over again. I guess that wasn’t very funny, but
18 watching him let go. “Oh, don’t do that!” Jesus. Intel, we did some training as an agent
19 handler you were also trained to operate as an agent so that you understood what they had
20 to do, in terms of carrying false documentation, carrying out espionage missions, picking
21 up intelligence, passing messages this that and the other. Well, one of the things we had
22 to do, the big exercise there was we had to run an agent. We had a class, I don’t know,
23 thirty people. So, you would run one of your classmates as an agent on a mission that
24 lasted, I don’t know, four or five days in a city where that person has never been. Our
25 class went west. Seattle, Portland, Salt Lake City I think were the three. So, I would run a
26 classmate as an agent in one of those cities. Another classmate would run me as an agent
27 in one of those cities. We practiced infiltration—Fort Howard, outside of Baltimore on
28 veteran’s hospital property. There’s this old fort. It’s still there. It was built probably
29 prior to World War I. Big concrete thing that had coastal defense guns. The intelligence
30 school had basically taken it over and used it as a training ground. We had Navy guys in
31 our class and they were infiltrated by submarine. They had real stuff man. They got off a

1 submarine into a rubber boat off of the shore. The Army guys, we would do, I don't
2 know, we started out by reporting to the classroom and the next thing you know we were
3 put in busses and taken out to Fort Howard. As we went to the gates, got off the bus.
4 Okay, you're now in a foreign country. Woah, we've just been infiltrated by school bus.
5 So we would go into this building, change, get into our civilian clothes which we had
6 stepped a foot out there, pick up our airline tickets and our false identification. Then we
7 would—We get back on the bus and go to BWI Airport and fly off. We did have to
8 practice on a separate occasion leaving this safe house out there at Fort Howard and
9 working out way through the forest to an exfiltration point by the sea walk. We had to
10 avoid the guards. Again, it's kind of a European setting barbed wire, watch towers. It
11 reminded you more of the pictures of the border fences between East and West Germany.
12 I remember, I never got captured because I crawled so slowly and quietly and carefully
13 that by the time, I got to the guide post, the guide had fallen asleep and I woke him up
14 and he said, "Oh yeah, you're two hours late. The sub left already. Not that we were
15 going to get on the submarine, but "you're so late that it doesn't matter, you're stuck."
16 We got out on our training missions and geez, I know we had a bet in the class. There
17 was this one guy, whoever got him—and he was not impressive. We didn't think he was
18 really going to be a very good agent. A bunch of us threw some money into a kiddy.
19 Anybody that got to run this guy had to run this guy as an agent? You're kidding? You
20 got to be kidding. Oh my god, it was—now what happened to him when you look at it,
21 "Oh man, didn't we tell you? Didn't they tell us, and didn't we tell you in pre-missioned
22 briefing? Don't go picking up things that you don't know anything, about like an
23 envelope. Some stranger walks up to you and gives you an envelope and you take it?" Oh
24 man, we had the cooperation of the local police in all these cities. At least some elements
25 of the police, not all. Of course, there would be Army counterintelligence agents who
26 would act as the enemy. At some point or another, everybody was going to be taken
27 prisoner and interrogated. Now that I think about it, it wasn't really bad. I remember
28 being made to stand in my underwear with a blind fold on holding a trashcan, a
29 wastebasket at arm's length and being interrogated. One of the guys doing the
30 interrogation, I guess as he walked by me one time just whacked the waste basket and I
31 must have jumped three feet in the air. They thought that was great. Boy, they started

1 beating on that trash can. Ah, what noise. There was no physical beating or anything.
2 They always made sure at the end of the interrogation they would go off-problem and
3 make sure that you were okay. At one point, I got picked up on the street. I was in
4 Portland that was a botched transfer, a botched attempt to transfer data. You know, it was
5 deliberately botched by the supposed agent who was the wife of one of the
6 counterintelligence officers. Yeah, and she knew what was going on. You're supposed to
7 have all these signals and bona fides and remarks, so that you can be sure that you're
8 dealing with somebody you should be dealing with. So, she deliberately screwed that up.
9 I refused to take the package. She stuffed it in my hand and the next thing I know two
10 guys have me up against the wall or a store window down on Main Street in Portland.
11 People walking by looking at them. What the hell's going on? These fellows go through
12 the street interrogation and whatever. I produced my phony documents and this, that, and
13 the other. Finally, they're done. They're going to pretend that I'm okay. There's nothing
14 that they need to hold me for. One of the guys goes, "Off-problem." I go, "Oh okay,
15 what?" He said, "Hey, you're from Westbury, New York, aren't you?" I said, "Yeah." He
16 said, "I thought I saw that in your background that they gave to us." He said, "Do you
17 know so and so?" He names this girl that I went to grade school with. I said, "Yeah." He
18 said, "I remember her, and it turns out this guy that was from Long Island, he dated this
19 girl and he wanted to know, is she still single?" I said, "Yeah, but not for long." The guy
20 I played football with in high school, a Marine, he's all shot up and he's back from the
21 war. He's been chasing—" The guy goes, "I know that fellow. Did she finally say yes?"
22 and I said, "Yeah, she did." So here we are on an espionage mission in Portland and
23 we're discussing somebody else's love life that's on Long Island. One of the guys who
24 was on a mission in Portland at the same time acting as an agent to someone else, he was
25 hustled out of a hotel by Army counterintelligence agents. This is part of the problem in
26 the mission. One of the hotel staff saw it and thought it was weird, he called the cops. I
27 think I had this in the questionnaire. Well, I still have some of the newspaper clippings
28 from the Portland paper.

29 JS: Really?

30 RD: Oh yeah, this got blown up and it had it the paper for several days. Some
31 kind of strange thing was going on in Portland. We got back to Fort Holabird, the fellows

1 name was Cecil Jones, that's his real name. In the article in the papers. "Oh, Cecil Jones
2 obviously an alias." (said in a Walter Cronkite impression) We were laughing our heads
3 off until Cecil got yanked out of class after we got back to Holabird he got yanked out
4 one day. There were some senior officers there and they took him to the Pentagon to
5 debrief him and this is how we're going to handle it. He came back and he was—I don't
6 know who in God's name he saw down there, but he just looked at us and we said,
7 "Cecil, what's going on?" He said, "Fellows, I can't say another word about this. Not one
8 word. Don't ask me." So, we didn't, we couldn't. But it was kind of funny to see some of
9 the police were quite seriously concerned about this. The press certainly was, and the
10 hotel was. When it finally came out that this was just some kind of an Army mission, it
11 turned out in the press, at least, it was characterized as a counterintelligence mission. I
12 guess the idea was that we were not going to say that, "Yeah, we're training Army agents
13 or our Army people to recruit and run agents in a positive intelligence as opposed to a
14 counterintelligence fashion." Anyway, we had a good laugh at Cecil for that. I'm
15 rambling a lot.

16 JS: No, no not at all. These are good stories about your training. Can we take a
17 real quick break for just a moment?

18 RD: Absolutely, let me know when you're ready.

19 JS: Okay. Before we took our break, we were talking a little bit about some
20 training and some memorable moments from training. Again, before getting into
21 Vietnam, I wonder if you could talk a little bit about your assignment in Germany. What
22 your duties were there and when you were there and just a little bit about that.

23 RD: Sure.

24 JS: Okay.

25 RD: I was in Germany from September of '69 to September of 1970 when I
26 shipped out for Germany and flew over, I was under the impression that I was going to go
27 to the 66th MI group in Munich. They did operate, they had case officers, various study
28 officers and specialists to __ (??) working in that line of work. I thought I'd be joining
29 them, I didn't. All of those orders, of course, go through Army headquarters in
30 Heidelberg. Someone in Heidelberg saw My 201 file, my personnel file, saw that I had a
31 masters in history and that, oh, we need somebody to run the intelligence library.

1 Obviously, this man has spent a great deal of time in a library. (laughter) Oh god, they
2 were so right, but this man wanted no part of a library, I had enough. I was ready for a
3 break and if the break was the Army, so be it, but please, no libraries. I was really
4 disappointed when they told me I wasn't going to Munich. Then when they told me I
5 would be running a library, I think I almost cried. I did, it was certainly not a strenuous
6 thing. I had a Staff Sergeant (SSgt) who later was promoted to Sergeant First Class (SFC)
7 and he ran it. There were two junior enlisted people, a draftsman and a female trooper
8 who—they took care of all the cataloguing, gathering, providing of the documents to
9 requesters. This was in an intelligence headquarters in Heidelberg. What made the tour a
10 little more interesting was every junior intelligence officer at headquarters, if he passed a
11 certain background check, would serve a time in what they called CISC, Central
12 Indication Special Intelligence Center. You would serve as a watch officer and you would
13 have a watch NCO, and a junior enlisted private. You two would operate as a team. The
14 watch team, there would always be a watch team on duty. Their job would be to route
15 message traffic to the proper analysts and that was interesting. You would see all sorts of
16 stuff. Every morning, the watch team would prepare the briefing book for the major
17 general who was the DCSI, Deputy Chief of Staff of Intelligence. You'd prepare his
18 book, and you'd have one or two other copies for Colonels or whatever. Putting that book
19 together was always interesting because we would look at the traffic that would come in
20 and they would always have a section on Vietnam, section on Soviet Forces Germany,
21 various Soviet bloc countries—intelligence reported over the previous twenty-four hours
22 or whatever. So that would be the General's briefing book. We got to see a lot of
23 interesting stuff. At the end of my time on the watch desk I asked if I could stay on the
24 watch rather than go back to the library. They didn't get too many requests from junior
25 officers to stay on the watch. Almost everybody wanted to go back to their unit or their
26 previous desk job, whatever it was. That was a nine to five or eight to four job. To watch,
27 you were on shift work. We would get off a couple weekends a month and sometimes we
28 would have a stretch like seven or eight days in a row or six days in a row off. And it
29 wasn't leave; you weren't charged leave. So what that meant was you could take off. You
30 had a car, or you jumped on a train, you could go see different things in Germany. That
31 was cool. I wasn't married, young, single 1st Lieutenant made Captain while I was over

1 there. Money wasn't bad, didn't have much expenses, spent the last four or five months, I
2 think, living with a German family in a small town near Heidelberg. They always had an
3 American officer living there so when another officer on the watch desk, Joe Manguna,
4 when Joe got his orders to Vietnam, he took me out to meet his German family and I
5 became the next tenant. When I got orders, I found somebody who would be their next
6 tenant. It was fun, it was fun. I go to—Joe and I went to London for four or five days. I
7 took off, drove down into Alsace to Loraine. Hey, you know, for a World War I buff.

8 JS: Oh, absolutely.

9 RD: You got to go.

10 JS: Right.

11 RD: I remember the young Frenchman had really cold, hard stares at my car and
12 me with US Army plates. The waitresses were very friendly. In fact, my French was
13 rusty, and I asked if I could speak German and would that offend the waitress and she
14 said—she answered in perfectly fluent German, “Not at all, not at all. No problem.” So
15 that's what I did for most of my time in Germany.

16 JS: Did you encounter any—or was there any anti-Americanism at all among the
17 Germans? Did you see much of that? Was there any war protest type things going on in
18 Germany at that time?

19 RD: Heidelberg is a student town.

20 JS: Okay.

21 RD: University is, I don't know, a thousand years old, five hundred years old,
22 whatever. No blatant anti-Americanism on the streets for the most part. If you went into a
23 German student's club at night, you know, because they had some good music, the beer
24 was better, whatever. Your short haircut was pretty much an indication that you were an
25 American GI. You got some cold stares. They didn't throw you out, but you knew you
26 really weren't that welcome in that particular setting. There were some protests in the
27 streets of Heidelberg, not often, but some. I don't—it wasn't necessarily an anti-
28 American thing, or an anti-Vietnam thing as much as it was students being students and
29 protesting against what they thought were their own governments' oppressive policies.
30 The German police and fire departments were tanned and buff. By golly jingoes there
31 would be a fire truck or a water truck with a water cannon. If it got too bad, the cannons

1 would open up and they'd wash a few students down the street. Everybody understood
2 that was okay, time to go. The kids would curse at the cops and the cops would turn the
3 water on again or whatever. It didn't last long and it all seemed to be rules of the game
4 that everybody understood. Most of the German folks that I met were very happy. To
5 know an American soldier what a big deal. I remember one German taxi driver who gave
6 me a ride to work one day, and he told me how he said, "Thankfully, thanks to God I was
7 captured by the Americans at Remagen Bridge." He said, "I was sixteen years old, and I
8 didn't want to be taken by the Russians and I was so happy when the Americans told me
9 to put my hands up." I saw some Germans who worked for the American—for the, the
10 Army, they could be really stuffy." When I first got there—when you first get there you
11 go to the housing office and you get your billeting assignment and it was almost like they
12 ran the American Army. It was disconcerting. "Now you have to come back this
13 afternoon, we can't take you here right now. Go away." (In a German impression/accent)
14 "Oh, excuse me, I thought you worked for us." "Don't be fresh, lieutenant, we'll get you
15 a colonel." (In a German impression/accent)

16 JS: Right. (laughter)

17 RD: That was when you—most of the Germans I met were very sympathetic.
18 They may not have thought we were—that the Vietnam War was a good thing to be
19 doing, but they were very sympathetic to the soldiers. Maybe they looked at us the same
20 way they looked at some of their own soldiers towards the end of World War II. They're
21 doing their duty; they're doing the best they can in a bad situation. One of the advantages
22 of living with a German family in a small village was you got to know people. The family
23 I lived with threw a farewell party for me and one of the couples and good friends there
24 and became some friends of mine came. He had been captured by the Russians on the
25 Eastern Front in 1943 or '44. They had not returned to Germany until like 1955. Yeah,
26 he'd been held in Siberian Gulags. I remembered him just telling me, "Look, don't be a
27 hero. If it comes to it and you can't do anything else, put your weapon down and
28 surrender." I remember saying to him "Yeah!" and in German, I know just the words,
29 "*nicht schissen, nicht schissen*" He looked at me and said, "I don't think that's going to
30 work." It's supposed to be *nicht schießen*." I said, "Oh what did I say?" he said, "No
31 shit."

1 JS: (both laughing)
2 RD: Oh yeah, that's right shit, okay. That wouldn't have been too good, you
3 know, telling the VC (Viet Cong), "No shit."
4 JS: Right.
5 RD: We corresponded even when I was in Vietnam.
6 JS: Oh really?
7 RD: I came back, I corresponded with the family whom I'd lived. They were just
8 sweet. My mom would send a Christmas gift package over to them and they would send
9 back packages of German coffee which was really good. I got a package in Vietnam; I
10 couldn't believe it. The family made homemade schnapps. Everybody in the village made
11 their own schnapps. I got a bottle of homemade schnapps shipped all the way from
12 Waldhilsbach in Germany eating in Phan Rang, Vietnam. (Whistle sound)
13 JS: Right.
14 RD: Had to make sure that disappeared before I had to carry it home. I got home
15 and there was another bottle waiting. Germany was a really good time. I put on—I'd
16 gone over, I was about 170 and I came back, and I was 180. Oh god, I wish I could say I
17 was 180 today. I remember feeling bloated. Getting down to 175 pounds in very good
18 shape at the end of the Fort Bragg training session. I came out of Vietnam, I was 148/149.
19 JS: Oh wow.
20 RD: I had a decent job there, too, so it was hot. So that—so that was Germany.
21 JS: Did you follow Vietnam pretty closely when you were in Germany?
22 RD: Oh absolutely. I mean, it was part of the job.
23 JS: Did you still—thinking at this point—well, during this time period did you
24 still think that you would still probably end up going there?
25 RD: Oh yeah, oh yeah, we knew, we knew. I was told when I got the assignment
26 to Germany—this was a favor that I had earned from my class leader at Fort Holabird. I
27 did him a favor—A couple of us have done a favor to him. He had a friend down in the
28 Pentagon working in MI-OPO (??) (Editor's note: Unknown what department RD speaks
29 of, assumed to be Officer Personnel Management) officer personnel something, but
30 working on assignments. So, he got my friend—one of my friends assigned to Japan and
31 I got Germany, but it was—we were told, "Hey, it's only for a year." Now, the guy who

1 got Japan stayed there for more than a year; that worked out good, but Germany, no. That
2 was year. When I got over there, they were levying Lieutenants and Captains after a year
3 in Germany, even if they were married and had kids. During the course of the year, they
4 had scaled it back until they were only levying unmarried junior officers, who had not yet
5 served in Vietnam. I don't know how they figured out the senior officer thing, but for a
6 junior officer you knew if you were in Germany you only had a year and it was almost to
7 the day.

8 JS: So, you knew after the year in Germany was over, as soon as you got back
9 from the states (United States) the next stop would be Vietnam?

10 RD: It was Fort Bragg for me (??).

11 JS: Right, right.

12 RD: While we were at Bragg, we found out which corps area in Vietnam we
13 would go to; one (I), two (II), three (III), or four (IV). I went to II Corps, that's what I
14 had asked for.

15 JS: Why II Corps?

16 RD: Dammed if I know. Probably because I Corps was hot. I mean, in terms of
17 combat.

18 JS: Right, yeah.

19 RD: Of course, II Corps, depending on where you were, if you were out on the tri-
20 border area; Kon Tum/Pleiku, that was no picnic. The Delta (Mekong River Delta) just
21 didn't look like—I didn't want to go to the Delta. I don't know, just something about I
22 don't want to be down there. II Corps—It seemed to be more interesting geographically.
23 You know, sometimes—I don't know, I don't know.

24 JS: Well, I think this is probably a good stopping point for today. Let me go ahead
25 and stop the recording.

1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr. Rod Dwyer. Today is June 25,
3 2010, and this is interview session number two. Okay, when we left off last time, we had
4 talked about some of your training and your time in Germany. We had briefly discussed
5 the advisory training program, but I wonder if we could talk a little bit more about that
6 today. If you could talk a little bit more in detail about that actual training program and
7 the value of it.

8 Rod Dwyer: Yeah, okay. Well, I got orders to go to Fort Bragg to report in
9 September. Fort Bragg was, and I think still is—well, at that time certainly was the head
10 of—it's the essential location for training advisors.

11 JS: Okay.

12 RD: We were in a course called MASA-01, Military Assistant Security Advisor
13 course number one. There were twenty-six or twenty-eight of us. One Major, a whole
14 bunch of Captains, and I guess a couple of 1st Lieutenants. Everybody—everybody in
15 there was an intelligence officer. Most of them had been trained to counterintelligence. I
16 think myself and one or two other guys may have been trained as Agent Handlers. The
17 course ran from September—late September to early December. Yeah, mid-December, I
18 think, in 1970. I don't know if I told you that the class was the first one, the first formal
19 Army training, and Army intelligence training for the Phoenix Program. At some point a
20 decision had been made that the Phoenix Program was going to be expanded and the
21 Army was going to provide the base of manpower for it. Prior to this time, Army
22 intelligence officers have definitely served in the Phoenix Program. I think it was mostly
23 an OJT (On-the-Job Training) for them. It might have been some small courses, short
24 courses. I think that the majority of them had been combat intelligence officers, MOSes
25 of 9301. I think the training was good. Out of all training that got in the Army. I think
26 what we got at Fort Bragg was the best, the most on target. We got a lot of language
27 training. We would start the day with three hours of Vietnamese language taught by a
28 Vietnamese man and woman. Then after lunch we would be in class studying all sorts of
29 things. The organization of the Phoenix Program. The dos and don'ts of the Phoenix
30 Program and it was made extremely clear to us from the start and repeatedly through the
31 course that torture was a crime (said with emphasis). It was not to be—it wasn't to be

1 done, it wasn't to be used, it wasn't to be condoned. It violated the Geneva Accords we
2 weren't—or uh the Geneva Convention was absolutely forbidden. In addition to the
3 Phoenix—studying the Phoenix Program, or *Phụng Hoàng*, as it was called by the
4 Vietnamese. We got refresher courses in small arms, in radio procedures, in calling in
5 artillery or air support. Whatever you might need at some point if you were out in the
6 field hunting down the VCI. The VCI, the Viet Cong Infrastructure. This was the shadow
7 government. It existed at about virtually every level in Vietnam from the Hamlet to the
8 Village to the District, to the Province, to the Region. And then of course, there was
9 COSVN, the Central Office of South Vietnam, which was the headquarters. It was—It
10 was the Viet Cong Government in the South. The whole idea of Phoenix was to
11 neutralize—that word got some bad connotations. But neutralize the effectiveness of the
12 VC shadow government. Yes, there were killings involved. Also, a heck of a lot of
13 capturing and a surprising number of ralliers, Chu Hoi's. This was what we were being
14 trained to do, it was police work and intelligence work. Trying to identify people; trying
15 to identify the structure of the VC Government locally. What was organized, who were
16 its members, how did they operate, where did they operate, who were their supporters?
17 Who could they count on for food or information? Keeping files—now this sounds
18 bureaucratic and by God it was. Oh, it was the part that I hated the most, and
19 unfortunately, I think it was most of the work that we had to do. (Sighs) Keeping files
20 and making entries. But it's fundamental police work, but at any rate it was a—I would
21 say it was pretty much an eight-to-five or nine-to-five existence five days a week. We had
22 a lot of free time after the day was over. We played a lot of touch football. One weekend,
23 another guy and I took off and drove down to Wilmington, North Carolina, and spent the
24 day fishing in the rain, decided that was dumb. Came back and hadn't caught, but two
25 little things who were—not worth the drive and getting sick in the rain that's for damn
26 sure. We could do things like that. And there was physical training. They had what they
27 called the MATA Mile, M-A-T-A Mile. I forget now what MATA stood for. Military
28 Assistance Training Academy or something like that. Whatever it was, the mile was two-
29 in-a-quarter or two-and-a-half miles. I still smoked and I was overweight from Germany.
30 I remember it took—I didn't run it, I did a lot of walking at first, but by the—but by
31 halfway through, say by late October, I was running the two-and-a-quarter miles and kept

1 knocking time off it, so hey. That was uh—I was never very fast, and I always hated to
2 run, but I started taking pride—it was cross country and that, at least, kept it interesting. I
3 dropped five pounds, I guess, but I lost a lot a flab and muscled up a bit. I learned to like
4 Vietnamese food because there were a lot of Vietnamese restaurants around Fort Bragg.
5 They had—a lot of the instructors in the language program also had or worked with
6 relatives in the restaurants. You know, they'd say, "Come over to our place tonight."
7 Prices would be reasonable and then they'd explain all the different kinds of food and we
8 loved it, absolutely loved it. That was good preparation, too. I remember we finished up
9 in December probably around the 15th. I bummed my way across the country to San
10 Diego on Air Force flights because my brother was in the Navy, and he was in San
11 Diego, and he was getting married the 19th of December. One of the guys in the course
12 with me at Fort Bragg loaned me his pants and a jacket. We were about the same size.
13 When we got to San Diego, I called the local MI (Military Intelligence) Office and asked
14 them if there was anybody there that had a dress blue hat. They thought I was crazy.
15 "How the hell did you get our number?" "Well, guys, I'm in intelligence, too." They
16 wouldn't let me in their office, but they came down to the street corner and handed me a
17 hat. Somebody else gave me a sword. Oh god, when I think back on it, I must have
18 looked like something from Ringling Brothers at my brother's wedding. I do remember I
19 had to—I was the best man, and all his buddies were there, a whole bunch of them. There
20 were six of us in a wedding party and I had to do the swords, present swords so that
21 Kevin and Mary could walk through, yeah I never—I'm in charge of this and I never had
22 any training. "The hell is this? Present arms? Yeah, that'll do, okay." Half these guys—
23 all the other guys, I think, were Naval Academy. Classmates of my brother. I'm thinking,
24 "Boy, the one Army guy in the sloppiest uniform with no training is in charge of these
25 guys?" I gave the command, and we stuck up our swords and I stuck mine right in the
26 roof of the chapel. And the guy next to me says, after Kevin and Mary walk through, he
27 says, "Rod, you can give us the command to order arms." I said, "I'd give it to you, but I
28 can't do it." How do you give the command to get the sword out of the roof? I always
29 figured that that was really the end of—that's the event that to me marks the end of my
30 time at Fort Bragg coming my way across country on the Air Force flights and then being
31 there for my brother's wedding. I do remember laughing—a whole bunch of us laughing

1 during the class when we found a copy of the Army times that described this course that
2 we were in. No, MASA-01 has started. It's the Army's first training Phoenix Program
3 (Makes a noise to cut out redundancy) Class of 26 or 28 of handpicked volunteers. I
4 don't know, did I tell you that?

5 JS: Yeah, I believe you did mention it, but yeah.

6 RD: Okay. Unless you have some more questions.

7 JS: Yeah, I have just a few follow up questions before we actually get to Vietnam.

8 RD: Okay.

9 JS: One thing, you talked about the language training. Did you get pretty good at
10 it?

11 RD: No.

12 JS: Okay.

13 RD: I wish I could tell you I did. We were certainly better than we were before we
14 started. I could struggle along in French and certainly in German at that time. But the
15 tonal was such— was so difficult. I'm sure you've seen it yourself how difficult it is. Are
16 you fluent, by the way?

17 JS: No, absolutely not.

18 RD: Okay.

19 JS: I know a little bit. I could maybe get by if I absolutely had to.

20 RD: Yeah, I don't know that I ever got to that level, the level you're at.

21 JS: I don't know if I'm there either.

22 RD: I mean, it wasn't—it was worse than that thing I told you about in German.
23 *nicht schissen*, that should have been *nicht schießen* instead of *nicht schissen*. I said
24 things in Vietnamese that made the interpreter look at me and go, "Are you crazy? Do
25 you know what you just said?" How you change your tone can change the meaning of the
26 word. I found it—I found the language sessions interesting, though. I don't remember the
27 name of the gentleman who was our instructor, but he was extremely patient, had a good
28 sense of humor, liked working with Americans. He told some great stories of Vietnam.
29 What had it been like for him, how he had served in the Army. It was a nice introduction.
30 I think he was the first Vietnamese person I'd ever met, and it was a nice introduction.

1 JS: Okay, another question I had. Let me ask you about this, was interrogation
2 techniques, was that a part of the training?

3 RD: I'm thinking hard on that, yes. Yes, certainly and that provided the
4 opportunity to reinforce the prohibition on torture. Questioning, good cop/bad cop type of
5 approaches, returning to the same subject to see if there was a consistent answer. (Long
6 pause) Yea.

7 JS: In addition—another thing along the lines of the language training, was there
8 much Vietnamese history and cultural training as well?

9 RD: Yeah, we did, we did get a fair amount. The history of Vietnam, its long
10 standing with the Chinese. What was it? Seven hundred years they lived under Chinese
11 rule before they finally threw it off?

12 JS: Yeah, somewhere seven hundred to a thousand. Somewhere in there.

13 RD: Talk about long, suffering, patient, and determined people. You know, also
14 the fact that you—don't mistake Vietnamese Shyness's or reticence for lack of courage
15 or determination or aggression even. For that, they could point to the Cham's and the
16 Cambode's. And certainly the Montagnard's. I enjoyed those classes very much. You
17 know, those classes didn't last the entire length of the training course. They were there,
18 they were there. A good friend of mine who served as a forward observer I think with the
19 Americal (23rd Infantry Division). We got to be—he and I got to be friends many, many,
20 many years later both worked in the mining industry. He said to me one time, he said,
21 “You were so lucky. You guys have much better understanding of the people and the
22 country, the history.” He said, “We just didn't get any of that, never ever.” Well, I mean
23 pragmatically we got it because the Army knew we needed it, to do our jobs. Maybe he
24 didn't, (to) call in artillery somewhere out in the boondocks.

25 JS: Along those lines, let me ask you a question. It's a theory that I have, and I
26 want to hear your prospective on it. In some cases, I don't want to get too far ahead here,
27 but I know a lot of cases you talked to a lot of American veterans who have absolutely no
28 respect for the ARVN, no respect for the South Vietnamese whatsoever. I wondered if
29 that lack of cultural training and lack of understanding if the Vietnamese had anything to
30 do with that. Someone like you had the training and more interaction. If you guys would
31 be—if advisors would be more apt to understand the Vietnamese and see things from

1 their prospective to the point that they had a better appreciation of what the South
2 Vietnamese did. Could you comment on that?

3 RD: I would agree with your supposition. I do think that had every GI been given
4 some level of training, some level of education—I mean, we had that two-week Southeast
5 Asia training thing at Fort Holabird in 1969. Now I got three to four months of exposure
6 to the language, to the people, and structured classes in their history and culture. You
7 couldn't give that to everybody, but you sure could give some part of it, I think. There
8 was such a—disdain doesn't capture it. It isn't strong enough. But there were so many
9 Americans who had such disdain for the South Vietnamese considering the old joke
10 about the flag. What isn't red is yellow. Yeah, we were lucky, I think, to get that training.
11 I think most of us who served as advisors have a deep respect and affection for the
12 Vietnamese people. I think, you're right, we did come to see them as individuals. Much
13 more so than our compatriots did who weren't exposed to them accept, perhaps in battle
14 or in, you know, pretty mercenary exchanges around their base camps. On a true question
15 which is part of your question. Troops are as good as their leaders and their training. We
16 had some really fierce fighters in our province. Well trained, well led. We had some that I
17 wouldn't trust to escort an old lady across a busy street. They were just, pardon my
18 language, shit-birds. Leadership more than anything else, there were some young
19 Lieutenants and there were no ARVN in our province. It was all regional forces, popular
20 forces, and PSDFs (Peoples Self-Defense Force). We had some real good RF (Regional
21 Forces) companies. We did have a battery—Yea I said there were no ARVNs, but I'm
22 wrong. I think there was a battery—there was a battery of 105s (105mm Howitzers). I
23 think those were ARVN troops.

