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Oral History Project.**

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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with W.L Costley Jr.
Conducted by Allen B. Richardson
Transcribed by Laura Darden**

1 Allen Richardson: This interview is being conducted with Captain W.L Costley,
2 Jr. by Gunnery Sergeant Allen B. Richardson at Marine Corps Schools, Quantico,
3 Virginia. The subject of this interview is saturation patrolling in the Phuoc Valley and it
4 is unclassified. Captain, would you state your name, grade, and service number, please?

5 W.L Costley: William L. Costley Jr., Captain, 068933.

6 AR: What were your duty assignments while you were in Vietnam?

7 WC: I was an observer with the 1st Battalion of the 6th Regiment of the
8 Vietnamese Army.

9 AR: What period did you serve in these billets and where were you physically
10 located within Vietnam during that period?

11 WC: This was in March of 1964 and the majority of the time, twenty-three days
12 was spent in the Phuoc Valley, the remainder of the time was spent in Da Nang.

13 AR: Captain, would you discuss the saturation patrolling in the Phuoc Valley
14 from the beginning of the operation until the end of it?

15 WC: Saturation patrolling, at that time, which was the concept that was being
16 carried out by the Vietnamese Army and the US Army in this particular area, in the I
17 Corps Area, our unit would move into a particular sector, a battalion would be assigned a
18 certain area and the battalion, in turn, would assign certain areas to its companies and the
19 companies right on down to the smallest unit. This was constant patrolling over no set
20 area or no set—where a unit would go out. No two patrols would go the same way, and

1 the purpose of it was to keep the Viet Cong, particularly, on the move all the time and
2 keep them jumping all the time and never let them let their defenses down. Patrols were
3 constantly moving out at night and during the day, although, after I went out in this
4 particular patrol with this battalion, I found it to be very unsuccessful, or what I
5 considered unsuccessful. I didn't think their patrols were successful and they didn't
6 accomplish what they set out to do.

7 AR: Can you discuss any VC tactics, in particular, in this operation?

8 WC: Most of the VC that we encountered, or the VC tactics, was primarily a
9 harassing-type tactic. Snipers, snipers shooting and helicopters, snipers shooting at
10 individuals or snipers shooting at units out on patrol. It was normally one or two snipers
11 firing a few rounds disappearing into the jungle. We did have one unit that was
12 ambushed by about a forty-man unit of the hard-core VC one night.

13 AR: Are you familiar with how this ambush is set up with the VC?

14 WC: Well, I'm not sure whether you could call it an ambush. I think the reason
15 they set up this particular thing, this battalion at the time had been operating in the Phuoc
16 Valley for several days. It was not a very aggressive unit and it had also been operating in
17 this area in the past. So the VC were probably familiar with exactly how it would react.
18 This approximately a forty-man unit was set up on the edge of a small village and where
19 on the side of a hill in a grove of cinnamon trees and they were dug-in, prepared positions
20 across this hill. The unit, a particular company of about sixty men was going out to set up
21 an ambush. They were crossing a rice paddy, approaching this village—and this was
22 about 8:30 or 20:30 in the evening—they were approaching this village and got within
23 about a 150 or 175 meters of it and the VC opened up with these forty men with three
24 automatic weapons, also.

25 AR: Did the Vietnamese have any type of immediate action drill to operate on
26 during an ambush?

27 WC: In this particular ambush, the unit of about fifty men immediately hit the
28 deck. Since they were crossing a rice paddy, they just deployed on a line behind a small
29 dike and immediately returned fire. The remainder of the battalion, which was about
30 four- or five-hundred meters to the rear, the battalion commander who was also located
31 back there, sent up the remainder of this company plus another rifle company that he

1 had—he had only two rifle companies—sent them up, they also deployed on
2 approximately the same line. This fire fight ensued, which lasted from about 20:30 until
3 almost 23:00. He also was close to Phuoc Chau outpost, which had a section of 105s, so
4 he called in artillery and the artillery fired high explosive plus flares for him and he
5 remained there the whole night until daylight. He never did attempt to envelop or never
6 did make any moves other than return the fire. The next morning, or sometime that night
7 between the end of the firefight and first light, the VC broke contact and moved out and
8 took all their dead and wounded with them.

9 AR: What type weapons did the VC use?

10 WC: That particular night, their automatic weapons, all three of them sounded
11 like Browning Automatic Rifles. I know of them was a Browning Automatic Rifle
12 because when we moved into position the next morning I found a full magazine, BAR
13 magazine. The rest of them were a variety of weapons. A lot of them that I was not
14 familiar with, although an army captain and a master sergeant that were with the unit
15 described some of them, some of them as old French weapons and some of them as
16 Czech weapons.

