DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Major General Jonas M. Platt, U.S. Marine Corps (Retired)

Benis M. Frank
Interviewer

HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION
Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps
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FOREWORD

This typescript, the transcribed memoir of Major General Jonas M. Platt, USMC, Retired, results from a series of tape-recorded interviews conducted with him at the Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, DC on 31 January and 7 February 1980 for the Marine Corps Oral History Program. This program obtains, by means of tape-recorded interviews, primary source material to augment documentary evidence.

Oral History is essentially spoken history, the oral recall of eyewitness impressions and observations recorded accurately on tape in the course of an interview conducted by a historian or an individual employing historical methodology and, possibly, the techniques of a journalist. The final product is a verbatim transcript containing historically valuable narratives relating to noteworthy professional experiences and observations from active duty, reserve, and retired distinguished Marines.

General Platt has reviewed the transcript and made only minor corrections and placed a restriction of OPEN on the use of his memoirs. This means that a potential user may read the transcript upon presentation of appropriate credentials. The reader is asked to bear in mind that he is reading a transcript of the spoken word rather than the written word.

Copies of this memoir are deposited in the Marine Corps Oral History Collection, Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, DC, and Breckinridge Library, Marine Corps Development and Education Command, Quantico, Virginia.

E. H. SIMMONS
Brigadier General
U.S. Marine Corps, Retired
Director of Marine Corps
History and Museums

Date: 9 October 1985

MAJOR GENERAL JONAS M. PLATT, USMC, RETIRED

Born September 21, 1919 in Brooklyn, New York, General Platt was graduated from high school in Cranston, Rhode Island. He attended Norwich University in Vermont, graduating in 1940 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering, and was commissioned a Marine second lieutenant in June 1940.

He served in the Marine Detachment aboard the battleship USS Washington during World War II, rose from lieutenant to major, while participating in Russian convoy operations in the Norwegian Sea, and six operations in the Pacific, including Guadalcanal, Tarawa, and Kwajalein. In 1944, after four months in the United States, he returned to the Pacific area. As a member of the 1st Marine, 1st Marine Division, he participated in the assault landings on Peleliu and Okinawa, earning the Navy Commendation and Bronze Star Medals, both with Combat "V," and the Purple Heart.

Following the war, he organized and commanded the Provisional Marine Guard at United Nations Headquarters in New York. He later served at Headquarters Marine Corps; earned a Master's degree in Psychology at Ohio State University in 1949; and taught infantry tactics and instructional techniques at Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, until December 1952.

During the Korean conflict, he earned the Legion of Merit with Combat "V" as Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, and Assistant G-3, 1st Marine Division.

He served again at Headquarters Marine Corps; was assigned to a joint staff in London; served briefly in the Mediterranean

during the Suez crisis in 1956; and from 1958-60 commanded the Marine Barracks, Washington, DC.

Upon completing the National War College in 1961, he was assigned as Regimental Commander, 6th Marines, followed by duty as Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, 2d Marine Division. During this period, the division deployed for the Cuban crisis in October 1962. From 1963 to 1965, he served as Commanding Officer of the Basic School.

General Platt was promoted to brigadier general on November 1, 1965, while en route to Vietnam. Upon his arrival, he became Assistant Division Commander, 3d Marine Division at Chu Lai. While serving with the Division, he commanded Task Force Delta in Operations Harvest Moon, Double Eagle I, Double Eagle II and Utah. In March 1966, he moved to Da Nang and became Chief of Staff for Lieutenant General Walt, commander of the Marine Forces in Vietnam.

While serving in Vietnam, he was awarded three United States decorations; the Silver Star Medal, and a second and third Legion of Merit with Combat "V". He was also awarded three decorations by the Government of Vietnam--the National Order of Vietnam, and two Vietnamese Gallantry Crosses with Palm.

Detached in December 1966, General Platt reported to Headquarters Marine Corps in January 1967, and was assigned duty as Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1. He was promoted to major general on March 19,1968.