24 JS: Okay, well anything else about the MASA training before we get into actually
25 the trip over to Vietnam?

26 RD: No, that was it. There were a lot of—We all had a lot of, I think, questions
27 about the program. I know I have a lot of questions about the program despite everything.
28 I still wondered about how legal it was. There certainly were those back in this country
29 who politicians and protestors who knew the existence of the Phoenix Program, it was no
30 secret and described it as a murder, torcher, and assassination campaign. Some of those

1 people were in pretty high positions. I had strong doubts about it. I remember I wasn't the
2 only one, we all talked about that.

3 JS: This is from a prospective prior to going?

4 RD: Prior to going.

5 JS: Okay.

6 RD: Prior to going, yeah.

7 JS: So, you had then definitely been exposed to those rumors and those
8 discussions about it being an assassination program?

9 RD: Oh sure. I mean, there had been senate hearings on it.

10 JS: And I will be interested to hear as we move into Vietnam if those doubts
11 remain.

12 RD: I'll tell you right now that those doubts got resolved pretty quickly. But I had
13 those doubts with me right up until, well certainly, I had them with me when I got to
14 Saigon.

15 JS: Did you talk much about this with the other guys that you were training with?

16 RD: Yes, sure.

17 JS: Were they all pretty much the same mind?

18 RD: Everybody had questions to one degree or another, but I think we also felt
19 that, you know, we'd taken a king's shilling here. We've given our words; we've taken
20 an oath. Were our own doubts and questions strong enough so that we refused to go or
21 refused to do this job? The answer was in almost every case no, they weren't that strong.
22 I guess what we were saying to each other, yeah, we've got these questions despite the
23 training we still have these questions because these questions are still being raised by
24 others outside of the Army. The only way to be sure was to go and find out. They told
25 us—they told us, who was the they? I think it was made known to us by the time we were
26 finishing up the program at Fort Bragg that if you got—when you got to Saigon, before
27 you were sent off to your Phoenix Assignments, if you had serious questions about it and
28 you did not want to do it, you could say no, you could decline even then. But you would,
29 in all likelihood wind up on a MAT team. The Mobile Advisory Training team. That
30 could be very risky. You would definitely be going on a lot more operations. Indeed
31 when I got to Saigon I asked that question in a room full of newly arrived officers and

1 enlisted people. I asked that question and was pulled by the officer in charge of the
2 briefing. “Yes, Captain, you can decline the assignment. I can assure you, you will be
3 with a MAT team tomorrow afternoon somewhere so far out in the boondocks you won’t
4 even be able to see a little bit.” “Okay, guess I’ll stay with the assignment.” And I did. I
5 don’t know whether I got ahead of you or not.

6 JS: No, no not at all. I think that’s certainly something interesting that I wanted to
7 get into. I had thought about getting into it a little bit later, but I think it’s good to cover
8 now those perceptions versus reality that you face later on.

9 RD: You know, at that point I’m still in Saigon. I’ve decided, “Alright, I’m going
10 to go see what’s going on.” I had sufficient questions in my mind before I went over. I
11 was sitting and talking with my father that December around Christmas time. I really was
12 wrestling with this. He called a friend there in the village in Westbury, the Kickhams
13 (??). The Kickhams had a daughter who had married a West Point graduate, Major
14 Lewis, Jerry Lewis. He was a lawyer in the Army JAG (Judge Advocate General’s
15 Corps), he was stationed in Saigon, and in the space of like 72 hours, I had his name, his
16 local phone number, and was told when I got to Saigon to go see him and talk to him
17 about these questions I had about the legality of the program. The culpability of those; the
18 responsibility of those in the program. So, I did, and I told him exactly—I told him all my
19 doubts and I told him that I was pretty concerned that when I got back home—I honestly
20 thought that a major political change was coming to the country. That those who were so
21 violently—not violently, but so strongly opposed to the war. Those who despised the
22 Phoenix Program and characterized it as a murder and an assassination that these people
23 would somehow hold us in account afterwards. Even if the program was perfectly legal.
24 In their eyes it wasn’t. What do we do? Are we going to be war criminals when we go
25 home? Lewis was pretty tough, but he listened, and he helped me work through the
26 legalities of the program. I felt better, a lot better for having talked to him. And then
27 when I finally did get to my team, I was so fortunate because I was going to replace a
28 senior Captain, a guy that had been an enlisted man and come up through the ranks,
29 Warren Faulk from Alabama. Warren was such a gentleman and so good as an advisor.
30 So leveled and easy. People just instinctively liked him and trusted him and to boot, he
31 had two more months on his tour. So, I had two months working with him.

1 JS: Oh wow, right.

2 RD: It was wonderful; it was wonderful. He and Captain Chi, our counterpart, got
3 along just beautifully. Warren made sure that I saw as much as possible, as quickly as
4 possible and I got very comfortable with what the program was doing and how it was
5 conducting. I also got to understand that the other side could be pretty viscous in their use
6 of terror and your wife's family has experienced that. I would say that probably—let's
7 see, I got to my outfit in uh—I think it was early February. I got held up in Saigon for the
8 longest time in January because of Lam Son 719. There were no planes available,
9 everything that flew was up there. That took a while and then I flew up to Nha Trang and
10 ran into a guy from my Fort Bragg class who was working there at the regional
11 headquarters. He said, "Oh man, look, here's a half a dozen openings. What do you
12 want?" They got them in Kon Tum Province, Pleiku, they got Phuong Duc I think. Then
13 there was this one in Ninh Thuan. And then I said, "What's Ninh Thuan?" He said, "I've
14 been down there, it's beautiful." The air base sits out there, it's got two, ten-thousand-
15 foot strips, it's got officers club you wouldn't believe. You can sit in the O-club (Officers
16 Club) and have a beer and look and see the South China Sea ten miles away on a clear
17 day. I said, "Where's the team? Is it on the air base?" He said, "Oh no, no, no they live in
18 compounds down in Downtown Phan Rang, the province capital." "Okay, that sounds
19 pretty good. Especially if we can get to the base." He said, "Oh yeah, those guys drive all
20 over." I said, "Oh yeah, I'll take that." That's how I wound up going to Phan Rang.
21 Warren Faulk met me at the air base, and I had a death-grip on my M-16. He finally said
22 to me, "Would you put that damn thing down?" He said, "You are fine here." He says,
23 "Let me tell you a couple of things." He said, "The VC are at the end of their supply line
24 here in Ninh Thuan province. He said, "We're kind of at the end of ours, too. This is a
25 quiet province now. It only turned out that the 101st (101st Airborne Division) had been
26 through there, I don't know, '68 or '67. They had just really torn up the province and torn
27 up the major armed VC units. Ever since that time—and then Tet '68 the story goes that
28 that was also a terrible setback for the VC. They tried to attack into Phan Rang and they
29 just got blown away. And those who didn't get blown away were identified and many of
30 them were captured. So, it was quiet. And another reason it was quiet was because over
31 in Tan Hai District—we had four districts: Tan Hai in the north and east, Bu Son (??)

1 further north. That had a lot of Montagnard's in it. An Phuc (??) to the south, it might
2 have been the largest district. I cannot recall, I've got it written down somewhere, the
3 name of the fourth district. But over in Tan Hai was the hometown of President Thieu
4 and his mother still lived there. It was quiet. It was nicely quiet; it was a beautiful village,
5 a nice little place. I drove over there just as picturesque as can be. We also had some
6 Catholic villages, and these are all resettled northerners. They had no love for the Viet
7 Cong. That village sat astride a VC infiltration unit. The PSDFs and the PFs (Providence
8 "Popular" Forces) that operated out of that village, boy, I'll tell you one time I think four
9 VC tried to get in and collect taxes. I think two of them were killed the other two,
10 actually, I think were forced to take sanctuary in the Catholic Church. They had villagers
11 chasing them with pitchforks let alone the PSDFs and the PFs who were after them with
12 M-16s. They were two of the most terrified people I'd ever heard about my whole life.
13 They really were glad to see the Vietnamese police come get them. An Phuc that was the
14 district in the South. The first time I met my counterpart, Warren took me—we drove all
15 over that province. We drove South on QL1 to a major village just above the border of
16 Binh Thuan Province. An Phuc was, because it was so large, and it stretched from the sea
17 to the mountains. That really was a major—that was where the VC had headquarters and
18 hide outs. They moved around, I think, more freely in that district than in the other
19 districts. Not to say they weren't present in other districts, but I would say Tan Hai was
20 the quietest, An Phuc was probably the toughest, Bu Son and Du Long, Du Long that was
21 the fourth one. That was the one that had more Montagnard's. Bu Son was to the left and
22 stretched out towards the lot, towards the estartment (??). That was where the air base
23 was in that district. Yeah, there were some pretty active VC in that district as well.
24 Anyway, the first time I met Captain Chi, he was in charge of a screening operation.
25 Basically, the RFs had set up a cordon around this one village and they were going—they
26 were just checking everybody's papers to see who had papers and who didn't. Who
27 couldn't explain why they were there. Maybe they were looking for a couple of people
28 specifically. I don't know, I was just an interested observer who didn't understand the
29 languages. It was really slow going. I was just in the way. He knew what he was doing.
30 He was forty-four years old. He'd been fighting—he'd been at war since he was fifteen.

31 JS: Oh wow.

1 RD: Yeah, ARVN. Here he is in charge of the Du Long operation. He's got police
2 and RFs working for him on this operation. He was, I think—I think I tried that good
3 man's patience. Seriously, we did not get along well, by the time Warren Faulk went
4 home and I took over. I would say within four or five months. I was just too hard a
5 charger without understanding what he'd been through. The political situation was very
6 difficult.

7 JS: Okay.

8 RD: Warren Faulk explained that sometime during 1970, Captain Chi had
9 convinced Province Chief, Colonel Thu to allow them to mount a big sweep, a big
10 roundup in Phan Rang and in several of the other towns almost simultaneously. They had
11 files on a whole bunch of people that they knew were active VCI (Viet Cong
12 Infrastructure) supporters. Some of these happened to be part of the Am Quang Buddhist
13 sect. Well, it was a big round up. There was something like sixty or seventy or more
14 picked up in one—in one sweep. By God, didn't the Am Quang's have their mouthpieces
15 in Saigon in an uproar! The next thing you know, President Thieu is getting so much heat
16 from the Buddhists in Saigon that he has to call Colonel Thu and tell him, "Hey, knock
17 this off." Of course, the Colonel doesn't appreciate getting a call from the president. You
18 know what rolls downhill and then it hit Captain Chi. So he was reluctant to do very
19 much without clear blessing from Colonel Thu. I guess I never really appreciated that
20 even though Warren tried to explain it to me before he left. It would frustrate me so why
21 can't we just go into this village; we know there are people there. It has to be pretty much
22 approved by the Province Chief who was a good guy, but sensitive to the political
23 nuances in Saigon. I don't know, I could ramble a bit, but do you have questions?

24 JS Yeah, I certainly do. I wasn't sure if you were finished there or not, but yeah, I
25 certainly have some questions. If you could talk, I guess, a little bit about the larger
26 advisory team that you were assigned to. Some of the different elements of that and the
27 makeup of that.

28 RD: Yeah, advisory team 45 was the provincial advisory scene and it included
29 four district advisory teams. One for each of the four districts in the province. We lived in
30 two compounds, one was called the MAC-V (Military Assistance Command Vietnam)
31 compound. That was on QL-11 which came down from Dalat and met QL-1 in Phan

1 Rang. Then about a quarter mile away was the CORDS (Civil Operations and Rural
2 Development Support) compound. Most of the military lived on the MAC-V compound.
3 Most of the civilians lived on the CORDS compound. Some military lived on chords as
4 well. The dividing line seemed to be, “Is the program you’re working in part of the
5 CORDS program? Or is it more, say, a Mobile Advisory Team?” The makeup of the
6 team itself was really varied. I think there were about one hundred and ten, one hundred
7 and twenty perhaps on the team when I arrived in January or February of ’71. We had
8 some Mobile Advisory Teams, we had artillery training teams, and we had infantry
9 teams. We had economic advisors, yeah. That economic advisor was a woman, a civilian
10 woman. Mary—I can’t remember her last name. The kind of economics she would advise
11 on would be things like agricultural economics. How do we get the crops—How do we
12 help the farmers get the rice crops into the market? How do we help them market it?
13 What else can be raised? How many crops can we get? We had a provincial
14 administrative advisor who would work with the civilian province leadership and the
15 province chief on how you organized and ran the province government. They had a
16 medical advisor, an Air Force doctor, of course, nicknamed Hawkeye who worked in the
17 Vietnamese hospital which was—oh god, that was tough. That hospital was a—I guess it
18 represented a big step up in medical care for the local people, but it sure didn’t look like
19 much to us. You’d see patients on stretchers in the hallways for days. Maybe two people
20 to a bed. Bill was the doctor and he got awfully frustrated, but he really stuck with it. Of
21 course, then he administered to all of us for our various escapades after hours. I think he
22 said at his farewell party that he really appreciated the opportunity to see so many
23 varieties of VD (Venereal Diseases). (Laughter) We weren’t saints. Let’s see, we had—in
24 the Phoenix office, the advisor’s office there was a Captain, an enlisted man, a translator,
25 and a clerk typist, a Vietnamese lady, Cho Tanh (?). Gosh, we had RF/PF advisors. We
26 had—There was something called the RD Cadre, the Rule Development Cadre. We had
27 RD cadre advisors, Psy-ops (Psychological Operations), MSS, Military Security Service
28 which was—we had a young guy. I think he dropped out of Princeton after two years,
29 Tom Troyer. Gosh, he was fluent in Vietnamese. He was ostensibly a civilian, but uh—he
30 was Army, but he never dressed in uniform. I always thought he was officer. It wasn’t
31 until later I found out he was like a Spec-5 (Editor’s Note: Specialist 5th Grade, SPC-5,

1 which is the equivalent of the E-5 NCO rank of Sergeant). You know, goddamn, he was
2 sharp as a tack. He really knew his stuff. I thought of all the intelligence programs. He
3 had the best information. We lived on the same compound over in CORDS and one day
4 at lunch time we were driving back to the compound and he said, "Rod, look." There was
5 an old, bearded Vietnamese man walking past the compound down this road. Our
6 compound had budded a Vietnamese Psy-ops or something compound. He said, "That's
7 so and so. That's his senior VC." We took off. We went in, we got weapons, and then we
8 took off to get them. Hey, he must have seen us coming because he vanished. You know,
9 we reported it because it was pretty obvious, he was studying compounds. We knew what
10 that meant. We also knew that the VC mode of operations was to take their time. They
11 would plan-and-plan-and-plan an operation. Sure enough, it was about a month after I left
12 that compound, the Psy-ops compound next to ours was hit. A bunch of the Vietnamese
13 soldiers were killed. Nobody on the American compound was hurt. But anyway, I really
14 digressed from the—.

15 JS: No, I thought that was a very interesting story.

16 RD: Yeah, that was one of the things that just impressed me about Tom. He knew
17 who he was looking for. I can't say I did. It was good. We really had a pretty tight team I
18 think on the whole. We'd set times when we would talk about how we would integrate
19 the different operations. The MSS (Military Security Service) fed information to Phoenix
20 and vice versa. Psy-ops would work if there was going to be a sweep of a village or a
21 check for papers or something like that. A Psy-ops team would go in as well. I'm trying
22 to think, boy, our team head when I got there was a Foreign Service officer. Absolutely
23 great guy. I think he'd been there for a year and a half, maybe two years. He was just a
24 first—the mind he had, his understanding of the Vietnamese, his whole demeanor.
25 Everybody, I think on the team—just about everybody loved him; loved working for him.
26 He didn't deny you your fun as long as you were doing your job. He had given Warren
27 Faulk, my predecessor, a good piece of advice which Warren gave to me to which
28 probably I should have written down. It was something to the effect of, "Don't push any
29 buttons for six months." Well, gosh, that's more than halfway through the tour. "Don't
30 push any buttons for six months. First, you've got to find out where the buttons are and
31 what they do. You're not here to rebuild the entire country or reshape the Vietnamese

1 programs. You can't do it in that time frame. You're just here to help. Watch, observe,
2 then go to work." We were all sad to see him go. He was replaced with a Colonel, a Full
3 Bird Colonel. The Colonel was a good guy, a nice guy, but his whole approach was
4 military. I think he arrived there with a—let's see, he had arrived in March before Warren
5 rotated home. Colonel Sellers arrived; I think Alabama guy. Went to Auburn I know that.
6 He played center for Auburn.

7 JS: Oh really? Huh.

8 RD: He could still snap a long snap, too. His was much more of an Army
9 approach to things. Very much in your face, can do, recharge, and let's head on up the
10 highway. To the extent that a lot of us who had served, even for a short time like me
11 under, oh, Mr. Owens, Richard Owens found the Colonel's someti—approach sometimes
12 to be abrasive. On the other hand, we knew his heart was in the right place. He did not
13 like the Phoenix Program when it started. He said so. He came over and sat down with
14 Warren and I and we talked. He wanted us to tell him about what was going on, how we
15 operated. He just told us right out, he said, "Boys, I'll tell you I don't like this program. I
16 think it's shady. I'm not at all sure that the Army should be participating in it, and I want
17 you to know I'm watching you." Oh god, Warren and I looked at each other and Warren
18 said, "Hey, I got two weeks. Good luck." You know, his attitude changed, too. He came
19 to know that he could trust us, that we would do our damndest to give him good advice
20 and that we were not out there willy-nilly shooting people or torturing them. He and I had
21 a pretty darn good relationship by the time I rotated out. Where do you want to go from
22 here? There are so many stories that year.

23 JS: Absolutely. One more thing about the team itself if I could ask. How about
24 morale overall from the people that you saw when you first came in there? Could you
25 gauge morale?

26 RD: Yeah, I think everybody appreciated being on the team rather than with an
27 American Military unit. That was 1971 and there was morale problems with American
28 units were far more common than with the advisory teams. Everybody was pretty busy on
29 the advisory team. You all went your separate ways every day which everybody had a job
30 to do and they weren't sitting around the barracks with their thumb up their, you know
31 what's. I don't mind is the devil's workshop. It was by no means perfect, the morale of

1 the team. We had—I do think that for the most part, the team members were dedicated
2 people really trying to help the Vietnamese. I think there were some who didn't care and
3 were just glad to kind of find a place in the shade and sit it out. While we had a number
4 of people who extended their tours, I think that everybody that I was close with was
5 really glad to get home. None of us extended. We were ready to go. We knew we were
6 fortunate to be in an area that was very little, large-scale shooting. We appreciated that.
7 We also had a club house believe it or not on the beach. We would go over there, and
8 we'd open it up on Saturday around noon time and then close it down Sunday afternoon
9 around five or so. You know, if you didn't have anything pressing you, and you wanted
10 to go to the beach house you could go over there and get a hamburger, a cold beer or a
11 soda. That was where I found out that the Colonel could still do the long snap. I played a
12 fair amount of touch football. He didn't get involved in the games. That probably would
13 have been laissez majeste to knock him on his ass. I don't know that there were too many
14 of us who could have done it. He was a big man, but I remember he said, "Rod, throw me
15 that ball. Then just back up. I'll snap you one." I thought he was going to snap it about
16 six, eight feet like in touch football. He just said, "keep backing up", y'know I'm twenty
17 yards back and, bam it hits me in the bellybutton. "Okay, you haven't lost it." We did fly
18 a fair amount.

19 JS: Okay.

20 RD: We had a helicopter allotted to us to the team every day that would come
21 down from a support helicopter company up in Cam Ranh which is fifty-five miles north
22 of us. We would have that chopper every day and then we could go out to the air base and
23 fly in—as passengers in some of the observation planes. We could get them to fly—"Just
24 take us out we want to go look at such-and-such. Wanna go see this part of the province."
25 "Okay." I remember being on several of those. Warren got me up there, geez, I think
26 within the first week after I got there. I was so impressed with the beauty of the province.
27 The ocean—I remember flying along the coast and looking down and seeing a manta ray,
28 huge thing. We're at fifteen hundred feet and it looks—I can see the bottom.

29 JS: Wow.

30 RD: And the manta swimming along and it was just—and the water was so
31 gorgeous. There was a big lighthouse down in An Phuc Province—District that sat on top

1 of a hill. A mountain really, a cliff overlooking the sea. It had been built by the French.
2 The lighthouse, that particular area I remember was a haven for VC in that district. Early
3 on, the RF mounted an operation to go after the VC in that cliff area. I guess they put a
4 couple of companies in there, and I went down one day. I think Warren and I flew down
5 and met another American advisor. Wayne, he was an armor officer, and he was an
6 advisor to the RFs. I remember sitting around having lunch with the troops by the
7 lighthouse. I think they were down there for about a week or so, but I was just there for a
8 day to get a feel for or a bit of a feel for what they were doing, and I made a mistake. I ate
9 some sausage that a Vietnamese trooper offered me. My stomach wasn't ready for it. I
10 was fine until that evening and then I was sick as a dog for about two days. It was early in
11 the tour and my stomach had not yet become acclimated. Once it became acclimated it
12 was wonderful. Seldom had a problem, but that was—that was something. The helicopter
13 missions were, oh, I know I flew the helicopter a few times. I remember one time, shoot,
14 we were actually seated at the breakfast table when we got word that a recon element
15 from the RF had been ambushed. They had taken casualties, and they were down not far
16 from that lighthouse. The helicopter crews had just joined us for breakfast. "Okay, who's
17 going to go?" I wound up going and grabbed an M-16 and took off with those guys. I
18 knew where the LZ—a good LZ (Landing Zone) 'outta be, and we got him in there. I
19 hopped out and I run around the front of the helicopter to see if I can help these guys get
20 into the chopper. By the time I get to the other side they're all loaded and the pilot's
21 starting to pull pitch. "Whoa, Whoa, one more, me!" Yeah, that's not a place I wanted to
22 be left alone at.

23 JS: No.

24 RD: Yeah, the mission I really, really remembered was one where we let's see—it
25 was me and the S-3 (Section-3, Training, operations, and plans) advisor, the Major who
26 at the time, had his foot in a cast. He had been playing touch football with us and broke
27 his ankle. So, he's got his foot in a cast, and he decided he's going on this flight out to the
28 west, really nasty area, where the province recon platoon had been operating and taken
29 some casualties. They tangled with the VC headquarters. They also had taken the VC
30 deputy privates commander. He was wounded, but he was still alive. We get out there
31 and we can't land. There's not an LZ. It's not cleared, and we can't get down onto the

1 ground. We need ropes, don't have ropes. Radio the air base, gets ropes to the helipad.
2 Go to the helipad, refuel, get the ropes, and get back down there. And in the meantime,
3 they were taking fire, but this time we got low enough so that the recon platoon could
4 pass up their wounded. We got two or three of them up onto the chopper and we wanted
5 to get the VC prisoner, but he had died in the meantime. So, we dropped a rope, and we
6 tied him to the rope. We tied his body to the rope, and I tied the other end to a retainer
7 ring in the floor of the chopper. We flew back to our helipad with this poor bastard's
8 body on a rope, underneath the helicopter. By that time in my tour, I had come to
9 understand that all this stuff, the stories about how Asians don't value life, and life is
10 cheap. That's not true at all; not true at all. There is respect for the dead. You don't—
11 what would you say? You don't treat the dead with disrespect, and I can only think that
12 the major next to me is saying, "Oh, this is great. We can fly right over these villages.
13 They'll see that son of a bitch's body. They'll know we got them." I'm thinking, "That's
14 not what they're going to think. They're going to think, "You ugly bastards, why can't
15 you treat them—That's no way to treat the dead." That's what we did. Once we had them
16 tied, you might be thinking, "Well, why the hell didn't we haul him up and haul the rope
17 up?" Once he was tied on and the other end was tied onto the retaining ring on the floor,
18 believe me, by that time the pilot was getting us the hell out as fast as he could." I was
19 actually still holding the rope with this guy's body at the end of it until I couldn't hold it
20 anymore. Of course, the wind and I don't know if that rope would hold. I don't know if I
21 tied a good enough knot. I was just thinking to myself "All this effort and this guy's body
22 could wind up God knows where." It held. I remember on that flight reaching for a
23 cigarette and lighting up a lucky strike. I don't know what made me do it, but I'm so glad
24 I did. Once I had it lit and going, I just took it out and put it in the mouth of the Province
25 Recon wounded. These guys were ex-VC. Tough as nails. They knew what would happen
26 to them if the VC ever got 'em. Wouldn't have a prayer. They fought like hell. They were
27 real veterans and they're looking at a Yank on his one-year tour. I remember just putting
28 that cigarette in the man's mouth. His eyes just turned to me and looked at me and kind
29 of smiled. He just said, "Come on." So, we just sat there and smoked our cigarettes on the
30 ride back. As far as I know, three of the guys, all of the wounded we took on board, they

1 were fine. They recovered okay. I don't know where do you wanna go from there? I'm
2 just throwing stories out.

3 JS: Why don't we—if you could talk a little bit about a description of your actual
4 duties. What your job actually entailed and your daily routine and what that would be
5 like.

6 RD: Boy, okay we get up, have breakfast, and then almost always we'd go
7 down—drive down to our office. The team had a compound, a big office building. On
8 that compound in addition to the main team office was the Phoenix building, *Phụng*
9 *Hoàng* offices. Also, the PRUs, Provencial Reconnaissance Unit were in another
10 building. I think there were three or four buildings on that compound downtown. Across
11 the street was the provincial headquarters where Colonel Thu's office was and the TOC,
12 Tactical Operation Center. The American advis—Phoenix advisor had an office of his
13 own. That's where the Americans would be. Right next to my counterpart's office,
14 Captain Chi. Then the rest of the building was pretty much—I think there were two more
15 rooms. There was a file room and then I think a big meeting room, a decent sized meeting
16 room. Could have thirty people in there for a meeting, if you needed it. The *Phụng*
17 *Hoàng* personnel were there working on their files. Every day I would get in and maybe
18 we had decided that we'd go down to a hamlet that day so I could check with a
19 counterpart if he was ready to go. If we went out to a village, of course we drove almost
20 every inch—trying to remember if we would go—yeah, I don't think we ever really just
21 took off in a helicopter to go to a village. The province was safe enough to pretty much
22 drive where you wanted to go. What we'd do is we'd get down to the district offices and
23 say hello to the people there to see what they were up to and then head on out to the
24 village or the hamlet with our district counterparts to do whatever questioning we had to
25 do, talk to the local PSDF. If there had been—now most of the contact with the VC,
26 armed contact came at night. Not always, but most of it was at night. That's when the VC
27 moved. The PSDF were pretty strong. They put up a good fight. I remember the first
28 contact—one of the things we had to do Jason, is we being the American advisors,
29 Phoenix advisors. When the VC were—if the VC was killed you went out with a Polaroid
30 and you took pictures of the bodies so that this could be a way to identify that. Picture a
31 chart, if you will, on the wall. With the names—An organizational chart with names

1 being filled in, in certain blocks on the chart, but maybe you didn't know who this was
2 that you got last night. You take the pictures back; they'd be shown around in the hamlets
3 and the villages. We'd come up with some identification. The first such thing was within
4 the first two weeks I was there. Just to me it was shocking. I've never forgotten it. We
5 went up to QL1 towards the Catholic village. A VC unit had tried to infiltrate the
6 previous night. I guess its north of it. It was north on QL1. They had taken at least one
7 casualty. There was one body: one VC KIA (Killed in Action). It's the first time I had
8 ever seen somebody dead as a result of combat. He was very young, he had hardly any
9 injuries, but you could see some specs on his chest. Apparently, what had happened was
10 that the PSDF had what we used to call the LAWs (M-72 LAW), light anti-tank weapons,
11 one shot rockets. The VC didn't have tanks, but the LAWs could be used as anti-
12 personnel lockets. They'd aim them in the ground. They'd hit the ground maybe ten
13 meters in front of the unit, the target. It would explode and blow shrapnel and rocks and
14 everything. That's what hit this kid. He was fifteen years old. They already knew who he
15 was. He lived in a house across the street in a small hamlet. We took his body back to his
16 mother. It was Captain Chi, Warren Faulk, and myself. I guess Chi was in his Jeep with a
17 couple of his people and the body. We drove—they could not have been three yards away
18 to this boy's house. I started to get out of the Jeep and Warren just leaned over and
19 grabbed my left arm and said, "Don't. Move." He said, "This is not for us to do. Chi—
20 Chi will do what has to be done." I was really glad because I just couldn't look at this
21 woman in the face. You know, the young man had apparently been a VC sympathizer for
22 one reason or another, don't know why. It turns out that he was probably the local guy for
23 that unit. He guided them into an ambush, they were waiting. Not that they knew that
24 they were coming, but they were set up out there in case somebody did. And pow. Well
25 that was the first one and of course, we took the requisite pictures. I recall taking pictures
26 of fifty some odd people in the course of the year. I think there were fifty-two identified
27 as VCI. Most of them were very, very low level. Guides, couriers, guards for a tax
28 collector. Province Recon got the deputy VC province commander. Another time we had
29 to drive out on a Sunday afternoon to a village—a hamlet way out to the west, Bu Son
30 district. It's so far out to the west they had killed—a team had come up—this hamlet was
31 like something out of the Wild West movies. It had wooden palisades around it. They

1 were so far out that they put up palisades to restrict access because the VC moved with
2 almost impunity out this far west in the district. And apparently the VC unit had come up
3 to them during the night and demanded to be allowed in. The PSDF opened up with M-
4 16s and they hit this one guy who apparently was the leader of the unit. So that was a
5 departure from the more usual lower rankers, he got hit in the face. One shot, he was
6 gone. We drove out there and took a look at him. We didn't bring that body back that day
7 because it was too late, and we were in Indian country. I did get a souvenir once. We got
8 two VC down in An Phuc, The Colonel and I went down. I took the pictures and we put
9 the bodies up in the back of a deuce-and-a-half then on an RF truck to bring back that had
10 been going through pockets. The guy had a homemade knife. If you can imagine this, the
11 handle of the knife looked like it might have been from a fifty-caliber shell. Maybe even
12 an AK shell, I can't remember, but I think it was a bigger piece of brass. The blade was
13 such rough quality steel. I don't know how old it was; how old it's been around. It looked
14 like it had been hand hammered. I don't have it anymore, but I thought to myself, this is
15 what these guys are carrying around for personal—obviously it wasn't a weapon. They're
16 pretty poor. I have to ask if we can stop for a moment.