17 AR: Then it wasn't automatic fire weapons as such, the attack wasn't an
18 automatic fire attack so to speak.

19 WC: No, only the three Browning Automatic Rifles.

20 AR: Were there any civic action measures used in your area, Captain?

21 WC: During this period, I saw no, what you would call, no civic action measures
22 at all, none whatsoever. Although, I believe that they could've used quite a few, but I
23 didn't see any.

24 AR: How about the influence of weather on the Vietnamese themselves? Can
25 they withstand this, I'm sure, more easily than we can; but how do they?

26 WC: During this period, it rained out of the twenty-three-day period we were in
27 the Phuoc Valley, it rained approximately five days, what I would call hard rain, out of
28 this period. During most of the rain, we were in sort of a static situation. As far as
29 affecting the Vietnamese, it didn't seem to affect them at all and it didn't bother their
30 equipment because they were traveling very lightly. We had no vehicles, so as far as
31 movement, it didn't affect us a great deal.

1 AR: Is there any adverse affect of the dampness on the weapons they're using?

2 WC: The weapons, the weather, I don't believe affected the weapons. The one
3 thing I was impressed with, the Vietnamese, the radio that they were using was ANPRC-
4 10, this unit I was with, and even under, what I would consider adverse conditions
5 because they didn't have the parts and equipment or the technicians that we have, and yet
6 I never saw one of their radios fail to work.

7 AR: Prior to this action, Captain, I understand you went through the Da Nang
8 area. Can you tell me what was in the Da Nang area at this time?

9 WC: At this time in the Da Nang area, there was one Marine helicopter squadron
10 there. I don't remember the designation of this particular squadron that was flying the
11 support missions for the Vietnamese Army at the time up in this area. Also, there was a
12 security, a reinforced security platoon from the 3rd Marine Division and I believe it was
13 from the 3rd Marines. These were the only Marines in the area at the time.

14 AR: One other question I'd like to ask about the weather and training in Vietnam.
15 How about insects? Did you have any problem with insects?

16 WC: The only insect or insects that bothered me, in the Da Nang area itself while
17 I was in Da Nang, the mosquitoes were very bad. Then, out in the field, the mosquitoes
18 were not too noticeable and bothered me very little. Ticks were bad. If ticks would get
19 on you, they would cause a big sore on you if you didn't get them off in a hurry. Then, of
20 course, the other thing that was really the big problem and gave you the most trouble
21 were the leaches. They were prevalent throughout the area.

22 AR: Well, you'd get these leaches, I assume, from being submersed in water.

23 WC: Right. Anytime you walked in an area, say, if you were under dense
24 undergrowth in a jungle-type area where it was very damp, you could look down on the
25 deck and leaches would just be crawling all over the deck. If you stayed there or stayed
26 in one place for just a few seconds, they would just cover your boots and they would
27 come up your trousers leg and even with blouse trousers, they would work their way up
28 on under your trousers.

29 AR: How about your training prior to going to Vietnam, Captain? Do you think
30 it was satisfactory to take care of the task?

1 WC: Yes. Prior to going to Vietnam, I had attended the 3rd Marine Division
2 Counter-Guerilla Warfare School on Okinawa. I'd also attended the Special Forces Staff
3 Course at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and the Psychological Operations Course at Fort
4 Bragg, North Carolina. So, I had had some training and knew a little about what to
5 expect.

6 AR: So, you were well prepared to the time you got there?

7 WC: Yes, I think so.

8 AR: Were the relations between the Marine Corps and the Vietnamese
9 satisfactory?

10 WC: Yes. From what little I observed between the Marine Corps and the
11 Vietnamese around the Da Nang area, they were satisfactory.

12 AR: How many Marines were with the battalion that you were with?

13 WC: Well, the battalion I was with, it was myself, and one Marine first
14 lieutenant.

15 AR: These were the only two?

16 WC: We were the only two.

17 AR: Do you have any comments on improvements that we could sustain the area
18 as far as equipment, tactics?

19 WC: Well, as far as equipment, practically all of the equipment that the
20 Vietnamese Army was using at that time was equipment that we had discarded, the
21 weapons. One weapon that they did use that I thought was very effective was the 60-
22 millimeter mortar, that which I understand, the Marines are using over there now. And
23 also, one other piece of equipment that they used—and it was the first time I had ever
24 seen it employed, I'd only seen it used in a training situation—was the M-79 grenade
25 launcher. They had two of these in each company. I thought they were very effective,
26 particularly at fairly short range in the type of terrain we were in.

27 AR: What did they use the M-79 for? What particular purpose?

28 WC: The M-79, it was used this particular night when this one company was
29 ambushed and they used it anytime in a small firefight at fairly close range. They would
30 use it in terrain that was sort of, what'd you call, not thick underbrush, but trees in sort of
31 a scrubby growth. It was used in this type of terrain.

- 1 AR: That's very effective. Okay, thank you very much for your interview
- 2 Captain.