Major General Platt retired from active duty June 30, 1970. For meritorious service as Assistant Chief of Staff-G-1 Headquarters,

U.S. Marine Corps, from March 1968 through June 1970, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal.

A complete list of his medals and decorations includes: the Distinguished Service Medal, the Silver Star Medal, the Legion of Merit with two Gold Stars in lieu of a second and third awards, the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V", the Navy Commendation Medal with with Combat "V", the Purple Heart Medal, the Presidential Unit Citation with two bronze stars, the Navy Unit Commendation, the American Defense Service Medal with Fleet clasp, the American Defense Service Medal, the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with one bronze star, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with one silver star and three bronze stars, the World War II Victory Medal, the China Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal with one bronze star, the Korean Service Medal with two bronze stars, the Vietnam Service Medal, the Korean Presidential Unit Citation, the Vietnamese National Order, two Vietnamese Gallantry Crosses with Palm, and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

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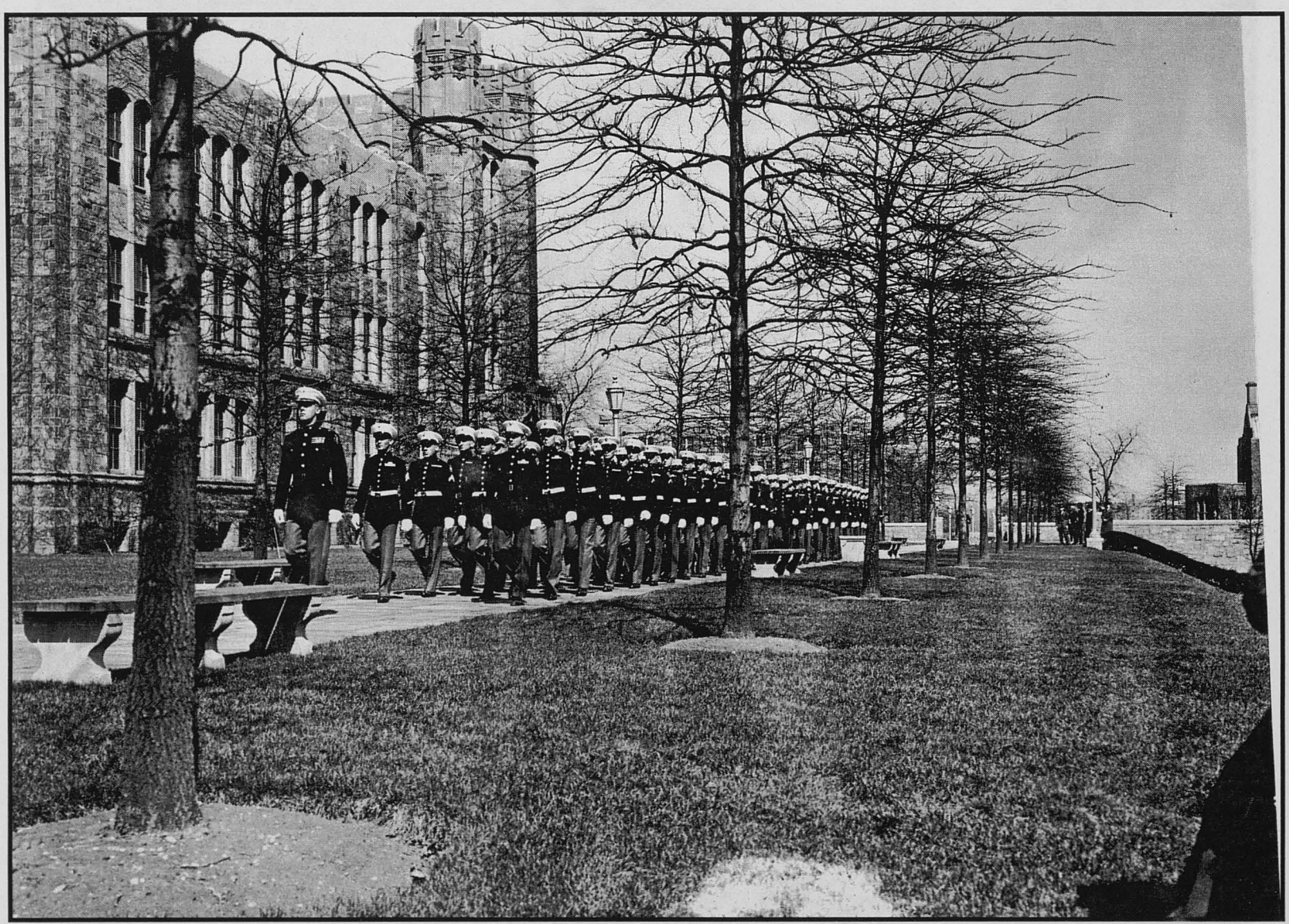
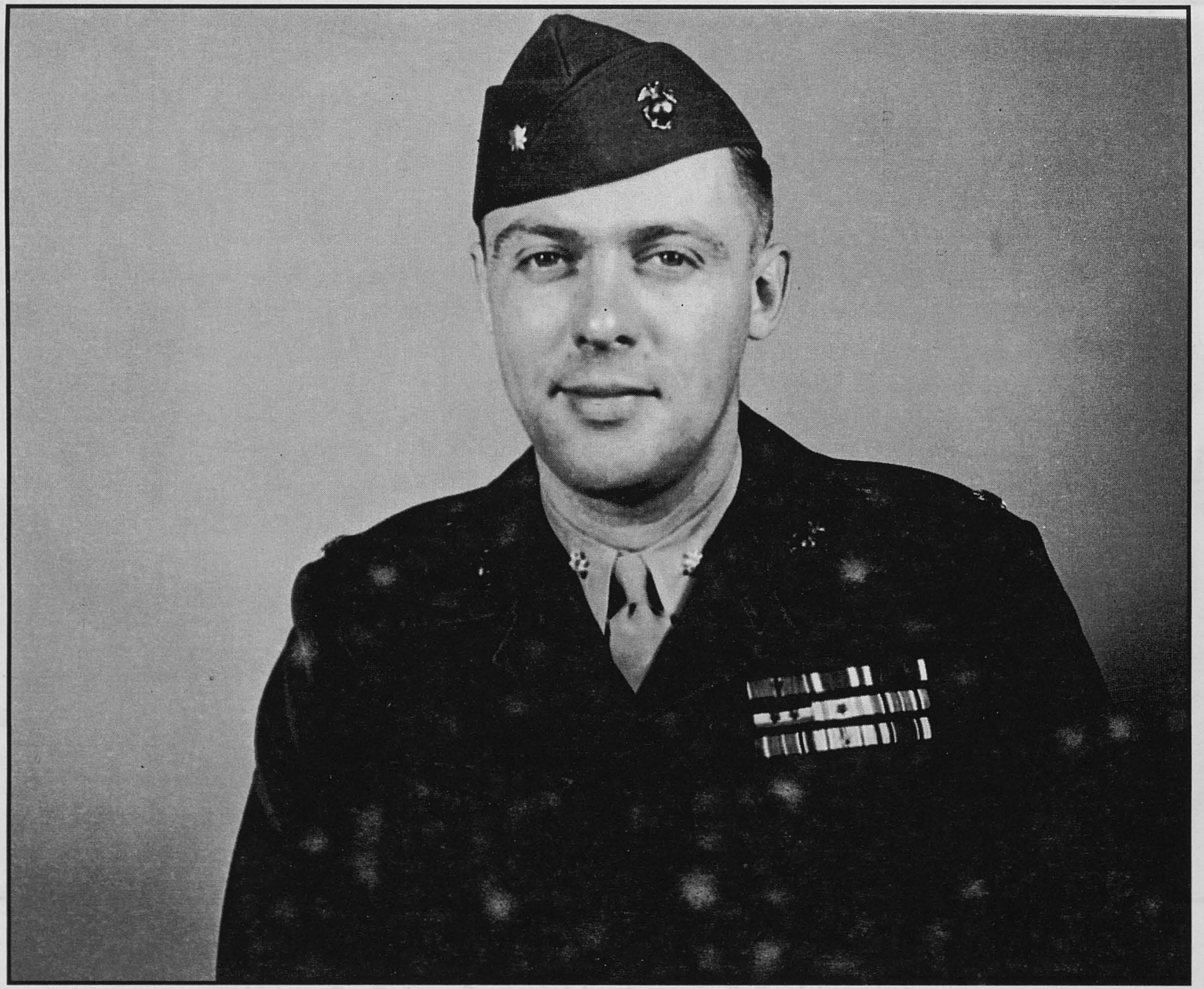
Major General Jonas M. Platt
(20 March 1968)

