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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with William Halloran
Conducted by Jason Stewart
Date 28 June 2011, 5 July 2011
Transcribed by Sarah Tapia**

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

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1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University conducting an Oral History Interview with Mr. William Halloran. Today is
3 June 28, 2011. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library on the campus
4 of Texas Tech. Mr. Halloran is joining me by phone from San Diego. Is that correct, sir?

5 William Halloran: That's correct.

6 JS: Why don't we begin, if we could, with a little bit of biographical information?
7 First of all, when and where were you born?

8 WH: I was born August 31, 1935, in Montclair, New Jersey.

9 JS: Could you, I guess, tell me a little about your parents? What were their names,
10 and what did they do for a living?

11 WH: My dad, William R. Halloran—the senior one—worked on Wall Street. He
12 was a cashier in a brokerage firm for most of his life. My mom was a homemaker.
13 Occasionally, later on after the kids were grown, she did a lot of waitress work mostly in
14 private country clubs around New Jersey.

15 JS: So, did you grow up there in New Jersey then?

16 WH: Well, I grew up for the first—my dad—when the family moved to Jersey
17 City, New Jersey, when I was about four months old. We lived for the first nine or ten
18 years of my life in Jersey City. Then moved out to the suburbs in West Orange, New

1 Jersey. Then moved all the way to Michigan. Lived on a little inlet in Lake Erie—off
2 Lake Erie. Moved from there back to Pennsylvania for a while. Then back to New Jersey.
3 My dad had gone out to Michigan to change jobs. When it didn't work out after a couple
4 of years, we made our way back to New Jersey. I went to school—junior high and high
5 school in Jersey then went on to Montclair State Teacher's College, where I got a degree
6 in business education and English.

7 JS: Well, growing up during that time period, I guess you have a lot of memories
8 of World War II.

9 WH: I have quite a few memories of—well, you know, I was—World War II
10 started I was five. So, I was somewhere between five and ten. I did see my neighbors go
11 off, the young eighteen and nineteen-year old's that were in the neighborhood go off to
12 war. I remember rationing quite well. Remember the fact that we didn't need a car since
13 my dad lived in Jersey City and just took the train over to New York. So, rationing and
14 guys going off to war. I had about five of my uncles in World War II.

15 JS: Oh, wow. Did they all make it through?

16 WH: They all came back. Every one of them, which was good.

17 JS: Was there much of a celebration there in New Jersey when the War came to
18 an end?

19 WH: You know, to tell you the truth, I have no memory of what went on when the
20 War came to an end. In 1945 we were living in West Orange, New Jersey. We were
21 living with my aunt whose husband had died, whose son was over in the war. He didn't
22 get back until, you know, two/three/four months after the War was over. So, the
23 celebration—whatever celebration was delayed. And me being ten or eleven years—ten
24 years old, I don't remember much.

25 JS: Well, as a child growing up in this time period, did you have much interest in,
26 I guess, what was going on in World War II? Any interest in the military for yourself
27 possibly?

28 WH: I had no real interest in the military for myself, to be honest with you. It
29 was—you know, we used to go to the movies on Saturdays. See the Saturday movies. A
30 lot of war pictures, there's a lot of westerns. That's pretty much what we saw—either
31 westerns or war pictures during the end of World War II. So, my uncles being in the

1 service and my closest cousin being the service didn't really gender an interest for me in
2 the military. I mean, you know, you were happy to see them in uniform. One of them
3 brought me a peacoat back—his Navy peacoat. I wore that and that sort of thing. But
4 after that it was, no. After the War it sort of forgotten for me and on, I went.

5 JS: Well, did you pay much attention to, I guess, the development of the Cold
6 War? What was going on there?

7 WH: Well, not really as I kid. I tell you I got interested in that later on because
8 after I graduated from college in 1957, the draft was still going on. I graduated and the
9 draft was still in effect. So, rather than take the chance of being drafted, I joined the Navy
10 to go to OCS [Officer Candidate School] to get my military behind me—to get my couple
11 of years behind me so that I—because at the time, getting a job—if you had been in the
12 service and had it done, it was easier to get a job than it was if you hadn't had your
13 military service. So, I went—I joined the Navy to go to Officer Candidate School up at
14 Newport, Rhode Island. Because I'd rather be three years as a Naval officer than two
15 years as an enlisted draftee. I figured that was the way to go. I got married right after I
16 got out of Officer Candidate School.

17 JS: Before we get into that training, you mentioned that you went to Montclair
18 State Teacher's School. What were you wanting to do for a living? Did you know?

19 WH: Well, at the time I first started there I was going to be a—probably an
20 English teacher. Or a business math teacher, something like that in high school. Did my
21 practice teaching in Livingston High School in Livingston, New Jersey? But I had to put
22 that on hold then. But I decided I better go get my military obligations out of the way.

23 JS: Was there something in particular about the Navy versus the other services
24 that attracted you?

25 WH: Yeah, actually. I mean, it's typical of young people at the time. The Navy
26 had if you were onboard ship, you know, you had a nice, clean place to sleep. As an
27 officer, your wash would get done. Your bed—your room would get cleaned by the
28 stewards. You had good meals in the wardroom. That all sounded a lot better to me than
29 being in any of the other two services.

30 JS: Well, what was the process like of actually joining?

1 WH: Well, a couple of us, a friend of mine and I, we both decided—from college,
2 that is. We both decided that that was a good thing to do. So, we went over to New York
3 City to the recruiting office and checked each of the services. After doing so, we decided
4 to join the Navy. The only problem for me was that's when I found out my eyes were not
5 quite as I thought they were. I had to go back and get a pair of glasses. I was near sighted.
6 Once I got that, though, they accepted me. I went to OCS in July of 1957.

7 JS: Could you describe, I guess, what OCS was like for you, A typical day of the
8 training, and just a little bit of what it was like?

9 WH: You know, the training was—I suppose you could call it arduous compared
10 to what we were doing when we go out—when we were in college. The Officer
11 Candidate faculty put a lot of pressure on the students. I think to see whether or not they
12 could stand up under any kind of pressure. I mean, you had to have your beds made just
13 right. You had to have your books lined up. It couldn't be—your barracks had to be
14 clean, you know, as a whistle. There could be no dust. You couldn't mess up while you
15 were marching. Every time you did that, you got demerits. Supposedly, after so many
16 demerits, you got kicked out. Well, it didn't take some of us long to realize that it was—
17 that part of Officer Candidate School was designed just to weed out those that couldn't
18 take little bits of pressure. So, once you realized that, then you didn't pay any attention.
19 You got a whole bunch of demerits early on, and if you didn't let it bother you and your
20 schoolwork wasn't affected, miraculously over the last half of Officer Candidate School
21 you didn't get any more demerits. The academic side was, you know, it wasn't that
22 difficult. You know, they taught you navigation, engineering, Navy life in general. You
23 had to learn how to swim if you couldn't swim. Most of could swim, but there were
24 others that couldn't swim. In my Officer Candidate class, we started, I believe, with 700
25 people started. Less than 600 finished. Most of those were washed out academically. It
26 wasn't that they—they were all college graduates. I don't think that it wasn't that they
27 couldn't handle it, but they'd get so upset about the other things that they couldn't do
28 their schoolwork properly. So, those of us that realized early on not to let those other
29 things worry you really didn't have much trouble. My trouble was mostly engineering
30 class. I was not a good engineering prospect.

1 JS: Those that were washed out, did they just end up becoming enlisted men at
2 that point?

3 WH: Yeah, if you were washed out for academic reasons—I'll say
4 psychologically, but I can't say major psychologically. Then, you were left in the Navy
5 for two years as an enlisted person. If you were a good guy, I mean if you tried your
6 hardest and did all the kinds of things, but you just failed out, you usually ended up
7 getting fairly decent jobs. If you were a real screw up or a wise guy, then you found
8 yourself on some destroyer escort in the North Atlantic. That's the way it worked.

9 JS: If you could, talk a little bit about the instructors and your impressions of
10 them.

11 WH: Good instructors. I thought they were really good guys. They were a lot of
12 young lieutenants and, you know, and chief petty officers who had been in the Navy. A
13 lot of lieutenants had been in for, say, six or seven years. Been at sea and were having a
14 shore duty teaching at Officer Candidate School. There were a couple of chief petty
15 officers who had been in for maybe eighteen/nineteen/twenty years and were teaching
16 there. So, I thought the instruction was good.

17 JS: Overall, did you find that training, I guess, was sufficient as far as preparing
18 you to be an officer in the Navy?

19 WH: Well, I don't think—I don't think in four months you can prepare yourself.
20 You had a lot of basics. At least it familiarized yourself with the Navy and certain
21 learning things—certain things about ships and the Navy. I don't think it adequately
22 prepared you to be an officer. Most of us did a lot of on the job training in the first year
23 we were in the Navy. I think that was the most—but it gave you enough information to fit
24 in, I think, and get going. When I got out of Officer Candidate School I was assigned to
25 an amphibious ship in Norfolk, Virginia. I was going to be their communications officer.
26 Was an amphibious repair ship. They sent me to school for—oh, I think it was two
27 months after OCS to a communications officer's course. So, that was the one that most—
28 gave me the most information before I went aboard a ship.

29 JS: Where was that at? The communications course?

30 WH: Right in Newport. Same place as the—same place as Officer Candidate
31 School. So, in my case, I graduated from Officer Candidate School, went home, and got

1 married, and then ten days later my new wife and I went back up to Newport so I could
2 go to school for a couple months.

3 JS: Could you talk, I guess, a little bit about the training you received there? What
4 it was like?

5 WH: It was pretty good training. It gave you—you know, you had to learn—as
6 well as learning about the equipment that you'd find on ships, it was also learning about
7 the signalmen rate, for instance. As well as the communications rates that you would
8 have working for you. So, you had to learn your flags and Morse code, and what kind of
9 equipment you might have on various ships. So, it was pretty good training. It wasn't
10 great pressurized training or anything like that. It wasn't like you were going to fail out
11 because you had bad marks or anything. It was just geared to giving you as much
12 knowledge as you possibly could get in two months before they sent you off. So, it was
13 pretty good. I thought it was good training.

14 JS: Before moving on to that first assignment, any memorable moments or funny
15 moments? Anything like that from your training from either OCS or the communications
16 school?

17 WH: Well, there were a lot of individual funny moments. I can remember in
18 Officer Candidate School, being in a march that you to do sometimes on a Saturday
19 morning before they gave you liberty. In Officer Candidate School you really didn't get
20 any liberty for the first two months you were there. So, the first two months out of four,
21 you didn't get any. You stayed on the base on the weekends. Then, if you were doing
22 well, then you got liberty. But on a Saturday morning, frequently first thing on Saturday
23 morning you would have the whole class would be marching and reviewing companies.
24 Each company had its own—for instance, we were all put in companies of about thirty
25 people. So, you had thirty guys in your company. Then you would go out and you'd have
26 these marching reviews in front of the—either a visiting dignitary or else the
27 commanding officer of the base or something. On the first one that I can remember
28 participating in, one of the hats fell off one of the guys marching. Instead of picking it up,
29 the rest of the officer candidate companies just kicked that hat completely around the drill
30 field. So, it wasn't happy, but it didn't make them keep us there for that particular
31 weekend. We had a lot of people who—that were—for me, I thought was more people

1 than I would have thought at that age who could not swim. Besides learning how to
2 swim, you had to jump of this thirty-foot tower into the pool. A lot of people had never
3 jumped that high. That was designed because if you were on a ship, you know, you might
4 have a long jump if you had to abandon ship or something. It surprised me how many
5 people were unable to swim and had to go to remedial swim training. And how many
6 people did not want to jump off a thirty-foot tower into a pool. There were a lot of funny
7 moments. They weren't anything you could describe, but the fun was in having the
8 instructors trying to coach a guy to get off the tower into the pool. Generally, it was a
9 pretty—it was work. You marched to and from call all the time. You had your own
10 duties. I mean, you were assigned specific duties to keep your barracks clean. Every
11 evening was homework time. You had to sit down and study. So, it was not a basic
12 amusing time. It wasn't a lot of fun unless you went off on liberty.

13 JS: Well, given your assignment to communications, being a communications
14 officer, was that something that you wanted to do?

15 WH: Well, I tell you, that was interesting. My buddy and I from college who
16 joined the Navy together, we were put in the same company. We had the same company.
17 When they asked us for our preferences, I asked for a ship on the west coast because I'd
18 never been out there in the west coast. He asked for a ship on the east coast. We both
19 wanted to be in the amphibious force. When the assignments came in, of course, you hear
20 these stories all the time but it's true. I was assigned a ship on the east coast, and he was
21 assigned one on the west coast. I wanted to go out west because I wanted to see it. He
22 wanted to stay east because he had a new bride and his wife's family was having some
23 medical difficulties, her mom and dad. So, he thought if he stayed on the east coast, at
24 least he'd be close if something happened. But it didn't work that way. As a result of that,
25 I think, after his three years, he got out of the Navy as we had planned. Whereas we
26 stayed in, which we hadn't planned.

27 JS: This assignment to the amphib ship, how long was that assignment for?

28 WH: Well, it was supposed to be for three years. But it was supposed to be my
29 entire three years, but I was on the ship for a year as the communications officer. When I
30 arrived, I walked in, and the captain told me on the first day I was there that the
31 operations communications department of the ship had failed their major inspection. That

1 my predecessor had already left and that there was no overlap time. I had ninety days to
2 make the department pass the next inspection. So, it was an interesting first ninety days.
3 Luckily, I had one or two really good petty officers that I could rely on. We did pass after
4 ninety days. I spent the year on there. One of the things I wanted to do was travel a lot.
5 But being on a repair ship, we didn't do much. We just went up and down the east coast,
6 anywhere from Norfolk to North Carolina. That was about it. You know, repairing
7 broken down amphibious craft and stuff along the way. But it was a good experience. It
8 got me some good training. But after a year, for reasons that I did not know and still don't
9 know, I was transferred over to an amphibious group staff at Little Creek, Virginia. So,
10 still in the same place but I left the ship and went to a Phi Group Four staff. I spent the
11 next two years there. I still was in the communications department, but I was one of the
12 assistant communications people because they four/five of us on that staff. My basic job
13 was registered pub custodian, crypto officer, and guardian of the classified information
14 the staff had. We deployed a lot on that—you know, we were on different ships. When
15 we weren't ashore, we would move to a command ship or a different type of ship as the
16 admiral's command ship and we would go. As before, I didn't do anything better than go
17 up and down the east coast. I got as far as Puerto Rico and that's as far as I got.

18 JS: Were you—as you were going through these two assignments here, where you
19 enjoying life in the Navy?

20 WH: Yeah, actually. Both my wife and I enjoyed it. Our first child was born down
21 in Norfolk. We didn't realize—I mean, we always thought we would get out of the
22 service and—I mean, you know, at the end of three years. That was the whole idea. But
23 as it got closer to the time, and I was looking for different jobs, I realized that we
24 didn't—the jobs out there weren't that attractive in comparison to the Navy. Especially
25 from a monetary point of view. The thing about the Navy was you had quite a bit of
26 responsibility and when you got out to go to work someplace else you just didn't have
27 that responsibility. So, we decided to stay in. One of the things we decided, of course,
28 was that we both the Navy, my wife and I, but we didn't really like the idea of being at
29 sea for sixty percent of your time if you were a shipboard officer. So, I made an
30 application to switch my designator from a regular—from a line officer—from a reserve
31 line officer over to become a reserve intelligence officer. That was accepted and so my

1 designator was changed from regular line to restricted line intelligence. I was sent of
2 Washington D.C. for three years.