17 JS: Absolutely.

18 RD: I mean just a moment. I'll be back in less than a minute.

19 JS: Sure, no problem.

20 RD: Okay, hang on.

21 JS: Alright.

22 RD: Okay, we had a really weirdly funny almost Keystone cop's episode in terms
23 of VC surrendering at one time. These were not necessarily low-level folks. A guy
24 walked in, a VC walked in and gave up at a district headquarters. He had been living out
25 in the brush with the VC headquarters for years. He was like a village chief, VC village
26 chief or province official. He said basically he had quit because of love. (Sound of
27 surprise) Well, he'd been in a triangle, and he came out with the short straw. He was in
28 love with a VC nurse who kind of loved him, but also loved somebody else out there. So,
29 this guy just couldn't take the rejection and Chu Hoi'd. Well, shucks, our hearts kind of
30 went out to him. About two weeks later, the VC nurse walks in. She's decided she really
31 loves the first guy. By this time, we're just sitting around going, "Holy shit. Maybe she

1 was friends with everybody, and they'll all be coming in." Two weeks after that, guess
2 who shows up?

3 JS: The third guy. (laughing)

4 RD: You got it. He can't stand being without her. The three of them lined up
5 going to prison together. It starts all over again. We laughed. That was probably one of
6 the funniest episodes. I'll turn it over to you. You guide it now.

7 JS: One of the big questions that we should focus on at some point is the actual
8 Phoenix Program, how it worked, and all that. I'm afraid we don't have enough time to
9 get into that today. I don't want to short that so maybe we should wait until next time for
10 that.

11 RD: That would be fine.

12 JS: Let me pause the recording.

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29 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
30 University continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr. Rod Dwyer. Today is July 9,
31 2010, and this is interview session number three. Okay, why don't we begin today if you

1 could talk a little bit about a description of the enemy and about the Viet Cong
2 infrastructure?

3 Rod Dwyer: Okay, the thing perhaps the most basic concept to grasp is that the
4 Viet Cong were as much a political movement as they were guerilla-war fighters. In fact,
5 guerilla-war itself is a political war. What came to be known as the Viet Cong
6 infrastructure or VCI. Was a shadow government that existed throughout South Vietnam
7 from the national level right down to the Village and Hamlet level. The national group
8 was often considered to be the National Liberation Front, the NLF. In fact, the NLF was a
9 front organization that included Vietnamese communists, out-and-out nationalists,
10 socialists, and a coalition of interest groups that were opposed to the Saigon Government.
11 The controlling operation or agency for the VCI in South Vietnam was the Central Office
12 for South Vietnam, COSVN. An elusive headquarters of military and political and
13 economic administrative significance. I recall the 1970 incursion into Cambodia. Not
14 only was that intended to knock back the NVA (North Vietnam Army, referred to as
15 People's Army of Vietnam, PAVN) and give South Vietnam some breathing space while
16 the American combat units withdrew. One of the principal targets was COSVN, Central
17 Office for South Vietnam. There was no doubt that the Viet Cong controlled the VCI.
18 The communist controlled the Viet Cong infrastructure all the way down to the Hamlet
19 level. This became a lot clearer after the war, after the north won. At the time, there was a
20 very good scattering of—how would you say it—Vietnamese Nationalists who had
21 positions and responsibility throughout the National Liberation Front and throughout
22 COSVN, if you will. Their actual level of control turned out to be far less. They were
23 extremely useful for presenting a united front to the rest of the world. You would have—
24 down at our level, there was a Viet Cong province chief and a deputy province chief. We
25 had four districts in our province, and I think that they operated with the same four
26 districts and the same province boundaries. Their political and administrative boundaries
27 may not have coincided precisely with the Saigon Government, the Republic of Vietnam,
28 the RVN boundaries. In a lot of cases I think that was left over from the war against the
29 French. Many of the Viet Minh (Vietnamese Nationalist) continued on into the VC,
30 particularly hardcore communists did. In our province the—trying to recall the general
31 location of the province—the VCI province commander, (the) province chief was out in

1 the very sparsely populated southwest area of the province out in the foothills. There
2 were Hamlet chiefs, Village chiefs, and District chiefs who operated within or close to
3 the Hamlets and Villages. Our area was pretty quiet. Ninh Thuan Province was pretty
4 quiet. There had been an awful lot of fighting that had gone on in the period of 1966,'67
5 and into Tet '68. The 101st had been through there. There had been a lot of battles. Then
6 when Tet came in '68, a lot of the Viet Cong Infrastructure surfaced. And the mistaken
7 believe just had happened throughout South Vietnam and the mistaken belief that the
8 people would rally to their cause, and they didn't. These people were identified and if not
9 captured or killed, they had to flee. A lot of the control apparatus of the VCI was actually
10 located outside populated areas. Now, they would certainly have their sympathizers
11 inside the villages and towns. People who were quiet supports and people who would
12 provide money, food, whatever they could, guides. And the VCI would enter the villages
13 and they would come in, in teams that were propaganda teams. They would stage puppet
14 shows, entertainment. There's not much entertainment out in the hamlets. So, you have
15 some puppet shows that get everybody kind of interested. Of course, the puppet shows
16 would have a message about the hideous landlords, the rotten Saigon Government, the
17 need to remain strong against the imperialist aggressors. At the same time, the
18 propaganda teams would often be accompanied by recruiters or that would be another
19 part of their own mission. They were able to recruit based on grievances, perceived
20 grievances against the local government, local Saigon Government. Maybe something
21 had gone wrong and an operation and a government person had shot or imprisoned
22 somebody or the taxes were deemed to be too high. So there would be youngsters who
23 would go in. They also had tax teams. These were tougher. They did not put on a smiling
24 face for the population. They were not above killing someone who was reluctant to pay
25 their taxes to the Viet Cong. There was an incident down in An Phuc District in the
26 southern part of our province in a hamlet that had—over the years they had become
27 somewhat more prosperous. There would be an introduction of pumps. The land-to-the-
28 Tiller Program had started to take effect down there. So, people had more of a vested
29 interest, and they were producing more rice. They would get into two to three rice crops a
30 year instead of one. An Phuc was also, I think, the most dangerous of all the districts. It
31 was Cowboy country, Indian country out there in the west and over to the east in the

1 sparsely populated hilly area by the ocean. So, they had—I would say, a fair freedom of
2 movement in An Phuc. They came in one night to a Hamlet and demanded rice and a
3 woman who I believe was a widow had her son with her in the front door of her house.
4 She said no and they shot her and killed her in front of her son. Yeah, it sent an awful
5 message, of course, at the same time I've never seen so many Vietnamese officials from
6 the Saigon side so pissed off. So angry. My counterpart was so angry that he agreed to
7 make a tape, a cassette tape which would be broadcast from helicopters or planes circling
8 over the area in the mountains down there where the team was believed to be hiding. That
9 and my friend John Wallace who was a Captain and he was a Psy-ops advisor. He got his
10 people to put together another tape. My counterpart's message was brief, but very firm.
11 Basically, we are so angry we will never forget this. We will find you if it takes the rest
12 of our lives. We will find you. If you want to live, come in now. The Psy-ops guys came
13 up with some other ones that were really spooky tapes. It was all in Vietnamese and they
14 had one that was absolutely eerie. It was supposedly the sound of the soul of a dead VC
15 wondering the mountains. You know from your own in-laws and your study, just living
16 there that the family unit is so important.

17 JS: Right.

18 RD: When a person dies the funeral is an extremely important event for the whole
19 family as spiritually for the deceased. And if you're not whole, if your body's lost, there
20 is a tremendous sense of spiritual loss. We were told there were those in that cultural
21 tradition who believed that they would wander—that their souls would wonder forever.
22 And boy oh boy, that tape capitalized on that. Now, was it effective? Geez, I don't know.
23 I think it may have spooked a couple of low-level guys into surrendering, but that was
24 one example of a TACs team at work. They also had assassination teams and they would
25 target members of the Saigon Government in the province. They would go after teachers
26 or hamlet chiefs or village chiefs and occasionally it seemed to me that they never went
27 after the ones that we thought might be a little corrupt. They didn't really remove the
28 thorn in the side of the people. They went after the people, the leaders who were doing
29 some good. One hamlet chief was deeply respected in his hamlet, but he had received so
30 many threats, that he could only be—he couldn't live in that Hamlet so he would pull
31 back to district headquarters or a larger hamlet and then go each day back to his Hamlet.

1 Of course, this set up a pattern and they got him. It was a tremendous loss because they
2 crowed about that, the VC did. That hamlet was shaky for a while. I think in other areas
3 of our province, thinking up at Tan Hai District, the VC had much less sway in Tan Hai.
4 This was the district where President Thieu's mother lived. You and I have talked about
5 that in one of the earlier interviews. Also, there were more Catholic hamlets there. So the
6 shadow government there was almost entirely outside the hamlets. They operated up in
7 the mountains just across the bay from Cam Ranh Bay. If you were up in a helicopter or
8 an observation plane, you could look down and see farms, where there were no villages,
9 no hamlets, there's nothing. The only people from the Hamlets who would go out that far
10 would be charcoal makers. So these things were considered to be VC farms. Corn, rice
11 but—not so much rice as it was corn and other vegetables. I think the rice cultivation to
12 get an adequate amount of rice took so much space and so much effort that it was
13 probably too much of an effort for them. Out in Bu Son District, which was to the west, it
14 ran around QL11 all the way up to the border to the Province of Delat. That also had
15 some pretty rugged terrain in the west and in the northwest. The VCI operated out of
16 those places, out of those mountains' regions. They actually had a base set up in there
17 where they trained new recruits in demolition. For practice, they would go out and blow
18 up a covert on QL11. Then the next day the government, the ghibian (??) people would go
19 out and repair the covert. There's no shooting involved, no attempt to hurt or bust up a
20 convoy or anything like that. Literally, they would just come out and they would practice
21 with their explosives. Okay, we'd give our engineers some practice, rebuild it. The only
22 time there was ever anything I recall violent in the tour, while I was there was when they
23 ambushed an American engineer convoy coming down from Delat that was heading back
24 to Phan Rang air base. They opened up with AKs and they killed a Major who was
25 driving sitting next to a Colonel. I think we've talked about that earlier.

26 JS: I can't remember if we have or not, unfortunately.

27 RD: Yeah, it was a really shaky afternoon. Of course, they radioed, and the air
28 base put up observation planes and our province senior advisor got in our helicopter and
29 took off up the road. I remember the Colonel was brought back to our team compound
30 and was seated at one of the dinner tables. He was just in terrible shock. He'd lost his
31 Major; he was covered in blood. There wasn't a damn thing we could do to help him. It

1 was one of those things that happens, it's over, and it's done with. You know, rumor had
2 it was that the VC sent an apology to the province chief, our province chief saying, "Hey
3 look, this was a mistake. We had some recruits out there and somebody pulled the trigger,
4 and they never should have." It makes a nice story, I guess. I don't know whether to
5 believe it or not, but that was also the general area at Bu Son. That and in Bu Son
6 District, that was where Phan Rang Air Base was located. The VC would rocket the air
7 base every two to three months whenever they could get some 107- or 122-millimeter
8 rockets. They'd shoot through three or four down there. So, our targets would be—we
9 would be looking for the TACs teams, we'd be looking for hamlet chiefs on their side,
10 and a lot of these folks had been out there for twenty years or more. Some of them went
11 back to the early days of the Viet Minh. A lot of them were youngish—younger folks.
12 Late teens, early twenties who had been out there. I'm thinking now some of the
13 prisoners I talked with, some of the Chu Hoi's they were not died and loyal (??)
14 communists at all. They were folks who felt their parents—they or their parents were
15 getting a raw deal from the Saigon Government in terms of taxes or no schools out in
16 their villages, whatever. Piss them off enough so that at one time or another, they said,
17 "Okay, if going to the VC is a way to help change this situation, we'll do it." Then as
18 things got better in the province, some of them looked at it and said, "it's not worth
19 staying out here," and they would come in. How you would go after the VCI—well, three
20 things—three end results. You kill them, you capture them, or you convince them to
21 surrender. They come in at their own accord, they Chu Hoi. The Phoenix Program itself
22 really goes back to the mid-sixties. I think about 1964 when the CIA established
23 something called the CTTs, the counter-terror-teams. The Viet Cong used terror as a
24 political weapon. Like the killing of that woman in front of her son in our province, it
25 was deliberate. It was intended to send a message. "You can't be protected by the Saigon
26 government. The south can't protect you; the Americans can't protect you. We're the
27 ones who determine whether you live or die. We deal ruthlessly with our enemies. You
28 don't want to get on our bad side." So, they—Pretty widespread use of terror throughout
29 the south. The CIA established these counter-terror-teams to identify, track down,
30 identify, and eliminate as many of these guys on the other side as they could. Those CTTs
31 morphed into the Phoenix Program, became a bigger program. As the American effort

1 grew in say, from '65 on. Then when you reach the time when Vietnamization became the
2 new policy and General Abrams took over for General Westmoreland and attrition gave
3 way to counterinsurgency. The advisory effort was beefed up greatly. Then it became the
4 *Phụng Hoàng* program. So, it went by the name of Phoenix or *Phụng Hoàng* depending
5 on whether or not you were talking to an American or a Vietnamese. With the advisory
6 effort in say, '69/'70, it really was aimed at turning the program over to the Vietnamese to
7 run and just put the American advice and support, but it was to be a Vietnamese program.
8 How it operated is really kind of—people thought they—I think people back in the states
9 had this idea that even in some of the line outfits—American line outfits had this idea that
10 the were—that the Phoenix program was a program of assassination and there were teams
11 of guys in black pajamas sneaking through the woods in the jungle. That really wasn't all
12 that true. It was, in some ways, some of the most—the work was drudge in many ways.
13 Collecting information can be awfully boring and frustrating, but that's what you are
14 doing. How you did it was you would use all sorts of different agencies that already were
15 in existence. The police, for example, had three different—at least three different
16 branches. The White Mice who were the regular cops that you saw on the beat, the NPFF,
17 the National Police Field Force. They were paramilitary. They were in jungle camos, and
18 they carried carbines and M-16s and they would operate out in the bush and they would
19 provide security for a police check—A roadblock or something like that and the Police
20 Special Branch. And the Special Branch was essentially a counterintelligence operation.
21 Their job was to collect intelligence on all sorts of bad guys, including folks in the black
22 market, but certainly on the Viet Cong. In addition to them you had things like the Rural
23 Development Cadre, the RD Cadre. This was a group of Vietnamese—a Vietnamese
24 agency whose people did dress in black pajamas and carry carbines. They would go out
25 and live in villages and hamlets with the idea of getting to know the people, finding out
26 what the needed in terms of development assistance, what they could do on their own,
27 what they could do with a little assistance, what they needed a whole lot of assistance for.
28 Now, if you're living out there, and you're making any headway while on this kind of a
29 job, you invariably—you can't do that job without knowing—without picking up
30 information. So, you'd have RD Cadre, you'd have the MSS, the Military Security
31 Service. That was ARVN Counterintelligence, all these different agencies. The Phoenix

1 or *Phụng Hoàng* Program was a coordination of all these programs, of the information
2 gleamed. So, there was an awful lot of file checking, awful lot of talking to your friends
3 and your counterparts in other agencies, following up on leads. Oh, and one of the most
4 effective in our province, was the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit. The PRUs. Now
5 they—the PRUs had gained some notoriety. I don't mean just in our province, but
6 throughout South Vietnam. They were, at least from my experience, wrongly perceived
7 as a bunch of murderous thugs, who would kill for money. Maybe at some point, some
8 place, some time that might have been true of some, but the gang in our province were
9 really good. I'm looking at—on the wall in my office. It's this plaque the PRU leader
10 gave me when I left, Mr. Lung. He and I got along great and often times he was the go
11 between or mediator between my counterpart, Captain Chi and myself. He and Chi went
12 back a long, long time. The PRUs would collect intelligence. They would work closely
13 with the Phoenix Program. In part because they wanted to see what information Phoenix
14 had collected about some people that they were interested in. Then they would put—The
15 PRUs would put people into hamlets and villages where the targets lived or where their
16 families lived and where the targets were believed to visit. These were well thought out
17 operations. They, you know, for an operation to take six months—you know, for an agent
18 to live in a hamlet and gather information on the target for six months, not unusual at all.
19 I recalled two long term penetration operations the PRUs ran. One was extremely
20 successful. They rounded up a bunch and they did kill some because there was a firefight.
21 They set up an ambush and they got this team, a VC team when it came to collect taxes or
22 recruit. They got—I think they took one or two alive and they killed the rest. One of the
23 other—The other operation I recall was, oh gee, there was this fellow who had been out
24 there in the hills twenty-five years or something like that. He was—I'm trying to
25 remember the targets title. He was well up in the VCI province government. He wasn't
26 their province chief. Their deputy chief had already been killed. I think he was the head
27 of security. He might have been the chief political guy. He always traveled with one
28 friend who had, in fact, been his best man at this guy's wedding. They would frequently
29 come into this hamlet to visit their wives, but it took a long time to build up the
30 information. One night the PRUs ambushed them. They didn't get the chief target, but
31 they got his bodyguard. They gave me the bodyguard's hat which is somewhere in the

1 basement. My wife doesn't want to see it so that's fine with me, just leave it there. But
2 it's got the coordinates on it where they ambushed them. Yeah they also—the PRUs
3 would use—they came to me one time and they said the chief, Mr. Lung said, "I need
4 some aerial photographs of a particular area in the province. Can you get somebody at the
5 air base to fly a mission?" And he said, "Can you get him to fly it so that they don't think
6 this is the target area?" Oh Boy, okay. So, I went out to the air base, and I talked to a
7 major out there. He said, "Yeah, we can do that." He said, "We've got an RF4,"—a
8 reconnaissance version of the Phantom. "It's got to make runs, in several areas and we
9 can just divert it and have it run a strip. They won't know what part of the province is the
10 target area, because we'll photograph half the province. And then you guys can take what
11 you want. You don't have to tell me what the area is." Ok fine. And that helped—I don't
12 know what actually became of that operation because that went—that got started before I
13 left, but I didn—I don't think it ended until later. A lot of the work of the Phoenix
14 Program was done in—if you want to think of a civilian version of cordon and search
15 where the hamlet would be encircled by—you could use the National Police Field Force.
16 You might have an RF company. And you would just—the Police would go through, and
17 they would just check identity papers. If you didn't have papers or if your papers didn't
18 look right, they'd like to talk to you some more. Sometimes you would capture a few VC,
19 known VC sympathizers, sometimes some VC; low level usually. The killing of the VCI
20 took place with the exception of the PRU actions that I just described. And sometimes—
21 Oh! Another tool in this Phoenix Program, although more on the military side, was the
22 Sector Reconnaissance Platoon (SRP). These guys were all ex-VC. They knew where the
23 VC were, they knew how they operated, and they would simply go out and hunt. I think
24 the last time we talked I told you about the time we went and picked up—tried to pick up
25 the wounded VC deputy province commander that died. Well, that was a Sector Recon
26 Platoon operation. Again, that info that they gathered would come back to the Phoenix
27 people, the Phoenix officers and vice versa. They would come over and pick up
28 information from us. That was the way it was supposed to flow. It didn't really matter if
29 the Sector Recon Platoon bumped off the deputy VC—a VC deputy province chief or a—
30 the White Mice picked them up in a traffic stop. The term was, "The target has been
31 neutralized." We also used OSI (Office of Special Investigations). There was a U.S. Air

1 Force OSI team out on the base and— 'course, their main focus was to gather information
2 that would help protect the base's security. But they had agents that they ran. And they
3 would share information with us and vice versa. Particularly if we picked up anything
4 that indicated there was a team moving with mortars or rockets anywhere in that area.
5 The VCI that were killed except for those two PRUs—The PRU operations that I
6 mentioned. Almost all of those, I believe, came during attempts by the VCI to get into a
7 village or hamlet at night and they were killed in firefights with Regional Force, Popular
8 Force, or PSDF units. So, worry of the encounter would come back to province
9 headquarters and one of the things we did in the Phoenix "*Phụng Hoàng*" Program was
10 we would go out with a Polaroid camera and take pictures of the dead, for identification
11 purposes. And then you could go back—My interpreter would sometimes know the
12 person. Sometimes my counterpart did. A lot of times they were just talking to the
13 villagers like, "Who is this? Who's he related to here?" You get some names, you go
14 back, and you match the name with what you have on the chart of the VC organizational
15 structure. The VCI Organizational structure throughout the province. Sometimes you'd
16 discover whole new teams that you didn't know existed. Other times you'd find out,
17 "Holy smoke, that team is now down to about two people. They got chewed up pretty
18 good." Sometimes we'd take a few days to put the—to get the ID on them. Now, there's a
19 downside to this. I'm thinking of an incident that happened out in Bu Son District.
20 Captain Hill who was the Phoenix advisor in that district and Sergeant Bowman, his
21 NCO, were with their counterparts. I think it was perhaps a PF platoon who saw two
22 people, man and woman, moving along a riverbank and they yelled to them to stop. This
23 is just outside the district town. This is not necessarily in no-man or Indian country. Now,
24 I don't know why these two people didn't stop, but they didn't, and the platoon opened
25 up. They must have been the worst shots in the district because they didn't hit them. But
26 it certainly scared these people enough, so they did stop. They put their hands up. It turns
27 out it's a guy and his wife who were just—they were doing nothing wrong. They got the
28 third degree; they were perfectly innocent. They got a tongue lashing from the district
29 chief for failing to stop when they were asked to stop. He was furious at them because,
30 you know, you could have died, and you didn't have to be killed. This is stupid, stupid,
31 stupid. Then, I remember Sergeant Bowman said to me afterwards. He described the

1 incident and he said, “You know what the worst thing was, sir?” And I said, “What’s that
2 Sergeant?” He said, “I asked this Vietnamese District *Phụng Hoàng* chief. Y’know, what
3 if we—what if those people had been killed?” And this *Phụng Hoàng*, the Vietnamese
4 *Phụng Hoàng* chief in that district just turned looked at him and said, “Well then
5 Sergeant Bowman, they would have been VCI.” He’s not going to take the wrap for
6 reckless behavior. You know, have him identified as VCI and therefore justify the use of
7 force. That kind of a mindset’s not good. It creates more problems than you need, and it
8 certainly is morally wrong. I mean, Sergeant Bowman was deeply upset, we all were. I
9 just remembered he at the time was a Sergeant First Class. He had like fifteen years or
10 twenty and he was just shaking his head. That can cause somebody to stop and think
11 about the value of everything they’re doing. I hated the paperwork and there was a lot of
12 paperwork involved. I loved to get out and get in a jeep with my interpreter, Mr. Yan, and
13 sometimes with Sergeant Clark, my NCO. We’d just go to a district, and we’d run into
14 the district American advisors. We would try to work it out in advance. “Yeah, I’d like to
15 come down to your district tomorrow. This Hamlet out by such and such location. This
16 seems to get hit a lot. Can we go down and talk to people down there?” And then we’d go
17 and talk. It would often be—we’d spread out. We’d talk to a bunch of people and then
18 compare notes. Some people were willing to talk, some people weren’t. The kids were
19 neat, the kids were great. I could get them talking about fishing and I’d ask them what
20 they caught in the river and then you’d say, “Does your father go fishing with you? When
21 you’re out here fishing do you see any people, any adults? Are they carrying any
22 weapons? When was that?” It’s a start. And then other, other—then my counterpart
23 would be talking, say, with a hamlet chief or whoever you could, wherever you thought
24 you could get some information. That was a lot of the days when we weren’t doing
25 paperwork that is. This program was part of the CORDS program, Civil Operation Rural
26 Development Support. That was kind of the counterpart to the Military Advisory
27 Command (MAC-V). Technically CORDS ran up to the American embassy. The
28 practical matter, General Abrams, head of MAC-V was also head of CORDS. He’d also
29 have a CORDS deputy. At one point it was Mr. Kolby, I believe. Pardon me. And
30 CORDS—well, Phoenix headquarters, *Phụng Hoàng* headquarters, swore that they
31 weren’t setting quotas for you for each month. But I never figured out what else to call it.

1 You would get—Nha Trang was our corps headquarters. Nha Trang would send
2 messages down to the provinces and we'd share that with our teams in the districts.
3 "Okay the targets—y'know for the month of, or for the quarter of whatever. Reduce the
4 VCI by fifty. It's not a quota, just do your best." "Well shucks, call it what you want. If I
5 had to tell the people up in Nha Trang, and I would, y'know that we didn't get anybody
6 this month." "What in the hell is wrong with your counterparts down there? (Makes a
7 babbling sound). Oh no, it's not a quota." I think the further away you got from the actual
8 doing of it, the less they considered it a quota, the higher up you went. "Oh no, it's not a
9 quota." To the people working down from the field, it looked like a quota, smelled like a
10 quota, walked like a quota, so screw it. You do what you can with what you got at the
11 time. If we couldn't get all the numbers that they wanted, that's too damn bad. There
12 were other reports that we had to fill in. There was a big thing. Now, you may have run
13 across it already with other advisors. The Hamlet Evaluation System, H-E-S, HES?

14 JS: Just a little bit.

15 RD: Yeah, every advisory team from the district level on up had to complete one
16 of these per month, at the end of each month. The members of the team, of course, were
17 all doing different jobs. So, you would have a piece of this. And the Phoenix people, we
18 had a piece to fill in. It drove me nuts, and I know it drove some others nuts because the
19 questions—now, this is all a computerized report. You fill it in, it goes back to Saigon
20 and some big Univac back then would chew it up and shoot it back to Washington. The
21 questions to us seemed to be designed to show that things were improving. You almost
22 couldn't answer that they were not that good unless you were willing to say they were
23 absolutely totally awful and that you were in danger of being overrun. And that's not the
24 case. They did, of course, have a part of that report where you could, in narrative form,
25 say what you wanted. And we did. It didn't seem to make any damn difference. I
26 remember we went to a Phoenix/ *Phụng Hoàng* training school in Vung Tau. I think it
27 was in late March or early March of '71. I ran into some of the guys I trained with at Fort
28 Bragg. For us, this was very repetitive, but for a lot of the other folks there it was good
29 because they did not—they hadn't had the Phoenix training in the states. We had some
30 people come down from Saigon to conduct certain parts of it. I'd only been there a couple
31 of months. Myself and a few others said, "We already had enough of a gutfeel for this

1 HES reporting system.” said, “Why are we doing this? Why is it structured in this way?
2 Why isn’t there more latitude to give a more accurate description in a narrative form?”
3 They said, “Well, it’s done this way because it’s easier to collate the information this way
4 and—Washington.” Kissinger’s name was spoken. “Wants to see progress.” The guy who
5 said this was a very junior officer, but he came out of the Saigon, MAC-V, CORDS
6 Phoenix Headquarters and I have to believe that he had picked up on something there, a
7 frame of mind back there. So, whether or not Mr. Kissinger really did want to see us put
8 this bullshit in the HES report, so it looked better, that’s one question. But I think what
9 we were told reflects a mindset back in Saigon. Very disappointing, very disappointing.
10 The good work that you could see would be knocking off or capturing or welcoming as a
11 Chu Hoi, a fairly high level of VC person because that’s hard to replace, particularly out
12 there in the boondocks. More and more North Vietnamese, people of North Vietnamese
13 origin were taking— were filling the ranks. VC armed units, like main force. But it was
14 also becoming true of the VCI because the Tet of ’68 has decimated the VCI so badly
15 that a lot of the VCI were doing two or three jobs instead of one. Everybody was
16 doubling or tripling. You took help where you could get it and if you needed some people
17 and they happened to be North Vietnamese and the North Vietnamese were certainly
18 willing to step in for purposes of control. In another area we saw a sprinkling of it. It was
19 kind of a quiet area. I think it was more prevalent in more active areas. Excuse me. Let
20 me stop there and just ask you if I’m—.

21 JS: Once a member of the VCI was identified, what would be the next step in the
22 process? Could you talk a little bit about that? I know you mentioned in our conversation
23 we were just having, theory versus reality, what the theory would be and the problems
24 with actually neutralizing the enemy in whatever form they would be neutralized.