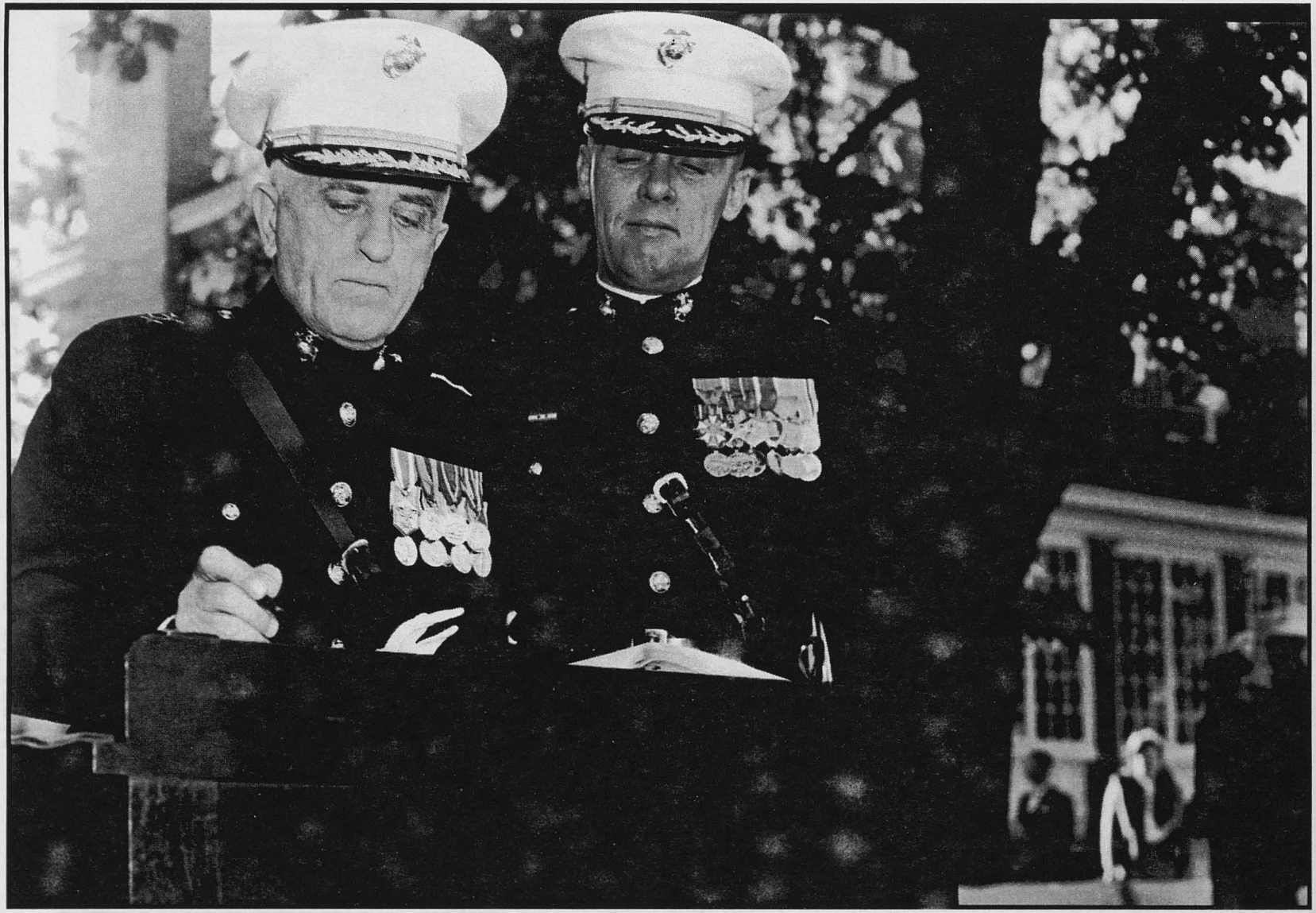


United Nations Organization Marine Honor Guard marching past
UNO Building, Hunters College, New York with Major Platt leading.
(20 March 1946)



Major Jonas M. Platt
(28 April 1948)

Officers of 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, Korea 1952-1953
(1st row) Lieutenant Colonel J.M. Platt, Major
William C. Doty, Second Lieutenant F.W. Linguist,
Captain Merrit A. Edson, Jr., Captain W.F. Simlik,
Captain Roy B. Whitlock, Captain Henry A. Checklou.



Sunset Parade, Marine Barracks, 8th & Eye. Major General Roy E. Gulick signs guest book while Colonel Platt looks on.
(1 May 1959)

Brigadier General Jonas M. Platt
Quantico, Va. Oct 1965

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MARINE CORPS HISTORICAL PROGRAM

Interviewee: Major General Jonas M. Platt

Interviewer: Benis M. Frank

Date and Place of Interview: 31 January 1980, Marine Corps Historical Center

Begin Side 1, Tape 1, Session I

Frank: Joe, we're going to begin our interview with the Viet Nam portion first. We have here with us Mr. Jack Shulimson, who is the senior historian on the Viet Nam project. He has some questions to ask and he will chime in at any time that he deems necessary, if we want to go off on tangents to get things clarified a bit more.

These are the list of questions that we have, twenty-one here. Some are pretty obvious and self-answering; others may not be.

The first one is, what was the role of the assistant division command group at Chu Lai when you took over from General Karch in 1965? Also, you may want to speak a little bit about General Karch's relief.

Platt: Well, General Karch's tour was up; he was at the end of his tour and I think I took over Chu Lai on the Marine Corps' birthday in 1965 with the responsibility for the defense of the base and all the tactical ground operations which were conducted in that area, in the Chu Lai area.