3 JS: Was there something in particular about intelligence that intrigued you?

4 WH: Well, one of the things was that I was already—I already had the clearances
5 because of my communications job. I was already involved in the coded messages and
6 classified information. So, you know, that sort of stuff sort of intrigued me a little bit
7 being the nosy type, or something like that. So, I decided that intelligence would be a
8 good fit for me. As it turned out, it was. So, we went to Washington in 1961.

9 JS: Before talking about that, any memorable moments, funny moments from
10 your time with the amphib?

11 WH: There were a number of moments. I was not a good ship driver. We used to
12 do these exercises out at Chesapeake Bay where you put pontoons down and then the
13 junior officers would be trained to bring the ship alongside. They wouldn't dare train you
14 in port, so they did it out at sea by putting the pontoons down and pretending that was the
15 dock. I can tell you this. I slammed into that pontoon many, many times. It sort of got
16 me—that was another thing, it sorts of got me in my idea that maybe I'm not the best ship
17 driver in the world. So, that might have been a factor in my not doing it.

18 JS: As you transferred over to intelligence, did you have to go through some
19 training first?

20 WH: I did not.

21 JS: You did not, okay.

22 WH: As a matter of fact, they have intelligence school but for some unknown
23 reason—one of the reasons I was selected right away and got order right away is because
24 a lot of intelligence officers had not been—had not had sea duty. So, right at that time
25 they were looking for intel officers who'd already had sea duty. Who could empathize or
26 realize what guys at sea were doing and why intelligence was important to them? So, they
27 didn't send me to school at all. They sent me to an office in Washington D.C., which was
28 the Navy's Naval Intelligence Office—Clandestine Office. It was a small office within
29 ONI [Office of Naval Intelligence], whose job it was to interface and react with the CIA
30 [Central Intelligence Agency] and other intelligence services. And plan and do covert
31 operations. So, that was particularly interesting for me. I mean, to get thrown in right

1 away into something like that in the intel office. We did things like—I mean, we can talk
2 about it now. At the time, the CIA was recruiting—so, this would have been '61 and '62.
3 The CIA was recruiting people to fly Air America in Laos, for instance. Before the
4 buildup to Vietnam but this was in Laos. So, our office was instrumental in doing
5 recruiting within the Navy for Navy pilots who would then essentially go to work for
6 CIA. They would keep their Navy rank and everything and their fitness reports would be
7 written. Everything else would be just like they were in the Navy except that they would
8 be working in Air America pilots and earning quite a bit more money. So, we did that.
9 We did things like getting hydrophones to be placed up in Baltic so we could listen to
10 Russian submarines coming out. That was done with the cooperation of the Finnish
11 Navy, which was by treaty with the Russians not supposed to have an intelligence
12 department in their Navy. But they did and we used Finnish fishermen to plant
13 hydrophones up there. That was the beginning of listening to the Russian submarines as
14 they came out of the Baltic. So, those were kind of things we did. Also, we did—when
15 the Bay of Pigs Operation went in the spring of 1961 and it failed, we assisted CIA in
16 getting out people out of Cuba. Those that had participated and escaped we used Navy
17 facilities and did it clandestinely to get those people out. So, it was an interesting job.

18 JS: Certainly, sounds like it.

19 WH: Yeah, and I was happy. I would have loved to stay there for three years but
20 at the end of year, little over a year again—once again I was transferred. I was transferred
21 to the Defense Intelligence Agency. It was a new agency being started up and as a young
22 reserve officer I was expendable. I mean, that's essentially—there's no other way around
23 it. So, those people that the Navy sent to the Defense Intelligence Agency to help man it
24 were either young and dispensable, or they were old and towards the end of their career.
25 That's the way the Navy looked at that intelligence agency back in 1962. So, instead of
26 having this nice clandestine job which I loved, I was sent to the Defense Intelligence
27 Agency where I was most of 1962 and all of 1963.

28 JS: Could you talk, I guess, a little bit specifically about your work? I guess, what
29 you were actually doing?

30 WH: In ONI or DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency]?

31 JS: Both, if you wouldn't mind.

1 WH: In ONI, we were arranging to have all these things done. Mostly we were
2 coordinators and arrangers. For instance, if you were going to ship hydrophones to
3 Finland, you had to find a way to do that so it wouldn't be known by anybody. So, we
4 would work the Department of Commerce, for instance. The Department of Commerce
5 had its own intelligence unit which is something we didn't know but they did. So, we
6 could arrange to ship these hydrophones under some other guise to Finland. That sort of
7 thing. It was the same thing with CIA. We would arrange to have pilots, for instance,
8 come into Washington D.C., not knowing why there were being called in. Then actually
9 do some interviewing—preliminary interviewing to see whether they would be interested
10 in moving to CIA or not. If they showed any kind of interest in it all, they wouldn't be
11 told what it was. Then we would turn them over to CIA interviewers who would actually
12 make the proposal to them. That's the kind of thing we would do.

13 JS: Working, I guess, with the CIA on Air America, did you—I guess, prior to
14 that, did you know much about what was going on in Southeast Asia? Had you paid
15 much attention to it?

16 WH: None.

17 JS: Okay.

18 WH: Didn't know anything until then. Didn't know anything until that time. That
19 was an interesting job being the clandestine interface for the Office of Naval Intelligence.
20 There was a couple of young officers—myself, I was junior—lieutenant junior grade. I
21 had been promoted. The other lieutenant junior grade, we would—we had pretty much
22 full access to CIA headquarters in Washington D.C. So, because we had to very—all
23 kinds of places, including their super-secret library and stuff like that, which we used to
24 use from time to time. We could move from place to place within CIA, where regular
25 CIA officers couldn't move because they were restricted, you know. They had need to
26 know areas, and so if you were doing something in CIA, that didn't mean you could go
27 over to another office within CIA just randomly. Whereas we had access to almost
28 everything in CIA. So, it was not only interesting, but it was also educational for us. So, I
29 learned a lot about the intelligence community in that little over a year I spent in that job.
30 When I went to the Defense Intelligence Agency, I was assigned to an office in which the
31 Air Force had turned over a complete office to the Defense Intelligence Agency. So, it

1 was basically an Air Force run office. It was Intelligence Collection and Requirements.
2 The idea was the intelligence community needed certain information, so this office would
3 determine who was best to fulfill that requirement—that collection requirement. Then
4 levy the requirement on whoever it was to go and do the collection of whatever it was
5 they needed. So, I wasn't wildly enthused about that job. Never was while I was there, to
6 be honest with you. But at the same time, the office was filled with—it must have been
7 forty people working in that office totally. Both Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine
8 Corps. A lot of them were experienced senior officers. Lieutenant colonels and Navy
9 commanders, things like that. So, as it turned out, it was a great learning experience for
10 me. I made lieutenant when I got there. I got promoted to lieutenant. In the fall of '62—in
11 the winter of '62—no, winter of '61. So, when I went down there in the spring of '62, I
12 went down there as a Navy lieutenant. I learned it wasn't my favorite job because it was
13 mostly paperwork. Getting information. Who needs what? Then levying it on someone to
14 collect it. Frequently in those kinds of jobs, you don't whether it's successfully done or
15 not successfully done. However, I learned a great deal about the intelligence community
16 worldwide simply by listening and talking to all those people who had been to all kinds
17 of jobs all over the world. So, as it turned out for me it was a wonderful learning
18 experience for two years.

19 JS: Any particular memorable assignments or projects that you'd—

20 WH: Yeah, one of them was an assignment we—the Air Force was sending
21 monkeys up into space and they needed monkeys. They needed specific kind of monkeys
22 because they were the kind that they were using, apparently, more intelligent than others.
23 So, they sent us this requirement saying, “we need you to collect, you know, twenty-six
24 such and such kind of monkeys.” So, it was our job to find out who could collect those
25 monkeys. We finally determined that it was an attaché, an Army attaché who was in the
26 Cameroons in the middle of Africa there. I think it was the Cameroons, might have been
27 one of the others. Anyhow, that area—central Africa. We actually levied the requirement
28 on the guy to collect twenty-six monkeys for the space program. We did find out that he
29 was able to contract out that problem down in—I believe it was at Cameroons. He got all
30 the monkeys they needed. In another incident, one of the—a source of one of the attachés
31 down in the Mediterranean had believed he found the missing link. A fish that came out

1 of the water and walked and everything. He sent it in to us in a jar, believing he had
2 found the missing—the link that got the sea-going creature to walk up onto the land. It
3 turned out it wasn't. But those little things happened a lot. Various kinds of things, you
4 know. So, for me it was a true education.

5 JS: You were there '62-'63, were you still with the Defense Intelligence Agency
6 when the Kennedy assassination took place?

7 WH: Yes, I was. Yes, I was.

8 JS: Could you talk a little bit about your memories of that?

9 WH: The memories of that are when he was assassinated it was—everything was
10 shut down. So, communications was nil. I had to be—we happened to be in the office
11 during the day. The classified phones and the classified equipment—it was unusable for a
12 number of hours that day. We didn't initially know what happened until somebody
13 listened on the radio and found out. So, for us it wasn't really—it wasn't much to do
14 except sit and wait it out until they decided it was not some big major conspiracy. So,
15 then basically—to be honest it was—everybody went back to work like they say, as
16 usual. But it was not much. It was not much fuss for us in the intel—in our business, at
17 the time.

18 JS: Well, anything else we should mention about your time there before moving
19 on to your next assignment?

20 WH: No. Son number two was born there. Daughter number one and final was
21 born in those couple of years that we were in Washington. So, I had three kids in the
22 spring. I think in the fall of 1963 I was due to get orders. First order was to send me—
23 they wanted to send me to Vietnam. So, that was very early on. It would have been as a
24 liaison officer with the Vietnamese Navy. At the time, the Navy was not sending people
25 over there who had a lot of security clearances. They were afraid of people getting
26 captured and having too much clearances. So, the people who were going to send me
27 there didn't realize that at first. So, they were telling me I was going to Vietnam and
28 then—oh, I don't know, five-six days later they called me and said, "No, you can't go to
29 Vietnam because you've got too many clearances." So, I didn't go in 1964. Then called
30 me up one day and said that he was going to send me to Iceland. I think I was thinking to
31 myself, "God, I must be on somebody's bad list or something." First Vietnam, now

1 Iceland. Job was the officer in charge of the Naval Investigative Service Unit in Iceland.
2 And the—oh, I don't know. It looked like we were going to Iceland because this was
3 good for two or three months, I think. Then somewhere around January/December 1963
4 during the Christmas vacation, they called me up said, "No, you're not going to go to
5 Iceland." What had happened, it was a—if you were married it was like a two- or three-
6 year tour. If you weren't, it was just a one-year tour. The guy who was in the tour had
7 gone up there for one or one-and-a-half-year unaccompanied tour. But what he did was
8 he got married while he was there, and he moved his wife there. So, when they found out
9 he was married they said, "Well, you're stuck for another year and a half." So, they kept
10 him there. They decided not to move him. So, I didn't go to Vietnam, and I didn't go to
11 Iceland.

12 JS: Well, where do you end up going then?

13 WH: I went to Paris.

14 JS: Oh, wow.

15 WH: Yeah, I went to Paris, France, 1964 in March. The whole family packed up
16 and we were sent to U.S. Army Special Security Detachment located at SHAPE
17 [Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe] Headquarters in Paris. Outside of Paris.
18 The reason I got there, find out later on, was because it was not, at the time, a particularly
19 desirable job according to the Naval intelligence people. It was a job that was run by
20 the—it was an oversea job by the security group. Those are the people who break codes
21 and everything. Code breakers. But because it was job necessitating analysis and report
22 writing and all that sort of stuff, they wanted to fill it with a regular intelligence officer.
23 So, I was still reserve officer. I hadn't put in to be regular yet. They said, "Here's a nice,
24 young reserve officer still. Let's send him over there." It's a wonderful place to be but it's
25 not a particularly good job. It wasn't the kind of job that made you get—that was in the
26 promotion line up, in other words. So, it didn't matter to me. I said, "Oh, for god's sake I
27 would never get to Paris." So, we said yes. We headed off to Paris and spent—I got there
28 in March of 1964 and stayed there till June of 1967. It turned out to be a much better job
29 than I anticipated, and the intelligence people anticipated. It had ready access to—I mean,
30 for a number of reasons our office was involved in high level briefings of the
31 commander—the supreme allied commander and his deputy. Plus, regularly brief the

1 ambassador to France, the ambassador to NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]—
2 the U.S. ambassador to NATO, and any other high-level people who came to Paris to
3 work. So, as a result, whenever the joint chiefs came over there for exercises or to meet
4 with NATO, our office did the intelligence briefing for them. Whenever the secretary of
5 defense or the secretary of state came over for high-level talks, it was our office that gave
6 them the special intelligence briefings. If the president were sending a guy to Moscow to
7 talk with the Russians or something, he'd stop on Paris, and it would be our office that
8 would give him a fairly high-level intelligence briefings before he went to Paris. So, it
9 turned out to be a wonderful job and in a wonderful location.

10 JS: Sure, absolutely.

11 WH: At the same time. Having my fitness report written by an Army colonel was
12 not the ideal, and then passed on to a Navy man over in London for the final workover,
13 who didn't know me at all was not the ideal thing. However, as the daily briefer, I
14 became the daily briefer for the supreme allied commander. So, I briefed him every day.
15 He decided that—I guess he liked me. He decided he would put an endorsement on my
16 fitness report each year. So, I had a four-star Army general supreme allied commander
17 writing part of my fitness report each year. So, from the promotion point of view, not
18 only did I make lieutenant commander, but I also was switched over from reserve officer
19 to regular Navy while I was there.

20 JS: Who was the supreme allied commander?

21 WH: His name was General L. L Lemnitzer. He had been the chairman of the
22 joint chiefs in the early '60s. Then he was going to retire and they decided to call him out
23 to make him the supreme allied commander in Europe. So, it turned out to be not only an
24 interesting job in a wonderful location, but it turned out to be a good job. Then after I left,
25 all the officers that followed me were officers who were on the path to promotion-wise.
26 So, it was an excellent job. I enjoyed it a lot. The family, we did a lot of travelling in
27 Europe as a family. I did a lot of traveling in my job.

28 JS: I know while you were in Paris, things were really beginning to heat up in
29 Vietnam. Were you paying close attention at that point?