25 RD: Yeah. In theory, the response to the identification of a VCI, you would tailor
26 the response of what the situation was. If you had the VCI identified as living in a village,
27 that’s one thing. You might just go in with some National Police and some Police Special
28 Branch, knock on the door, “Please come with us.” If the VCI was out in the boondocks
29 as so many of the leaders were, I should say as so many as we believe so many of them to
30 be. Sending National Police and Police Special Branch out there was not the way to go.
31 You might be able to pull it off using the National Police Field Force, the paramilitary

1 arm. Even that would be dicey because they were—The NPFF (were) not as heavily
2 armed as a good strong VC platoon or as the RF or PFs were. So, you might try to set a
3 trap, because usually the VCI would come in. At some point or another they will come in
4 because the fish has to swim in the sea, the guerilla has to swim in the people. He can't
5 live forever outside the hamlets. He can't be effective. He has to have that
6 communication. In theory, you would set ambushes. As I think I told you, the Provincial
7 Reconnaissance Unit under Mr. Lung did a good job of that. They would mount long-
8 term operations. It was not unusual for them to put an agent into a hamlet for up to six
9 months gathering information on the comings and goings of identified VCI leaders who
10 would come in from the boondocks to visit their family to collect taxes, to recruit, to give
11 propaganda pitches, whatever. It could take, as I said, up to six months before they would
12 spring the trap. Those were very, very specifically targeted operations. Specific targeting
13 was a phrase that was drummed into us back at Fort Bragg in Phoenix training. It's a very
14 personal war, if you will. In theory, you're trying to identify individuals. It's not a
15 massive sweep, it's going after certain key people. That's theory. Now, in practice while
16 the crews could pull off some of those kinds of operations, in practice, we had a problem
17 in our province. I think that the problem stemmed from something that had occurred in
18 1970. Sometime in 1970 when my counterpart Warren Faulk was there. Captain Chi, the
19 province *Phụng Hoàng* Chief, convinced Colonel Tu, the province chief—the Phoenix
20 chief convinced the province chief that they should run a big sweep to nail a whole bunch
21 of identified VCI and they did. They got sixty to seventy people, almost all of them
22 identified VCI, others were suspects rounded up in suspicious circumstances. Hotdog!
23 Only problem was that too many of them were well connected members of the Am
24 Quang Buddhist sect that had, for years, been able to raise holy hell in Saigon politics.
25 They proceeded to do that. President Thieu was not pleased with this, and the word came
26 down to the province chief and thence to my counterpart that most of these people were
27 to be released. And so, it was done and of course that caused incredible embarrassment
28 for the province chief and for my counterpart. I believe that my counterpart had received
29 orders from the province chief that he was never—the Phoenix, the *Phụng Hoàng* was
30 not to do any more of these kinds of operations, unless they had outright approval all the
31 way up the line to Saigon. In fact, any *Phụng Hoàng* Operations had to be approved. So,

1 this made it difficult for Captain Chi to operate with the other agencies. It's one thing to
2 operate with other agencies to gather information, but it's another thing to then say,
3 "Okay, we have this information and go to one of your cooperating agencies and say,
4 "Hey look, how about you guys doing this operation out here and picking up these
5 people?" And they look at you and go, "Oh yeah, weren't you the one who organized that
6 fiasco last year?" We would—I wish I had understood more and had been more
7 sympathetic to Captain Chi. He was caught between a rock and a hard place. I know his
8 heart was in the right place. But I was too much of—I was too naïve. At any rate, Captain
9 Chi, on a number of occasions said to me, "Yeah, we got these VCI identified down in
10 such, and such province—district and we know roughly where they are. Why don't we
11 start setting up some operations?" He'd look at me and he says, "Well, you know, we
12 must be flexible Dai Wei. We must be flexible" The most famous saying he ever left me
13 with. "We must be flexible." And I get pissed off and say, "Jesus, we've been flexible for
14 so long, why can't we just go get them." And then he'd look at me and say, "Sometimes
15 people who want to do so much shooting have not seen any." "Ooh, that hurts. You're
16 right." Once in a while he'd say, "I think I'll go talk to Mr. Lung, the Province, PRU,
17 Province Reconnaissance Unit chief." Mr. Lung had to have been one of the most skillful
18 politicians as well as being a hell of a good leader. The PRUs seemed to be smiled on by
19 the province chief, the Colonel. I'm sure Lung had Colonel Tu's ear. Long was also a
20 good, good friend of Dai Wei Chi, my counterpart. I think Chi was just trying to say,
21 "Look, I can't do this. I don't have the leverage right now, but maybe Lung, maybe the
22 PRUs." A lot of information went to the PRUs. Sometimes they could do it, sometimes
23 they had other targets. I think sometimes they may even had been mounting operations
24 based on what corps PRU headquarters sat down. Cause they still had CIA advisors at
25 corps level for the PRU program. If we had—let's say we had the information, but we
26 weren't sure that we could do anything with it. We would certainly pass it to an agency
27 that had assets in the effected hamlets or villages. So, if you had RD cadre out there,
28 you'd let them know. They might say, "Oh yeah, we're the ones that told you about it the
29 first time." "Oh okay, we picked up some confirming information from somebody else.
30 Police Special Branch may have had an operation out there that picked up some
31 identifications." All you can do is let them know. I think that with the exception of the

1 operations that the PRUs mounted, most of the killing of VCI took place as the result of
2 normal nighttime security operations outside hamlets. By that I mean the hamlet would
3 have night ambush positions set up every night by either PSDF or PF. They might not
4 have been set up with any specific information that a VCI team was coming in that night.
5 They would just be set up in antici—to defend as a general matter. It happened on a given
6 night a VC team did attempt to infiltrate the village and ran smack into an ambush.
7 Anywhere from one to three of them might get killed. Capturing of the VCI—they were
8 low level captures that would take place. Hit roadblocks. Sometimes a small hamlet
9 might be cordoned off with police assets. National Police Field Force provides security
10 around the hamlet. The police, White Mice, start checking papers with the Police Special
11 Branch kind of watching over their shoulders and the Special Branch has a list of people
12 in that area that they believed to be VCI. They're just looking for papers. That's kind of a
13 peaceful way to go about it. Far cry from the ambush. You'd pick them up and then
14 they'd be taken back to the PIC, the Province Interrogation Center. That would be how it
15 could operate. We did not have any big—any big sweeps in the Phoenix program in that
16 province for the best of my recollection in the year I was there. As a result of what had
17 happened the year before and the embarrassment. I think I told you about the Chu Hoi's,
18 some of the Chu Hoi's. I'd get to talk to them after they had talked to the Vietnamese
19 province people. They would usually spend, depending on how high level they were they
20 might spend anywhere from a week to six months over at the Province Interrogation
21 Center. They might get shipped out somewhere else for further interrogation. The low-
22 level folks I found that few of them were communists. They were people who had
23 grievances, or their families had grievances with how the Saigon Government had been
24 governing or not governing. The VC seemed to be an avenue for change. As things
25 improved economically and I think socially in that province, as the level of violence
26 dropped say, from '69 on, a lot of the lower-level folks who had served basically as
27 guides or bodyguards, they would come in. They said it just didn't seem to make any
28 sense. The VC are hungry, they're at the end of their own supply line. They're living out
29 in the woods in the mountains for years. We see things are better here now. We think
30 they're going to lose. We think the VC will lose. We think that our concerns are being
31 answered. Then there was the infamous love triangle.

1 JS: I remember you mentioning that.

2 RD: Oh Lord, I'll never forget that as long as I live. You know, you dream up all
3 these wonderful programs, but if you can just throw a few heartbreakers into the tents.

4 JS: Right.

5 RD: Yeah.

6 JS: Well, I want to ask you a follow up questions about your relationship with
7 your counterparts and, well, the question is the fact that your counterpart didn't always
8 follow up on these leads with the VCI and pursue them. Did it ever, at that time, when
9 you were in Vietnam, did it ever make you question his loyalty? And if he was truly loyal
10 to the cause? I've seen these stereotypical Americans say, "Well, you cannot trust the
11 Vietnamese because of things like this." Did it cause you to have those kinds of thoughts
12 at that time?

13 RD: No.

14 JS: Okay.

15 RD: No, I don't recall that it did. He's forty-four years old. I'm twenty-six,
16 twenty-seven. He's been fighting for thirty years. He had a brother in the Rangers,
17 Airborne Rangers who had been shot up pretty bad in Lamson 719. They were close, I
18 saw the brother with Captain Chi when the brother visited. I found out in the middle or
19 late summer of '71. In given what I knew or what I had been told what had happened the
20 previous year in the big Phoenix sweep. *Phụng Hoàng* Sweep that caused such
21 embarrassment. No, I thought he was basically trapped politically. I didn't think that he
22 was a VC sympathizer. I do think that virtually every Vietnamese person had a much
23 better understanding, a much more visceral understanding of how dirty a civil war it was.
24 It was not just a war of aggression by the communists, it was in truth a civil war, also.
25 The politics of that and trying to establish a national government and a province
26 government to govern effectively under those circumstances. Part of that would be to
27 provide the political security that Phoenix was intended to do by eliminating the other
28 guy's political apparatus. You know, I'm impressed that the program worked as well as it
29 did now. Back then, I wasn't impressed with it at all. I was disgusted, but I did, did not—
30 to the best of my recollection I never thought that my counterpart was VC or sympathetic
31 to them.

1 JS: Well, you do have—not you, but there is that stereotypical view about not
2 being able to trust ARVN counterparts and the ARVN in general. Do you think some of
3 that potentially came from Americans not understanding that larger political
4 considerations?

5 RD: Some did. Some of it had to have come from that. Some of it is just a culture,
6 cultural differences. You're living in a land whose people are so different from you and
7 your people, and language, and culture. You don't communicate very well; you can't
8 speak their language and most of them don't speak yours. They live in ways totally
9 different from what you're used to. Their religion for the most part is something that you
10 might never have seen or have no understanding of. It's easy to fall into the trap of
11 stereotyping people. I've talked with a lot of guys who served with American line outfits
12 and their view of the Vietnamese is, well, still bad. Amazing though, the number of
13 advisors you talk to and how different it is. Americans who were so proud to serve with
14 Vietnamese units, who knew that a Vietnamese soldier was good as anybody else when
15 properly led and motivated. I know that I was—although I had better training and
16 preparation in terms of Vietnamese culture and history and language and all that. I could
17 still fall into the trap and stereotype people. It wasn't fair, it wasn't right. I hope I didn't
18 do it as often and as pervasively as others may have.

19 JS: Well, another question along those lines. Of course, there were, in some cases,
20 good reason for not trusting some of the South Vietnamese allies and the fact that some
21 of them actually were, in some cases, would turn out to be sympathizers for the VC or,
22 you know, actually VC themselves. Did you guys run across that at all? Did the Phoenix
23 Program track down some of those people as well?

24 RD: I don't recall that we did in our province. I suspect there were such people,
25 but I don't know who they were. I hate to admit ignorance on something like that, but by
26 God, the only thing I can admit to in this case is ignorance. I've often wondered who
27 popped up to the surface in 1975. You had talked about some of your family and an
28 uncle-in-law having been VC. Yeah, well I wonder sometimes if an interpreter here and
29 there might not have been either in the pay of or sympathetic with them. There were
30 just—some of them I know, absolutely not I would never believe it, never believe it.

31 JS: Alright.

1 RD: Sure, would like to know what happened in '75 and who came out of the
2 closet.

3 JS: Right.

4 RD: What pissed me off more than anything else was the bureaucrats. And
5 sometimes they just seemed to want to shuffle their papers and not do anything or, "Hey
6 Captain, why don't you—why don't we have a—let's go to dinner, let's have a party." I
7 went off on one of them one time I said, "I think all you want to do with us is party. Want
8 us to pay the bill for the beer and the food. I don't see anybody pushing hard." He got
9 very offended by that. I could have handled it more diplomatically. I was not much of a
10 diplomat then. Probably not much of one now. A lot of rougher edges then. Anyhow,
11 your question.

12 JS: Okay, along the lines of intelligence as far as identifying the VCI, could you
13 talk a little bit about—I guess, what were some of the best forms of intelligence, the most
14 reliable to prove and say, "This person is VCI, and they need to be taken care of." In
15 whatever form.

16 RD: Would you ask me that again? I want to make sure I understand what you're
17 asking.

18 JS: Sure, sure. Yeah, I didn't phrase it very well. I guess what I was trying to ask
19 was what were some of the best and most reliable forms of intelligence to identify the
20 VCI?

21 RD: The best, I trusted what the PRUs brought back because I knew how they
22 operated and then a lot of their stuff came from agents that they had put in place. So, it
23 was based on personal observation and data gathering under extreme stress, you know,
24 tough conditions. At the other end of the spectrum is stuff that would come in—an
25 unknown source—A source unknown to us reported to a hamlet chief that he or she had
26 seen a group of armed Vietnamese moving along a patty dike at XYZ location and time.
27 "Anybody know this person? Anybody got a source out there that they trust and also
28 reporting something like that?" Sometimes you get some weird reports. Particularly on
29 the movement of VC main force units. And these would be very well trained and
30 equipped VC military units. Main force units were, in some cases were tough, aggressive
31 and well-armed as NVA units. Sometimes you would get reports on that and that could

1 raise the hair on the back of your neck because our province was so quiet. The main force
2 units seemed to move through it, but not stay in it. They might stop and do some R&R
3 (Rest and Recuperation) out in the mountains in the west, but they were not, generally
4 speaking, involved in combat inside the province. Reports that such units may have
5 included Americans or at least people of western origin. We had reports of Cubans,
6 Russians, and I have to say this is all what we used to say, F6. A to F would be how you
7 categorized the source and 1 to 6 would be how you categorized the information coming
8 from the source. So, you could get—F6 would be the lowest possible rating. Source
9 unknown can't evaluate data. A1, of course, would be great source. Yeah, this info
10 checks. I never knew who the OSI sources were. They would come into town once every
11 couple of weeks and swing by our offices. I think they met a bunch of their sources in the
12 local brothel. Hey y'know, whatever works, whatever works. Sometimes they'd just be
13 working through a marketplace, like any other American GIs (General Infantry). Who
14 knows who they talked to in the marketplace. Anyway, it was hard to evaluate. I didn't
15 run the sources; I didn't know them. We would get—I think what was happening was the
16 *Phung Hoàng* office would be getting these reports from the various agencies and the
17 districts and then my interpreter, Mr. Yan, would translate them into English. Type them
18 up and we'd look at it. And a lot of times I'd say, "Geez Yan, this information is on its
19 face. It looks very interesting because it seems to co-indicate that there's something that
20 could happen there at the air base, but what's the source?" He said, "Oh, I don't know, I
21 think they just talked to some old woman." Okay, you might be right, you might not.
22 Now, if we got four or five reports like that within a space of a week or even two, there
23 was say a unit that looked to be carrying a huge tube. Oh well, that tube could be a 107 or
24 a 122. We would drive out to the air base and talk to our friends. We wouldn't do it on
25 the phone because the phone lines were not secure.

26 JS: Right.

27 RD: I remember one time there was one of the most fascinating works was of a
28 VC main force battalion led by a one breasted woman.

29 JS: Huh, okay.

30 RD: A woman, I think from a province in the north of II Corps. I don't have my
31 map with me. Binh Dinh Province, Binh Dinh. Who—Binh Dinh had been a hot bed of

1 Viet Minh support, anti-French support for forever. This woman had been picked up and
2 tortured by the French and one breast had been cut off. She became one of the most
3 feared. She escaped—well was released at some point and became, eventually, the
4 Commander, a Lieutenant Colonel commanding a VC main force battalion that was one
5 of the toughest battalions in II Corps. Feared throughout the corps, respected. Boy, we
6 got word one time, her battalion seemed to be entering, I think Bu Son District up in the
7 northern part of it and we just went, “Uh oh.” We never got anything further. So, if it had
8 been true, she must have just been passing through like so many other main force units
9 had done at one time. Wanted a place to rest, recuperate, or just head on down the trail to
10 Southern II Corps or maybe up towards Dalat, whatever. Boy, when we got that we got—
11 I think that time we did call the air base. “Hey, I want to talk to you, and I want you guys
12 to check your sources.” We went out and talked to them, showed them what we got. “F6?
13 yeah, but it’s not E5.” Which is a totally unreliable source with totally stupid and false
14 information. So, it’s possible. We tried hard to confirm or deny that one. We tried to put
15 the word out to sources everywhere we had. That would have been one that the Sector
16 Recon Platoon would have been very interested in.

17 JS: Speaking of the Sector Recon Platoon, was this made up of VC from that area
18 that knew the area?

19 RD: Yeah. Sector Recon were all ex-VC and most of them had operated in that
20 province and certainly within that general region. The PRUs, technically not a military
21 unit, a Provincial Reconnaissance Unit was actually—their hierarchy led them up
22 through—their advisory hierarchy was CIA. They were kind of like direct successors to
23 the old counter-terror-teams. Very well armed, extremely good in the brush, but also
24 good in terms of intelligence operations. The recon platoon was excellent as a recon
25 platoon. Snoop and poop in the woods. They were very good. They could take good Intel
26 and act on it. The PRUs would, as I said before, they would put people in. They would
27 infiltrate people in the villages and hamlets to get the intelligence they needed. The recon
28 platoon, they couldn’t really do that because they were ex-VC. If they got identified, if
29 their cover was blown, they were dead right away. The other guys were, too, but it was
30 far more likely that if you were an ex-VC and operating as part of the Sector Recon
31 Platoon, you would know ‘em.

1 JS: Would there ever been any instances of things like those guys having a price
2 on their head or things like that?

3 RD: Sure, I had a price on my head.

4 JS: Oh really?

5 RD: Yeah, most American officers did. I remember reading *Chickenhawk*. I'm
6 tryna look at that the—If I have that here I'd like to give you the author's name, but he
7 was a helicopter pilot. He maintains that the VC and NVA had a ten-thousand-dollar
8 price tag. You kill—you bring down an American chopper, you kill an American pilot,
9 and you get ten-thousand-dollars. Well, my goodness gracious. Pilots are surely more
10 valuable than Intel officers. Yeah, I found out one day from another American, another
11 Captain in the Phoenix Program, but he operated out of An Phu district. We were sitting
12 around talking one day they had—that district had just picked up and captured a VC and
13 had been interrogating him. The VC said—well, I don't know how the subject came up,
14 but whatever. The VC said that there was a price tag on my head. I looked at the guy, my
15 friend and I said, "On the province Phoenix Advisor's head?" And he said, "Yeah, but
16 you by name."

17 JS: Wow.

18 RD: I said, "No shit, how much?" He says, "Fifty dollars." "That's insulting, fifty
19 dollars?" My friend looked at me and said, "That's the same price they put on the head of
20 the province senior advisor Full Colonel." "Well shit, the Colonel should be insulted,
21 too." And then the guy reminded me fifty-bucks was about all a Vietnamese peasant
22 would see in a year. And I suspected that would be cash and cash value. So, a year's
23 wages, earnings. To the best of my knowledge nobody ever tried to collect. I'm still very
24 grateful to the people in that province because I was out as often as I could be. I tried to
25 be out in the hamlets and villages. Somebody could have gotten me if they wanted and
26 could have collected. I'm sure that there were prices put on Mr. Lung, the PRU chief, on
27 the province chief, probably on my counterpart. From what I heard after the war, if you
28 had operated in the PRUs or as part as *Phụng Hoàng*, you'd be lucky to get to the re-
29 education camps. You'd be executed.

1 JS: Well, you talked about going into the villages and spending quite a bit of time
2 there. Could you talk a little bit about, I guess interaction with just the regular locals and
3 your impression of them?

4 RD: Oh, yeah. Since most of the time we were going in there into the villages and
5 hamlets, we were not there to arrest somebody. We were there to talk and to get
6 information. It was much more low-key. So, it was non-threatening in that sense. I wish I
7 could speak Vietnamese. I wish I could have spoken it better then, than I did. I had to rely
8 on Mr. Yan, and I think he was good. I think he was, oh, I think sometimes he kind of
9 abridged it. He would give me the general gist of the conversations. And sometimes you
10 could sense that the villager hamlet chiefs or officials were nervous when you're talking
11 to them. My counterparts would do the talking, I wouldn't. We'd have a general idea
12 what kind of questions we wanted to ask them. Usually, it was related to an incident, a
13 specific incident that recently happened, an infiltration, or maybe somebody ambushed a
14 VC team outside that hamlet. In some cases, you could sense the nervousness of the
15 chiefs—the hamlet chief's officials. Those were, I would say, in places where the VC
16 infiltration had been successful. Where the VC had been stopped, where there was a
17 history of stopping them outside and determined opposition such as the Catholic hamlet.
18 The level of comfort of the officials was very high and their identification with their
19 people was very strong. I liked the people I met. Particularly if we had a chance just to
20 talk with farmers, or fisherman. I loved talking to fisherman. We would go out fishing on
21 weekends. Probably did it three or four times during the year I was there. The village of
22 Tan Hai in the District of Tan Hai. Right on the South China Sea lot. Big, big fishing
23 operation. In fact, there was a huge Nuoc Maum operation there. It was one of the things
24 that—I run into Americans who served in that province, and they passed through, and
25 they go, "Yeah, Ninh Thuan, oh lord, it stank of Nuoc Maum." Well, you know, you get
26 used to it. You get to know what good Nuoc Maum is. Yeah, but we'd go out there with
27 them, with the fisherman. Our two or three Americans and maybe the same number of
28 counterparts. We'd rent a—basically you'd charter a boat or a commercial fisherman or
29 he and his crew would take you out, he and his mate and catch all sorts of fish. We'd just
30 have a great time. Somehow, we could communicate, you made it happen even if you
31 didn't take your interpreter along and mostly you didn't—cause I didn't because he was

1 married and he had a family. His Sundays were his, but we managed, and we had a hell
2 of a good time. Usually, we'd go back to the village with all the fish we caught. The
3 captain's wife and family would cook them, and we'd all sit there at these huge tables
4 and we'd inv—they would invite in people from all over the town. It would be a good ol'
5 Vietnamese fish fry. We swelled rice and the best Nuoc Maum and cold beer, yeah. I
6 liked it. I liked the people. I thought that the ordinary people I met, the farmers, the
7 fisherman that they weren't really communist. They might not have been strong
8 supporters of the Saigon government either. They were kind of just trying to get by. Feed
9 their families, improve their lot as best they could. They really appreciated having better
10 roads to get the crops or fish or the Nuoc Maum to market. The introduction of pumps
11 and new brands of rice, you know, they accepted this. They loved the land-to-the-tiller
12 program because people who had been tenants, virtual serfs now owned their own land. I
13 just came to think of them very much as you would, our blue-collar workers back here.
14 Farmers in the Midwest. They had an innate political sense of balance. They'd managed
15 to live and survive in the midst of this war for God knows how long. I think they were
16 tough. They had nice senses of humor. They could laugh. And if you showed them any
17 kind of—if you just tried to understand, be nice, be quiet and listen, observe. I think they
18 appreciated that.

19 JS: Alright. Getting back to, I guess, you talked about that particularly interesting
20 or memorable case of that report of the one breasted Viet Cong woman, but were there
21 other any particularly memorable reports or cases that stick out in your mind that you
22 could possibly talk about?

23 RD: I remember getting reports of—and I think I mentioned this, Americans or
24 Cubans or Russians being with a Viet Cong unit. Sometimes the report would say the
25 Americans would appear to be prisoners, or appeared to be a prisoner. You got something
26 like that, you put it on the map, and you tried to get an observation flight, I mean if the
27 information wasn't too old. I can't say that we ever tracked any of that down, but there
28 was a real sensitivity to any report that might indicate the presence of a POW. As for the
29 Russians, eh, we didn't believe that too much, but Cubans? Yeah, we knew they were—
30 we knew that Cubans had been active in particularly intelligence operations, so possible.
31 The Russians we thought it more likely that they would be Chinese advisors. We also

1 thought that if any of these types of people were with a unit in our province, that had to
2 be a pretty big unit. There were no big strong VC units. If there was a main force
3 company in our province, that was about as big as it got. So, these other units, if they
4 were there, like I said before, if they were passing through—if indeed they were there,
5 they were passing through or they were on R&R, and they'd be leaving soon. I don't
6 mean to say that it was hunky-dory, that it was totally pacified because the VC could plan
7 for months if not years an operation. And they would be extremely detail oriented. If the
8 plan was not disrupted, they would have a very good chance of carrying it off. It took a
9 great effort to do this. I give them a lot of credit; they weren't stupid at all. They were
10 good in using ambush tactics. They attacked a hamlet in An Phuc District early one night
11 after complete darkness had come down. An RF company was sent to relieve the hamlet.
12 There was one way in on a patty dike. Apparently, the RF did not observe proper security
13 procedures. They were laughing, joking, holding hands as they went down the dike. The
14 VC had been waiting for this, and they had a 105-round hanging out of a tree over a dike
15 and they triggered that shell. They just reeked carnage. Some of the guys on our team
16 were on chopper pad duty that night. It rotated. If a medevac came in, you know, if you
17 were on duty, you'd help meet it and get whoever needed to be taken into the province
18 hospital while these guys said the floor of the helicopter was so slick with blood that you
19 couldn't stand up in it. It just drenched the entire floor. The non-skid floor was no longer
20 non-skid. Just a bloody mess. That was a classic operation that they pulled off. It was a
21 reminder. I think that happened like in, oh, about this time of year or a little later. I was
22 pretty well into my tour and nothing like that had happened for quite a while. It was a
23 reminder that, "Hey, we are still out here, and you are not immune. We can get you." It
24 certainly tightened the pucker-factor for quite a while. I think it made a difference in
25 terms of the RF leadership, training, and their discipline. They just—they invited it that
26 unit. They were not under the command of the best—their commander was not—he was
27 lax. You know, "we just going to walk in here and chase the bad ol' VC away, they're
28 not going to stand up" and then blam.

29 JS: Another memorable incident I suppose. I know you mentioned in the video
30 that you sent me about the incident on the road where some Cham women were killed.
31 Could you talk about that and what happened there?

1 RD: Yeah, at the time I was doubling up and serving as our team's police advisor.
2 Our regular police advisor had been transferred and we were waiting for his replacement
3 to arrive. I guess that took about a month. During the course of that month there was an
4 American convoy coming out of Dalat. It came down QL11 into Phan Rang and then
5 turned south on QL1. They were headed for Phan Thiet, the province capital of Binh
6 Thuan Province to our south. Hot weather; hot, hot weather. Long drive and like a lot of
7 American units and kids, they were nervous, so they drove hard. Apparently, when they
8 got south of the An Phuc District town, district capital, they had entered an area of the
9 district that was heavily populated by Chams. Rice paddies, I recollect on both sides of
10 the road. Big, big rice paddies sweeping. One young driver fell asleep at the wheel and
11 went off the road into the rice paddies, hit two Cham women working in the paddy. Oh, I
12 recollected one was pregnant and I believe she was the wife of a Cham village chief. The
13 kid was killed, these two women were killed. The Cham's—of course, the convoy
14 stopped. The Chams came out and they were enraged. You have to understand, part of the
15 rage both the Chams and the Vietnamese felt at these convoys, was that the convoys
16 seemed to operate without any regard to safety of the local inhabitants. They would come
17 barreling through towns. Dogs would get whacked. Sometimes we'd have a kid get hit.
18 As advisors we were pretty fed up with the convoy procedures ourselves. At any rate,
19 Chams came, and they brought their guns, they brought their weapons. They would
20 defend their villages with PSDF people, too. They surrounded the convoy and basically
21 took them prisoner. Danny Biard, Major Biard who is the An Phuc district senior advisor
22 went down to see if there was something he could do to loosen this log jam and settle
23 things down. And they took him prisoner. Word came back to the province headquarters
24 of what had happened and now that Major Biard was also taken. Everybody on the team
25 loved Danny Biard. I talked to—I remember going to the police chief and saying, "Are
26 you going to go down there? Basically, we've got a traffic accident and it's boiling up
27 into a hostage situation and you want to go down and talked to them?" He went and
28 looked at me and he said, "Those are Chams, I'm not going down there. It's too soon,
29 gotta let this settle." I talked to—I think I talked to the province senior advisor very
30 briefly. I can't remember if I did or not, but I think I did. I sure told people that I was
31 going down there. My police interpreter, Sergeant Dinh came with me. We just drove

1 right up to it, walked up, Chams opened up the cordon, and I walked up and there's
2 Major Biard and he's looking at me and said, "What did you do this for?" I said, "Well, I
3 came down to see if I could help." He says, "Oh my God." At that point an armed Cham
4 came over and stuck a rifle up under my chin. I don't know whether it was an M-1 or a
5 carbine, I think it was a carbine. I realized, "Boy, this is one of the stupidest things I've
6 ever done." Before I could even think that through, Sergeant Dinh stepped up and he just
7 swatted the rifle out from under my chin and he grabbed the Cham by the shirt front, and
8 he just yanked him up on his toes. Right in his face he said, "You don't get to that
9 Captain except through me and if you want to try me, I'm ready." Something to that
10 effect. He was clearly willing to lay his life on the line for me. It was absolutely the
11 bravest thing I'd ever seen anybody do. Well, we sat there despite Sergeant Dinh's
12 bravery we were captured. We were all sitting together—I mean they weren't going to
13 hurt us; they just weren't going to let us go. They were just trying to figure out what in
14 the hell they were going to do next. We had radios so the province senior advisor said,
15 "Hey look guys I'm about—" We eventually got a call from him, he said "I'm about a
16 quarter mile up the road. I'm here with the two," what were they? "M-100s, I think, the
17 old armored-cars. It had twin 50 caliber guns and a turret." He basically commandeered
18 these Vietnamese armored cars and their crews. I guess the province chief was there, too.
19 They were not about to come rolling down QL1 like the Calvary because people could
20 get hurt. "We're here, we haven't forgotten you. We're working on things, just be
21 patient." After hours we were getting nowhere, and a helicopter comes in and John Paul
22 Vann steps out. Vann was the leader and the head of the advisory effort in all of II Corps.
23 He's the equivalent of a two or three star general and he's got a reputation in terms of
24 dealing with Vietnamese and the Vietnam War and the counter insurgency, and all that.
25 He's one of the most respected and feared. Boy, if you were working for him you didn't
26 want to screw up. Well, he obviously was not pleased with what was going on down
27 there. He just got out of the helicopter, walked down the road. He had his radio with him
28 all by himself. As I recollect, he's all by himself. Maybe he had an interpreter, but his
29 Vietnamese was pretty good. At any rate, he sat and talked with the Cham village elders
30 and basically, "What do you want? This is silly, we can't all sit out here all night." "Well,
31 we're not going to let you go. You got to pay so much money." "We'll pay, allot you

1 some payments. Certainly, acknowledge that there's been a problem here that you didn't
2 create, but now you've created a bigger problem." "Oh well, we're not going to let you
3 go." By this time, it was dark. I guess he'd had enough, Vann had, had enough. Because
4 he just picked up his radio and said something like, "Okay, now." I don't know, fifteen
5 hundred feet, twenty-five hundred feet up very quietly motoring around half a mile away
6 was a gunship, a big gunship. Like one of those old C-119 gunships with Gatling guns,
7 20 millimeters. Three or four of them. First of all, search lights went on. Lit the convoy
8 up and I remember it's the weirdest light I had ever been in or ever seen because there
9 were no shadows. It was just total light. Then way off, about a quarter mile, half mile off
10 a rice paddy you hear this, "Whirr" like a power motor or a power saw, a chain saw.
11 These red hoses open up out of the sky and they're just splashing tracers all over this rice
12 paddy out there. They weren't shooting at any particular target or anything, they weren't
13 trying to hit anybody, it was a demonstration. John Paul Vann's way of saying, "This is
14 now over. You want to talk some more, we'll talk. Go on back to the district compound
15 and we'll talk. But the convoy goes free, my people go free, and we all go home." Five
16 minutes later we were home, we were out. It was over. I got properly chewed out for
17 walking into a situation where I could do no good, and then get told people appreciated
18 the fact that I was willing to try. But then Vann ended that situation right there. He was
19 quite a guy. He had—I could tell you a couple other Vann things if you want.