I had OPCON, as I recall, of the 4th Marines minus one

battalion, the 7th Marines and the artillery group, with a very small staff. As General Walt's representative on the scene, I was basically a coordinator. I might add that my relations with the units that were not under my OPCON were excellent. It was very much of a cooperative endeavor.

Frank: So as assistant division commander, you performed the normal functions of an assistant division commander.

Shulimson: But you also had the additional authority as coordinator for the Chu Lai base?

Platt: Yes, in terms of base defense, in terms of tactical ground operations.

Shulimson: You had no difficulty with any of the units of the 1st MAW that were at Chu Lai in relationship to a base defense role?

Platt: Absolutely none. There were no problems that I can recall at all.

Shulimson: You mentioned a small staff--did you need a larger staff for the responsibility that you had?

Platt: I don't think so, not in conducting the base coordinator role. I think a small staff was sufficient. When I left to become CG of Task Force Delta, of course then, I needed a much larger staff. That staff in Chu Lai stayed behind largely, and continued to do their functions under the temporary command of the senior

regimental commander, which I believe in all instances was Colonel Peatross, except during Operation Utah when he was Task Force Delta's chief of staff.

Frank: OK, well that answers first and second questions. The relationship of the assistant division command group with the division, 1st MAW, and III MAF.

Next one relates to the cause of General Henderson's relief during Harvest Moon and some have put the cause of this relief on the experience of the Task Force Delta staff. Will you comment on this to the degree you wish to, what changes you made, if any, in the staff when you took over.