30 WH: Yes, we were. It was a big topic. In fact, as we had sort of a semi-official
31 relationship with the British in Paris. We would give them information on what was

1 happening in Vietnam, and they would reciprocate by telling us everything that was
2 happening in Malta or Cyprus or in the Mediterranean where they had big assets. They
3 had a lot of intelligence assets in the Mediterranean. So, sort of the quid pro quo
4 information. Each time the joint chiefs came over for exercises or came over to discuss
5 things with NATO, the big topic that went on between Washington and Paris most of the
6 time had to do with Vietnam and our increase. So, I had a lot of—we had a lot of
7 information during those three years I was there about what was happening in Vietnam.
8 How it was happening and why it was happening. We also had—one of the things that
9 our office did over there was Army office had an eyes-only feature in which senior
10 officials could send simply eyes-only messages to whoever they wanted to. So, if the
11 president wanted to send a message to the supreme allied commander with nobody else
12 knowing what he was doing, he would send what's called an eyes-only message and he
13 would send it through our office. So, one of our guys working there would pick it up,
14 look at it, see what it was about, and then take it directly to whoever it was that was
15 addressed to. Nobody else would see it. Except of course one of us in the office. So, we
16 did learn a lot about Vietnam during those three years.

17 JS: Did you yourself, I guess, develop much of an opinion on the War at that
18 point?

19 WH: You know, I didn't—from what I could see, I didn't think it was going very
20 well. I wasn't too wild about it. But when the time came for me to switch in 1967, to a
21 new job—if you were going to—since I had just been promoted to lieutenant commander
22 and I was looking, you know, for a full career in the Navy, one of the things you almost
23 had to do was get to Vietnam. It's one of the things that's kind of like getting your ticket
24 punched or something like that. So, when the bureau of Naval personnel—we'd call him
25 the detailer, but he would be the assignment officer—came over to Europe, we talked.
26 We got together, a bunch of us from England and France and Italy, met one place and
27 talked about it. I said, "Well, you know, I'll go to Vietnam from here." From Paris. My
28 next assignment. What I asked him to do was send me someplace not in Saigon but
29 someplace out in the field. I didn't want to be in one of those big, massive intel sections
30 in a building in the middle of Saigon. I wanted to be out in the field. So, I got orders to a
31 mobile riverine force down in the Mekong Delta.

1 JS: You received those order to Vietnam—when would that have been?

2 WH: In the summer of '67.

3 JS: Summer of '67, okay. What was—if you don't mind me asking, your family's
4 reaction to your orders?

5 WH: Not wild about it. Not happy about me going over there for a year or
6 however long it was going to be. And being in a warzone. But my kids were still
7 relatively young, so they didn't really fully understand. But my wife was not particularly
8 overjoyed, but she understood why. So, she was supportive in that way. So, I left—
9 actually, I left the end of June in Paris and came home. Got them settled in New Jersey.
10 We settled near the family—my family and her family. Thinking that if something
11 happened to me, then she wouldn't be alone. That turned out to be a mistake. It would
12 have been much better to have them go live someplace on military installation or in a
13 military town. Because the anti-war protesters and everything were a problem. They were
14 a problem for her and a lot of other people who were living someplace where there was
15 not a lot of military people.

16 JS: Before we get into Vietnam, one other question I wanted to ask you about
17 your time in Paris. Could you talk a little bit about—I guess, what was the official stance
18 on America's involvement in Vietnam from some of these other nations that you guys
19 would have been dealing with?

20 WH: You know, it's—there wasn't any negative—there wasn't any negative stuff
21 from—I mean, we were dealing almost on a daily basis with military people or civilians
22 who were working for the military or the government at large. So, there wasn't any real
23 negative feeling. Even the French. You remember the French had been there first. So,
24 they were not critical. We didn't really—in Paris, we really didn't see any critical
25 reactions of our involvement over there.

26 JS: Well, I know you mentioned later on that your wife and family had some
27 trouble with the antiwar protestors in the US. But when you first came back from Paris,
28 before going to Vietnam, did you see much antiwar protests then at that point?

29 WH: Not really, no. Because I went back to essentially what my hometown was. I
30 was there and I spent—I had quite a bit of leave built up and so I spent about two months
31 at home before I went. Spent July and August in New Jersey in a small town. My

1 hometown only has about 8,000 people. Most of the people that I knew and family and
2 my friends and everything knew I was going. You know, there was no—I spent a lot of
3 time with the kids, and we went to parks and fishing. Spent time with the grandparents
4 and all that sort of stuff. So, it was relatively peaceful then.

5 JS: So, then you—I guess you left for Vietnam in September?

6 WH: I left, yeah, like on the thirtieth of August of 1967. I came to San Diego for a
7 couple of weeks training. Was supposed to be training a little bit about the language. Also
8 went to a survival school here in San Diego. Then after two weeks here, I went up to San
9 Francisco. That was small boat training and weapons training. Where they showed us all
10 about the small boats that were going to be used over in the delta. Plus, weapons training,
11 you know. It was firing M16s, small arms, mortars, and hand grenades. That sort of stuff.
12 Did that for another two weeks. So, it was—I spent a little over a month out here on the
13 west coast. Then I left for Vietnam on the first or second of October.

14 JS: Did you think that training you received there in San Diego and San
15 Francisco—did you think it was pretty good?

16 WH: It was good training. But, of course, it's silly. I went to survival school in the
17 desert here and I'm going to a watery, jungly area. You know, so it's just a little bit—
18 however, some of the basic principles are the same. So, it wasn't bad. The rest of the stuff
19 was good.

20 JS: Well, looking back on that training from your perspective now, is there
21 something that should have done but didn't do that could have been more helpful?

22 WH: You know, I think it would have been better if they could have given us a
23 little bit more language training. Little bit more Vietnamese training. I know the
24 realization was that I was going to a U.S. unit working with U.S. people. But it would
25 have been helpful to have a little bit more of Vietnamese language training.

26 JS: How did you get over to Vietnam?

27 WH: I used a contract flight from San Francisco to Saigon. One of the charter
28 planes. I went over—it was filled with mostly Army and Air Force people and there were
29 only two Navy guys on. It was myself and the Navy dentist. When we got there, the
30 Army people were—we got to Tan Son Nhut Airbase. The Army people were met by a
31 bus. The Air Force people were met by a bus. Nobody met the Navy people (laughs).

1 Nobody met the two of us. So, we hitched a ride with the Army people. The driver
2 dropped us off at a Navy hotel, a BOQ [Bachelor Officer Quarters] type hotel in Saigon.
3 We spent the night there.

4 JS: So, did you then arrive in country at Tan Son Nhut?

5 WH: Yeah.

6 JS: Okay. How long were you at the Navy BOQ before—

7 WH: I was only there the one night. We stayed there one night. I had a friend who
8 was stationed in Saigon in the Naval Intelligence—Commander Naval Forces Vietnam,
9 in his intelligence office. He had a rather large intel office, and he was there. So, after the
10 one night I was out at the BOQ I went down to see him, and I stayed in his room for the
11 next two nights. Went into his office and, you know, he gave me as much intel briefing as
12 he could in the day and a half that we were there. He was telling me what he was doing
13 and what his views were. What his thoughts were. I had worked with him for two years
14 before in Washington. So, he and I were good friends. I knew he was a good intel officer,
15 and I trusted his judgement.

16 JS: Upon your arrival in those first couple of days there in Saigon, what was your
17 first impression of Vietnam?

18 WH: It was hot, and it was muggy. It was fairly chaotic, actually. Since my
19 command was down in the Mekong Delta there was nobody there in Saigon who cared
20 anything about me particularly (laughs). Except my friend. But we had a lot of good talks
21 before I left. Essentially had to make your own way to where you're going. You know,
22 you have to find a way to get there. One thing that was interesting to me was at the time,
23 he told me that from his intelligence work that he was doing that North Vietnamese were
24 supplying the Viet Cong down in the delta through Cambodia. Yet the public position by
25 U.S. government and the U.S. Military was that they were not doing that. It was not—
26 there was no need to go in and do anything in Cambodia. What he was telling me was
27 since I was going down in the delta and going to be up close to the Cambodian border
28 many times, that he knew for a fact they were supplying through Cambodia. But that it
29 wasn't being published. He was very frustrated about this because that was not right, he
30 said. So, I got that information. That was a big part of the information I got before I went
31 down. He drove me out to another little airport someplace and I got one of these little

1 Army planes that can land—it was within 100 yards or something. They flew me down to
2 the base where the Mobile Riverine Force was. I got down there, I think it was the third
3 or fourth of October—third of October, I think.

4 JS: One question before discussing that. I know that you mentioned a little earlier
5 that you said you preferred to be out in the field as opposed to a big intelligence unit in
6 Saigon. Could you talk a little bit about that? I guess why that would have been that you
7 preferred that.

8 WH: Well, when I was in Washington, I was in a big intelligence outfit. The idea
9 of being in another big intelligence office with lots of other people, certain jobs to do,
10 didn't appeal to me at the time. I wanted to be out where I was actually doing something
11 that might help the cause on the spot. Mainly, you know, my job—when I found out there
12 was this mobile riverine force that had been started only about a year before down in the
13 delta, I realized that what the intelligence officer did was not only able to perhaps target
14 the enemy. But whatever he did otherwise, by explaining to his troops what was out there
15 and where they were and everything, he could actually save lives. Our own lives. That
16 appealed to me more than sitting in some big office.

17 JS: Where down in the delta were you assigned?

18 WH: I was assigned to—it was called CTF-117—117, rather. Command Task
19 Force 117. There were three Task Forces down in the delta. It was 116 that had all the
20 speedy patrol boats. Guys that road around interdiction and stuff like that. There was the
21 115, which was a coastal group. Then there was 117, which was the Navy element of the
22 Mobile Riverine Force. That force was a force of amphibious boats that had been armor
23 plated. The Navy took Army units on search and destroy missions throughout the delta.
24 So, this is what the mission of the group was to search out and destroy the enemy in the
25 Mekong Delta. They did it by taking them by boat. Dropping them off. The Army would
26 fan out and do their search and destroy. The Navy would support them from the streams
27 and the canals. Then when the operation was over, the Army troops would pour back
28 onto the boats and the boats would come back to the main river to the force itself. Which
29 was anchored—the motherships were anchored out in the Mekong River. So, that kind of
30 thing I thought would be a heck of a lot more interesting. It might have been a little more
31 dangerous, but it was a little more interesting.

1 JS: Where were you assigned?

2 WH: I was assigned—I was the intelligence officer for the staff for 117. We
3 had—I had one—it was myself, and I had an assistant. An officer assistant. I had—at the
4 time I had one enlisted. So, there were three of us in the little intel office we had. Enlisted
5 guy was an intelligence first class petty officer.

6 JS: Were you, I guess, based aboard one of the motherships?

7 WH: We were based upon the USS *Benewah*. Which was a barracks ship
8 essentially that had been turned into—it's turned into the command ship for CTF 117. So,
9 the commodore, who's a senior Navy captain, ran 117. A full colonel was in charge of
10 the brigade of the 9th Infantry Division, 2nd Brigade. We, the two brigade and the Navy,
11 they were two commanders in charge of the operation. Essentially a joint command. So, I
12 lived in—for instance I shared my room aboard ship with—an Army intel officer shared
13 the room with me. Living quarters—and we worked together at the time.

14 JS: I guess could you describe—I guess what life aboard ship would have been
15 like there on the *Benewah*?

16 WH: Well, like was—aboard ship you had to, you know—the food was pretty
17 good, basically. The water was taken from the river and run through the ship's
18 desalinization program. It was really a filtering program. So, the water was reasonable.
19 The food wasn't all that great because more of the time it was powdered potatoes and
20 powdered milk, and stuff like that. But the rest of the time was pretty good food. One of
21 the things that I always was disturbed about was there was all this rice sitting down there.
22 They were prohibited by law from buying the rice. So, there was all this nice rice being
23 grown and sitting down there and we were eating potatoes—powdered potatoes or
24 something instead of good rice. But, you know, some of those things were taken care of
25 later on in my tour. So, it was a general—a typical day would be, get up in the morning
26 and have a meeting with the commodore and the staff. Then depending upon what was
27 going on, you had an operation going on. Typical operations were like three days on and
28 two days off. So, you would have an operation which was determined. You would go out
29 and hunt for the enemy. Then you would work that up. As the intel officer, you would
30 work up who was the enemy, where was he going to be and what kind of weapons did he
31 have. Then you would brief that to the boat squadron commanders. They would take it to

1 their troops. Then the Army intel guy would brief it to the Army troops. Then they would
2 go out. You would do whatever you can to give them as much information as possible.
3 Then they would go out and do the fighting for three days. Then they would return to the
4 ships, and they'd have two days off. But during those two days off, then the process
5 would begin during those two days for the next three days. So, it just went on like that
6 day—you know, week after week after week. The typical day would be to get up in the
7 morning and have some breakfast. Then go to a meeting and you would work, you know,
8 all day long. Whatever you were doing. I can give you some insight into some of that.
9 When I first got there, it was one commodore who was there for the command who
10 started it up and put the Navy Mobile Riverine Force together. Irascible old captain.
11 When I reported in, my relief that was there—I only had one day turnover. So, I was
12 there one day with my predecessor and then he was gone. When I had the meeting with
13 the commodore, he told me I was replacing the best intelligence officer in the Navy, and I
14 couldn't possibly do any better than he did. That was my entrée to my new boss. "Oh,
15 this is great, yeah. What have I got myself into?" I found some other things there. He
16 didn't—the Army was doing all the targeting. They were using information—I have to
17 tell you that before I left, the Navy had debriefed me of all my security clearances. Not
18 all of them. But all the special intelligence security clearances. That is all the ELANT and
19 Comint clearances and satellite stuff. I got rid of those because they didn't want—
20 supposedly they didn't want a Navy guy down in harm's way who could get caught. As a
21 result, it turned out the Army was doing all the targeting and the Navy had no say in the
22 targeting whatsoever. This commodore liked it that way. He didn't want to be involved.
23 So, I asked him, "What the hell am I—what's my job?" "Well, your job is to tell the
24 Navy troops what the enemy has and where they're going to be and what to look for." I
25 said, "Well, okay. Fine." But I thought we should be involved in the targeting. I mean, it
26 was our troops going out in harm's way just as much as anybody else's. So, as luck
27 would have it his tour of duty was up at the end of November. So, it was only two months
28 I had to spend with that, and a new commodore came aboard. When the new commodore
29 came in and I had my meeting with him, he wanted to know what I was doing. I told him
30 and he said, "Well, what do you think you should be doing?" So, I told him what I
31 thought we should be doing, and he said, "Do it." So, that was a complete change. That

1 was a nice change. I also told him that he wasn't doing any—he had no say in any of the
2 targeting and I didn't think this was right. I mean, he was sending his own troops out in
3 harm's way, and he didn't have any say in it. He didn't like that either. So, he said, "Get
4 on the helicopter tomorrow morning with me. We're going up to Saigon." He and a took
5 a trip up to Saigon on a helicopter the next day. This was in early December. He went in
6 and talked to the commander of the Naval forces in Vietnam and insisted that I get my
7 clearances back. So, from that office I walked down and got read back on all my
8 clearances that I had been debriefed on. I said, "Well, you know, you should be briefed
9 too." He said, "No, no, no, no." Because what happens when you get all those clearances,
10 you have some restrictions on your travel. So, he said, "You just do what you have to do
11 and then you tell me." I said, "That would be fine." So, from that time on, I had the same
12 clearances as my Army guy, and we could jointly target and jointly look at the same
13 thing. Because, you know, you see things in information differently. I mean, everybody
14 doesn't look at the same information and come up with the same conclusions. So, we
15 were now in the targeting business, which my boss wanted. He also told me that I was
16 now going to be a hydrographer for the force. I said, "I have no hydrographer training."
17 He said, "Nobody else does either." What that meant was that in addition to doing some
18 targeting and information on the enemy. Since all these boats went up and down the small
19 streams and canals in the delta, you had to be able to tell the boat crews and the boat
20 commanders how far up the canal they could go during high tide and when they had to
21 get out of there. Because the tide—the Mekong Delta had—the Mekong River had a like
22 seventeen-foot difference between low tide and high tide. It's a big one. Therefore, you
23 could have a dry canal at low tide, but you could have fifteen feet of water and the boat
24 could get up there easily. But if it got up there with fifteen feet of water in it, it had to get
25 out of there before the tide started to go down. So, my job then became to tell the boat
26 crews when they could get up any particular canal and when they could—had to get out.
27 What that entailed was for me to make—and which I did. I spent a lot of time in a
28 helicopter flying over canals and streams in the delta. Looking at which ones—the tides.
29 High tide and low tide were. Luckily, my assistant was a photo interpreter. Had been a
30 photo interpreter, my assistant intel officer. So, you could take pictures. You could take
31 photographs of bridges over these canals. Since they were all built by a Mr. Eiffel—they

1 were Eiffel bridges. They were designed by the same guy who built the Eiffel Tower. He
2 designed all these bridges the same way. So, the measurements of the bridges could be
3 tolled. You could look at the bridge—at the water—different levels and see the heights.
4 Used the bridge to determine just how high the water would be and whether you could
5 get under that bridge or not. And whether—and then from the tide point of view, you
6 could tell when you had to get out of the stream and when you could go up it. So, that
7 became part of my job for the next ten months. It was a good job. I took a great deal of
8 pride in trying to make sure that the sailors in the boats got up and down in the streams
9 got out. Get in and got out when they were supposed to. Because if the boat was caught
10 up there, it couldn't get out. They were sitting ducks. They would be vulnerable.