20 JS: Sure, absolutely.

21 RD: We had a habit of naming these VCI teams. We would refer to them as
22 Action-Arrow Teams. They would all have names or numbers attached to them, Muy
23 Gon Thag (??) was the real—I think that was the real Vietnamese name for the teams. It
24 was like a two-edged sword because they were both political and military. But they got
25 their nickname Action-Arrow Team from the Americans because anytime there was an
26 incident or an action, an arrow would be put up at that spot on the map. God knows
27 where it started, but we always referred to as Action-Arrow Teams. Vann just refused—
28 he would not put up with that. He said it glamorizes them. Call them terrorist teams, if
29 you will. Call them VC teams, whatever you want, but no more of this Action-Arrow
30 bullshit. That was one thing. I remember giving a briefing to him in a province and I
31 slipped. We knew in advance, don't use that term. I slipped. Boy, it took him about

1 fifteen seconds to chew my butt. I don't think I ever used that term again. And then I
2 guess this was back towards the end of my tour, I would say November or early
3 December of '71. I was up in province—not province, but region headquarters in Nha
4 Trang talking with a very nice Lieutenant Colonel who was the head *Phụng Hoàng*
5 advisor in the province. He'd been working on a different problem. He said to me, "I'm
6 really glad you're here because I want to sound you out on something. I want your advice
7 on it." "Sure, what is it?" He said, "Well first of all, you're trained as an agent handler?" I
8 said, "Yes sir, but I've never worked in it." And he said, "Well, that's okay." He said,
9 "Mr. Vann has put forward the idea that the *Phụng Hoàng* advisors should, on their own,
10 recruit agents and establish networks, in addition to their regular responsibilities." "Oh?"
11 He said, "I'd like to know what you think." And I told him it was really, at least in my
12 case, a very dumb idea because we would probably lose the people I recruited as fast as I
13 could recruit them. He asked why and I said, "Because everybody in that province knows
14 me." And I told him about the price on the head business. I said, "They know me by
15 name. They're watching, therefore anybody I get in touch with and directly recruit is going
16 to be a marked person." I said, "You can try it with cutouts, but then you would be
17 trusting me to trust somebody else to do the recruiting and the actual running of the
18 agent." I said, "If that's the case then that's what we have now. In essence. So, you're not
19 getting anything new other than establishing new networks." I don't know whether
20 they—the colonel seemed to appreciate what I was saying. I heard no more about it, so I
21 don't know if those things. So, I don't know if those things were ever done, but I do
22 know that Vann was a tremendous believer in intelligence. I just looked at that as that
23 idea whether or not it ever came to fruition as one more example of how highly he valued
24 good intelligence. He would turn over every stone he could to find ways to get good
25 intelligence. The last thing I remember—geese, this had to be within a month before I got
26 out. He came down to our province. He made it a point to visit every province and spend
27 several nights in each province and most of those nights would be out in the field. A
28 whole bunch of us spent the night in a hamlet down there in An Phuc. Vietnamese Saigon
29 government propaganda teams were showing movies. Everything was hunky dory. They
30 had so much security it was incredible, unbelievable. I was part of the province team that
31 stayed out that night down there. It wasn't bad. I mean, we certainly weren't roughing it.

1 We had cots, but not quite sure. I remember thinking, you know,” I got about three weeks
2 to go, and I don’t care if this is Time Square, I don’t want to be out here.” It was what it
3 was. It showed me, once again, that this guy Vann was for real. I think that that’s the
4 second to the last Vann story I have. I remember when he was killed in ’72 in the Easter
5 Offensive. When his chopper crashed. Late in ’72 I ended up going to work for the
6 federal government in product safety commission. One of the secretaries in our office,
7 her husband, had been one of Vann’s pilots. He was fine, he was safe, he was home, but
8 he had been one of John Paul Vann’s chopper pilots for like a year or eighteen months.
9 Totally loved the guy. Thought Vann was one of the most fearless people you’d ever
10 known. Just really loved him. Of course, then there’s Sheehan’s book, *A Bright Shining*
11 *Lie*. There’s another side to the man, but hell, there’s another side to everybody.

12 JS: Right, yeah.

13 RD: That wraps up my collection of little bits of John Paul Vann.

14 JS: Well, why don’t we go ahead and take a break for today?

15 RD: Yeah.

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21 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
22 University continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr. Rod Dwyer. Today is July 23,
23 2010, and this is interview session number four. Okay Rod, I’d like to begin the day, if
24 we could, by discussing some of the perceptions of the Phoenix Program. If I could get
25 your comments on those. Dale Andrade’s, *Ashes to Ashes: The Phoenix Program* says
26 that there were three stereotypical views on the program. Let’s start one at a time. First,
27 he says one of the stereotypical views was that it was an assassination program of secret
28 murder. Could you comment on that? Where that—from your opinion where that
29 perception comes from and if there’s any truth to it.

30 Rod Dwyer: Sure. Well, there were three—the program was designed to help
31 neutralize the Viet Cong infrastructure. Neutralization became a really bad catch term in

1 the sixties and seventies. Neutralization, if you're going to neutralize an enemy
2 government, you've killed them, you've captured them, or they surrender to you, but
3 somehow you render them ineffectively. Was it a murder program? No, it was not
4 murder, it was war. In some cases, these people were killed, but it was not designed to be
5 murder in the sense of a crime. It was not that. I can't say that somebody never used the
6 program wrongfully, that there wasn't ever an instance where something was perverted.
7 Where the legal legitimate names, the program were perverted. I can only speak for what
8 I saw in one year. I did not see that. From what I learned reading about the history of the
9 program, certainly from what we were taught at Fort Bragg before we went over, it was
10 not a murder program. I think in that class of ours at Fort Bragg, we spent a lot of time
11 talking about this, and about the perception of it as a murder program. Both in the classes
12 and back in our rooms on our own time. We were very leery because—we were leery of
13 exactly that stereotype. I think that every one of us who went over, who had those doubts
14 and wanted to be sure that we weren't getting involved in something like that came back
15 feeling that, no, we had done something totally legitimate, and it was not a murder
16 program.

17 JS: Where do you think that perception came from?

18 RD: Well, I guess there's two ways to answer that. One is—who were the ones
19 that raised that? And almost without exception, they were opponents of the war in
20 Vietnam. I think that some of them, because of their deep-seeded opposition to the war
21 chose to characterize or to believe that it was a murder program. I think for some others
22 they adopted the stereotype and then came to oppose the war. The program itself goes
23 back to the mid-sixties. In the early to mid-sixties Hanoi had made a decision. Now, this
24 is in the history books, to step up its efforts to suborn or subvert the Saigon Government.
25 In essence, it activated or reactivated its Southern networks and took the political
26 opposition into the jungle and made it both political and military. They started using the
27 terror tactics that they had employed for years in their war against the French. They
28 started to assassinate government officials and big landowners. Anyone who they
29 perceived to be a threat to them was a target for terror tactics. The real audience, the real
30 target were the people. The CIA in, I think it was 1964, instituted what was called the
31 CTTs, the Counter-Terror-Teams. Their goal was to go and get rid of these Viet Cong

1 terror groups, terror squads. That led to a clandestine war against the Viet Cong
2 infrastructure. From that evolved what came to be known as the Phoenix Program and
3 *Phụng Hoàng* Program. Yes, ambushing and killing Viet Cong, political leaders was part
4 of it because those were the people who gave the orders. I know that there were people
5 here in this country who believed that doing that, killing a political leader, was murder.
6 Was it murder in the criminal sense? No. No more so than the assassination of Heydrich
7 in Czechoslovakia in WW2. No more criminal than the French Resistance, ambushes and
8 assassinations of German Army and SS (*Schutzstaffel*) officers. It was the physical
9 elimination of the enemy including the elimination of the enemy's political infrastructure.
10 It's a legitimate target in war. I can see where people got the idea, especially back here
11 where it was nice and safe. It was abhorrent to people, but again, I think that most of
12 those folks were motivated more by a sense of—more by their belief that the war itself
13 was wrong.

14 JS: Right. Andrade talks about the perception partially coming from imposters
15 claiming that they had been a part of the Phoenix Program, but never had any direct
16 involvement with it. Some of them in some cases had never even been in Vietnam. Did
17 you hear about any of those types of things?

18 RD: Later after I came home, I saw some of that. *Stolen Honor*, have you read
19 that?

20 JS: Mm-hmm.

21 RD: Now, it's part of that. People who claim to have been in the Phoenix Program
22 and done things, well, I'm always surprised by people who claim to have been in
23 Vietnam and weren't there. Yeah, I guess there's some mistake about having gone to war
24 and being a veteran and all that crap, but I didn't personally encounter it, I read about it.
25 One thing that really ticked me off. April of 1971, I'm in Vietnam; I'm working in the
26 Phoenix Program. My predecessor Warren Faulk, Captain Faulk had just rotated back to
27 the states and John Kerry's testifying in a pair of old fatigues before some senate
28 committee and he refers to the Phoenix Program—refers to us who work in that program
29 as war criminals.

30 JS: Right.

1 RD: I mean, it was a broader brush, but we certainly were included. At the time, I
2 kind of just shook my head. Goddam, it's unfair. Years later, it really, really stuck in my
3 craw when I—back then I didn't have the time to sit and think about it. You had work to
4 do. There wasn't a damn thing I could do. Years later I could, I could vote against him,
5 and it hurt. It just troubled me so much that he had no personal knowledge of the Phoenix
6 Program. How could he speak of that without a base of knowledge? I couldn't speak
7 about being a PBR (Patrol Boat, River) skipper. I had a few friends who were PBR
8 skippers. Guys I met long after we came back from the war. Guys I worked with, but they
9 could speak to that. They wouldn't speak to what the Phoenix Program was. How the hell
10 did he get off doing that? Like I said, I never ran into anybody who did that. I read about
11 some of them. Anyway, I think I would have—I don't know what I would have done if I
12 had run into somebody like that.

13 JS: Alright, well the second stereotypical view that Andrade talks about is that it
14 was, Quote: "A program designed to strip the Army of its ability to conduct the war on its
15 own terms." Could you comment?

16 RD: I don't recall that argument. Can you elucidate on that?

17 JS: I'm not really sure. I guess it's referring to making it more of a pacification
18 program as opposed to a big-war operation where you had large units coming in. I guess
19 that's what it's referring to. I'm not real sure.

20 RD: If we assume that that is what it is, then Phoenix is no different from Rural
21 Development Cadre, Psy-ops, land-to-the-tiller, or any of those CORDS—any of those
22 programs run under CORDS supervision. Civil Operation Rural Development Support.
23 I'm sure that there were people in the Army who were not believers in the pacification
24 programs. I think that they were sadly mistaken that indeed, pacification was the whole
25 game. Up until '72 and at that point, the big-war had to come back because the NVA
26 were no longer—Hanoi was no longer confident its political warfare program waged
27 through the Viet Cong and the National Liberation Front (NLF) could possibly succeed.
28 And in fact, I think they had recognized that in Tet of '68 and again in the small Tet of
29 '69 their whole political warfare program had been decimated. We'd already fought, if
30 you will, a series of—from '65 on, into '69 huge, big Army battles. I'll posit this as a
31 thesis. That there is a tremendous irony. American went into South Vietnam for whatever

1 reason. As part of Cold war response, the containment of communism, whatever. They
2 went in, in a big Army way in '65. Up until then it had been pretty much a half-hearted
3 pacification effort and training of a South Vietnamese big Army. The Americans go in
4 and from '68 to '69 basically take on the NVA and the main force VC units and pretty
5 much grind them to a stalemate. At which point in '68, the Tet Offensive was launched
6 on orders from Hanoi. They believed that they still had tremendous influence in the
7 villages and hamlets, which they do, but they overestimated and exposed themselves. The
8 VCI was decimated in '68 and took further heavy losses in '69. So now, what we have is
9 the NVA and the main force units basically being held back by the big unit war. The
10 political warfare is crunched by a terrible error in judgment on Hanoi's part in '68. It's so
11 bad that it takes Hanoi until 1972 to launch any major offensive and that's the Easter
12 Offensive and it is a big war operation. Why is it a big war operation? Because they no
13 longer have any hope whatsoever of winning the people over through their political
14 warfare. Their apparatus is debunked. So, to those in the Army who believed that
15 pacification was just—it was no way to make a career, no way to fight a war. Well, it was
16 a different war. It was all kinds of different wars simultaneously. You'd have to have big
17 unit warfare at certain times, but if the initial threat was a communist takeover through
18 submersion of the government and supporting the people, then pacification was the *Sine*
19 *qua non*, to victory in that kind of a war. If the American officers and soldiers who
20 believed that this was—hey that's fine, they still had their big units. Creighton Abrams
21 had a totally different view of the war from gener—different when compared to General
22 Westmoreland's.

23 JS: Are you referring to the One War Policy combining—

24 RD: The what policy?

25 JS: The One War Policy combining those types of—the different efforts to fight
26 those different wars into one concerted effort were focusing on pacification as well as
27 dealing with the larger issues of the larger NVA units?

28 RD: Yeah, yeah. I think that Abrams' emphasis on what Nixon chose to call
29 Vietnamization, but what was essentially the pacification effort, I think it was correct.
30 You know, I beg your pardon. Hang on a sec. If the job—the goal was to win the people
31 to the side of the Saigon Government or at least get them opposed to the Viet Cong. Then

1 big unit warfare has to be employed or followed very judiciously because collateral
2 damage is always there. And particularly so, the risk of it is particularly large in big unit
3 warfare. You can lose the people and win the battle. I'd wonder what it would have been
4 like if we had had more support back here in this country for what we were trying to do
5 there. I really fault political leadership and the military leadership for not explaining the
6 necessity of the war to our people. We wouldn't convince all of them, never. But I think
7 in one sense it was fortuitous that when Nixon decided on a policy of Vietnamization, at
8 that point the big units had done their job. They had pushed the NVA and the main force
9 units back into the hills away from the people so the pacification could go forward.
10 Pacification, I think worked. It worked to the extent that the North understood that the
11 only way it could get control over the south was for big unit warfare and the only way
12 you could do that was to be sure that the Americans would not come back. I don't know,
13 that's a lot of pontificating.

14 JS: No, not at all. Well, the third perception or stereotypical view—and this gets
15 into the larger issue of an assessment of the Phoenix Program. It's values, whether it
16 worked or not. Andrade said some people had the perception that it was, Quote: "A bad
17 joke, a comedy of errors that accomplished very little except creating paperwork and
18 statistics to hide its abysmal failure."

19 RD: (laughing)

20 JS: What do you think of that?

21 RD: I'll tell you what, in terms of paperwork there was a hell of a lot of
22 paperwork. Oh god, there was paperwork. Yeah, in some ways I agree with some of that
23 viewpoint. I guess we had weekly reports to file, we certainly had monthly reports to file
24 from the *Phụng Hoàng* Program, but then there was the Hamlet Evaluation System
25 reports that were filed monthly where that district senior advisor, the province senior
26 advisor and the head of each of the different programs had a piece of that massive report
27 to complete. And we hated it. There was an awful lot of paperwork involved and it wasn't
28 just Phoenix. I told you what we were told in Vung Tau in the Phoenix Orientation
29 Program, we complained that we'd seen these reports, and the questions were framed in
30 such a way that we had to answer almost invariably, we had to say that things were
31 better. And they were. Because the only way they could say they weren't good was to say

1 that they were terrible. And that wasn't always true. And then we were told, "Oh yeah,
2 well Washington and specifically Kissinger wants to see progress." Oh boy. It was very
3 frustrating to have to do all that paperwork, but to say that the program was only that and
4 was covering up its own abysmal values, well, that's not entirely accurate. Even Cargile's
5 (??) book on the history of the war seems to accept the number of what, twenty thousand
6 VCI killed and that's only part of the neutralization to operation. That doesn't really
7 account for all the Chu Hoi's or all the captures. The program varied from province to
8 province in terms of its success. A lot of it—So much of it depended on the Vietnamese
9 leadership. The province chief and the *Phụng Hoàng* chief—I told you about the
10 difficulties our guys had in our province where the political fallout from the previous
11 year's roundup of An Quang/ VC. Basically, put that program, the Phoenix Program our
12 province on hold. We could pass out information to other operating agencies and the
13 PRUs were good but—and Sector Recon was good. They could use the information, they
14 could operate. They had the confidence of the province chief. Some of the guys that I
15 trained with at Fort Bragg, when we saw each other at meetings in Nha Trang, they told
16 me that it was going great guns and I remember, Big Al—Al Perera was up, I think, in
17 Kon Tum. He told me that his Vietnamese counterparts were totally in favor of the
18 program and very supportive. The *Phụng Hoàng* Program was very active up there. Also,
19 Al, was in Province. Kon Tum that was a flashpoint. Ours was quiet, thank God. You
20 could sit around and get frustrated down in Phan Rang and Ninh Thuan, but you were
21 seldom to getting shot at. Up in Kon Tum it was a real war every day. I think the
22 perceptions up there are obviously, were different. Program enjoyed more support up
23 there. But boy, we hated the paperwork. You still had to do the paperwork in Kon Tum. It
24 didn't make a damn bit of difference. You still had to file your reports. (sound of
25 disgust), Yeah, some guys—I ran into some fella a couple months ago, an Army ranger.
26 He had not been in Vietnam, he was a younger man, but we talked. He said, "Oh you
27 went Vietnam, what was it like?" I said, "My biggest threat was paper cuts." I would say
28 that probably, oh, a day a week at least was spent on some kind of a report that had to go
29 up the line. I hated the meetings. It was all bullshit as far as I was concerned. The
30 Vietnamese regional guy, *Phụng Hoàng* guy would come down. There would be a big
31 meeting, and our regional advisor would come down. We'd all sit in the meeting room.

1 The Vietnamese regional *Phụng Hoàng* person would lay out what the goals were for the
2 next month or the next quarter. Review what our province had done. Of course, it was
3 never satisfactory. Our guys would stand up and tell them how many files we'd opened;
4 how many interrogations had been conducted. What'd we learn from it? What'd we learn
5 from those interrogations? Who were we interrogating? How did we get them? That's the
6 important stuff. What do we do with the intelligence? I don't know that part of it was
7 certainly boring, frustrating, it'd drive you nuts. But I loved going out in the villages and
8 the hamlets. That was real. We were forbidden to go on any actual Phoenix Operations,
9 but we could go out and visit the hamlets and we certainly went when our counterparts
10 went out. Sometimes just on our own. Okay.

11 JS: Well, one last thing regarding these perceptions or stereotypical views.
12 Andrade wraps up by saying this, I wanted to see if I can get your comment on this as
13 well. "Far from being a side show or the quote 'other war', the Phoenix Program's
14 attempt to strike at the VCI represented final recognition that the conventional military
15 might, alone, could not win the war. In many ways, that recognition was too little too
16 late, but there are lessons from the experience that should be examined. Unfortunately, it
17 will not be simple merely to step back and look, because the Phoenix Program remains
18 mired in myth and misunderstanding. A decade and a half of allegations, half-truths and
19 outright lies have framed the picture the public sees when it here's the name Phoenix."
20 Do you think that's a pretty accurate description about the program itself and those
21 myths?

22 RD: Yes.

23 JS: Okay.

24 RD: Yes, I do. There was an opinion column in the *Wall Street Journal* sometime
25 last year. Lessons of Vietnam for Afghanistan. And—Oh, it was—Lewis Sorley wrote it.
26 Let me make a note, I'll send it down to you. But he specifically talked about the Phoenix
27 Program and in terms of the need to recognize, that there was, indeed, a shadow
28 government of the Taliban in every province or almost every province, and that until you
29 could deal with that, you were not going to make the people secure, you were not going
30 to be able to defeat the Taliban. I mean, I'll find that. I have it on my computer upstairs
31 and I will send that to you. Oh, speaking of that, it reminds me. I was talking with an old

1 friend, a college buddy, ROTC buddy yesterday. I was telling him that you and I are
2 going through these sessions. He's interested. I thought I had on my computer copies of
3 the questionnaires; can you send me whatever information you normally provide
4 prospective interviewees?

5 JS: Sure.

6 RD: Yeah, there actually are a bunch of people I would like to share this with,
7 including my brother who had three tours in Vietnam.

8 JS: Yes sir, I can certainly send you those.

9 RD: I appreciate it.

10 JS: Okay, well I guess the next thing then—and you kind of touched on this
11 already somewhat, but from your own perspective as you could give your own
12 assessment of the Phoenix Program. How successful was it? Do you think it was
13 worthwhile? That type of thing.

14 RD: Actually, I put pen to paper on Wednesday and tried to assess these. In terms
15 of what happened in our own province of Ninh Thuan, do I think the program was
16 worthwhile? Yeah. Was it successful? To a limited extent. So much damage was done to
17 the VCI all across the country in Tet of '68. That in some ways, it became more difficult
18 for the program to have success later. There were fewer targets. The VCI had exposed
19 themselves to the extent that you knew who they were and that they were still there in the
20 villages and hamlets. They could take—that knowledge neutralized them because they
21 couldn't operate without support. So, the key then becomes, could you cut them all from
22 their leadership out in the boondocks? If you do that, then these people die on the vine.
23 You pick them up whenever you want. I think that there were very, very few top-ranking
24 VC hamlet chiefs, village chiefs who actually lived in the hamlets and villages. It was not
25 safe for them there. They had to be in some secure base camps from which they would
26 attempt periodically to go to their villages. So, their effectiveness was greatly reduced in
27 our province. That's a legacy of Tet in '68. In the year I was there I would say that the
28 specific targeting of VCI was occasionally successful. Mainly when it was done, the
29 Provincial Reconnaissance Unit, or Sector Recon the police themselves I considered
30 relatively ineffective, but then we couldn't mount any operations—any Phoenix
31 operations—any big things, because the province chief had had its fingers burned the

1 previous year. Then we could do, you know, you could go into a Hamlet and check
2 identification papers, cordon it off. No major, major operations that I recall, no political
3 support for it. We did have a wealth of information. Some of it was good and that info
4 became a source of intelligence for agencies like the PRUs or Sector Recon. I think the
5 total of kills in the year I was there was fifty-two, but the greatest majority of those
6 occurred with little or no *Phụng Hoàng* assistance. Those were kills as a result of VC
7 trying to infiltrate hamlets and encountering night defensive positions. I don't know how
8 many actual captures we had or Chu Hoi's. We had some for sure and the love triangle
9 was just absolutely stellar. I'll never forget that. Golly geese, you're seeing the enemy as
10 human. I can't emphasize enough that to succeed this program had to have a supportive
11 province and district officials. In Ninh Thuan in 1971, was Luke-warm at the province
12 level. District leadership, that varied in terms of support. Some district chiefs, some
13 district police chiefs were leery because, "hey, the province chief can get you fired. He
14 can fire you; he can get somebody else in here. You like your job?" There also were some
15 who strongly supported the program but had to do so in ways that didn't tick off the
16 province chief. I'm thinking now of the police chief in the Tan Hai District. There were
17 people like him who were very solid supporters of the *Phụng Hoàng* program. Saw great
18 value in it and there were some out in Bu Son District, out where the air base was, around
19 there. There were some in An Phuc District, southern most district. The largest district in
20 the province. The most wild west of the four. Does that help? Did that answer your—?

21 JS: Yes, absolutely. One other question regarding this. Just thinking about as the
22 VCI's ranks were being thinned as a result of Tet and from Phoenix Program operations,
23 were there instances where North Vietnamese came in to fill their ranks or was that an
24 impossibility because they didn't know the people and the community?

25 RD: Based on what I've read since the war, a lot of the VCI positions were filled
26 by North Vietnamese. That puts them at a disadvantage politically and culturally. I don't
27 know to what extent. I cannot recall specific North Vietnamese in our province holding a
28 position. It's certainly possible. As I pointed out a couple minutes ago, the VCI really
29 were not strong in most of the villages. They could get in to many, some pretty much
30 whenever they wanted, some few, but the VCI were greatly reduced. Both in and outside
31 of the villages. A lot of positions in the structure in their shadow government were either

1 vacant or you would find one person wearing three hats. The top leadership was most
2 certainly located outside heavily populated areas. Not to say they didn't have agents or
3 operatives. Phan Rang City I think was—the city of Phan Rang had about, I think, thirty-
4 thousand people in it. There were like sixty-thousand total in the province at the time. I'm
5 sure the VC had their agents in places, lots of places. In terms of giving orders or
6 controlling, no. That had to come from outside the villages and outside the hamlets. On
7 the other hand, they were not eradicated. They did continue to exist. They did carry out
8 some taxing recruitment and psy-ops in some villages. You know, as events turned out,
9 the VCI became irreverent to the North Vietnamese final victory. They simply were no
10 longer in a position to lead large groups of people in political or military context. They
11 could provide guides, but hey, they were still there. You get to a certain point where
12 things seem to have a balance and I guess that's what it was in '71. They still existed out
13 in the mountains and if you went out there looking for them, you'd be getting into nasty
14 situations like the Sector Recon Platoon did and the PRUs would. If they came into the
15 villages and hamlets, then they put themselves at risk.

16 JS: So, using Mao's protracted theory of war, the idea about the revolutionaries
17 having to swim among the sea of the people. Would you say from that prospective then
18 that American operations, South Vietnamese Operations were prospective—were
19 successful from the prospective that they had effectively, by this point, "removed the fish
20 from the sea," so to speak?

21 RD: You know, it's never one hundred percent, but I think that they had—had
22 greatly reduced the number of fish that was swimming in that sea. We also were lucky;
23 we had the help of the VCI in doing that in Tet.

24 JS: Well, again, along these lines of assessing the success of the program, on a
25 larger view, a larger prospective. From your perspective at the time that you were getting
26 ready to leave Vietnam, the overall war effort from what you could see, how did you feel
27 that things were going? Did you have any idea what was to come later, that the war
28 would eventually be lost?

29 RD: I remember—I clearly remember sitting at the table at the party from my
30 going away party thrown by Phoenix people. My counterpart didn't come. Which was—
31 We were not on good terms, but we had a hell of a party anyway. I'm looking around and

1 I'm thinking, "Oh, these people don't understand that we're going to walk away from
2 them." Almost all the American units were gone by January of '72. It was pretty clear, to
3 me at least, that politically we could not continue, even at a reduced advisory level. Now,
4 a few months later in the Easter Offensive when the NVA came across the 17th parallel,
5 American Naval Gunfire and Airpower, was—that was a large factor in stopping the
6 NVA, but it was the South Vietnamese Marines and ARVN who did it, took it all back. In
7 another year, it became clear that we weren't even going to be able to loan them—to
8 offer air-strikes or naval gunfire support. No more, nothing. I felt that at the end of my
9 tour that I had learned a great deal in that year about myself, but about the war effort
10 itself that it had—I had come over and found that, indeed, things were much better than I
11 ever would have thought just by reading papers or watching TV back here. Things were
12 much more secure. It varied from place to place, time to time, but on the whole, things
13 were—I would say the security situation from what I could see was a hell of a lot better.
14 Certainly, in our province. What little I could learn from friends in other provinces, too.
15 But at the same time, I just had this awful feeling pit in my stomach because I was
16 convinced that despite all the successes, it was not going to end well. I don't think that
17 the Vietnamese people with whom I worked ever thought that the United States would
18 not be there to help them. I still feel terrible about what happened in '75; what happened
19 in congress here. From the early seventies on they essentially set the stage for a route.
20 There was corruption in the South Vietnamese Government, sure. There was corruption
21 among some of the government officials in our province for sure. I never felt that the
22 province chief or my counterpart were corrupt, ever. If this was a counterinsurgency war,
23 then the politics of this kind of—politics plays an incredibly important role and it was
24 politics that I think prevented us from doing more, at least in that year I was there. But
25 that wasn't corruption. That wasn't because somebody had a side agreement with the VC.
26 I didn't really feel too good when I left. I was glad to come home, I was glad to get out of
27 the Army. I was fed up with the Bureaucracy of the Army itself. Certainly, with the
28 Phoenix Bureaucracy. I had seen, I think, some great potential and seen some actual
29 things and actual situations that were most encouraging. I just had a shitty—pardon me,
30 really lousy feeling that despite all the games, it was going to be lost.