11 JS: What was the, I guess the area of operations that you all were looking at? Was
12 it the entire delta?

13 WH: The entire delta. It went from the Cambodian border all the way down to the
14 South China Sea. We moved around considerably based on the targets. But I was only
15 there—I could tell you this right from the beginning. So, this would be part. I was there
16 maybe a month, and I wrote to my wife and told her we might as well come home
17 because we weren't going to win.

18 JS: What was it that convinced you of that?

19 WH: What convinced me is because we were fighting with one hand tied behind
20 our back. You couldn't—there's certain things that were not allowed. You couldn't do.
21 For instance, any religious edifice—they had all these pagodas all over the south. If the
22 North Vietnamese or the Viet Cong were caught, they would just run into those pagodas.
23 Safe haven because we were not allowed to go in there after them. Or blow 'em up or
24 anything else. So, they would just go into a religious shrine and sit there until nightfall.
25 At night they would sneak out and go away. So, I mean, what's the point? I mean, I know
26 it's a religious shire, but if you're going to win a war you got to—and you got 100 of
27 your enemy troops running into a shrine. The next morning they're gone. That was just
28 one case. The second case was this ridiculous idea that they weren't resupplying. I
29 actually would go—we could go in a helicopter and fly over the Cambodia/Vietnamese
30 border and look over there. You could actually see the resupply. You could actually see
31 them resupplying. Why would you allow you enemy to resupply without taking any

1 action against them? Well, they did. So, what does that tell you? It told me right then
2 we're never going to win. We can't do it doing it this way. You couldn't bomb this. You
3 couldn't fire that. You couldn't do that. If it's a friendly village and we were going up the
4 stream and we got friendly fire from that village, we could not fire back because that was
5 a friendly village. Okay, well, you know, the problem with that is great except that when
6 the friendly—when the fire comes from that village and smacks into a boat and eight
7 sailors are killed. You know, pretty soon, you know, the troops are not that happy. So, it
8 didn't take long. I said, "We can't do that." That was a prevailing figure by most of the
9 people. I mean, we were doing our job. We were doing our duty to the best we could. But
10 at the same time, most everybody on the staff that I was with there said the same thing.
11 It's just going to end poorly someday.

12 JS: Well, given all of that—I know you mentioned that everyone was doing their
13 duty. But given the restrictions and how that was impacting the progress, or lack thereof,
14 of the war, how was morale among the unit?

15 WH: You know, morale was—basically the year I was there morale was pretty
16 high. I mean, high—for most of the people that I dealt with, most of the time there were
17 professional military men. The soldiers were the ones I felt sorry for. It was the Army
18 troops, you know, most of those were draftees. Those were the ground grunts that were
19 going out and sloshing through the rice paddies and everything else hunting down the
20 enemy. A lot of the Navy people were—we had a lot of—we had some draftees and
21 enlistees too. But a lot of the Navy people on the boats were career enlisted men, too.
22 Guys that had been in ten/twelve years. So, it's a different mindset. Well, they have a
23 different mindset. They're going to do the job the best they can they know. Even though
24 they look at the end result think god I know now—the problem was, of course, listening
25 to the stuff that was being put out by the president, the secretary of defense. Even by the
26 commander over there, General Westmoreland. I was not a fan of General Westmoreland.
27 Or Mr. McNamara.

28 JS: Well, for potential future listeners that may not know too much about the
29 delta—I guess, could you just give a little brief description of what the delta was like as
30 far as the environment itself. Maybe something about the difficulties of operating in that
31 area.

1 WH: The delta is a massive—the Mekong River splints in two as it comes down
2 out of Cambodia. There's a—on the south of it—well, let's see if I look it that way. On
3 the east side of the Mekong Delta, the river is—the Mekong River it's wider. One is
4 called—I can't remember the name. There's the Bassac River and something else they
5 called it. But it's the—Mekong is it. They're two major rivers that come down out of—
6 from Cambodia and down from Thailand and everything. Run through the Mekong Delta,
7 South Vietnam. All along both of those rivers is where major towns have built up. Those
8 that have any population at all. So, maybe along the one side of the western side, you'd
9 have one/two/three/four, maybe five major towns on both of those rivers. We're talking
10 about, what, maybe—I don't know, 20,000 people or something like that. Those towns
11 would have, you know, people living there. Restaurants and businesses, everything else.
12 Then for the rest of it, it would be like rice paddies. Many, many, many rice paddies.
13 Those paddies would be—the rivers themselves would be lined—it would be like dikes
14 along the rivers. But they wouldn't be manmade dikes, they would be just natural dikes.
15 Where a lot of trees and growth and jungle area would be. You would have that, oh, I
16 don't know. We're talking about 100 miles now worth of this stuff. If you were—and it
17 would be interlaced with these—some of the—the French made some canals that the built
18 when they were back, there. But others were just natural streams that would run down
19 into the delta. Into the rivers. Those streams would also be lined—most of them would be
20 lined with underbrush and jungle. So, if you were on a small boat carrying Army
21 troops—out small boats were armor plated. They were old LS—LCVPs [Landing Craft
22 Vehicle Personnel] and amphibious boats that carried troops. They were all retrofitted
23 with armor. Some of them—we had one that had a flamethrower, for instance, attached to
24 it. Others had millimeter guns, mortars, machine guns, on them. Then we had the
25 others—it was just like a regular amphibious landing for big boats except down in the
26 rivers. Then the troops would fit onto a troop carrier one. Then they would be supported
27 by heavy gunfire. They would put the troops ashore. While putting them ashore on some
28 of these streams and canals was sometimes pretty difficult because it was so jammed full
29 of underbrush. Then you'd have these long, massive rice paddies and they would be
30 separated by these long berms, dikes, jungle areas. Because they would be different—you
31 know, different farmers, different properties. Most of those Vietnamese people that were

1 down there that time, they didn't give a bleep who the governor was or what was going
2 on. They just wanted to, you know, grow their rice, live peacefully. It was a shame
3 because you could see the countryside, what a beautiful place it would have been without
4 all that war going on. So, it was that way for, you know, 120 miles north/south and
5 maybe another 200 miles south and west. That area was traversed, as I said, by those two
6 rivers that ran down into the South China Sea. So, it was all rice paddies, streams, and
7 canals. And jungle, that was it. On the one end, it was bordered by Cambodia. You could
8 actually—and many times you could actually land—you could walk—you could land
9 your helicopter in Vietnam and at low tide, walk across the river because it only came up
10 to your knees. Land and go over and stand in Cambodia. There were no fences or guard
11 posts or any—just a massive no man's land. Not that one would do that, mind you.

12 JS: Changing the subject a little bit, if we could. Could you talk, I guess, a little
13 bit more about actual intelligence you guys would gather, where you would get it from,
14 how you would get it? And what—

15 WH: Okay, the two major intelligence information that we would get would be
16 from intercepted enemy communications. They would chit chat and talk. So, it would be
17 collected—down in the delta it would be collected by the Army Security Agency. They
18 would—somebody would translate that. It would be translated. But frequently it would
19 just be communications intelligence itself without being intercepted/translated. Because
20 you could tell where they were. And by the amount of traffic, they were using you could
21 tell how large the outfit was. It would be triangled and pinpointed so you could say that
22 there was a large group of enemy at this particular spot. The other thing—the other grade
23 information was captured enemy people. That would be two. The third would be by
24 patrols that would be sent out. For a while, down in the Mekong Delta we had
25 Vietnamese SEALs. They were under instruction by US. So, you have, say, two U.S.
26 SEALs who would then be assigned to a SEAL group. Then those SEALs would be sent
27 out to gather intelligence. So, they would go out on their own and go back into these
28 provinces and find out what they could find out. Then they would come back with
29 information. So, that was—there were three big ways to do that. We thought, originally
30 early on, we could use photographic intelligence. But it wasn't—if we ordered—the Air
31 Force was in charge of taking aerial photography. You'd take—if I said we were going to

1 go at this province, this half of the province a week from now and I needed photographic
2 pictures. By the time we got the photographs the operation would be over because they
3 were not capable of taking photographs, producing them, and getting them to us in any
4 reasonable amount of time. So, any photographs that were taken of the Mekong Delta,
5 while I was there, was done by myself or my assistant. We would go out in a helicopter
6 and simply take pictures. We did it randomly so that you couldn't tell where we were
7 going to go. In the beginning, when I first started that in December and January, we just
8 flew all over the delta taking photographs so we would have pictures of various areas and
9 the towns and the rivers and the streams. We used a Polaroid camera. You would just lay
10 out the door of the helicopter and snap pictures. That was it. It proved extremely
11 valuable. Those photographs were great because we used 'em throughout the entire year.
12 So, that's where the information came. A lot of the good information came from
13 communications intelligence. They'd just find out where they were sending their
14 messages from and how they were sending their messages. How many it—and you could
15 which you—and after a while you could know who the good people who were trained
16 would know which unit it was, even. Where they were. They'd say, "Okay, that's the
17 502nd Viet Cong Battalion and it's located up in eastern end of such and such a province."
18 One of the other things that used to upset us a lot was sometimes we would have good
19 targets, then we would have to go someplace else. Even though we knew the enemy was
20 somewhere else. One of those reasons was—it was a—I don't know what we would call
21 it. Sign of being important or something for a province chief. As if we had an operation
22 there, he would want an operation in his province. They would say, "Okay, we'll do one
23 in your province." We would say—intelligence officers would say, "Well, there's nobody
24 there in that province. Why should we go there? We need to go to this place." They'd
25 say, "Well, we got to pacify the province chief and so we're operating there. So, we'd go
26 in and operate for three days. Maybe get one enemy killed and that's it. They'd get out
27 and—the only reason we did it was because the province chief wanted to have one. It also
28 happened with B-52 raids. That was a sign that you were important. Because if you're a
29 province chief, you wanted a B-52 to come and drop these big bombs along—all up in
30 the X. You know, maybe you'd have so—we would have—we would see B-52s dropping

1 bombs on an area which we knew there was hardly any enemy. So, there's another reason
2 why we'd say, "Who's going to win the war?" Right?

3 JS: Right. Well, in your work with the South Vietnamese, the work that you guys
4 did with them. What was your, I guess, your general impression of the South
5 Vietnamese?

6 WH: Well, the Marines—we worked with the Marines for a while. They had the
7 Marine Corps, South Vietnamese Corps. For a couple months in 1968, and in the summer
8 of '68, we worked with the Marines. They were a pretty tough lot. They fought and they
9 continued to fight. But generally speaking, the ARVN [Army of the Republic of
10 Vietnam], the South Vietnamese Army, when they were out fighting in conjunction with
11 the U.S. troops. You know, five o'clock came in the afternoon and they stopped. This
12 happened frequently. They would just—"It's time for dinner." It didn't matter if you had
13 the enemy on the run or anything. It was kind of like, "Oh, the working day," you know?
14 "We'll fight from nine till five and then that's it." Then they would stop. So, I—most of
15 us were not fully impressed with the ARVN. It wasn't that they weren't nice people at all,
16 because the ones that I met were fine. It's just that they had a different kind of outlook on
17 running a war. So, it was sad. So, it was an interesting year. I got to do what I wanted to
18 do originally when I went there. Mainly because my—I got a new boss. His ideas were
19 different than the old guy's. It was interesting but when it was over, I was glad to be
20 home. I came home, incidentally, to a different—I should say something about my wife.
21 My wife was in New Jersey, and she was a member of a waiting wives club. So, there
22 was like ten or eleven wives in that area whose husbands were all in Vietnam at the same
23 time. They all managed to find each other, get together, and have a waiting wives club.
24 They would get together and talk about lunch and everything. My wife being—as it turns
25 out, my wife was like the oldest woman there. I was more senior because most of the
26 other wives were, you know, they had second lieutenants, first lieutenants. That kind of
27 thing that were over in Vietnam. Young people, just West Point graduates or something
28 like that. Sometimes they would be asked to go on a radio show and talk about their
29 husbands being gone and everything. The sad part of that was that they were never able
30 to tell—they never spoke—if they went on a radio show or were interviewed for a
31 newspaper, they could not give their last name. They could not say where they lived.

1 None of that stuff. Because people would harass them. Call them up, write letters, do
2 anything, call them. Their husbands are baby killers and that. You know, they would get
3 all kinds of hassle. So, that was kind of sad. It was kind of sad for troops who would be
4 drafted, get out of Vietnam, and come home. They would come back to an airport or
5 something and people would actually yell at them and scream at them and stuff like that.
6 Now, as a professional military man myself, when I came home, I went to Washington
7 D.C. for some training. Then I got stationed down in San Juan, Puerto Rico on a military
8 base in a military station. So, when I came home, I came home to a military community.
9 It's different than coming home to a civilian community because you were accepted
10 immediately. People in that community had served and, you know, they knew what was
11 going on. So, it was a different—I had a much easier time from that point of view than
12 the poor kids who came home. I saw kids come home, you know, and get spit on in the
13 airport. That's pretty bad. I think—when I look at what's going on now, I say that's really
14 good. But it's too bad—too bad we had to go through Vietnam in order to get this.

15 JS: If we could, why don't we go ahead and take a break for today.

16 WH: Okay.

17 JS: But I'd like to have one more session with you, if possible.

18 WH: Okay.

Interview with William Halloran

Session [2] of [2]

Date 5 July 2011

1 JS: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University
2 continuing an Oral History interview with Mr. William Halloran. Today is July 5, 2011,
3 and this is interview session number two. All right, last time we were talking we were
4 already—you were already in Vietnam. I wanted to begin today, if we could, with a little
5 bit about your impressions of the enemy and how they operated. If you could talk a little
6 about that.

7 WH: Yeah, in my job as an intelligence officer I got a fairly decent impression of
8 the enemy. They were—for the most part they were much more technically savvy than
9 our own people thought they were. For instance, when I got there, they had been doing
10 some search and destroy operations. You know, sometimes they would run into the
11 enemy and sometimes they wouldn't. They were wondering why, for instance, we would
12 go someplace where they thought they were and there would be no Viet Cong there. After
13 I got there and did some research, I realized that what our people were doing was we
14 were giving too much information out on unsecured radio transmissions. When I brought
15 this to the attention of some of the operations people there I said, you know, "You can't
16 do that because you've got these guys out there sitting in a sand pan someplace with
17 radios and they're listening to your, you know, your broadcast." They go, "Oh, no. These
18 guys—they're not capable of doing that." It was our underestimation of the enemy. They
19 did, in fact, have people out there listening to the radios and translators. They were
20 picking up a lot of information that we were just giving away by broadcasting parts of our
21 missions. When we were going to leave and things like just arbitrarily over the radio. So,
22 after we finally convinced them that they were doing that, our operations got better
23 because we started to do things either over secure transmission lines or person to person
24 without sending it over the radio. So, I think the Viet Cong were technically more
25 advanced than many of our planners had thought they were. One of the things that helped
26 us though, I think, was their propensity to over plan things. If they were to plan an
27 operation about attacking a mobile riverine force out in the middle of the river with say
28 rockets or landmines or mines, or something like that to put on the ships. They would—it
29 turned out after we did some questioning of prisoners, that they would go through their

1 plans and then if something changed, some minor thing changed. For instance, if we were
2 to move our ships around, which was the standard position, move 'em a little bit for
3 safety's sake. The Viet Cong then would scrap the plan and start all over again. They
4 were not capable of adjustment of their plans. Which, you know, is a real trait for, you
5 know, American forces. If a little bit went wrong in the plan, the American forces could
6 make some adjustments and continue. But the Viet Cong seemed to have to go back and
7 restart all over again. As a result, they did not go after our ships as much as I thought they
8 should have. They did a few times in the river, but out of a whole year that I was there, I
9 think there was only really two times when they were successful in any kind of attack. I
10 think it was because of the way they planned. I'm not sure, I think this was generally a
11 communist trait. You have to have everything down perfectly before you do it. But they
12 were tenacious fighters, there's no doubt about it. So, they had some technical
13 capabilities that our forces didn't think they had, and they were tenacious fighters. They
14 were good fighters.

15 JS: You mentioned just a moment ago a few times of them going after the ships.
16 Could you talk a little bit about those incidents?

17 WH: Yeah, well, once they placed a limpid—a mine on one of our support ships,
18 it was an LST [Landing ship, tank] anchored out there. It did explode beneath the
19 waterline, and it caused some deaths and quite a bit of problems. So, that was one time
20 that that was done. Another time they conducted a rocket attack against our main
21 barracks and command ship, the USS *Benewah*. They did fire some RPG 7s into the ship.
22 On one occasion, it did enter a berthing area and kill—I can't remember how many, but it
23 was six or seven sailors, I think, were killed in that particular incident. Those are the only
24 two real incidents that I can remember while I was there. For them actually having any
25 kind of successful attack against our main ships, motherships out in the middle of the
26 river.

27 JS: What type of precautions or defenses did you guys have against attacks like
28 that?

29 WH: Well, generally speaking with the base—the operating base out in the
30 middle of the river, there was always small boats that were scheduled to—on a schedule
31 basis, they would run circles around the force—the main ships. Occasionally dropping

1 hand grenades into the water to discourage swimmers, their version of the UDT
2 [Underwater Demolition Team] people. We would call it Vietnamese Sappers. So, we
3 would do that. Then, from the major ships there was firing from the stern of the ship. Just
4 randomly into floating debris that would come down the Mekong River. We assumed that
5 if they were going to have swimmers coming down and set mines on the ships, they
6 would use the cover of—there's a lot of flotsam floating down the Mekong River. Lots—
7 big pieces of dirt and wood. Pieces of foliage and stuff like that that would be floating
8 down that would make good cover if somebody wanted to just float underneath them and
9 use them as cover. So, firing into that was a regular basis. That went on around the clock.

10 JS: You also mentioned, a moment ago, that when you first got there, there was
11 the tendency to, I guess, underestimate the enemy. Why do you think that was?

12 WH: I don't know, to be honest with you. I mean, as an intelligence officer,
13 you're—one of the things that you're trained to do as an intelligence officer comes to you
14 after a number of years is that you should never underestimate the enemy at all. But our
15 people at the time seemed to underestimate the capability. They viewed them as, you
16 know, Vietnamese guys in black pajamas fighting but not having a technical capability.
17 That was a mistake to view them that way. I don't know where that came from. I think
18 it's a general tendency for, maybe American forces over the years, to generally
19 underestimate foreign capabilities.

20 JS: You also said that over time that they learned not to—that you guys learned
21 not to underestimate them. Was there something in particular that caused that change?

22 WH: When we—you know, I think when we had new leadership that came aboard
23 and the intelligence folks on both sides, the Army and the Navy, intel types would tell the
24 bosses, "Look, you've got to stop this. You've got to cut that down." When they cut
25 down talking too much over unsecured radios, then our search and destroy missions went
26 off better after that. So, it was like we'd have a search and destroy mission, say in
27 October or November/December of 1967. Sometimes we'd go in there and there would
28 be no VC [Viet Cong], you know, they'd do a three-day search and destroy mission and
29 not find anybody. After that, when they stopped that—when they stopped doing that, then
30 the instances of not finding anybody were reduced considerably. So, I think that's what,
31 you know, that caused them to say, "Okay." When the commodore and the colonel who

1 was in charge of the Army put out the words that, “You will not make these discussions
2 over the air.” You know, “Be careful.” I think that was a turning point.

3 JS: Was there also a concern about, I guess, talking about missions and
4 operations, any sort of classified information in front of allied forces as well? Such as the
5 South Vietnamese. Were you guys concerned about them being leaks as well?

6 WH: Well, you know, there was some concern. But for the most part we operated
7 with just American forces. There were only sometimes—there was one stretch of about a
8 month during 1968 in the spring, when we operated with the Vietnamese Marines. There
9 were a few other occasions where we conducted joint operations with the ARVN, which
10 is the South Vietnamese Army. There was concern about leaks in the—especially with
11 the Army. Not so much with Marines. So, you had to be more careful. But if they were
12 assigned a specific mission, I mean you had to tell them what that mission was. So, you
13 know, there was concern. But when you were operating with them, there wasn’t much
14 you could do about it.

15 JS: In terms of—I can’t remember if we discussed this last time or not. But in
16 terms of intelligence gathering and type of intelligence you all use. Was information from
17 local civilians—was that a big part of it? And what was the relationship like with the
18 civilian population?

19 WH: Yeah, we did discuss this a little last time. But most of the information came
20 from intercepted communications and electronic intelligence. A lot of information then
21 came from captured Viet Cong people. There wasn’t much information that came from
22 the local population. You know, occasionally somebody would tell us something, but it
23 wasn’t a regular information. There were times when we did work with the Vietnamese
24 SEALs for a while. They had American advisors and they would go out and collect
25 intelligence on whereabouts and individuals. We would get word about an individual
26 being somewhere who was a high-level Viet Cong Communist coordinator of operations
27 and things. Then they would go out and try to capture him. Or they would go out and just
28 on intelligence missions. Find out—observe and then come back and report. So, there
29 was a certain amount of intelligence picked up that way by reconnaissance missions done
30 by Vietnamese SEALs and U.S. advisors. But not too much with just the everyday folk.
31 The everyday folk most of the time just wanted to be left alone. The relationship with

1 villages was pretty good, in most instances and townspeople. The force did a lot of
2 goodwill operations. They would send dentists and doctors out into these towns and
3 villages, you know, and do medical and dental work. The folks in many of the villages
4 were appreciative of that. But they had a difficult time. The Viet Cong would always do a
5 lot of things to disrupt that to let the villagers know they shouldn't cooperate. I mean, at
6 Christmas time 1967, we had a Christmas party for a village. The town of My Tho down
7 in the delta. It's M-Y-T-H-O. We brought a whole busload of children. Most of them
8 were orphans and they were brought by some Catholic sisters to the base—the onshore
9 base at Dong Tam for a Christmas party. Were given gifts and Sant Claus. Had a
10 Christmas tree and all kinds of things. On the way back to My Tho, the Viet Cong set off
11 a mine on the road underneath the bus and there were a number of children killed. Those
12 are the kind of messages they would send to say, "Don't have anything to do with the
13 Americans." So, in many instances the towns and villages, although they would like to do
14 more, I think, were worried that there would be reprisals. So, that kind of fear was
15 generally throughout the South Vietnamese.

16 JS: I know we started—I asked you about our impressions of the Viet Cong.
17 Could you talk, I guess, a little bit about—a little bit more about them in terms of
18 strengths and weaknesses. What you knew about them from that perspective.

19 WH: Well, what we knew about them. Their strengths were dedication, I think,
20 and good leadership. One of the weakness they had sometimes was the amount of
21 weapons that they had to use against us. They didn't always have the—I don't want to
22 say the correct ones, but they didn't—they weren't always armed as fully as they would
23 have, I'm sure, liked to be. So, they were at some disadvantage then. Then they were at a
24 disadvantage because most of our operations also used artillery. Which would be
25 stationed—Army would station them along the rivers, and they could fire, you know,
26 five/six miles inland, or whatever. So, they did not have that same capability down in the
27 delta to do the same thing. They didn't have artillery. So, their strength was their
28 leadership and their dedication, I think. They were on a mission and that's how they felt.
29 So, their weakness was probably not enough firepower in many instances, the battalions
30 down there. Their battalions—if you had a big—if you had a good battalion, it might
31 have 300—somewhere between 300 and 500 people in a battalion. Maybe out of that, say

1 you had 400 in a battalion, there might have been only 150 of those who were fighting.
2 Actually fighting. In the delta, we were mostly fighting the Viet Cong and not North
3 Vietnamese troops.

4 JS: On the flip side of the coin of that question—looking back at it now, what
5 would you say was the strengths and weaknesses of the American side?

6 WH: The strengths were the American fighting man, both the sailors and the
7 Army units, was really good. We sometimes lacked numbers. The American companies
8 and the Army companies and their battalions sometimes were not as strong as they—
9 numbers wise, as they should have been. But we had adequate firepower. Air control, you
10 know, we had control of the air down there. So, you could call in aircraft almost anytime.
11 And leadership, I think was a good thing. The weaknesses were—especially in the
12 beginning, not recognizing the enemy's potential as much as they should have. Two, the
13 fact that sometimes we went and fought based on political reasons and not on military
14 reasons. There was a lot of politics in there. Targets were chosen—I mentioned that the
15 last time, based on politics and not on good intelligence.

16 JS: We've talked about things in general terms. But more specifically, are there
17 any particular operations that—in your mind—that stick out in your mind that you can
18 talk about?

19 WH: Particular operations—I remember one operation in which we operated
20 down in the Can Tho region. So, that's in the far southern part of Vietnam—of the delta.
21 It was a tricky operation because there were log canals that had to get down to the
22 operating area where we were going after a couple of battalions. From my point of view,
23 it was a tough decision because you had to know whether you could get underneath a
24 number of bridges on these canals to get down to the area. When the tide was going to be
25 up and when the tide was coming back. How many people we got down there? And the
26 fact that going down a canal or stream was a dangerous thing for the troops because they
27 could be easily fired upon from the sides. Which they were on many occasions. We went
28 up and down that thing maybe three or four different times in the canals. We were always
29 getting fire from certain villages. Those villages were considered friendly villages which
30 meant that you could not, you know—the Viet Cong would come into a friendly village
31 and from the banks on that village. But the American troops were not allowed to fire back

1 because it was considered a friendly village. So, you could get people killed. Which we
2 did from fire with the inability to fire back. I remember that one particularly because
3 Army troops were—got so angry on that particular mission that they put their artillery
4 down and, on the way, out one time on the last time we were down there. They just—they
5 put their artillery down and filled their weapons with shrapnel. They called it flechettes, I
6 believe. When they got fired on this particular time, even though supposedly we were not
7 supposed to fire out, they fired into that village. Because on three separate occasions
8 going down and coming back, we were fired on and we had people killed out of that. It
9 just got so frustrating to the troops one day that they just decided to—whack—fire into
10 there. That was done. As far as I know, it was never reported. Never mentioned in
11 dispatches or in reports. It was just done and then that was the end of it. But that was a
12 particular one. The other one that I remember was the end of December 1967. There was
13 going to be a truce for Tet. We could see that they were building up forces coming—a lot
14 of activity of resupply coming through Cambodia. Up in that region between—right at
15 the Cambodian border. By orders from Saigon, I don't know where the orders came from,
16 but it was not ours. We were supposed to put a squadron of boats for fire support along a
17 stream along the Cambodian border. Very close to the Cambodian border. We didn't, you
18 know, the intelligence people and the operations people advised against it. But that was
19 the orders that came from Saigon, so that's what happened. Then, instead of a truce,
20 that's when they launched their Tet Offensive. When the Tet Offensive came, a whole
21 squadron of our boats was caught up this river and had to get out of there. They were
22 fired on heavily by Viet Cong and we lost a number of people coming out of that canal—
23 that river. They finally did get out and then during the Tet Offensive, it did a lot of
24 damage to the Viet Cong. It was really a shame that frankly, the Tet Offensive turned out
25 to be a major loss for the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong militarily. Down in the
26 delta we inflicted much, much, much—a great deal of damage to the Viet Cong. But, as it
27 turned out, it was a political victory for the North Vietnam. Because that's what really
28 turned public opinion in the United States against the war. So, those are two operations
29 that I remember quite well because it was—both of them involved intelligence people,
30 you know, deeply. And it was memorable.

1 JS: I know that during Tet the Viet Cong hit—I guess it was Vinh Long as well
2 as, I think, Can Tho pretty hard as well. Is that correct? Were you guys involved with
3 those operations?

4 WH: Yes, we were as a matter of fact. Vinh Long was a big operation. Initially I
5 think in Vinh Long the South Vietnamese Army, I think, was the one that responded
6 initially to Vinh Long. Then we came down a little bit later because we were up north
7 around Sa Dec, I believe was the name of the town at the time. Up north closer to the
8 Vietnamese border—err, I mean the Cambodian border. Town of Sa Dec. Then we came
9 to Vinh Long and helped to mop up. I remember Vinh Long particularly, because that
10 was one time when I came close to getting hit. We were flying a helicopter—observation
11 helicopter above the city of Vinh Long. The Army intelligence officer and I, and a couple
12 of other people, were in there making observations about where the biggest fighting was
13 from and what was going on down below. The Viet Cong were firing up at the
14 helicopters, as it turned out. A shell came right up through the helicopter, very close to
15 myself and the Army officer. We told the other intel officer, and we told the pilot to get
16 up. Get out of there. Which he did. Normally you could fly at 1,500 feet or so and you
17 wouldn't have to worry about small arms. But if they had a higher caliber machine guns,
18 you know, stationed on a truck or something, they could get higher than that. He
19 immediately took it up at about 2,000 or 2,500 feet to get out of range of whatever it was
20 that was firing at us. I never did find out what it was, but it was too close for comfort. We
21 also went down to Can Tho and did mop up operations down there. But we pretty much
22 fought along a bunch of towns along the Mekong. From the Cambodian border all the
23 way down to Can Tho.