1 JS: Alright, we can talk a little bit more about this, if you don't mind, once we get
2 to coming home and life after Vietnam and seeing the way things ended once you were
3 back in states. If we could change gears for a moment, however. Talking about a few
4 more things while you were there in Vietnam. Well first of all, I guess on a lighter note in
5 some ways, one thing—when you weren't on duty, when you weren't busy with the
6 Phoenix Program if you did have some free time, how would you spend it?

7 RD: Oh, we did have free time. In some ways it was nine to five, a strange way to
8 fight a war, but anyway, I know for—I remember early on in the tour a lot of us would go
9 play basketball outdoors at the end of the day. Sometimes we'd cut out of the office a
10 little early, an hour early. I was never much of a basketball player before then. I played
11 enough over there so that it was—I learned some skills, not that they ever stayed with me.
12 We had fun and boy, did we run off any beer we consumed. Golly, I thought it was
13 insane. It would be close to one hundred degrees; one hundred percent humidity and we'd
14 be running up and down a concrete court. One time a Vietnamese team, a RF gang
15 showed up and they took us on. They had one fellow who was as tall as any of our people
16 and big. We kept—"Where the hell did, he come from?" He had four guys come up to
17 our armpits and one guy who towers over us. The four guys were fast, they were like
18 lightning. The big guy, he'd take a position and you couldn't move. They whipped us the
19 first day and they showed up again the next day. I remember Major Everett, Jim Everett.
20 We're getting our butts kicked again and he calls timeout, and he pulls us over and says,
21 "Guys, we're letting them play their game and we're trying to match them on
22 breakaways. We can't do it." He said, "Slow it all down. Just slow it down and play
23 defense." We started doing that and they came apart. They absolutely came apart. It was
24 like setting up the perimeter and they had to get through and they couldn't do it. We
25 stopped worrying about scoring and started worrying about defense. As soon as we did
26 that, they started turning it over. We had a ball, but we would do that. There was some
27 baseball equipment, too, and I loved baseball. Nobody wanted to play except one guy. So,
28 we'd go out—once in a while we'd go out. There was a big stadium on QL-11, just
29 outside of town. They would hold big fairs—big agricultural fairs and province wide
30 things there. This guy and I would go out and play the old game of three flies, six
31 grounders. Fishing, we would fish. I think on about a half dozen occasions. I think always

1 on a Sunday we would go with our counterparts, or somebody else's counterparts and it
2 was always out of the village of Tan Hai, in Tan Hai District, just beautiful. We'd go out
3 on a fishing boat, and we'd fish, oh, I don't know, three/four hours. The fish that we
4 caught were magnificent colors. I never saw anything like it in my whole life. Absolutely
5 beautiful. And then we'd go back to the village and usually we just turned the fish over to
6 the people in the village and maybe the Captain's wife would clean them up and would
7 have an old-fashioned Vietnamese fish-fry, great fun. We had an all-ranks club, the team
8 club. No such thing as an officers club, or NCO club, or anything like that. It was one
9 club for everybody, it was nice. We would occasionally have a band. Everybody paid
10 some dues in the club and occasionally we would be able to get a Filipino band or
11 something to come up from Saigon or wherever. That would be a big thing. I think we
12 had that maybe three or four times. That was a lot of fun. There was a pool table. We
13 could—We had access to the air base and the air base had a library, a pretty good library.
14 I did a lot of reading. Of course, we had our own team library and cartons of books would
15 show up from USO (United Service Organization). I remember it was in Vietnam that I
16 finally read *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy*. I think I have read those
17 books oh, four or five times in all the years since then. Just love them. It's also where I
18 found Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*. Years later that was one of the
19 books I gave to my son when he became an Army officer. I still go back and read that
20 every once in a while. You know, sometimes you only remember the good stuff. And that
21 wasn't really how it was. You need to read something that makes you stop and remember
22 the other parts of it. A lot of reading, sports when we could. We played—We had a team
23 beach-house. It sounds terribly civilized, frivolous. But hell, this was a coastal province.
24 There was a beautiful sandy beach. We had a beach-house there. It would be opened up
25 around noon on Saturday. There was a small kitchen. You could get a beer, coke, and
26 hamburger, something like that. It closed down on Sunday afternoon. It wasn't open
27 overnight or anything like that. Everybody went back to the compounds, about five miles
28 away. There was an Air Force beach next to ours, there was a bigger place there. Then up
29 from that was what we called the Vietnamese Beach. Boy, it was popular. On weekends
30 the beaches were full. Just next to our team beach was an American infantry company.
31 The only Yank infantry outfit in the province. They were there to guard the head of a JP-

1 4 pipeline. Tankers would come in, hook up to the pipeline and pump JP-4 which ran
2 through the pipeline about ten miles to Phan Rang Air Base. Those boys were—talk
3 about going nuts from Garrison duty. They had discipline problems over there that were
4 really bad, but hell, they were cooped up, they never got out. I remember one time VC
5 tried—a VC unit came in one night over near whether or not they were trying to attack
6 the pipeline, I don't know, but three of them were killed. I had to go out with a Polaroid
7 camera the next day and go through their bodies and pockets and take their pictures and
8 all that. I'm surrounded by a bunch of teenage American soldiers with their Japanese
9 cameras. The old joke about all the Japanese tourists, let me tell you, American teenage
10 soldiers bored out of their mind are just as obnoxious. I tried to tell them, "Get the hell
11 out of here. This is not a joke here." "Sir, we haven't seen anything (babbling), we never
12 get outside the wire. (babbling)" "(sigh) Alright, take your pictures and then get the F out
13 of here." The beach was lovely. We played a lot of touch football. I actually tried to teach
14 a course, an Intro to US World History out at the air base. It was kind of a senior in high
15 school/freshman in college type of thing. They could get credit from the U (University)
16 of Maryland extension program. Which was—They had a good program out there at the
17 air base. I started with, I don't know, fifteen guys. It was down to one within three weeks.
18 I was—It was bad. I was not a good prof. I had done some teaching before, but as a
19 substitute teacher. This was tough keeping their interest. I probably put too much of a
20 demand for reading on them. It's what I thought was necessary to a course, but one night
21 a guy came up to me and he told me how much he enjoyed the course, but he had to drop
22 out. I said, "Why?" He said, "Sir, I can't focus." I said, "Okay, why?" He said, "It's my
23 job." He said, "All day I drive a trailer truck full of thousand-pound bombs out to the
24 flight-line and sometimes back from the flight-line." He said, "I'm so nervous." I said,
25 "You know what, you're right. You get a hell of a lot more value out of a couple of beers
26 at the end of the day than you would, if you can't sit still in here." It did not—the course
27 petered-out in about six weeks. While I was out there, I would go out at the end of the
28 day. I think it was about once a week and I would stay in—I would stay with my two Air
29 Force OSI friends, the Office of Special Intelligence, Special Investigations, the Air
30 Force Intel guys out on the base. They would come into Phan Rang and stay with us
31 sometimes. They were running agents. Anyway, I asked them if I could stay out on the

1 air base after the classes and they said, “Sure.” So, I stayed with them and then went back
2 to my unit the next morning. Then one time there was a—the VC rocketed the air base on
3 occasion. One time, they hit it. It was during the day. The front half of the hooch where I
4 used to stay was blown away.

5 JS: Wow.

6 RD: Yeah, their bedrooms were fine, their bedrooms were fine. I slept on the
7 couch in the living room and that was not fine. I’m just as happy. “Ok fine, course is
8 over, and I don’t need to stay out here anymore.” Those rockets were so awfully
9 inaccurate. They weren’t guided at all. It was just kind of like bottle rockets with big
10 warheads. They’d launch them off bamboo frames. I guess they had a several thousand-
11 yard range. So, they could sit out on a hillside. Sometimes the observation pilots would
12 look, and they could actually see the frames after the attack. Anyhow, you were asking
13 about what we did in our spare time. That’s kind of what we did.

14 JS: Alright.

15 RD: We had R&R, of course.

16 JS: Yeah, that was my next question was about R&R.

17 RD: Yeah, the Phoenix Program was a good one in terms of R&R’s. Now, the
18 usual thing was you got a one-week R&R, two weeks? I can’t remember. We had two
19 R&R’s and two weeks at home in the states.

20 JS: Okay, wow.

21 RD: For Phoenix.

22 JS: Right.

23 RD: I guess it was to sweeten the pot. There was of course—We can go right back
24 to perceptions of the Phoenix program and the Army sweetened the pot. We had two
25 R&R’s and I used them both. I went to Hong Kong in, I think it was July or August of
26 ’71. Loved it, I had a ball. So beautiful. I went to Tai Pei in late November of ’71.
27 November or December. Anyway, I remember Tai Pei as being cold and rainy. Not as
28 much fun. Very busy, industrial. That was impressive. I had two weeks’ leave at home
29 which I took in October of ’71. That was interesting. When we were leaving Saigon, Tan
30 Son Nhut, you flew commercial on those. So, you booked your own flights and all that.
31 Now, I flew out on a Panam-747. I had never seen anything that big. And we’re standing

1 on the tarmac looking at this thing and most of us are going, “It’ll never get off the
2 ground.” Boy, it did and we’re in the lower deck and not first class. We get to Guam and
3 it’s two o’clock in the morning. You can’t get a beer, but you can get ice cream and
4 coffee. Nobody wanted coffee. Anyhow, we flew on from Guam and we got to Honolulu.
5 I guess it was around nine o’clock Honolulu time. It was morning and that’s when we
6 started—oh by that time, before that time the stew’s (stewardess) had taken us on a tour
7 of the 747. We had seen the piano lounge upstairs, oh my god. Talk about country-boy
8 come to the city, Jesus. We get to Honolulu. There’s about two hundred GIs on the plane.
9 Some of the guys were still in jungle fatigues and I think they were heading home on
10 emergency leave. There’s two hundred GIs on this plane and we land in Honolulu, and
11 they tell us, “Don’t get off the plane, we’re just picking up passengers here.” “Okay.”
12 The doors open and in comes Mr. and Mrs. America with their teenage daughters. You
13 could see the shock on their face. Oh my god. They maintained a good distance from us,
14 but it was funny. As the flight back to the west coast went on, some of the fathers got up
15 and came back and were talking with us and buying us drinks. Guys who had been in
16 Korea or who had other family members in the service. They were trying to be nice, and
17 they were. It was very thoughtful. I do remember one of the stew’s, I had asked her for a
18 drink, and she brought a whole damn bottle and just put it on the table in front of me and
19 says, “Keep it.” A little later I realize we’re coming into San Francisco, “I need to shave.
20 I look like hell.” My doc-kit is in my bag which is in the baggage compartment. The pilot
21 sent back his doc-kit.

22 JS: Oh wow.

23 RD: Yeah. Unfortunately, American Airlines, I think it was, flew me from San
24 Francisco back to New York to Kennedy and they lost my luggage. We get back, it’s
25 October, its five o’clock in the morning or whatever the hell time it is and I’m in summer
26 weight uniform and I have a fatigue jacket, field jacket. And it is—I am freezing to death.
27 My blood had gone thin in my ten months over there. I was just cold. Anyway, I hop in a
28 limousine with about four other businessmen all going to different villages on Long
29 Island. The guy tells me, the driver says, “Yeah, I’ll get you to your house.” Well, we’re
30 driving down an old country road which is a pretty good-sized road. I think three lanes
31 each way. We get to the main (unintelligible), Post Avenue, my village of Westbury and

1 he said, “I’m not taking a limo in there, it’s too small. The streets are too small in that
2 town” “What? No, you can get out of here.” The other guys were absolutely shocked.
3 One or two of them objected. “You can’t do that to him, he’s coming home from
4 Vietnam, and you can’t do that.” The driver said, “I don’t care. I’m not taking him
5 home.” So, I got out and I walked a mile and a half, big deal. I was just so happy to be
6 home. I had called my house, my parents from San Francisco and I guess that was like
7 ten or eleven o’clock at night their time. My mother answered the phone, “Hi, how are
8 you?” “Fine, I’m in San Francisco. I’ll see you in the morning.” “Oh, that’s fine dear.”
9 Then she goes back to bed and my father tells a story later, “Well who’s that on the
10 phone?” “That was Rod.” “That was Rod?” “Yeah, he’s in San Francisco, he’ll be here in
11 the morning.” My father sits up, in bed, “What!?” and then my mother sits up in bed and
12 goes, “Oh my God!” (Laughter) It was a great visit home. Good to see everybody. My
13 father took me back to Kennedy and he just leaned across the seat as I got out and he
14 said, “Take care of yourself. Be safe.” I looked at him and said, “Dad, I only got three
15 months. This is a piece of cake. I can do this one standing on one leg.” I just felt so
16 confident. That was a good break.

17 JS: Yes sir. I guess before wrapping up Vietnam, there any particular—any other
18 memorable moments or funny moments that stick out in your mind that you could talk
19 about?

20 RD: Oh, well I told you about Sam the monkey and his filthy habits.

21 JS: Actually, we did not talk about that on the recording. We talked about it after
22 we had stopped recording. Would you mind talking a little bit?

23 RD: Yeah, I thought Sam was really cute riding on my shoulder, sitting on my
24 head until somebody pointed out Sam was masturbating. And that’s what he did to
25 people. We thought he was—If you didn’t know it, you would think he was a really
26 friendly little monkey and he was just getting it off. Sam would do the compound dogs
27 any chance he got.

28 JS: (laughing)

29 RD: He looked at some of the dogs walking around. The dogs were great watch
30 dogs. They loved the Americans—they hated the Vietnamese. So, we always knew— and
31 it was unfair because the Vietnamese on our compound were great. But geese the dogs—

1 Anyway, Sam would ride the back end of the dogs. There was one dog that wouldn't put
2 up with it and he bit Sam two times. He had one straight dog, one dog that wouldn't put
3 up with monkey business. But Sam—I remember we had a Vietnamese chopper landed
4 on our pad and came in and had lunch with us. Damn if that monkey didn't bite the
5 Vietnamese pilot—one of the Vietnamese pilots. He would go crazy around Vietnamese
6 people. Some folks said the dogs and the monkey acted that way because they understood
7 that they could be dinner under certain circumstances. I don't know. I do recall that
8 sometimes we would—at night, after dinner we'd be in the club and then we would drive
9 back to where the other compounds were where three or four of us lived. Yeah, we would
10 go up to our compound, but we would stop at a little soup stall down in the village. Have
11 bowls of Pho. We didn't bother to ask what the meat was. We knew it could be dog. On
12 occasions we certainly had dog, cat, and rat, but it was all good. Even the rats. They
13 weren't rats from the garbage dump, they were rats from the rice patties and the wheat
14 fields. Nothing like a good green fed rat. Good grief.

15 JS: I know another thing you mentioned in the questionnaire was something about
16 a snake in the dining hall.

17 RD: Oh, geese. Yeah, it was the rainy season, and it was dinner time. There were
18 a series of separate tables around the dining hall, and they would seat, I guess, about eight
19 people. We were at one table, and we looked over at the table next to us, about five/six
20 feet away and it was a full table. And curled up on the floor amongst all the combat boots
21 was a viper.

22 JS: Oh wow.

23 RD: And we got the attention of the guys at the next table, said, "Don't panic.
24 "Don't jump, but you have a snake on the floor amongst your feet." Well despite our
25 cautions I never saw eight guys move so fast. There were feet flying all over. The snake
26 never knew what happened. Some guys ran into their rooms and came back—one guy
27 came back with an M-16. Really stupid. A couple of guys ran and got machetes, some
28 guys ran into the kitchen and got meat cleavers. Oh god, that snake was spread all over
29 the place. I'll tell you, the idiot with the M-16, oh jeez. Somebody stopped him as he
30 came in the front door, back in the door of the mess hall. "I'll take that." We all laughed
31 about that one.

1 JS: Well.

2 RD: The football games were good, but they got pretty competitive. I remember
3 getting in a wrestling match with one guy who—I was playing quarterback, and nobody
4 blocked this guy, and he flattened me. I was really ticked. He didn't have to flatten me.
5 We were rolling around. Two Captains rolling around in the sand, tryna knock each other
6 silly. Two Majors came over and pulled us apart. Read the Riot Act to us. We did have
7 fun.

8 JS: Alright, well anything else we should cover about your time in Vietnam
9 before we discuss coming home?

10 RD: Hmm, I'll probably think of a dozen things tomorrow. I was actually looking
11 at these pictures. It just reminds me how beautiful it was. Absolutely—I thought Nha
12 Trang was one of the most beautiful places, with the islands sitting off the coast
13 mountainous islands. Beautiful, beautiful water. Hmm, rugged, boy. Here's a series of
14 pictures from an operation. Up in the horseshoe in Tan Hai District in June of '71, Jim
15 Everett, the district senior advisor at Tan Hai had been out on an observation flight and
16 he spotted a—the wreckage of an American airplane. He got a tail number off it, and I
17 remember, he gave it to me because I was going up to Nha Trang. You could trace with
18 the tail number you could find out where the plane had come from and who was on it and
19 whether anything had been reported missing. We were pretty sure that there was
20 nobody—there were no remains in it, but we wanted to be very sure. We went out, it was
21 a Saturday morning, and it was Sergeant Virgil Kaas, K-A-A-S; Sergeant Kaas, myself,
22 and Major Everett, and a company of RFs. We hiked up into the horseshoe. It was quite a
23 climb. Hot, oh boy. I was exhausted. Virgil, he hung in there even though he heaved up
24 whatever he had eaten last night. Everett just kept on going. He just kept us out. There
25 were times I wanted to quit on that hike, and he said, "No, no, no, you can't do that.
26 They're watching you; they're watching you." So, we made it up there and got to the
27 wreckage, took pictures of it. Absolutely no signs of any human remains. And then—this
28 was an area that was frequented by the VC. Not too far from some VC farms. So, we
29 were weary. I thought we would walk back down with the RFs and—the chopper, we
30 would get one chopper a day for the teams use and the Colonel came up on the chopper
31 and said, "Find an LZ and I'll come get you three guys." The RFs, they were okay. We

1 were just excess baggage to them, I guess. They were going off to do something else, but
2 you know, you can train at Fort Benning or Fort Bragg or—In waving in a helicopter into
3 an LZ. We had the damndest LZ. It was a ledge about thirty feet wide. With a cliff on one
4 side, and a sheer rock outcrop going up on the other side. Major Everett looks at me, the
5 choppers coming in, we pop some red smoke, they ID the red smoke and they said,
6 “Okay, Rod get out there and wave them in.” I looked at him, said, “Me? You want me to
7 do that? On that? Look it, there’s no room!” He said, “Sure there’s room.” The chopper
8 comes in and all he can do is get one skid on the edge of the ledge. Boy was he a good
9 pilot. He held that bird there while the three of us piled on. Of course, that shifts his
10 weight distribution at the same time. I guess he had maybe a foot of clearance between
11 the edge of his rotor blade and the rock outcrop, oh man. Anyway, we pile on the bird,
12 and he just rolls the bird off the edge of the cliff straight down until he picks up his air
13 speed. Holy mother of God. You know, I’m about to lose mine, too, Virgil. He just fell
14 straight down the cliff until his air speed picked up and then off, we went. 90 knots, about
15 ten feet off the ground. Cool, very cool. And we get back to the village where we started
16 from. Sergeant Fortune is there in the jeep. We hop out of the chopper, the Colonel goes
17 off with the bird back to our compound and Sergeant Fortune, God bless him, has three
18 cold beers for us. Oh boy did that taste good. Oh boy. And then when we got back had
19 lunch and went swimming that afternoon. All in a day’s work. That was cool, but I
20 remember—I’m looking at the pictures now. Oh boy, that was some barren terrain. It was
21 yellow smoke, not red. I’ve got a picture of it. Sweat soaked, oh my lord. I’m looking at a
22 picture of me and I’m standing there and—after you’ve been in Vietnam awhile, you’re
23 green— your olive drab fatigues would be salt from all the washing and the perspiration.
24 They would be very light green. Well, we sweat so much it looked like we had brand new
25 fatigues on. Just dark as can be. I guess, you know, it was probably in the upper nineties
26 and very, very humid. You get acclimated to it. I’ve certainly lost that acclimation
27 though. That’s what it is around here today and it’s miserable. The beauty of the area—
28 we had some triple canopy jungle, but a lot of the province was something you might see
29 out west and certainly down in the An Phuc District and stretching from the southern part
30 of the province from Ninh Thuan into the northern part of Binh Thuan was desert. I don’t
31 know if I told you this earlier, but the only place in Asia that got less rain was the Gobi

1 Desert. Other parts of the province, however, got monsoon rains. All sorts of terrain
2 vegetation. Anyhow, that operation sticks in my mind.

3 JS: Alright. Anything else?

4 RD: It's kind of a shame, we were forbidden to go out on actual Phoenix
5 operations, but I think that was part of the sensitivity that American leadership had. They
6 just didn't want any more bad press. They didn't want people saying Americans are
7 going out assassinating people. Assassination, you know, we were ambushing enemy
8 people. That's what we were doing. Perfectly legitimate in warfare. And it's not like
9 those people didn't carry arms or weren't accompanied by bodyguards. Anyway, it
10 bounced back to something that you and I were talking about at the start. We'll stop. I'm
11 looking at the notes I made the other day. I think I covered everything on that. Basketball,
12 fishing, football, beach house, R&R's, team club. The food was good. Our mess hall did
13 a darn good job. Having two compounds was—we had our own mess hall on CORDS
14 compound and then one on the MAC-V compound. When the Colonel took over, he
15 basically closed the CORDS mess hall. Everybody eats lunch and dinner together and
16 that really helped. Teams' morale; team spirit. There was an us/them relationship. The
17 MAC-V compound was almost all military. The CORDS compound was military, but
18 that's where all the civilians lived. We did have bunches of civilians working with us.
19 Since we were one team, this was—this was a better way to do that. We could eat
20 breakfast at our compound, CORDS compound, but the mess hall was closed after that.
21 On Sundays—not every Sunday, but very frequently there would be platters of steaks.
22 Pick your own and grow it yourself. Oh, good. Sergeant Lewis was the—in charge of the
23 mess hall. He was really good. He also was a good friend to have. One time he needed to
24 build a Vietnamese police—National Police Station in a village down in An Phuc. This
25 was a big thing. You know, establishing the presence of the National Police on a daily
26 basis in a village that had been basically taken back from the VC. But, getting the
27 supplies, my Vietnamese counterparts had terrible difficulty getting the necessary
28 building supplies through their chain of command. Speculators to where there was Black
29 Market activity payoffs or whatever, but that's all speculation. The fact was they couldn't
30 get it. “What do we need?” They said, “Well, we need so much plywood.” Okay, I went
31 out to the air base, and they had a huge carpentry shop out there. I found the Sergeant in

1 charge, talked to him, told him what we needed. Asked him if there was any way that he
2 could help us—help me get that amount of plywood. He said, yeah. He thought he could
3 do it. And kind of like, “Well, what’s in it for me and my guys?” And I said, “What do
4 you want?” He said, “Um, what do you think about a couple of cases of beer and a case
5 of steaks?” I said, “I think I’ll throw in a half gallon of Chivas Regal for you.” And we
6 did it. I went to Sergeant Lewis—oh that’s right, that’s right. The Chivas Regal was for
7 Sergeant Lewis. I traded him the Chivas Regal for a case of steaks, two cases of beer;
8 took it all out to the Air Force base, got the plywood, brought it back and gave it to my
9 counterpart and he got it to the police down in An Phuc and the thing happened in about
10 three days. It was cool. The other time I appreciated Sergeant Lewis was in November of
11 ’71 there were presidential elections in Vietnam. Low and behold what a surprise
12 President Thieu won ninety percent of the votes. That was the day that there was a
13 drunken RF Lieutenant who tried to come into the town. And the town was off limits that
14 day because of the elections. Off limits, all the military units had to stay outside the town.
15 This guy had been drinking, tried to get into town, the police stopped him, told him no,
16 chased him away. He came back with his unit, and they started shooting at the police.
17 The police ran up their M-100s, the big wheeled armored cars with twin fifties. They
18 started shooting back. All of this was taking place at QL-11 and QL-1. About three
19 hundred yards down the street from the MAC-V compound. We on the team, we could go
20 from one compound to the other, but we couldn’t go into town. And if we left our
21 compound, we would wear side arms because everybody was expecting VC might try to
22 come in and disrupt the elections. At any rate, I went from my compound, the CORDS
23 compound over to the MAC-V compound. We were sitting around drinking beer in the
24 club, and I didn’t have a sidearm. Meanwhile, all of a sudden, we start hearing: (Rapidly)
25 “Pop, Pop, Pop. Pop. Pop” “What the hell is going on?” We assumed the VC was trying
26 to get into town. At the time, we didn’t know about the drunken RF Lieutenant and his
27 crew so everybody’s running like hell for the bunkers. I realized I don’t have a weapon.
28 Sergeant Lewis goes, “Hang on,” and he throws me a 12-twelve gauge. God, I loved that
29 thing. It’s got a spreader-bar on the front. Have you seen those things?
30 JS: I believe I know what you’re talking about.

1 RD: What it does is it compresses the shot pattern, so it flattens it out
2 horizontally. Yeah, nasty. The thing didn't have a follower spring in it. You'd chamber a
3 round and it wouldn't chamber another round. So, I'm in the bunker with this piece of
4 crap, waiting and figuring, "Oh, this is wonderful. I've got a single shot twelve gauge and
5 that's it." There's some contractor is in there and he's got a six-shot .38 revolver. I think
6 he was more dangerous than me, I've got the triggering mechanisms for the claymores in
7 front of me and I had a radio. I'm on the radio with our TOC and there was a young
8 Specialist there and he was very cool. I'm yelling, "Hey, get to the air base. Get the air
9 base up and we can find out what the hell's going on." He basically said, "Sir get the hell
10 off the radio so I can get to the air base." He said, "I've already called him and they're
11 putting an observation plane up. Meanwhile, another Captain and a Special Forces
12 Sergeant were up on the water tower. There was a platform out there. They climbed up
13 there with a radio and they got in touch on a different frequency with the air base. They
14 were able to see down the street so they could see where the action was, but even they did
15 not know that it wasn't VC. Meanwhile, rounds were popping off the first time I ever
16 understood what the noise is that a round makes when it goes over your head. There was
17 an observation plane—within five minutes too, flying real low and looking real carefully.
18 That's when we started to find out what the hell was going on. So, we just stayed low.
19 The thing petered out. I found out later that the guys back on CORDS Compound, which
20 was a couple hundred yards on the other side of the intersection where the fighting was
21 going on. They were in their bunkers, too. One of the guys came running out of his hooch
22 and apparently the RFs fired—I don't know whether it was mortar or—probably it was a
23 blooper, an M-79 round exploded just as this guy—just as Reggie came out of his room.
24 He was fine, but it didn't miss him by a whole lot. Meanwhile the Nungs (??) who were
25 our guards on that compound, they weren't taking any crap from anybody. This round
26 comes off and blows up in our compound. One of the Nungs just unloaded with his M-79.
27 He didn't care who he hit, but he was putting rounds on that intersection and nothing else
28 came in at the compound, but I had to ask Sergeant Lewis if he was ticked off at me to
29 give me such a crappy weapon. He said, "Well, I wasn't going to give you my M-16, sir."
30 I don't know if there's any other things. Like I said, I'll probably think of a bunch, but
31 that's later.

1 JS: Well, fortunately for today we've pretty much run out of time.

2 RD: I'm looking at the clock and it's almost been two hours.

3 JS: You think we could schedule one more?

4 RD: If you'd like to, certainly.

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16 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
17 University continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr. Rod Dwyer. Today is August
18 2, 2010, and this is interview session number five. Okay, we were just talking a few
19 moments ago about an issue that came up in a previous interview. Why don't we begin
20 with that?