24 JS: You mentioned a moment ago that you all could tell that the VC were building
25 up during that truce period prior to Tet. I guess around Christmas. But did you guys have
26 any indication, I guess, of what was coming?

27 WH: Not really, no. We knew that there was a buildup, but there was supposed to
28 be a truce. In the past they had honored those truces, you know, they'd have these three-
29 day holiday truces where nothing would happen. But you could see the buildup going on.
30 It wasn't hard to see. You could just go up in a helicopter, in one of those spotter planes
31 that they had and go up there and see them. Now, in any other war you would think of,

1 you saw your enemy building up and riding along in, you know, with equipment in their
2 sand pans and everything else. In any other war you would just go in there and wipe them
3 out. Not let them do that. But this was not allowed. I mean, they were in Cambodia and
4 then they came into Vietnam and still nobody went and charged. We just let it go on. I
5 mean, this is not the way to run a war. This is why—this is why people on the ground
6 said, I mean, “How do we ever expect to win this thing fighting that way?” You can’t just
7 let your enemy build up his weapons and his ammunition and everything else without
8 doing anything about it. But that’s what we did.

9 JS: As the Tet Offensive was progressing, was it apparent pretty soon that this
10 was going to turn out to be a major American victory?

11 WH: No, I don’t think so. I don’t think it was apparent. But at the end, when
12 everything boiled down, say, at the end of January and you could look at everything kind
13 of clearly, you realized that we had done a massive amount of damage to the Viet Cong.
14 We had killed an awful lot of their people in the operations. They had lost many, many,
15 many people. Our losses were not—I mean, we had some losses, but they were—I don’t
16 want to say minor because that’s bad. But compared to them, it was minor. We lost
17 people, but it wasn’t anything—we decimated—some of their battalions were really
18 decimated. We knew we had inflicted, down in the delta, a great deal of damage to the
19 Viet Cong. But, you know, what was going on in the northern part of South Vietnam, you
20 know, up in Hue and all those things. Generally speaking, during that time, we were
21 oblivious to what was happening up there.

22 JS: As a result of the enemy losses because of the Tet Offensive, afterwards were
23 things pretty quiet?

24 WH: It was much more quiet after that. The enemy, I think, needed time to
25 regroup and resupply. Especially with people. So, during the early spring, it was much
26 quieter down in the delta. We had bought, at the time, I think it was—I can’t remember
27 exactly when, but it was probably April or May. The decision was made to bring an
28 additional mobile riverine force into combat. So, by the time that summer had come—
29 midsummer or so, we actually had two mobile riverine forces. One of them was operating
30 more in the norther part of the delta closer to Saigon. We were operating further south in
31 the delta. I know it didn’t last that long because I don’t remember—you know, once I

1 left, which was in the end of September 1968, I didn't really follow what was going on
2 there afterwards. I didn't follow the mobile riverine force. First of all, it was difficult to
3 follow because it wasn't—that force was not publicized very much to the American
4 public. Most of the stuff concentrated—the news accounts and everything were about
5 Saigon or the norther part of South Vietnam. It wasn't much about—it was hard—you
6 hard pressed to find an article about the mobile riverine force anywhere.

7 JS: While you were still in country, did you hear—I guess the American press'
8 response or the American public's response to Tet? Did you hear about the way that it
9 was being, I guess, portrayed?

10 WH: Oh yeah, we did. We did. We got the news pretty much. It was—we heard
11 about it. I don't want to say it was demoralizing. It wasn't demoralizing to the troops that
12 were there. But it was of concern. I mean, we knew what had happened and yet basically
13 the tide had turned against allied forces down there. So, we were pretty much aware of
14 what was going on in the states and how the press was dealing with it. How the American
15 people were looking at it. But as I told you before, most people thought they could—you
16 know, we might as well get out of there anyhow because we weren't going to win it
17 under these circumstances.

18 JS: Given that thought process, I guess, what was the—what was your reaction
19 when you heard about the beginning of the draw down and the beginning of
20 Vietnamization, I guess?

21 WH: I thought, you know—I don't know. I thought there was a better way to do it
22 than we did it—politically. But, you know, these are political decisions. They're not
23 military decisions. The thought process was—it was kind of like a *fait accompli* for us.
24 The troops and the people still did their job when I was there. You know, effectively and
25 there was no lack of effort on the part of the people or the military there. But they were
26 sort of despondent about the way things were going.

27 JS: In regard to that, did morale remain pretty high?

28 WH: I think morale was still high, yeah. Moral was high because it was typical of
29 almost all wartime things. You know, you're fighting next to your friend and your people
30 that you know. Your object is to keep them safe and not do anything to harm them.
31 You're really fighting for you unit and the people that you're serving with. I think that's

1 been proven to be the best way over all the wars. It was hard in Vietnam because the
2 turnover was so great. You didn't have things like you did in World War II. People were
3 there for a year and then they were gone. They were replaced. If you were an Army
4 squad, for instance, going out on mobile riverine force and fighting, you would be—you
5 were in the company, say of some battalion. The company would go out and they would
6 fight for a while, you know. Somewhere along the line there would be, you know, fifteen
7 people go home, and another fifteen group would come in and join you. There was no
8 real cohesiveness among the troops. There were rarely people who were there together
9 for an entire year. That included all the Navy people too.

10 JS: Any other memorable or even humorous experiences that we haven't
11 discussed at this point?

12 WH: Well, there was one humorous—there were some humorous things
13 happened. New Year's Eve—let's see. Maybe it was not New Year's Eve. For a while in
14 the month of December 1967, our ship went off to—I don't know where they went. To
15 the Philippines or something because they had to have one of its engines replaced. We
16 moved ashore for a month. We went—lived on Dong Tam, which was a base right close
17 to the town of My Tho, along the Mekong River down there. Living on that base for a
18 month was—it was humorous at times. For, you know, a period of three weeks the base
19 would get mortared every night. Then it would—you could hear the mortars as they
20 stepped in, they would start at one end and then come in in a line, for instance. If it was
21 on your line, then you got out of your bunk at night and jumped into the bunkers out in
22 front of your barracks building. There were some people killed on those mortars. One of
23 them hit a Navy Seabee barrack—err, office down there. They lost a couple of people.
24 Generally, you could hear the mortars coming in and then you could take action. If the
25 mortars were on the other side of the base, you didn't even get out of bed. It was kind of
26 surreal. One night we—one day we had a steak and beer party. The Army Officer's Club
27 was a—I mean, called it an Officer's Club but it was like a—it was a Quonset hut is what
28 they were. We had a steak and beer afternoon. Right in the middle of everybody eating
29 their steak and having a beer and having a rest time—the stand down period, the mortars
30 came in. It was actually humorous to see everybody scatter during that particular time. As
31 it turned out, the mortars did not come close to the Officer's Club where we were having

1 it. But they were close enough that people scattered—you didn't know that. It looked like
2 it was coming that way. People scattered and went into bunkers and everything else. Beer
3 and steak went everywhere. It was kind of a strange thing when you're in that kind of a
4 situation. I had never been in that situation before. When you're in that situation you
5 don't really have any fear. It's not a fear thing. It's strange. You know, people say, "Were
6 you scared?" Well, no, you weren't scared. You weren't afraid. You were just taking
7 action or something, I don't know. Most people I knew had no basic fear throughout my
8 entire year that I was there. I was never afraid. Nor most of my compatriots were never
9 afraid. There was no fear factor. It was the strange feel. You think that in that situation
10 where you might get killed, you'd be afraid, but you don't have any fear factor.
11 Psychologically I'm not sure why.

12 JS: I know you mentioned the beer and steak party. But what types of things, I
13 guess, would you all do if you had any free time? How would you spend it?

14 WH: Well, you had free time sometimes. Occasionally we would go—if we did
15 have some free time, you know, like a day or two where we didn't have too many things.
16 Sometimes we would hop on a boat and go—if we were nearby, for instance—I can
17 remember an incident where we—three or four of us took a boat, got a Jeep at someplace
18 and went down to Can Tho. The Navy had the 4th Riverine Advisor for the Navy was in
19 Can Tho. That's—IV Corps was down in the delta and the riverine advisor was a Navy
20 intelligence officer advisor. He had a little—I don't know what you'd call it. He had a
21 house down there with rooms. You know, we could go down there, and we could go and
22 sit and relax on his—the deck of his house. Just sit back and drink some beer and have
23 some decent food. Talk to people from—what they were doing and what we were doing,
24 that sort of thing. So, it was kind of a relaxing thing. Then you would get back on the—
25 take your borrowed Jeep and take it back to where you were and hook up with the boat
26 crew. Get the boat back out to the riverine forces before they moved on or something like
27 that. So, we could do that. When we were near Dong Tam, which was the main riverine
28 force shore base—support base, from time to time we would simply take a boat in and go
29 into the base. They had—for officers they had one half of a Quonset hut was a Naval
30 Officer's Club and the other half was a Chief's Club. You could go in there and relax.
31 You know, have a beer, chitchat with people from the various ships and the various boats.

1 Other than that, you pretty much stayed—except when I was out doing actual work, you
2 pretty much stayed on the ship. There was always plenty to do. Getting ready for next
3 operations. A typical day for me would be to get up in the morning. We'd have a staff
4 meeting at like eight o'clock in the morning. Then after that staff meeting, you'd get a lot
5 of instructions in what was going to happen. Then you would work most of the, you
6 know, the day getting ready for it. I did a lot of helicopter flying reconnaissance missions
7 when were down—especially over areas where we were not. We would use that time to
8 go to areas where we were not operating at the time just to get intelligence information.
9 When I say intelligence information we're talking about streams and bridges and crossing
10 points and tides. That sort of thing. We did that kind of thing and come back then work
11 on it, generally speaking. Then there would be always—usually a meeting at night, again.
12 At nine o'clock or nine-thirty to review what went on during the day and what was—how
13 we were progressing for the next operation. Then after that was over, we would, you
14 know, go up to your room. I would usually go up and read any mail that I had for myself,
15 for instance. I had a small tape recorder. I had three small kids at home, and I would read
16 stories on the tape and then send that tape back home. Then my kids would hear me
17 reading the stories to them. Because my daughter at the time was, well, let's see. She was
18 like four years old. So, I had a four-year-old, a six-year-old, and an eight-year-old. So,
19 they would listen to their stories and then they would record things on those and mail
20 them back to me. So, that's how we kept—and then after that was over, I would usually
21 do my exercises to keep in shape. Take a shower and go to bed around eleven/eleven-
22 thirty. That was a normal day.

23 JS: Did you get to go on an R&R [Rest and Recuperation]?

24 WH: I did go on R&R. I went to—we had an opportunity to go to—I think it was
25 Thailand or to go to Hawaii. So, I opted to go to Hawaii for a week. That was in March
26 '68, about halfway through. My wife met me there. So, we did have—we had like six
27 days in Hawaii. One thing I can say about Hawaii was the folks in Hawaii really treated
28 us well. It was very nice of them. The prices, the hotel rooms, you know, you'd go
29 someplace and go to dinner at night and frequently they would comp you. You didn't
30 have to pay for your drinks or anything like that. It was—Hawaii folks were really good
31 while we were there.

1 JS: Well, is there anything else about your tour of duty that we should mention
2 before we talk about the end of it and coming home?

3 WH: Yeah, no. I can't think—I think I've gone over it. Generally speaking, it was
4 an interesting tour. Separation from the family was probably a lot. Totaled about thirteen
5 months total. It was good—I felt my job—one of the things I felt after the Tet Offensive
6 for most of the rest of my tour there was what my job as the intelligence officer—I took it
7 as the better I would do my job, the more American lives I would save. By letting them
8 know exactly what they were up against and where they could go and what they could do,
9 and that sort of thing. I felt that that was my primary duty. I would be saving American
10 lives.

11 JS: Well, what was the end of the tour like and coming home? What was that
12 like?

13 WH: Well, the end of the tour was interesting. I was going to be assigned to
14 become the commanding officer of the Naval Intelligence—err, the Navy Investigative
15 Service Office in San Juan, Puerto Rico. They wanted me to go to Washington to have a
16 month's training before I was sent down to Puerto Rico. Getting out of Vietnam, after I
17 flew by helicopter to Saigon, and I had a flight—I was supposed to stay there the night
18 and take a contract flight the next day to San Francisco. When I got there and checked in
19 the day before, people at the transportation desk said, "I see you're going to go to the east
20 coast." I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, we have C-141 that leaves in an hour. It goes all
21 the way to Dover, Delaware. You want to take that?" So, rather than stay there another
22 day I said, "Sure." So, within an hour I was on a C-141 getting ready to leave. What we
23 were carrying—there was about six or seven of us that took that flight. Maybe ten. But
24 they were taking coffins. A whole bunch of silver coffins lined up in the middle of the C-
25 141 going back to Dover. Because Dover is the mortuary for the military. So, we flew all
26 the way back to Dover. It was a long flight. We stopped in—I think it was in Anchorage
27 for refueling in Alaska. Then directly from there to Dover. So, by the time we left—I
28 don't know. It was about twenty-three hours or twenty-four—you know, almost twenty-
29 three hours from the time I left Saigon until I got to Dover. It was a very interesting thing
30 that happened in Dover which was memorable to most of us that were on that trip. We
31 arrived in the middle of the—you know, in the middle of morning. It was like 3:00AM in

1 the morning and the base is essentially shut down for the middle of the night. You get in
2 at three in the morning, well, what are you going to do? Everybody that was on that flight
3 were people who were going north. They were either going to Pennsylvania or New
4 Jersey or New York or Connecticut, something like that. That's why they took that flight,
5 including me. I was going to go visit my folks who lived in New Jersey. We called the
6 Greyhound Bus terminal in Dover—I did. And talked to them about whether they had
7 any busses going north and they did have a bus. They had a bus going at like 4:00AM
8 that stopped in Dover coming from the south and going up to New York City. I said,
9 “You know, can we get on that bus? But we don't have any way to get from the Air
10 Force—the Dover Air Force Base to your Greyhound Bus station.” So, the guy on the
11 phone said, “We'll, just a second.” So, he come back on the phone, and he said, “We'll
12 send a car for you. How many are there?” So, I check around and it was like six of us
13 who wanted to go north. So, the Greyhound Bus terminal—one of the people who
14 worked there just got in his van and drove out to Dover Air Force Base, picked the six of
15 us up and all our baggage and luggage, and took us back to the Greyhound terminal.
16 When we got there the bus had been there for twenty minutes. They just held the bus
17 there until we got there. Although there was a lot of people on the bus, there was still
18 room for us on the bus. When we got on the bus and took off north. It was, you know, I
19 was really amazed. Because you heard so many stories about people being ill-treated
20 when they come back from Vietnam and that was true. But in this particular case, the
21 Greyhound Bus people were great. They didn't charge any of us for the trip up. They
22 came and got us, held the bus for us until we got there. The people on the bus were told
23 that the reason they were waiting was because there were six or seven people coming
24 back from duty in Vietnam. We all got on the bus and people all cheered and we went.
25 The Greyhound bus driver did a number of things. For instance, they're not allowed to
26 stop on the road but one of the guys wanted to get off at the Pennsylvania Turnpike in
27 New Jersey. He stopped at the side of the road and let the guy off and get his baggage.
28 Then we all went up to New York, which I got off in New York and took a regular local
29 bus out to my hometown. So, I was very grateful to the Greyhound Bus people at that
30 time. I think they did a wonderful, wonderful thing for us. I went there because my wife
31 and kids had already moved from New Jersey down to Puerto Rico to my new duty

1 station. Because school had started, and we wanted to get the kids into school when it
2 started. So, she had been down—she went down at the end of August. This was the end
3 of September. I got over to—then after I finished with visiting my folks for a few days, I
4 went down to Washington where they wanted me to stay a month. I got in there on a
5 Monday morning, and they said, “Okay, we’ll we’ve got you for a whole month.” I said,
6 “You’ve got me for these five days, that’s it. Because I’m not—you know, after thirteen
7 months I’m not going to stay here for a month. So, whatever training you’ve got to do,
8 you better do it because on Friday afternoon I’m leaving.” So, they—I have to hand it to
9 them, they hastened my training. What was necessary and what wasn’t necessary.
10 Because I was new to Naval Investigative Service, you know, the criminal thing. At the
11 time, all those Naval Investigative Service offices were run by—each office had a Naval
12 officer in charge. But over the years they changed that. It became only a few years after I
13 left—say, four or five years, it became a total civilian organization. So, after five days in
14 Washington, on Friday I flew to San Juan, Puerto Rico. Met with my family.

15 JS: At your time there in Washington, those few days there, did you see any
16 antiwar protests? Anything like that?

17 WH: No, I didn’t. No. No, you know, I was living in a BOQ and going from the
18 BOQ to the headquarters and back to the BOQ, essentially. That was my—so, I didn’t get
19 out into town at all at that time. I got to San Juan, Puerto Rico, of course, and I was—we
20 had—my wife had gotten housing on a military base there at Fort Buchanan. It was an
21 Army Reserve Base and it had housing for people who were stationed down there. So,
22 you know, I was one of the lucky ones. As a career military person, you got home from
23 Vietnam, and you went to a military base and everybody there was supporting. So, I did
24 not have any civilian protest type things. I wasn’t involved in any. There really weren’t
25 any in Puerto Rico when we got there. Puerto Ricans were not jumping up and down like
26 they were in the many cities in the states. So, it was an easy transition back to military
27 life again. The only difficulties I had was getting myself back from being in a warzone.
28 That was—you know, while you’re in Vietnam everyday was sort of like a matter of life
29 and death on your mind. I mean, people were dying all the time. Then you came back to a
30 job in which—for many instances it just seemed to me that—I had a difficult time getting
31 interested, let’s put it that way, in the job. Because the Naval Investigative Service, at the

1 time—you have to remember this is—this would be 19—the end of 1968/'69 and into
2 1970. The Navy spent a lot of time trying to—drugs were a problem. Homosexuals were
3 a problem for the Navy. So, you know, they spent a great deal—even though it was
4 supposed to be felony criminal cases that we were doing—which, we did do a lot of that.
5 Helping out people on ships that would come in and on commands that needed
6 assistance. I found that we spent too much time ferreting out people who were just
7 smoking marijuana or people who turned out to be homosexuals that the Navy wanted to
8 get rid of. So, we spent—as far as I was concerned, it was an inordinate amount of time
9 on that. It took me probably six months after I got back before I finally got back into the
10 swing of just being a plain Naval officer instead of a Naval officer who was in a warzone.

11 JS: Any particular memorable cases that you could talk about during that time?

12 WH: Well, there were a couple of memorable cases. One case had—because we
13 were—in San Juan we were responsible for not just Puerto Rican bases but some of the
14 islands down there. On one of the islands, we had a communications base. It turned out
15 that the officer's wives there were running a prostitution ring down there. Well, that was
16 pretty interesting case. So, word of this got out and we sent an agent down there to do his
17 investigation. Found out that one of the officer's wives was running a prostitution ring
18 using a couple of other officers' wives and some other wives—Navy wives on the base—
19 on the small base. And then outside of the town. I can't remember w—right at the top of
20 my head I can't remember whether that was Bermuda or one of the other islands. The
21 result of this case was once the agent—once our agent found out what was going on and
22 who was involved in it and the report was sent back, we sent it then back to Washington.
23 Within one day—the very next day those officers and their wives were transferred off
24 the—off. They were gone. Completely gone. All their household goods and everything
25 remained. Those had to be taken later on. But they were simply shipped out. What
26 happened to them afterwards we never knew. But most likely the—I mean, it wasn't—in
27 most cases the officers themselves had no idea. But that's a knock on their careers.
28 Probably they were done. But that was a memorable case.

29 JS: I know you mentioned that it took you a while to get back into the swing of
30 things. But did you end up enjoying the assignment and living there in Puerto Rico?

1 WH: I enjoyed living in Puerto Rico, yeah. I enjoyed it. The weather was great.
2 They had a golf course right on the base where we lived. So, we could actually walk to
3 the golf course. My kids could walk to school. All three of them went to school there. So,
4 I think my kids and myself enjoyed it more than my wife. My wife is a daughter of
5 parents who were born in Germany, so she's a Nordic type. The heat really got to her
6 down there. Because it's not—I mean, we had air conditioning in the unit. But anyplace
7 else you went, you know, it's—it just is hot. It gets—not only does it get hot, but in many
8 instances in the summertime it gets hot and humid. So, you're talking about ninety-two
9 degree and maybe ninety percent humidity. She didn't—she just simply didn't like the
10 heat. Everything else she liked. I mean, we had a—knew a bunch of friends we met there.
11 Couple of which we stayed friends with until today even still. So, we met some nice
12 people. We had some good times. It was a good tour for me to come back to. That was
13 the only problem, the heat. My wife and the heat.

14 JS: Well, I know you mentioned a little earlier that you weren't able to follow
15 what was going on with the mobile riverine force after you got back because there just
16 wasn't much coverage. But did you follow the War in general terms while you were
17 there?

18 WH: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. We saw the War in general terms, there's no doubt
19 about it. Actually, mobile riverine force was one of those two units that I told you was
20 disbanded not too much later. So, I think by the end of 1969 or early '70, one of those
21 two units was disbanded. The other one operated most of the time in the northern part of
22 the delta around Saigon. So, you know, I followed it as best as I could. But as far as the
23 War was concerned, then we just followed it regularly. It pretty much was going the way
24 many of us expected it to go.

25 JS: Is there anything else on Puerto Rico you should mention?

26 WH: Eh, no, I can't think of it. It was good. The weather was great. The golf was
27 good. The job turned out okay. I wasn't enamored with that particular job even though I
28 got—after about six months I got into the swing of things. But I wasn't cut out to be a
29 criminal—leading a criminal investigative unit. So, I realized that that was the case. But
30 anyhow, the job was—it was good. I left there in the summer of 1970 and was assigned
31 as a student in the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. So, that was a good

1 assignment because I got to spend an entire year just simply being a student. So, a lot
2 more time with my family. I thought it was interesting that because the War College
3 students were in Newport and you went from like the end of June—err, no. I mean, you
4 went from August, I think, end of August to June. So, it was like a ten-month school.
5 That people rented their houses to War College students for ten months. You didn't have
6 to sign a one-year lease. You signed a ten-month lease because that's how long the school
7 was. So, I thought that was pretty good.

8 JS: What type of coursework were you doing there?

9 WH: Naval War College is—it's like a postgraduate school. At the time they did
10 not give master's degrees. Later on, they did. You could get a master's degree from
11 George Washington University there if you wanted to take your normal studies and then
12 add on studies for George Washington University and get a master's degree. But
13 generally speaking, I decided not to do that. I just decided to concentrate on the War
14 College curriculum. It's a mixed curriculum. It's theories on war, but it also covers
15 economics and history. It's a really well-rounded curriculum. They have a lot of good
16 professors there. Plus, they bring in a lot of guest speakers from various universities and
17 from government to come in and speak to you. So, you have a lot of seminars. You study
18 Russian history, and you study Russian tactics, at the time. Sine Russia was the big
19 boogeyman. You studied a lot on international business an international management and
20 international affairs. The idea is to make the officer a well-rounded individual who
21 understands the world situation as well as the military situation. So, it was good. I did
22 well there. I graduated as a distinguished graduate from the Naval War College. It was—I
23 enjoyed my time there. We had a good time.

24 JS: Was this one of those assignments that I guess is pretty much required to
25 move up the ladder?

26 WH: Well, it's not required but it sure helps.

27 JS: What was your rank at the time?

28 WH: I was a lieutenant commander.

29 JS: Lieutenant commander, okay.

30 WH: Yeah, I had made lieutenant commander when I was in Europe. I had only
31 been a lieutenant commander for a year when I went to Vietnam. So, yeah, that was two

1 years as a lieutenant commander when I left. Then it was two years in Puerto Rico as a
2 lieutenant commander. So, my year in Newport at the postgraduate school was a—I
3 mean, at the War College was my fifth year. So, I came up for commander at the end of
4 my tour. I left there to go to Denver, Colorado, to Armed Forces Air Intelligence Training
5 Center. Where the Navy and the Air Force had a joint school to train incoming
6 intelligence officers, reserve intelligence officers, foreign intelligence officers, and—all
7 the entry level enlisted intelligence types would go to Lowry Air Force Base. So, it was a
8 joint training between the Air Force and the Navy. I went there as the branch chief in the
9 regular intelligence business. So, I was in charge of all that training except for
10 photointerpretation and computer type training. Everything else I was in charge of there.
11 Not long after I got there, I was select to promotion to commander.

12 JS: How long were you there for?

13 WH: I was there three years. Didn't want to be there three years. Being at a school
14 like that for three years is a lengthy time. I was supposed to be sent there for two years.
15 They extended my tour of duty there because the Navy was in one of its periodic
16 financial troubles and if you had a two-year tour anywhere, they were trying to make you
17 stay there for three years wherever you were. But I had done my job. My job was to
18 rewrite—one of the things I was sent there to do by the Navy was to rewrite the Navy
19 training course as a separate—err, see that it got written. Because the Navy had already
20 decided beforehand that they would move out of there. That it wasn't cost effective to
21 have a Naval training facility out in Denver when they had two naval facilities, one on
22 each coast, that they would change. So, they wanted the whole thing rewritten so that we
23 had a separate and distinct Navy course. So, while I was there, I oversaw the rewriting of
24 a distinct Navy intelligence course, or courses. As a byproduct, the rewriting and the
25 overseeing of the Air Force intelligence course.

26 JS: You said three years. Would that have been '71-'74?

27 WH: Yes. It was like summer of '71 to the summer of '74. Three years I spent
28 there. It wasn't my favorite tour of duty. The first year was pretty good. Year and a half
29 was good. But once you got things rolling and these things got written and you did what
30 you did to reorganize the school, then the rest—the third year that I was there was

1 really—you know, you were involved in simply administrative actions. But the third year
2 was not my best year. Just from interest point of view.

3 JS: Well, I know by '73 that the American draw down in Vietnam had pretty
4 much been completed. What did you think of that? Of the final withdrawal of American
5 troops?

6 WH: I thought it was a terrible way to do it. I mean, we certainly—it was like we
7 ran out of there and you had to escape off helicopters and rooftops. I thought it was a—
8 you know, it should never have come to that. But that's the way most of us feel. When
9 the Prisoners of War came, a lot of Naval intelligence officers were sent either to Hawaii
10 or to the west coast to debrief the POWs [Prisoners of War] that were coming home. I
11 was not one of those that went. But a couple of people that worked for me went. I would
12 have thought—I would have like to do that, but they decided that I needed to stay there.
13 Yeah, no, I—you know, generally speaking, most of us thought it was a terrible way to
14 end the war.

15 JS: What was your next assignment after Denver?

16 WH: After that I was—I had been negotiating to go for a job. I had decided to
17 come back to Norfolk, Virginia to be the intelligence officer for the amphibious group.
18 Phib Group 3—err, no. Phib Group 2. Yeah, Phib Group 2. After a number of questions
19 and negotiations with the detailer back in Washington, I finally settled on that. It wasn't
20 my favorite choice of a job, but it was the best at the time. And at the time, my wife and I
21 had decided that we would probably retire from the Navy down in southern Virginia
22 someplace. So, that seemed appropriate. We could go back there and live in the area for
23 three/four years and find a retirement home there. Then whenever I did retire, we would
24 stay there. So, that was our plan. But the day that I—the very next day after I said I would
25 go back to Norfolk for this job, I got a telephone call from my boss from Vietnam. The
26 commodore, name was Robert Salzer. He had been a captain in Vietnam and now he was
27 a vice admiral. He was the head of the amphibious force in the Pacific. Of all the
28 amphibious forces. He called me up and said, "I hear you're going to go to Norfolk." I
29 said, "I am." He said, "Well, would you rather come out here and work for me?" I said,
30 "Yes, I would." So, I went home that night and told my wife that my boss from Vietnam
31 had called and asked for me. So, we're going to San Diego instead. So, that's how we got

1 to San Diego originally. What I did not know was—I said the amphibious—the
2 intelligence officer for the amphibious force in the Pacific was a job for a line officer who
3 had a subspecialty in intelligence. He wasn't an intelligence officer. When I said that to
4 Admiral Salzer he said, "Well, don't worry about that. I'll take care of it." So, I said,
5 "Okay." So, I packed up and went to—we packed up and went to San Diego in June of
6 1974. What I didn't know was that the Pacific Fleet was changing so that the amphibious
7 force, the cruiser destroyer force, and the logistic—the whole logistics fleet was being
8 combined into one force, Commander, Naval Surface Force Pacific. So, when I got there,
9 I found this out and I became the intelligence officer—the first intelligence officer for the
10 Naval Forces Pacific. A much larger, obvious, command with a much greater degree of
11 importance for the intelligence officer than was just the amphibious force. So, I became
12 the N-2. When I got there, I found out that the admiral had brought a number of folks
13 from Vietnam. So, I was reunited with his chief of staff. Had been the ops officer in
14 Vietnam. One of the communications—the head of the communications had been his
15 communications officer there. The training officer at SURFPAC [Commander, Naval
16 Surface Force Pacific] had been—and one assistant ops officer in Vietnam. So, what
17 Admiral Salzer had done was he had followed the careers of all the people that he liked to
18 work with and when he had the opportunity as admiral to bring them to his back again,
19 that's what he did. So, I was fortunate in that. So, I spent—I was hoping to spend three
20 years there, but it became such an important job that the head of intelligence, essentially,
21 Admiral Bobby Inman, who was then, I think, at the time I believe he was the head of
22 NSA [National Security Agency]. But he was the big chief in intel—Naval Intelligence.
23 So, he had a say in assigning officers. Anybody over the rank of—any commanders or
24 captains he was pretty much involved in assigning. But he decided that job should be a
25 two-year job because it was such an important job now, he could put people into it. So, I
26 spent two years there on the staff in San Diego. While we were here, my wife and I
27 decided that instead of southern Virginia, we'd retire in southern California. We thought
28 San Diego was a great place. So, we decided to retire here. Which I didn't do, of course.
29 At the end of my tour there, I was coming up for a promotion to captain the following
30 year. But I had kids in school now and I've just two years. I really wanted to have a
31 couple of my kids, you know, go to the same school for a while. So, I politicked to try to