21 Roderick Dwyer: Okay, I think you had posed the question to me or asked me to
22 consider the viewpoint that some folks allegedly had the pacification program prevented
23 the Army from accomplishing its primary mission which I would assume was to destroy
24 the opposing Army. Y'know I—in our last interview took the position pretty strongly that
25 I view the Vietnam War as a war of pacification, as a political war. At least as much as it
26 was a military war. To focus solely on the defeat of the opposing Army was to run the
27 risk of losing the entire war because of the political context in which the war was waged
28 in the south. I'd been wrestling with that over the last week-ten days. I've been looking at
29 Lanning and Craggs book, *Inside the VC and the NVA*. They took the viewpoint—they
30 made a statement early on in the book, that the United States lost the War in Vietnam
31 because it could not and did not defeat the North Vietnamese Army. And that made me

1 stop and think. I still believe that at its heart, the Vietnam War was a political war in the
2 sense of it being a war fought to win the allegiance of the South Vietnamese population
3 and that Hanoi's efforts to achieve that goal had to be met with what became known as
4 the pacification effort. Conventional military tactics were not going to win the war by
5 themselves. They might well have lost it if that was the only thing we had, but they were
6 a very essential part of the war. But as I thought more about this a little after ten days, it
7 struck me that I needed to come to some more balanced viewpoint because in a sense, I
8 look back on it, at least, the war in the South initiated by Hanoi was at its start an
9 extremely political and psychological effort. Only gradually did the Viet Cong evolve
10 into a stronger and stronger military presence. It was, in essence, in order to establish a
11 shadow government throughout Vietnam that would rule the people. The efforts had
12 become so successful that in the mid-60s there was real danger that the Viet Cong, with
13 the assistance of a certain number of NVA divisions could cut the country in half and
14 basically create such turmoil that the Saigon Government would have to fall. With the
15 introduction of large numbers of US troops and conventional units, that threat was
16 stopped. However, the political—I keep saying the political aspect of the war setting
17 aside Clausewitz's—Now, the full agreement that Clausewitz was right, war is politics by
18 another means. Now, having said that and recognizing all wars are political, there are
19 very different types of wars. This was one of those very different types of wars. From,
20 say '66,'67 on until, oh,'69 after the—it seems to me that what was happening was a
21 mixture of conventional warfare against NVA units and the VC main force units and a
22 slow progression in the dirty little war. The pacification effort. Hanoi made a terrible
23 mistake when it thought that in 1968 it could raise the population on its behalf with the
24 Tet attacks. In essence it wiped out the VCI. The pacification effort took great leaps
25 forward at that point, but ironically—damn, this war is so full of irony. We have a flat out
26 American and South Vietnamese Military victory that turns into a psychological defeated
27 hone. We have a Hanoi, an NVA, and NLF planning disaster in Tet. It wipes out VCI
28 throughout South Vietnam. VC main force and VA units take tremendous casualties and
29 have to drawback and lick their wounds. The pacification effort leaps forward because
30 there is so much less opposition to it now. Westmoreland leaves and you get a
31 commander-in-chief in Vietnam, Abrams, who believes far more strongly in the

1 pacification program than did his predecessor. And yet, the very disaster suffered by the
2 VC and the NVA and the success of the pacification effort over the next two years
3 essentially makes it unavoidable that the north would wage conventional war they can no
4 longer win through guerilla warfare. The time is gone. The only way that they can come
5 back is to lick their wounds, build their conventional strength, and look through
6 opportunities by waging political and psychological warfare in the states and throughout
7 the world through propaganda. They win that. We pull out combat troops. Congress starts
8 to limit what we can do and all of a sudden, the North's conventional threat becomes
9 much more realistic. They try in the Easter Offensive of '72, but it's too soon. The South
10 Vietnamese Government can still strike back hard, and it has US Naval and Airpower
11 assisting it. But you get into later '73/'74 and early '75 and there's just nothing coming.
12 We're not even allowed to replace South Vietnamese equipment losses on a one-for-one
13 basis like we had promised them. So now, in April of '75, the North Vietnam wins the
14 war through conventional military tactics. And perhaps, arguably, those who maintain
15 that, say such as Lanning and Crag who say, "Hey, we lost because we didn't defeat their
16 Army." Yeah, and that was the Army that took over the south, but we never had the
17 chance to defeat the Army. We were never allowed to do it because we couldn't wage
18 war beyond the conventional warfare beyond the boundaries of South Vietnam in a land
19 sense. I don't know, these thoughts have been running through my mind for the past
20 week to ten days. I just thought I'd want to offer a more balanced viewpoint than I did the
21 last time. Now, if any of this makes sense, it's probably a bloody miracle.

22 JS: No, I think it absolutely makes sense. Now the one question I have, so would
23 you agree then with, I guess, Lewis Sorley's interpretation that, you know Abrams—
24 well, you've touched on this, but Abrams got it right in the fact that he realized there
25 were two different things going on. The pacification was important, but the conventional
26 wars was as well in combining both of them into his one-war strategy.

27 RD: Yeah, yeah. I think that is right. I think Sorley's description is right. I think
28 that General Abrams, God rest his soul, was a hell'uva lot closer to being correct than
29 General Westmoreland. There are two guys that come out of basically the same crucible
30 in World War II and wind up with totally different views of how to wage war in Vietnam.
31 Amazing.

1 JS: I'm glad you touched on that. I think that's an interesting—unfortunately a
2 perception that had been overlooked until fairly recently with some of the more recent
3 scholarship that's come out. I'm glad you touched on those things.

4 RD: Speaking of recent scholarship, I cannot find Professor Reese's book on
5 Vietnam's forgotten Army. I've tried through our county library system and through a
6 library loan and nothing seems to come up. Also, you mentioned a Professor Neiberg, N-
7 E-I-B-E-R-G. What is his first name?

8 JS: Michael.

9 RD: Michael.

10 JS: Right.

11 RD: I will try again, but I couldn't find anything on him, either.

12 JS: Okay, alright. Well, afterwards if you want, I can talk to you a little more
13 about the best ways to track down those books.

14 RD: Thanks, I'd appreciate that.

15 JS: Sure, no problem. Well, anything else before picking up with the chronology
16 of where we left off last time?

17 RD: Um, I don't know if I mentioned that my brother and I were both in Vietnam
18 at the same time.

19 JS: You briefly mentioned it, however, I don't think you talked too much about
20 his service though.

21 RD: Yeah, my brother Kevin is a couple years younger than I am. He was a Naval
22 Academy graduate, Class of '68. An infamous class; Webb, North. A heck of a class.
23 Anyway, he was a fighter pilot. He flew F8s, he flew two tours in F8s and then a third
24 tour flying F14s. His second—actually, his first tour he caught up with his carrier the
25 *Hancock* and they were, at one point, on Dixie Station. Not Yankee Station up in the
26 northern gulf of Tonkin, but further south and they were actually, oh, exchanging pilots
27 with the Air Force including Air Force guys at Phan Rang Air Base about ten miles from
28 our compound. So, that pilots would get some feel. They'd fly observation missions with
29 the Air Force guys. Anyway, Kevin wrote to me, and he said, "Hey, this is happening. I
30 can get a one week posting at the Phan Rang Air Base. Is there any way you could get to
31 the air base?" Well, I had to laugh because I could get to the air base anytime I wanted,

1 but I immediately wrote back to him and here, oh God, the bureaucracies of war
2 intervened. His letter went from his ship to the Philippines, maybe to Hawaii before it got
3 transferred out to the Fleet post office system into the Army post office system. It went
4 back to me. By the time I got the letter, he was already in Australia. They'd stopped there
5 for R&R. So, we totally missed each other. He knew where I was and I didn't know
6 where he was, but he was still flying F8s on that tour and then I think it was the day I left
7 Vietnam was the day he shipped out on the day of his second tour. He was with—I think
8 it was with VF-214 off the *Hancock*. He flew F8s. Again, in that tour. His third tour was
9 in '75 VF1. They were the first squadron to fly Tomcats, the F-14s.

10 JS: Oh wow.

11 RD: Yeah, and he flew cover for the evacuation of Saigon. He told me later, he
12 said, it was absolutely quiet. Nobody fired a shot. No NVA or VC, anti-aircraft fire
13 whatsoever. They seemed to just let it go, let it happen." That was his guess. He said,
14 "We couldn't fire unless we were fired upon at that point. And he said, "Nobody was
15 shooting at us." He's one of the guys I want to share those materials with.

16 JS: Well, we'd certainly love to interview him as well if he would be interested.

17 RD: Yeah, I know during that second tour during the Easter Offensive, they
18 actually loaded the F8s with I guess you'd call them Dumb Bombs, the old iron bombs.
19 Maybe 500 pounders or 250. There was a pretty big confrontation between the NVA and
20 the ARVN down in III Corps. I think it was An Loc, but I'm not sure. At any rate, the
21 ARVN Infantry Division held out and actually won after being besieged for, God knows
22 how long. At one point, the NVA shot down an American forward observer, observation
23 plane. Kevin and his wing-mates just dropped their bombs on the NVA, and they made
24 gun-runs every time the NVA tried to get out into no man's land to get the pilot. They
25 kept the NVA suppressed to the point where the Americans were able to sneak a
26 helicopter in and yank the guy out. There were some nice medals for that, but apparently,
27 if I recall the story correctly, the Air Force flew the observer out to the *Hancock* a day or
28 two later so he could personally thank the fellows who sprayed the NVA and kept their
29 heads down. Cool story.

30 JS: Absolutely.

1 RD: Yeah, the day—I think it was the day I left; I think that was the 14th of
2 January of '72. I believe that was when the *Hancock* sailed. He was on his second tour.
3 They just had their first child. My mom told me that she was at work and someone—
4 people knew that Kevin and I were on active duty and that I'd gone to Vietnam. They
5 also knew when I was coming back and they said to my mom, "Oh, isn't this the day that
6 Rod's out?" and she said, "Yeah." And they said, "Well how's Kevin?" "Well, he left for
7 Vietnam today." So, I still don't know how my parents did it. We have lived with a son
8 who's deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, and I'd come to understand what that could do
9 to the pit of your stomach as a parent, and I don't know how my mom and dad did it with
10 two of us there and Kevin going back three times. I think their faith was—they were very,
11 very strongly religious in a quiet way. I know that their faith had to help them through
12 that because I've seen it help them through other tough times. So that has to be one of the
13 big clues. I still remember the song that was playing in the loudspeaker in the airplane,
14 (unintelligible), "West Virginia" by John Denver as we took off from Tan Son Nhut.
15 Ironically the evening before, I had been down in Saigon turning in my gear at MAC-V
16 and hopped a helicopter flight back to Bien Hoa and don't you know as we're flying back
17 to Bien Hoa—this is evening time, it's probably six or seven. Dusk is coming and
18 somebody opens up on us and it's not friendly cause I'm looking out the door where I
19 was flying passenger in a Loach, The "Little Birds" they call them. The pilot starts to do
20 all sorts of hijinks. My campaign hat went right out the door. Good thing I was strapped
21 in or else I would have gone right out the door, too.

22 JS: Oh wow.

23 RD: Because I was looking and all these big green basketballs coming up.
24 They're so slow and then all of a sudden, they're so fast. Of course, green was the color
25 of enemy tracers. I'm assuming that it was the Chinese, Chicom equivalent of a .50
26 caliber like the 12.7. Oh, a nasty thing, nasty things. Scared the living bejesus out of me
27 once I realized what it was. The first couple of times; the first couple of tracers I said,
28 "That's a pretty light." Stupid guy, you've been there a year, and you think this is a pretty
29 light? Idiot.

30 JS: So, this was the night before you left?

31 RD: Yeah, right before I left.

1 JS: Oh wow.

2 RD: That night at Bien Hoa—actually, Bien Hoa and Long Bien kind of adjoined.
3 It was an ammo storage dump across the street from the hooch where I was staying and
4 all of a sudden—everybody’s asleep and then all of a sudden—God knows what time it
5 was, it was probably two in the morning. There’re explosions all over the place. It was
6 small arms, thank God, but apparently one of the guards whose smoking, fell asleep, fire
7 started, and there were rounds popping off everywhere. It was amazing. Guys in their
8 BVD’s and naked as J-Birds standing there who’ve got a can of beer in their hands and a
9 cigarette. I’m looking at them going, “Holy shit, look at that.” You know, after a while
10 you just get so, “Oh wow, that’s cool fireworks.” First the thought was, “Well hell, the
11 VC must have rocketed it.” I’m like, no, no. The base fire department got it under
12 control. It turned out that somebody was careless, that’s all. Just careless. But what a
13 heck of a last night in-country.

14 JS: As things were winding down for you in Vietnam, did you get the short
15 timer’s syndrome?

16 RD: Yea, yeah, I did. I was fortunate because my replacement came in early. I
17 guess, just as I had come in early for Warren. Bill Whitlock out of Missouri came out. He
18 was an MI Captain with Ranger training. It was his first tour in Vietnam, excellent
19 officer. I think Bill arrived—I think Bill came in late November, early December,
20 perhaps? I remember that he was certainly there for Christmas because he had I and Yon,
21 Mr. Yon our interpreter drove up QL-11 into the mountains and cut down a really
22 straggly Charlie Brown-type pine tree for a Christmas tree for the team mess hall. We
23 drove all the way back only to find out that in our absence the great Army Santa Claus
24 had sent a helicopter all the way around dropping off really nice Christmas trees to every
25 advisory team. We looked at the scrawny thing that we had cut down and somebody said,
26 “Oh that’s okay guys. We’ll put the big one up in the mess hall and we’ll take the
27 scrawny thing you’ve got, and we’ll put it in the club house. That’s a little darker and
28 people won’t notice it.” (laughter) So, our efforts weren’t totally for not. Now, Bill came
29 in Whitlock? Whitlow? And Whit was a blessing. He really jumped right in there. I don’t
30 know this for fact, but I believe that he and Dai Wei Chi with whom my relations were
31 not that good, but I think he and Chi did a lot better, than Chi and I did. They seemed to

1 hit it off better. I tried to stay the hell away from the two of them. Let Bill work his own
2 way in with Dai Wei Chi. I felt that my presence would only be a dead weight. But yeah,
3 I got short timers' syndrome. I started to look for ways to go—Hell, I took in-country
4 leave. I went to visit friends. You know, the Colonel got a good level of confidence, the
5 PSI (??) with Bill. So, when I wanted to take off and go visit some friends up at the 101st
6 outside of Hue around New Year's, that was fine with him. He signed a pass for me to
7 take in-country leave. I got to go down to Bien Hoa to depart from Bien Hoa a day or two
8 early. Actually, I left Vietnam on the 14th which is what my orders said I could do.
9 Instead of flying down and spending one night down there I spent two nights down there.
10 I remember Sergeant Clark—Sergeant First Class Clark was the NCO in our Phoenix
11 Office at the Province Level and 1st Class, absolutely 1st Class. I think Bill—Bill Clark
12 later entered the warrant officer program in Military Intelligence—Army Intelligence, but
13 Bill was—I think he went home in December, Bill Clark. I have to be careful with my
14 Bills here. You have Bill Whitlow and Bill Clark. Bill Whitlow went home, I believe in
15 December and I remember chewing him out because I had been away for a few days and
16 come back and found out that he and Yon and Chi, I think just the three of them, maybe a
17 couple of guys out of the *Phụng Hoàng* Office had gone into this area of An Phuc
18 Province, An Phuc District rather is just not a nice area to go in. Particularly if you
19 weren't armed. And they were very lightly armed. In fact, Bill Clark told me he wasn't
20 even carrying a weapon. Something had come up and Chi wanted to go check something
21 out on a heck of a rush basis. I just remember looking at Bill Clark and saying, "You've
22 been here a year; you're like ten days short of seeing your wife and kids and you went
23 into that area without a squad and no weapons?" Oh boy. Yeah, of course I've done some
24 stupid things myself dumber than that, but he took it in good nature and looked at me and
25 said, "Yeah, well I hate to tell you Captain, but you're not perfect either." "Well, yeah,
26 I've done some dumb things so what the—Let it go." Anyway, Bill Clark made it home
27 in December and when I got to Oakland Army Depot in January, after I mustered out, he
28 picked me up, took me up to his house. He and his wife put me up for a day or so, fed me
29 a good meal, put me on an airplane to San Diego so I could visit my brother's wife and
30 kid. Spend a few days with them. It was hard to leave the team. I mean, it had come to be
31 home. I felt very badly for a number of reasons when I left. That was one, the team had

1 become home. And as much as I wanted to get out of the Army and get back to teaching,
2 I was a little leery of what this change from the Army to civilians was going to be like. I
3 had come over to Vietnam scared stiff and believing that we were losing everything.
4 Only to find out that the actual picture was nowhere near as bleak. It was much greyer
5 than the media had projected or reported. There was a lot of progress being made, yeah,
6 there were a hell of a lot of problems, but I felt that if we really would stand by them,
7 they could do it. But in the pit of my stomach, I didn't think that we would stand by them.
8 The Vietnamization program would be—such a rapid draw down of combat forces. They
9 strength of the anti-war sentiment in Congress. The limitations that were, at that point in
10 late '71, early '72, were more of a threat than an actuality. They soon started to become
11 real. I just was not sure that my country would stand by its commitments. I just remember
12 looking at the faces of the *Phụng Hoàng* personnel, at the sending (??) party they threw
13 for me. How happy they were, and it was like they just—I was convinced that they could
14 never conceive of the idea that the US would not stand by them one hundred percent. I
15 felt a little almost dirty going home. I wish that I had done a better job in the year that I
16 was there. I still wish I had done a better job. In some ways I think I could have done a
17 better job if I was much older. I think I would have more understating of people than I
18 did when I was twenty-seven. Then I came home. I spent some time in San Diego with
19 my sister-in-law and my nephew, my brand-new nephew of two months old and then I
20 flew back to New York. My parents met me, I guess, at Kennedy Airport. We went back
21 to our village and went to dinner at the home of good friends of my parents who didn't
22 want my mom worrying about cooking dinner. Just go pick him up and bring him home
23 here and we'll have dinner here. They were old friends of the family. It was a doctor and
24 his wife. He'd been our doctor for God knows how long. I guess since I was about six. So
25 certainly, longer than twenty years. They had two daughters and a son. I had a terrible
26 crush on the older daughter who had long since been married, but the younger daughter
27 was always a skinny little kid who was no longer a skinny little kid. I remember I felt so
28 awkward at dinner. These were old family friends with my parents. It was awkward. It
29 wasn't their fault, but I finally said, "If you'll excuse me." I looked at the young
30 daughter. I said, "Ann, you want to go get a drink?" So, we went and got a drink down at
31 the local tavern. I guess I started talking about some of the stuff in Vietnam and she kind

1 of looked at me and said, “You know, I don’t understand anything you’re talking about.”
2 Well, that was the end of the evening. I took her home. That was the first clue, I think,
3 that this was not going to be an easy re-introduction. I started—well my mom, God love
4 her, just wanted everything to be normal again. She got me back into the Westbury
5 School System as a substitute teacher. Oh boy, I took over the social studies class load of
6 this teacher who’d had a heart attack and this was eighth and ninth graders, I think. Jr.
7 High. The same Jr. High that I had substituted in back in ’68. Oh boy, two weeks after
8 that night I was getting shot at, that last night in Vietnam, two weeks later I’m standing in
9 front of a class of eighth graders and the day starts with PA coming to life. Alright,
10 Pledge of Allegiance. Four years before everyone stood up, faced the flag, put their hand
11 over their chest and recited it. Now, four years later, a few do, most don’t care, nobody
12 seems to be paying attention. Some are actually being obnoxious about the whole thing,
13 deliberately obnoxious. I’m two weeks out of Vietnam and I’m thinking of the friends
14 that I’ve known who have died over there. This is another wakeup call that this is not
15 going to be an easy reintroduction. This is the same school, in the same village, but it’s
16 not the same anymore. The whole—certainly I’ve been a civilian when Bobby Kennedy
17 and Martin Luther King was assassinated in ’68, but I don’t think that I’d understood the
18 full impact in American civilian life. Particularly of Dr. King’s assassination. I saw
19 changes in the Army. The Black Power movement within the Army. The DAPs (??), the
20 distrust, the outright hatred in some cases, racism all over the place. Racism all over the
21 case—place. That’s too broad a statement. Not fair, not fair, but I’d seen instances of it. I
22 hadn’t understood how much society had changed in those four years until I got back into
23 the classroom and looked at and tried to communicate with seventh, eighth, and ninth
24 graders. It was really tough and not very successful. I guess I hung in there for a couple
25 of months and then in April, late April I bought a new car. A 1972 Mustang. A three
26 speed, small eights. And I had hoped and planned on driving across the country and back.
27 To the East coast, to the West and back. I just said, “You know, I got to do this. I’m not
28 comfortable here. I just got to go.” My parents understood. They weren’t too crazy about
29 it, but what the heck. So, I just drove around the country, and I tried to stay with friends
30 from college and the service. You know, it worked out fine. I had a great time. I did the
31 whole trip alone. I got down to Washington and stayed with my closest friend from

1 college who was an ROTC mate. He had not gone to Vietnam. He had been stationed in
2 Europe and Italy when I was in Germany. We got together over there a couple of times.
3 By this time Kent was out of the service and had gotten his master's from Maryland, was
4 working for the old Civil Service Commission. Now the Office of Personnel
5 Management. He got me to take the Civil Service entrance exam. That was in April and
6 eventually I got a job offer to come down to DC and work for the Federal Food and Drug
7 Administration of Beurocradic Safety starting in October of '72 and I did that, I took it.
8 They were very understanding. I said that I could not start until after I got out to San
9 Diego when my brother came home from that second cruise, the one that had started in
10 January. That was fine. I had come home with, I think, ten thousand dollars and maybe
11 more in my GI savings account. A chunk of that went to the car, but money went a lot
12 further in those days so I could buy an airline ticket to San Diego and back. That was
13 good. I know that in that intervening summer of '72 before I came down here, I continued
14 to work for the Westbury School System, but in the summer as a janitor. I kept running
15 into kids I taught and now I was cleaning. I guess I taught them too well. I don't know
16 what the hell they were in summer school for. I hoped it wasn't social studies. I was still
17 cleaning up their messes. But that was a difficult time for my parents. I'm living at home,
18 twenty-seven, coming up on twenty-eight. It's a rough re-entry. I drank way too much. It
19 took a while even after I got down to DC there. Kind of, you know, to get your hands on
20 things. I mean, it wasn't that constant downward spiral or anything like that. There would
21 be some days that were lousy and there would be some days that would be good.
22 Gradually the good days came to outnumber the bad. I think that the real turnaround
23 started to happen when I met the gal, when I met Sherry, my wife. We just hit it off. We
24 had a great time together, had fun, laughed more, and life seemed to have a purpose then.
25 Again. It wasn't just the job. The job was part of an overall picture. And then I had been
26 toying with the idea of law school since I had been in Vietnam. My dad always wanted
27 me to go to law school. He kept saying, "Son, you're so much brighter than some of these
28 dumb lawyers I have to work with. You could do a lot better than they're doing." I just
29 didn't want to do it. I wanted to get a PhD in history. That idea kind of—I just couldn't
30 face going back into the academic world and working on a PhD in history. I just couldn't
31 do it. I got the job down here working for the government and pretty soon came to

1 understand that it was a regulatory agency. So, it was driven by legal interpretations of
2 the statute and regulations that created it and that it had to enforce. Which meant that if
3 you wanted to do something you had to have it blessed by a lawyer. I soon came to
4 understand my father's complaint about all the dumb lawyers you had to work with. You
5 know, by God, I'm tired of listening to these, you know what's. They couldn't—like John
6 said in the bible about Jesus. They couldn't undo the sandal off some of the folks I'd
7 known in Vietnam think this is ridiculous. So, I went to law school at night in self-
8 defense. I just didn't want to take anymore "you know what" from these guys. The only
9 way to strike back was to have that JD or LLB in the back of your name. So that's why I
10 went back to law school. Anyhow, I got married. Sherry and I got married in '74, August
11 10th. It's going to be thirty-six years next week. I finished law school, went to work here
12 in DC doing a DC type of law, regulatory practice, but doing it through trade associations
13 as an in-house lawyer. I did that for a few years. The first few years was for an outfit
14 called Outdoor Power Equipment Institute. The name was actually bigger than the
15 association, but it was the association of companies that manufactured lawn and garden—
16 powered lawn and garden equipment. Lawnmowers, snow blowers. Anyhow, I did that
17 for three years and then the recession of 1980, they decided to let their government affairs
18 department go and I was their government affairs department. When I got picked up by
19 American Mining Congress to work for them doing Environmental law. I stayed with
20 them until 2006. By that time, it had become the National Mining Association. I wound
21 up being a Deputy General Counsel, if titles count. I think if you stay around long enough
22 a title will fall your way. I don't know if the paycheck will, but the title will come. Met a
23 lot of good people. An awful lot of really good people. In the course of those thirty years.
24 A lot of them are still good friends. That part has always been fun. Two sons, the older
25 guy is the one that has been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. He went with the 101st as
26 a chopper pilot. He's a Captain now. Well, you know the background. He's at UVA and
27 working on his master's in Military History. Then he'll go to West Point. He should
28 make Major by the end of this year. The younger guy, he's got his masters in Sports
29 Management. Sports Facility and Events Management out of East Carolina. He's working
30 at American University right now. Just interviewed at Alabama two weeks ago. Alabama

1 called him and flew him down. So, we've got our fingers crossed that, that would work
2 out cause that's a first-class place.

3 JS: Yes sir, my favorite school in the world.

4 RD: Roll Tide. I'm beginning to know. I have to get the accent right.

5 JS: Yes, sir.

6 RD: Ironically one of the older guy's best friends, he and his wife both graduated
7 from Bama, and they have a daughter, and her first words were "Roll Tide".

8 JS: (laughing)

9 RD: And they filmed the event.

10 JS: I'm not surprised.

11 RD: It is a little different from going to school in Boston.

12 JS: Right. Well, I'm working on my son, too.

13 RD: If he can do that bilingually that would be fantastic.

14 JS: (laughing) Yeah, it would be.

15 RD: How do you say "Roll Tide" in Vietnamese?

16 JS: That is a good question. I need to ask my wife that.

17 RD: Golly jeez. Anyhow, I don't know what else to tell you, Jason. We may
18 really have—you may have run me out.

19 JS: Okay, well I do have a few follow up questions on your post-war experiences
20 if you don't mind.

21 RD: Yeah.

22 JS: Okay, first of all I know you talked about, after you got home, talking to your
23 parent's friends' daughter about Vietnam briefly before she said she didn't understand
24 what you were talking about. Did you ever, in this time period, after you came home did
25 you ever talk to anyone else about your experiences?

26 RD: I tried too sometimes unsuccessfully. After I came down to DC, something
27 made me pick up the phone and call John Wallace. John was one of the Captains on our
28 team. He was the psy-ops advisor for Team 45 (MAT-45). I knew that John was going to
29 be stationed at Fort Mead in Maryland. So I looked up in the phone book and I found a
30 Wallace in that area. I also knew that John was getting married to his high school
31 sweetheart after he got out of Vietnam. I called a lady answered the phone, and I asked if

1 it was Barbara Wallace and she said, “Yes.” I said, “I don’t know you and you don’t
2 know me, but I served with John in Vietnam.” She was very gracious, and she had John
3 call me. And he was absolutely wonderful. John’s a Mississippi boy, too. He said, “Let us
4 try and put together a team party.” He got maybe ten, fifteen folks from the team who
5 were in the DC area. Mr. Owen, who had been the province senior advisor when I
6 arrived, Richard Owen. Foreign Service officer, since deceased. Reg Hill, who had
7 been—he was a Captain. He was the head *Phụng Hoàng* guy in the Bu Son District and
8 the number two advisor in that district in Bu Son. Sergeant Fortune, Sergeant First Class
9 Fortune who had been the unfortunate victim of that racist situation I described in the last
10 discussion. Golly geez, Tom Troyer who was the MSS advisor on our team, Military
11 Security Service. The Vietnamese counterintelligence military, ARVN. Golly Gee whiz,
12 John was there, his wife; Reg and his wife; Mr. and Mrs. Owen. Tom wasn’t married, I
13 wasn’t married. I was trying to think. There were others and it was so good for one night.
14 And that made it all the more heartbreaking. Naw, let’s not over dramatize this. By
15 comparison, it was so easy to talk to these people about Vietnam. In some ways, not so
16 easy to talk to them about what life was like now. I remember Mrs. Owen—Mr. and Mrs.
17 Owen asked what I was doing and where I was working for the federal government and it
18 turns out it was just a few blocks away from where they lived in the nice area of
19 Bethesda, Maryland. Mrs. Owens said, “You probably shop at such and such a market.”
20 And Dick Owen just said, “Honey, I don’t think so.” He understood. To shop at that
21 market, you couldn’t do it on a TSM salary. You know, the gulf—the gulf was there, but
22 there were still good bridges. Things like that helped. When I started law school in the
23 fall in August of ’73, I went to Catholic U Law School. I could have gone to any of the
24 four or five schools. Some of which were, by reputation, more prestigious. One reason I
25 took Catholic U over the others was they had a philosophy that law school can be a dog-
26 eat-dog world. At Georgetown friends told me that you come in, you sit down the first
27 day in this huge auditorium and say, “Look to the left, look to the right. Of the three of
28 you, only one will finish.” At Catholic U they brought 280 of us in, sat us down in this
29 amphitheater. “Introduce yourself to the person on your left and on your right. You’ll be
30 shaking hands with them in three or four years when you all graduate together.”

31 JS: Wow.

1 RD: “We don’t allow anybody in here that we don’t think can make it. And we’re
2 not here to wash you out.” Okay, that was a very different philosophy.

3 JS: Right.

4 RD: Still, it was always a pressure cooker. I was going at night and that first year
5 in law school, in essence it’s kind of like an intellectual boot camp. They kind of take
6 your mind apart or make you take it apart and put it back together again in a way a
7 lawyer thinks. It’s much the same as taking your mind and psyche apart at Fort Benning
8 or Fort Devens and making you a part of a—making you think and function as part of a
9 unit in a different way than you ever had as a civilian. But law school, it was stressful. I
10 actually went and got some psychological help that first year. Just talking about things
11 with a counselor. We’d meet once a week, maybe twice a week and then dropped down
12 to once a week. This counseling was offered free by the university, and it helped, it
13 helped a lot. What also helped was there were people in the class, particularly my school
14 class who had just come out of the service. Many of whom had been in Vietnam.
15 Ironically enough, I’m sitting in contract law class the first year and I’m sitting next to
16 this guy. He’s an Air Force Major, Major Moore. Major James C. Moore. After a while I
17 said, “Hey, Major. I knew a Jim Moore in high school that was two years ahead of me.
18 President of our student body.” He looks at me and says, “Chaminade, Minneola, Long
19 Island?” I said, “Yeah!” I said, “Are you that Jim Moore?” He said, “Yeah!” We got to be
20 very good friends. We did moot court together. He was married and had—I think he and
21 his wife Fern had two kids. I remember that—when moot court that first year. Everybody
22 has to do moot court and Jim and I teamed up and we wrote our brief, and we made our
23 arguments and this, that, and the other. Then we took the girls to dinner. He took Fern
24 and I took Sherry, and we went out to a place. If you’re ever up here and want to go to a
25 really nice kind of romantic place, The Old Anglers Inn on McArthur Boulevard. It’s still
26 there. We spent some money out there, but it’s absolutely a great place to take somebody
27 special. I know it was wintertime because there was a fireplace with this roaring fire with
28 great drinks and wonderful food. Oh boy, nice night. I think Jim stayed in the Air Force,
29 retired as a full-bird colonel in the Air Force JAG. Forget where he wound up. We lost
30 track of each other a couple of years later because I decided to go—after we were married
31 Sherry and I talked it over and I decided to go to school both day and night to try to finish

1 up as quickly as I could. At that point, Jim and I, our paths diverged because he stayed in
2 the night school. We didn't share any classes after that. We sure had a good time
3 together. One of my best friends in law school was a fellow named Steve Nichols. Steve
4 and his wife, Sally had been members of IVS, International Volunteer Services in
5 Vietnam. In the delta, I believe. Not up in II Corps. There was an IVS guy whose first
6 name Jay up in II Corps in our province and he worked with the Chong's. Well Steve and
7 Sally knew Jay. Ironically Steve got his draft notice while he was in Vietnam. So, he had
8 to go back to California where he declined to report. He was taken to court, sentenced to
9 a couple of years of public service and I believe he became a smoke jumper for the state.
10 He and Sally had worked with IVS in schools, in education teaching. I think they'd been
11 at Vung Tao. At any rate, we hit it off. Just despite the ostensible differences between
12 what he did and what they did and what I did in Vietnam, we became very good friends,
13 all four of us. Many times, over the years, we had dinner together at our place or theirs.
14 But there was a really funny night in Con Law class. The professor, Larry Bellville later
15 went on to become dean of Suffolk Law in Boston and actually has a PBS program now.
16 Fascinating discussions, a lot with Vietnam veterans. Bellville had been an anti-war
17 activist and had gone to North Vietnam at least once, if not twice. At any rate, he was our
18 Con Law prof. He could be sarcastic as oh! One night I guess we were working on
19 criminal constitutional issues and he just kind of lit into us—almost as if we were of no
20 account. He says, "Look, you don't know what it's like to be brought up on criminal
21 charges. There's nobody in here. Is there? Who has ever been brought up on criminal
22 charges?" One hand goes up and it's my friend Steve's. I knew why. The whole class just
23 goes—you can hear the gasp. The funny thing was Bellville's face. He didn't think
24 anybody in this class of well-off middle-class people had ever been convicted of a felony.
25 Here's one of his students saying, "Yeah, I was." Oh God, I think people bought Steve a
26 round of drinks that night. But Steve was a tremendous comfort to me, personally, when
27 Saigon fell. We were in school during that period of April '75. I finished up in December
28 of '76 and I think I said this on the tape I sent to you. It's absolutely true. Whether it was
29 in class or at work or at home with Sherry, I was worthless. I would go to work, and I
30 would sit at my desk, and I would read the *Washington Star* and the *Washington Post*. I
31 would listen to the radio. There would be times when I would just shut my door and

1 cried. I didn't get much work done. Then I'd go to school, and I know a couple nights
2 after class, particularly after the last class nights of the week Steve and I would just go
3 get a couple of beers and talk. You know, Steve was so gentle. He never put blame on
4 anybody. He believed the war was wrong. I had believed it had come a failure. Steve
5 would not listen to me take any blame. He just wouldn't do that. You know, you're
6 kicking yourself. What could you have done? You did what you thought was right, but at
7 the same time we were both kind of just, "Ooh God, what's going to happen to the people
8 with whom we worked?" That just burned. That really just burned inside of me. In the
9 years afterwards I really had no—there were occasional glimpses of what may have
10 happened to friends or acquaintances. Another one of life's little ironies. I remember
11 taking some film into a camera store not a mile from our house here in Silver Spring.
12 Two Vietnamese gentleman, probably in their mid-forties were running the store. A very
13 nice operation. It turns out that one of them was a doctor and I think one of them was a
14 dentist in Vietnam, but they were both professional men over there. We got talking one
15 day. I always hesitated to bring up the fact that I had served there. After a couple of visits
16 in there I brought it up and they asked me where and I told them Ninh Than and Phang
17 Rang. Oh, my goodness gracious they knew Ninh Than, they knew Phan Rang. I said,
18 "Well, did you know Colonel Tu, the province chief?" and they said, "Yes, he's alive.
19 He's in Saint Louis." I would say, Jason, that this took place—let's see, we moved in
20 here in '77 so this would be about 1980 perhaps. They said that Colonel Tu had survived
21 reeducation camps and escaped after release from the camp. Surprisingly to me, he
22 couldn't have spent that long in a reeducation camp. A few years later the Vietnam Wall
23 was dedicated. I was down there—I didn't march, but I was down there, and I ran into a
24 gentleman named Grant Lecour who lives in—oh, I think he lives in Calvert County here
25 in Maryland. Grant Lecour had worked with a Monk in Laos during the war in Southeast
26 Asia. You know, I believe he was in Special-Ops. He was also very, very active in this
27 organization called Counterparts. I don't know if you've heard of it.

28 JS: Yes, sir.

29 RD: Okay, well he talked to me about joining Counterparts. Cause I think I
30 actually showed up with my old fatigue jacket or blouse on and he saw the MAC-V. Most
31 of the guys down there had served with American units. Anyway, Lecour, when he found

1 out I had worked in the Phoenix Program just looked at me and he said, “Your
2 counterparts are dead.” He says, “I hate to put it that way to you, but everything that
3 we’ve been able to figure out is that if you worked in Phoenix, and you didn’t escape.
4 You’re dead.” I hope he’s wrong, but I’ve never heard anything that counters it. Oh boy,
5 they lost a lot of good people. Jumping back to ’75 during that last god-awful offensive
6 when they rolled down—when the NVA rolled down from Da Nang like a hot knife
7 through butter. Once they busted out of Quang Tri they went right through Wei and Da
8 Nang and Qui Nhon, I mean Bien Dien was theirs for the taking and always been strongly
9 pro-VC. Nha Trang didn’t hold up well. Well, Phan Rang did. Apparently one of our old
10 compounds was a keystone of the resistance. That it was mostly RFs.

11 JS: How about that.

12 RD: They put up a two- or three-day fight and nobody further north fell up until
13 you got to Quang Tri. Nobody fought that hard. They slowed them up. I’m perversely
14 proud of that. God bless them.

15 JS: Had you followed those late developments in the war prior to the fall of
16 Saigon?

17 RD: Yeah, yeah, I tried to. I remember—what was the—was it Phuc Long? No,
18 Quang Duc that the NVA took in like December of ’74. It’s out there to the Southwestern
19 edge of the MR-2, II Corps. It was kind of, by reputation, it was kind of a hillbilly
20 province. It wasn’t really built up. And it was almost a test case. In fact, I think the North
21 Vietnamese had described it as a test case. They took it to see what the American reaction
22 would be. And when there was no reaction then they started to accelerate their plans. So
23 instead of thinking that it might be ’76 or ’77 when the major final offensive could begin,
24 they went hell-bent for leather in their planning and then got things all set for the assault
25 on Ban Mic Thuoc (??). In I guess it was February that was the one that—boy, when that
26 happened it was just such confusion, and they decimated that ARVN division. I think it
27 tried to go back down to QL-9 to Quin Yon. That was the route that Group Mobile 100
28 got wiped out on. Yeah, I remember distinctly having a very bad feeling when I read that
29 Quang Duc had fallen in December. That’s just not good because there was no effort to
30 take it back and yet Thieu said, “Well, we’ve got to defend every inch.” Well, you can’t.
31 You’ve got to draw a line and now we’re starting to draw lines, but he’s also not getting

1 any help at all. By that time there had already been massive restrictions opposed by
2 congress on what we could do. No more air support. They'd already cut the aid from a
3 billion a year to seven hundred and something then down further. They wouldn't even
4 give Ford, President Ford his half billion in emergency aid that he requested in April. Or
5 March of '75. It was like they wanted to put the last nail in the coffin themselves. They
6 certainly made it easy for the NVA. I really want to get a hold of this book by Bui Tin
7 called *Following Ho Chi Minh*. I want to read more of the post-1975 accounts by former
8 VC or former NLF members. What I have read indicates that whatever role they played
9 in the NLF and the VC prior to the fall of Saigon. In the post war years, those VC and
10 NLF veterans, those Southerners were eased out of positions of responsibility. Many of
11 them came to regret having—I can't say that they'd come to regret following so blindly?
12 Maybe their failure was to believe too strongly that whatever happened in the south
13 would be determined by Southerners and the reunification perceived with a southern
14 viewpoint as well as a northern viewpoint. It turned out that there really was only one
15 viewpoint. You know, there was some cheer, I guess to be taken in the years after 1975.
16 It was horrible, horrible escapes by the boat people. Some cheer, perhaps, that those
17 escapes tended to prove right those who had forecast that a communist takeover would be
18 not a good thing for the south. And to Rajon Baez's statement that something to the effect
19 of it's painful, but I have to acknowledge that the reader's digest was perhaps closer to
20 the truth about that war than mother towns (??) or some other more radical publication.

21 JS: I think all of this ties into some of the larger issues that I wanted to ask you
22 about before wrapping things up. Do you mind if we move into some of those?

23 RD: Go ahead.

24 JS: If I could ask you some of those questions.

25 RD: If you don't ask the questions I'll just rattle on forever.

26 JS: (laughing) Not at all, not at all. Alright, well first of all, you kind of touched
27 on some of these things, but first of all, looking back for your perspective now on the
28 Vietnam War, how do you feel about American involvement to begin with? Should we
29 have been there? Should we have gotten involved? And also, how do you feel about your
30 own service in Vietnam?

1 RD: Hmm, should we have been involved? It's almost a question of how could
2 we not have been involved? I mean, historically we were allied with Ho Chi Minh against
3 the Japanese. In the '40s we had OSS jumping in to work with Ho Chi Minh. With the
4 end of World War II, we've become the strongest non-communist power in a world that
5 is becoming increasingly divided into two armed camps, communist and non-communist.
6 Or at least perceived that way. Much of what happens immediately after World War II
7 with the demobilization of our armed forces, turns out perhaps to have been a bit
8 premature and by '47, '48 we were into a reorganization of our armed forces and a
9 creation of both a separate Air Force and the CIA. The institution of the Marshal Plan.
10 The CIA is created clearly to be leading the intelligence arm in the battle we now foresee
11 coming with the Soviet Union, the struggle. The Marshal Plan is a wonderful thing
12 because it makes us feel good about our own generous American self, but it's also very
13 enlightened self-interest in creating a stronger non-communist Europe that can resist the
14 Soviet Union's attempts to sow some chaos through economic tribulation. The doctrine
15 of containment is developed we're a war weary country, but we have not suffered the
16 same devastation that Europe and Russia have. So, we still have the economic strength so
17 we can contain the Soviet Union and the expansion of Communism. Korea is—some say
18 it's the first test of containment, but I don't think so. I think Greece was. Then the
19 creation of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). Let's see, NATO I think came
20 after Korea, I'm not sure. But anyway, these events the Civil War and Greece, the
21 creation of NATO, the North Korean invasion and the UN's response to that invasion in
22 South Korea. All these things happened in the space of a few years. They are related and
23 they are related to this doctrine of containment. Which is still in full bloom in '54 as the
24 French suffered defeat and withdrawal from Vietnam. Many of those opposed to the
25 Vietnam War point to the Geneva Accords and our country's refusal to sign the Geneva
26 Accords as an instance of bad faith and had we signed the accords and proceeded with an
27 election we would have had reunification and no war. Yes, but that is looking at things in
28 a vacuum or at least only from one side. It is a logical follow through to the doctrine of
29 containing the spread of Communism to look at the Geneva Accords and say, "Hmm, we
30 hold this election and we've just agreed to elect the communists into power in an area
31 that isn't communist." "No, we're not going to do that; we're not going to sign the

1 Accords. We're going to start on this." I guess what they now call Nation building. So,
2 we're in. I guess it's more effective to criticize—It's more correct, perhaps, to criticize
3 the containment philosophy. Where the containment philosophy or policy did not allow
4 for differentiation among the communist powers. I think we, for too long, saw Soviet
5 Union China and Korea and North Vietnam as all one of the same and all under the
6 power of the Comintern or the General Secretary of the Communist Party in Russia, the
7 Soviet Union. We did not allow or give enough—factor in enough the differences that
8 arise from Nationalism or Socialism, rather than Communism. The geographic and ethnic
9 differences. You know, intellectually we knew that the Chinese and the Vietnamese hated
10 each other's guts and had been at war for two-thousand years. How did we factor that in?
11 We didn't. The Chinese are sending them arms, the Russians are sending them arms.
12 They're all the same. I only—I give Nixon and Kissinger credit. They, to some extent did
13 discern that and worked hard to see what wedges they could drive between Moscow and
14 Hanoi. Beijing and Hanoi. What leverage they could create there. That's good, but the
15 other thing was that man I don't think we ever understood just how dedicated the North
16 Vietnamese were to taking over the South to their version of reunification.

17 JS: Right.

18 RD: In that sense I think we did fail to understand our enemy. But they were the
19 real enemy. It was not this monolithic world block of Communism; it was North
20 Vietnamese Communists. And it is important to add the adjective: North Vietnamese.

21 JS: Right.

22 RD: That distinguishes them from others. But then you can start to appreciate,
23 perhaps, the historical and cultural factors now at play. Anyway, I don't really think that
24 we could have avoided involvement in Vietnam. Could we have been involved in a
25 different way? Perhaps, perhaps, but you know it wasn't just a unilateral decision on our
26 part. Things might have been different because the North Vietnamese never wavered in
27 their determination to reunify the country the way they wanted to. As for my own
28 involvement, I'm proud that I served my country. I'm sorry that I didn't serve it better. I
29 wish I could have done a better job, but I'm not ashamed that I went to Vietnam. In many
30 ways I'm grateful for it even though it was just one year in my life, it is—I think the one
31 most formative year in my life. I can't think of another similar period of time when I

1 learned so much about myself and about other people. Much of which I didn't even
2 realize until later, but it's been a year, and the experience has always been with me for
3 good or bad; for both.

4 JS: Alright. A few other of the larger issues regarding the war that I'd like to ask
5 you about. One, was media coverage of the war and/also if you could talk a little bit
6 about your thoughts on the protest movement as well.

7 RD: You know, I went over thinking that the media did have—I don't know if it
8 was biased, but say a lack of understanding of the military and of war, but when I got
9 over there and found that, "Hey, it's not hard to see areas where progress has been made,
10 but that progress in the living standards and the new schools, better roads, better security,
11 introduction of new rice crops and this, that and the other. These things may appear once
12 in a while in the news reports, but these are things that make huge differences in the day
13 to day lives of the people." And if the press is going to say, "Well, now we're kinda—
14 now the war's changed for one of pacification and Vietnamization." than you got to get
15 your ass out there and look at it and come to understand it. And I didn't see any of that
16 and—in any profession, there is going to be lazy people. Discounting that, I had to come
17 to the conclusion by the time I left that, it wasn't just a lack of familiarity with the
18 military or with a lack of familiarity with Vietnamization, but there was actual bias.
19 Because it kept happening over and over and over again. Not so much in what was said,
20 but what was not said. Very disappointing, very discouraging. The other thing was
21 something that I had learned in my senior year at Boston College when I was working on
22 my honors thesis. The formation of an independent American Army in France in the First
23 World War. One of the sources I used—a couple of the sources I used were newspapers. I
24 had access to the *London Times*, *New York Times*. I'm trying to think. I think I had access
25 to a French paper, but I used the *London Times* and the *New York Times* more. I
26 remember—now here are papers that are not biased against the war—WWI. Not biased
27 against those military operations. In fact, if you want, they're cheerleaders, they certainly
28 support their country's involvement. Let me put it that way. But by God, they had so little
29 understood of the actual military operations that were taking place. They would get a
30 glimpse of something, play up that glimpse, and not see that the picture they saw was a—
31 not part of the big—it was part, but only a relatively small part of a much bigger picture

1 that spread out both in space and in time. They had difficulty seeing that. And maybe
2 that's an unfair criticism of journalism and maybe that larger contextual understanding is
3 something that you, Jason Stewart, and your colleagues have to do and for a time I
4 wanted to do. That's the historian's job, but I don't—that experience in research there
5 and then again working on the master's thesis to the extent that you use journalism. I kept
6 finding a lack of understanding of the big picture. I didn't think it was that hard to figure
7 out the big picture or at least come up with an attempt at what the big picture was. I
8 mean, in Vietnam, day to day you're so damn busy with the grind of things that you—I
9 didn't walk around with the thought that, “Oh boy, if we can get so and so out there in the
10 An Phuc District, we'll just yank the lynch pin out from under the VCI in this province
11 and the entire region would become pacified which is part of the big picture.” No, it was
12 kind of like, “Oh God, could we ever get anybody to go out there and hunt for that
13 bastard?” It was the day-to-day things. I looked askance at newspaper reporting of
14 American Military efforts, but hey, afterwards when I worked for the Product Safety
15 Commission or when I was working on environmental issues for the mining industry and
16 something I was working on was covered in the press, I always thought it was amazing if
17 they got two sides of the story and a miracle if they realized there were often more than
18 two sides. You got three or four points. One thing that always amazed me about my wife,
19 that's how we met. She was a journalist covering the agency where I worked. She dug
20 and dug and dug and she talked to as many people as she could. She and her boss, they
21 published this weekly newsletter covering federal regulation—Federal Product Safety
22 Regulation. They had a better understanding of the big picture. There in the universe in
23 which their little limited universe they reported. God, I wish I had seen some of that same
24 effort on the part of others. We did the media thing. Now what was the other question?

25 JS: The protest movement.

26 RD: Oh heh, ah boy. From the time I was in graduate school all the way through
27 until '75. So, from '66 to '75, one way or another I saw some protests. In grad school in
28 '68 I remember hearing two guys—two seniors; male seniors in the university talking
29 about what they were going to do after they graduated. It wasn't what jobs, it was, “Are
30 you going to Canada? Or are you going underground?” That shocked me, but that was the
31 real world for many people. We saw the protests in Germany. For a while I was dating a

1 girl here in the states who was very much anti-war. Sometimes we would just get into it
2 because I felt she was condescending and believed anybody who supported the war was
3 stupid. You know, intellectually inferior. You know, the best thing I ever heard about the
4 protests and the protestors was in Vietnam. We were at dinner one night in the CORDS
5 compound. Mr. Owens was still the province senior advisor, and when we sat down to
6 dinner. He would pose a question to the table and ask our viewpoints on it. One night he
7 said, "What do you think should happen to the war protestors who have fled to Canada?"
8 A lot of us younger officers just, "Well, the hell with them. Don't let them back in,
9 revoke their citizenship. They ever come back in, and we catch them, let's throw them in
10 jail." One-man, Major Biard, Danny Biard. I think he was a MAC team advisor at that
11 time. I guess he was a senior Captain. He made Major and became district senior advisor
12 in An Phuc District shortly thereafter. Danny was up in the ranks, a mustang. He was in
13 his second tour; he got a battlefield commission in Vietnam. He's on his second tour in
14 Nam and he's infantry. Now, you give it all these things and you think you're going to
15 get a response that comes out basically crucify the SOBs. No, not at all. Danny Biard was
16 one of the most intelligent, thoughtful human beings I ever met in my whole life. And
17 that night was the first time I realized what a gem he was. He said, "Let them come
18 home." We looked at him and said, "What? How can you say that?" He said, "Let them
19 come home. Our country is so badly divided by this war. There are honest differences of
20 opinion. We can't keep the hatred up amongst ourselves. We've got to get past that. If we
21 can come home and try to reintegrate ourselves in our society, so should they." I've never
22 forgot that. And when President Carter—let's see, what was the technica—Did he pardon
23 them? The protestors who went to Canada? Any violation of federal law or failure to
24 report or refusal to report for induction?

25 JS: I believe so. I believe they did.

26 RD: Say that again? I can't hear you.

27 JS: I said I believe so, I believe they did.

28 RD: It hurt, don't get me wrong. It hurt, but to Danny Biard's words stayed with
29 me and I thought, "You know, we've done it. Good." It was a major step that had to be
30 taken just as was the recognition under Clinton of the DRV (Democratic Republic of
31 Vietnam) It had to come. I live in a neighborhood where I think most of the folks who

1 were my age during the Vietnam War protested the war. Certainly, didn't support it. And
2 yet there are a number of us in the neighborhood who served in Vietnam. There's a
3 retired Colonel down the street. He was a DC National Guard; he didn't go to Vietnam.
4 Next to him is the fellow who worked in the Air Force and worked in Tan Son Nhut. I
5 suspect that Steve took apart every airplane that ever landed at Tan Son Nhut because he
6 still takes apart every mechanical device that passes through his garage. I don't know, he
7 has an engineering degree, so I think that's what he was doing. There's a few others
8 around the neighborhood. Tom Ricks lives in the neighborhood who's written things like
9 *Making the Corps*, *Fiasco*, *The Gamble*. Tom never served in the military at all. He's
10 fascinated by it, and it has become, I think, one of the most well-educated and thoughtful
11 observers of the military. Now his wife, Mary Lou said, "Hey, you know Vietnam, I cut
12 class over at the local Catholic high school so I could go down and protest that war you
13 were fighting in." "Fine, why didn't you do a better job? I could have come home sooner.
14 Weren't very effective." (Laughter) I love to say that because there's so many people
15 who think they were so effective they ended the war. Indeed, maybe you did with all your
16 protests, but you didn't end it the way it could have been. I don't know.

17 JS: Well, one of the last questions I have for you. You've kind of touched on this
18 a little bit already just a moment ago, but your opinion on US policy towards Vietnam
19 today and the reestablishing relationship with Vietnam if you could talk a little more
20 about that.

21 RD: Well, I think it was the right thing to do. I think it was inevitable. I know
22 there's a lot of bitterness amongst some that the recognition was ever granted. There was
23 concern on a broader scale about the human rights violations that the DRV Government
24 continues to inflict. The Montagnard's in particular. There are still opponents of the
25 regime imprisoned. The security apparatus continues to exist. There are legitimate
26 reasons for criticizing the government of Vietnam for its policies and practices towards
27 its own citizens. On the other hand, if you don't recognize 'em, if you don't establish
28 trade relations, if you don't have communications with them, how are you ever going to
29 communicate effectively? And as broad of means—it's one more category of ways to
30 communicate with another country and with its people. So, we needed to do this, and I
31 think we needed to do it for our own selfish interests like further accounting of those lost,

1 Americans lost, human rights concerns. The criticism can be made that the current
2 administration doesn't really focus on that, but they also have some pretty major issues
3 elsewhere in the world to focus on and the resources are limited, but at least Chelsea got a
4 wedding present. The fact that these kinds of communications can be there, these
5 channels are there, good. As long as they are used.

6 JS: How about the other side of American involvement? Well, not necessarily the
7 other side, but another aspect of American involvement with Vietnam now, with a lot of
8 veterans going back to Vietnam. What do you think about that? And have you ever
9 considered something like that?

10 RD: Yeah, I've talked about it, but I don't know if I'll ever do it. We're hoping to
11 travel, my wife and I in another few years when she retires. I'd love to go back to
12 Germany and visit the area where I was stationed and see some other parts of Europe that
13 I've never seen. We went to Ireland last year and had a ball and I wouldn't mind going
14 back there today. Vietnam, yeah, it certainly wouldn't be the same lighthearted trip, but it
15 wouldn't necessarily be a total downer, either. I thought, I guess for the last fifteen years
16 a Vietnamese Catholic nun spoke after mass one day in our Catholic parish. I went up to
17 her afterwards. Basically, they run orphanages and schools in Vietnam. We have
18 continued to support that effort, giving back a little, I hope. We've watched her
19 individual efforts grow to be pretty successful, I think. We have gotten letters from
20 Vietnamese youngsters who over the years have progressed through schools to the point
21 where two of them now—in this family of four siblings—two are now out gainfully
22 employed and the other two are perusing higher education and hopefully will be in one of
23 the professions, medical professions. I would like to see what it is like now. I wonder if
24 any of the people I met are still there in Phan Rang. God, I wish them well, but I don't
25 know that going back to Vietnam would be my top travel priority. I guess if I had all the
26 time and money in the world, you'd bet I go back, but it isn't cheap. You know.

27 JS: It's certainly not.

28 RD: And you've got family to live with.

29 JS: It's a long flight.

30 RD: Golly gee.

31 JS: You know that though, so.

1 RD: Oh, I have never forgotten that flight. Seventeen hours at least, and that was
2 just flight time. How long is it for you guys when you go back?

3 JS: Um, total transit time is it takes about twenty-four hours, but yeah, it's I think
4 about—one of the flights alone is fourteen hours.

5 RD: Just one leg?

6 JS: Just one leg here from Texas to Vietnam. From Dalla—Well, actually not to
7 Vietnam rather from Dallas to Japan is fourteen hours. Then like another four to Vietnam.
8 Four or five to Vietnam after that.

9 RD: Where do you land, Saigon?

10 JS: Yeah, Saigon.

11 RD: What's the airport like?

12 JS: Well, the first time I went in 2003 and 2004 on study abroad programs we had
13 some veterans go back with us and they got off the plane—it was their first time back to
14 Vietnam and they said, "Oh my God, it looks the same." Tan Son Nhut hadn't changed
15 hardly at all according to them. Now, I will tell you, though, I went back in—the last time
16 I was there was in 2007 they had opened up a brand-new terminal with the help of the
17 Japanese. The partnership with them they had built a brand new one. It was nice, but I
18 was also a little disappointed because of the loss of the history, but it was a nice terminal
19 none the less.

20 RD: Yeah, they still have the old aircraft revetments around there?

21 JS: There are some. Now, Tan Son Nhut itself has shrunk quite a bit as you can
22 imagine. The military side of it anymore because our tour guide actually told us that we
23 were driving out on this road and there were houses and businesses everywhere and he
24 said, "This used to be part of Tan Son Nhut. There were airstrips here." Now there are
25 businesses and houses there. So, it shrunk quite a bit, but you do still see some of those
26 revetments and things. Some of them are still there.

27 RD: Well, MAC-V headquarters—and there was transit operation, all those things
28 were smack-dab up against Tan Son Nhut.

29 JS: It's funny, the other little things you would see there is we would be riding on
30 a road and seeing an old deuce-and-a-half (M35 Cargo Trucks) come by or a military
31 jeep and say, "Well, we know where those came from."

1 RD: Yes, indeed. Did the deuce-and-a-half have all its tires?

2 JS: It did, it did. I believe it did. The other one that was interesting, we were
3 somewhere in the delta, we had come off of a ferry and there was a bulldozer there that
4 was still painted that Army green. It still had the star on it, too, the white star. I was
5 surprised they hadn't at least bothered to paint over that. But no, they were still using it,
6 but little things like that. Little traces that still exist.

7 RD: Yeah, I'd like to see the air base at Phan Rang. That had two, ten thousand-
8 foot concrete strips. I mean, they had B-57s going out of there. The Royal Australian Air
9 Force. 4 Squadron, 4 bomber squadron and they did night Ops against the Ho Chi Minh
10 Trail. They had F-100s, C-123s and C-130s, and it was also a stopping off point for Air
11 Vietnam which flew some older airplanes. I remember flying in an Air Vietnam DC-3 in
12 the old civilian airliner configuration. And it was plush, it was lovely. It was slow and a
13 bit noisy, but big old, tufted seats, just a lovely flight to Tan Son Nhut. During the final
14 days of Saigon in '75, Presidential Palace in Saigon was bombed by a plane that took off
15 from Phan Rang Air base. I think it was an A-37 Dragonfly which was a cross between
16 a—it was a two-seater, and it was a cross between a trainer and a fighter bomber, a
17 tactical-fighter-bomber. The pilot was a turn code VNAF (Vietnamese Air Force) pilot. I
18 remember the turnover of the base to the Vietnamese from the American Air Force was
19 proceeding apace when I left in January of '72 and the correspondence that I had with
20 guys on the team after that said it was just, "Awe man, you'd hate to see the air base
21 now." Buildings stripped. It looked like half this—you know, the implication being that
22 stuff was being stripped and sold on the black market. The air base itself barely functions
23 and of course they couldn't go out. The guy's team—one reason you went out there was
24 because that was a big post exchange. So, you'd go out there and buy your booze and
25 your cigarettes and other items you wanted. Nope, that closed so the nourished one then
26 became Cam Ranh Bay, fifty-five miles to the North. It was safe enough to drive, but it
27 wasn't a thing you just did on the spur of the moment. We used to drive out to the air
28 base on lunch hour. So, their way of life changed on that team and then in the Easter
29 Offensive of '72, things got—guys got reassigned in a hell of a hurry. At least one, if not
30 two were reassigned from Team-45 to become aerial observers, gunnery observers up at
31 Pleiku, Kon Tum, or even in I-Corps as the need for—the need grew. Of course, most of

1 the combat units had been withdrawn by that time so that pool of experienced observers
2 was very, very thin. Just about every one of the officers, we had all had some training and
3 adjusting artillery or air bombardment. I remember one letter from Bill Whitlow said,
4 “Oh yeah, Tommy Caulk is backing around in Pleiku.” I think he said forward air
5 controller. Good God. I just remembered something. Tom Caulk, when he came to the
6 team in October of ’71? This will date us. He was head over heels in love with this young
7 seventeen-year-old American tennis player named Chris Evert. Chris Evert, seventeen.
8 Did he know her? Oh, hell know. He’s just seen pictures of her, that’s all. A lot of us had
9 pictures up from playboy. He had Chris Evert’s pictures from Sports Illustrated. Ah well.
10 Well, my friend, where are we?

11 JS: Well, I was just about to ask the final question which was if there’s anything
12 else we should cover. Anything else we haven’t discussed at this point?

13 RD: I think that about does it.

14 JS: Okay. Well, in that case then I’ll go ahead and bring the interview to a close.

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Interview with Roderick Dwyer
Session [5] of [5]