1 get a job here in Wash—in San Diego when I finished that job. So, they gave me the job
2 of CO [Commanding officer] of Naval Intelligence Training Center here. Fleet
3 Intelligence Training Center, FITCPAC [Pacific Fleet Navy Fleet Intelligence Training
4 Center], in the Pacific. This was a school that trained all the fleet intelligence people. We
5 also had reserves and foreign people come in for training too. But basically, it was to
6 train the fleet in intelligence. People that had been out in the fleet and now needed more
7 intelligence training. So, unfortunately, I had to go there as the XO [Executive Officer]
8 for about nine months before the CO left. So, I went over there as the XO. They told me
9 that, “Oh, you shouldn’t do that because it’s not good for your career. You know, you’re
10 coming up for captain.” And, “Everybody that’s been the CO over there has retired as a
11 commander. You know, nobody’s ever made captain out of there.” I said, “Well, if that’s
12 the way it’s going to be, that’s the way it’s going to be. Because we want to spend more
13 than just two years here. I’d like to get my kids through one school—to get out of there at
14 one time.” So, I went over there as the XO and when he left, I transferred up to CO. I was
15 there as the CO for about a year and a half. I was there when the promotion board came
16 up and I made captain anyhow. I think I made it generally because my old Vietnam boss
17 asked me to come out here and that job was a really good job. And my fitness report had
18 been signed by a vice admiral. So, I got promoted anyhow. But I knew as soon as I got
19 promoted, I was going to be transferred back to Washington. Since that’s where most of
20 the Navy captains’ jobs were and there wasn’t any real jobs here. So, at the end of—I
21 mean in the summer, I guess, of 1978—yeah, towards the fall. I guess—yeah, August I
22 was transferred back to Washington. I went back to the Defense Intelligence Agency.

23 JS: Was that your last assignment?

24 WH: That was my last job. I spent two years there. I had intended to spend more,
25 but it was a tough job. It was a very interesting job I had. It was a tough job and I spent so
26 much time on the job. I never got really—you know, it wasn’t family friendly. It was one
27 of those jobs in Washington where you worked six days a week and sometimes even you
28 get called in on Sundays. It was a tough job, though. It was a job in the Defense
29 Intelligence Agency, but I was physically located in the joint staff area of the Pentagon.
30 My job was heading up an office which supported the joint staff and the chairman’s
31 office with intelligence. So, when the Iran hostages were taken, the president, the

1 secretary of defense, tasked the chairmen of the joint chief to come up with the various
2 plans for what to do about the hostages that were there in Iran. So, what he did was set up
3 about five or six different cells. Highly classified cells to determine what to do. One of
4 those was the rescue operation. So, my office was in charge of getting the intelligence
5 that they needed to support whatever one of those five or six cells would be chosen to do.
6 So, there were various, various cells that were supposed to do all kinds of things. It was
7 about, you know, after a month or so that when they settled on the rescue mission. So, I
8 spent a lot of time getting, you know, they would tell me what they needed, and I would
9 get it from whatever source that was necessary. Whether it was DIA or CIA or NSA,
10 satellite reconnaissance or even any of the service intelligence. It was my job to find it
11 and get it to them. That was the job that—really, it was like eighty hours a week. So, it
12 was big task. Then, of course, it fumbled. It fumbled because, I mean, President Carter
13 was told that they needed to go early because of dust storms. But he kept trying
14 diplomatic and diplomatic and diplomatic missions. When he finally decided, it was into
15 dust storm season. When we went, that's exactly what happened. One of the helicopters
16 was lost in the dust storm. There was so much dust on the ground the helicopter crashed
17 into a C-130. A lot of people don't realize this, but I don't know whether it's been
18 published or not, but we actually—the rescue team actually flew into Iran and landed in
19 the desert out where they were and flew out again on a training mission to see if they
20 could do it without being detected. And they did. So, they knew they could get in without
21 being detected because we had done it. But then it blew up at the end. I had spent so
22 much time working there and so little time with my family. I had still—my son was in
23 college out here, San Diego State. But my other two kids were in high school back in
24 Virginia. I had spent so much time working that I didn't have a heck of a lot of time. So, I
25 asked my big admiral in the sky if I could get out of there after my couple of years and go
26 out someplace else in the country. I wasn't particularly caring where. Whether it was San
27 Diego or Newport or Norfolk or someplace. In their wisdom, they decided that no, I had
28 built up such an amount of contacts and rapport with a lot of people in Washington in this
29 job that I was going to stay right there in Washington. So, I can look forward to another
30 three or four years being in D.C. Even though I might change jobs, I would just go to
31 another job that—when you're a ranking officer, when you're a captain or a colonel in

1 Washington and you're into one of those jobs where you're leading something. I mean,
2 it's job that just goes on and on. There's no time for any other life. So, I went home,
3 talked it over with my wife and we just decided to retire right then. So, in the summer,
4 June 30, 1980, I retired and came back to San Diego. My wife was extremely happy
5 because she wanted to do that more than I did. But when I couldn't get out of
6 Washington, then I had to agree with her because I didn't want to stay there any longer.
7 So, I retired June 30, 1980.

8 JS: If you wouldn't mind, could you talk, I guess, a little bit about life after the
9 Navy, if you would?

10 WH: Yeah, life after the Navy. Life after the Navy was interesting in that I had
11 the opportunity when I retired to stay right in Washington and go to work at the National
12 Reconnaissance Office. Because I had a good rapport with the man who headed it based
13 upon my work there before during the hostage crisis. But then we—my wife and I talked
14 it over and I would be essentially doing pretty much the same thing. I would be working
15 on high level stuff, and I would be working—I mean, those people in his office worked
16 long hours. So, I decided, you know, if I was going to do that, I might as well just stay on
17 active duty, you know. And do it as opposed to moving over and working as a civilian.
18 So, I rejected that and then decided to come out here to San Diego anyhow. Find a job. I
19 had a couple of opportunities with defense contractors. You know, because they have all
20 those programs. But I decided after I finished that I didn't want to do that kind of work
21 anymore. I had a good career and I wanted to try something else. So, I went and got my
22 real estate license and then went to work for a small real estate office in San Diego here. I
23 was in real estate sales for, you know, I don't know. Maybe two years or so and doing
24 fairly well. But it was a bad time for real estate here in San Diego. It was the early
25 eighties, and I don't know if you remember, but in 1980 or '81 when Reagan was elected
26 president—under Carter and the last couple years, I mean, interest rates were up to
27 fifteen/sixteen percent if you wanted to buy a house. So, nothing was being sold. So, I
28 had a bunch of Navy friends who were being transferred out but couldn't sell their house.
29 So, they came to me and said they needed somebody that they could trust in order to
30 manage their property for them while they were gone. I didn't want to do that but, you
31 know, I wasn't real thrilled about doing that, but these were Navy types, and they were

1 friends and they needed help. So, I took on a few property managements. Then word got
2 spread around and I got another one and another one, another one. Next thing I knew, I
3 was in the property management business. So, I essentially from about 1983 till 1998, for
4 about fifteen years, I basically did property management. You know, I'd sell a house
5 occasionally or buy a house for somebody. But it was mostly selling somebody's house
6 that I was managing. So, I had myself—my own little, teeny property management
7 business. So, for fifteen years that's what I did. But towards the end of that, I was
8 unhappy with it. I got tired of renters and owners. You know, destroyed living rooms and
9 people who couldn't change a light bulb or couldn't fix a toilet. You know, I got tired of
10 that—the mundane part of property management. It didn't involve—I was sort of in
11 undeclared partnership with another Naval officer who had retired. Another Naval
12 intelligence officer who'd retired. So, it was a good opportunity because it was—for this
13 particular kind of business, when I was away on vacation, and he would look after my
14 stuff. When he went on vacation, I could look after his properties and things like that. So,
15 we had a good deal that way. It enabled my wife and I to travel more than we had
16 expected. One of the reasons I went into the business in the first place, so it worked out
17 pretty well. But when I got to 1998—I think it was '98. Yeah. Because I had turned sixty-
18 two. So, once I turned sixty-two, I could start collecting social security. So, I had my
19 Navy pension and social security, so I just retired period in 1998.

20 JS: Well, before wrapping the interview up I'd like to ask you just a few more
21 questions if I could. Some broad questions about some of the larger issues of Vietnam.
22 Well, first of all, I know we've kind of talked about this a little bit. You've touched on
23 this some before. But could you talk, I guess, just a little bit about your overall view on
24 Vietnam. About American involvement and, I guess, also, if you could, about your own
25 participation in the war.

26 WH: Well, overall view. When we got into the Vietnamese War, in the beginning,
27 it was a—it seemed like a noble goal. You know, to protect South Vietnam from being
28 overrun by the North. There was the trickle-down theory, you know, that if you allowed
29 this to happen, then the communists would take over this. Then they would take over that
30 and then they would—you know, it would just be steamroller. So, we didn't want to do
31 that. Well, I don't know how—I'm not sure I was politically astute enough to know

1 whether that was a good theory or not a good theory. But anyhow, we got into as a
2 training, you know, training. Then we started to build up. But basically, before I even
3 went to Vietnam, my view was that if we're not going to fight this war all out—and it
4 became obvious to many of us. Because I was in the intel business, and I saw a lot of
5 intel traffic back and forth about how the War was being run. As you recall, I was in
6 Europe at the time, and I had access to classified info, and I had access message wise to
7 all the joint chiefs when they came over. The secretary of state or the secretary of
8 defense. The presidential messages that came back and forth to them. So, I could see
9 what was going on. It was obvious to me at the time that we weren't not going all out. I
10 mean, if we were going into a war to win a war, then we should do it—we should go out
11 to win it. Or else we shouldn't do it. What we were doing was what, you know, I and
12 many of my colleagues considered a half-ass effort in the war. So, even before I went to
13 Vietnam I was not enthused about our—the results that we were going to have. If we
14 were going to continue in that vein, well, then it didn't seem like it was going to be—
15 when Nixon was elected, I thought maybe—well, maybe he'll change. You know, maybe
16 he'll change the philosophy. And he did change certain philosophies, but the basic
17 tenants of the running of the War were still the same. So, I wasn't too happy about that.
18 So, I kept that feeling. When I went to Vietnam and volunteered to go at that time, it was
19 because I was in the—essentially, I was career military person whose duty it was. It
20 seemed to me if there was a war going on and you were a military career person, then you
21 ought to be there. So, that's why I went. But I wasn't enthused. After I got there, it just—
22 as I said before, it just made me realize once again there's no way we can come out of
23 this war good under the way we were fighting it at the time. I didn't like the—what I
24 considered to be falsehoods were coming out of the mouths of the commander there,
25 General Westmoreland or Secretary McNamara. Seemed to me they were just lying to the
26 American public. So, I was not surprised that the War ended poorly. That's the way—
27 that's what happened.

28 JS: What did you think of the media's coverage of the war?

29 WH: Well, I was—I'll tell you; this is the first time in my career that I had any
30 real contact with the media. The media would come down to the delta frequently. Many
31 of the people who came down to the delta—it seemed to me already had their mind made

1 up about what they were going to write regardless of the facts. There was one person who
2 came down during my tour there who I—only one reporter that I respected. Because
3 frequently it was up to the intel officer and the ops officer to give a little briefing to the
4 reporters, you know, about what was happening. What we were going to do. The reporter
5 that I respected was a woman reporter. I think she reported for NBC. Her name was Liz
6 Trotte. She came down with what seemed to me an open mind and listened. Then wrote
7 what actually happened. Many of them, it seemed to me, had their reports written before
8 they even knew what happened. The reports that went out that I get—I didn't get to read
9 everything that the reporter made because you would have to get that paper or listen to
10 that newscast which sometimes, we didn't do. Were generally slanted in some way. So, I
11 was not—it just made me think about reporters in general and what happened to the old
12 crew. You know, that used to report for World War II factually and, you know, the trust
13 was important and all that sort of stuff. It just—I was disillusioned. Let me put it that
14 way. But you know—you know, also when high echelon government officials begin to
15 smear the truth when they're giving out information, you can't blame the reports then. In
16 a way, from looking at whatever they say with a jaundiced eye. I think that's what
17 happened.

18 JS: What did you think of the protest movement?

19 WH: Well, you know, the protest movement went way over. I mean, there's a way
20 to protest without being destructive. I thought, you know, it was destructive. And the idea
21 that a lot of people—it was mostly young people during that time, blamed the fighter.
22 His, you know, that was really bad. I mean, you get a kid that's drafted out of someplace
23 and sent to Vietnam and he comes home. Why should you blame him for the pol—I
24 mean, that was sickening to me. Of course, those grievances—those things that happened
25 then are probably who it has turned around for these wars. So, even if you don't like Iraq
26 or Afghanistan, at least they're not blaming the fighters. So, if that was the cause of this
27 happening now, well then, I suppose it might have been worthwhile. But it was bad then.

28 JS: What is your opinion of U.S. policy towards Vietnam today with trade and
29 travel tourism? Even American veterans going back.

30 WH: Oh, I think that's fine. It's no different than what we did with Germany after
31 World War II. I don't—you know, what's the point in having the—there was no point in

1 blaming the current people. You know, for instance, I know the story—I'm not sure of
2 the amount now but, you know, sixty percent or seventy percent of the people who live in
3 Vietnam weren't even born during the war. I mean, it's all after. The War to them is, you
4 know—there were two girls—two young women here in Rancho Bernardo where I live
5 who cut my hair at the barbershop. They're both from Vietnam. Their parents came over
6 here after World War II—I mean After the Vietnamese War. I mean, you know, they
7 don't even—I know more about their country than they do. Than they do. You know,
8 they just—the War to them is a piece of history that they don't even know well. So, I
9 think it's fine. We should trade with them. We should do whatever we do with any other
10 country.

11 JS: Have you been back to Vietnam, or do you have any desire to?

12 WH: I have not been back to Vietnam. I really don't—you know, I did—maybe
13 about ten years ago I actually thought about going back and maybe taking my wife back
14 and going to some of those places. But I didn't do it then. Now I just—you know, I'm not
15 that wild about travelling. At my age now travelling is a hassle. Just getting on the airline
16 is a hassle these days. So, traveling over there, no I don't really have any desire to go
17 back now.

18 JS: Is there anything else we should mention that we haven't at this point?

19 WH: Gosh, Jason, I can't think of anything to be honest with you right now. I
20 think we covered it pretty well.

21 JS: All right, well, great. Well, in that case then I will go ahead and bring the
22 interview to a close.