Platt: Well, it is true that that staff had had a very short planning stage and they hadn't had the opportunity to work together as a staff over a prolonged period of time, and most of them were very new in country.

However, I would not attribute General Henderson's relief to the inadequacies of the staff. Then Colonel, later Brigadier General Doehler was the chief of staff and performed superbly.

I made no changes in the staff at all. What I did do was augment the staff; thanks to the kindness of Colonel Peatross. He loaned me, so to speak, his 3, his 4 and his assistant 2. Pete Snyder was his 3, Floyd Johnson was his 4; and a Captain Johnson was his 2. They came into the staff, I think the second day that I was there, and performed as 2, 3, and 4 Alphas. Now, they had been in country for

some time; the three of them had operated as a team and that did greatly strengthen our the staff.

But I did not, by doing that, infer that staff was inadequate. I just felt that we needed more people who had been in country, who knew the "ground rules" so to speak, who knew the environment, and I think it did help.

Incidentally, for the other three operations that I had, most of those people performed on my staff; only in this case, as the actual 3 or the 4.

Frank: Do you have any further questions on Henderson?

Shulimson: No. There was some comment that prior to the time you took over, that the Task Force Delta command post had moved three or four times during the operation. That perhaps, one of the blames, that the planning of the operation had gone for too long and that the 1st VC had been aware of the Marine plans and of the movement, especially of the South Vitenamese unit, and the fact that the ARVN regimental commander had not been informed of his destination until just prior to the operation; but yet the enemy was there waiting for him.

Platt: I really can't help you too much on that. As a background, there was sort of a tacit understanding that the ADC's, the two ADC's, General Henderson and myself, would be task force commanders in operations within the areas in which we resided, so to speak. In other words, anything down in the southern part of I Corps would come

under my aegis; anything up in the Da Nang area and further north would come under General Henderson.

I was briefed by General Henderson on that operation a few days before it started, but my only role until the time that I was called in was to ensure that Mel got adequate support from Chu Lai from the units that were sent from Chu Lai to become part of Task Force Delta and to ensure that Route 1 was adequately protected, that the convoys really got to the LSA where they were supposed to go. So, I don't think I can comment with any intelligence on the other parts of the question.

Frank: Regarding the task force concept in III MAF as employed in Viet Nam, would you discuss this? Did any conflict arise because of the two hats you wore, first as head of the ADC command group, then as head of CG Task Force Delta?

Platt: Well, I think the task force concept was sort of a natural evolution in terms of the situation that we faced.

We had large distances involved. Further, much of the force was committed to a defense role. For example, in only one of four operations did I have two battalions from the same regiment. You were usually dealing with battalions from different regiments. I think it was a good concept and I think it worked. But there was no conflict in terms of the two hats--the task force commander and the Chu Lai base coordinator.

Very simply, when I left the Chu Lai area, the base coordinator function fell on Colonel Peatross. And I can remember no conflicts at all between the two.

Shulimson: Did you maintain two separate staffs, or was there any overlap?

Platt: Two separate staffs basically. The task force staff was developed for a specific operation and as we went on, more and more key members came from an existing regimental staff. In other words, as I told you, I had Peatross' 3 and his 2 Alpha and his 4.

On Operation Harvest Moon, Colonel Don Sherman, who had just come in the country to take over as CO of the 4th Marines, was my chief of staff. For Utah, Colonel Peatross was my chief of staff.

The Chu Lai base coordinator staff, with one exception, stayed in Chu Lai while I was gone. That one exception was then-Major Chuck Poppe, who was the 4. As I recall on Utah, he came along as the Task Force S-4. Does that answer that, Jack?

Shulimson: Yes, just a little bit further. In other words, the ADC staff, I mean the Task Force Delta staff was an ad hoc staff, semi-permanent, but was only in existence as long as the task force went out in the field.

Platt: Absolutely correct. It was formed for a specific operation, usually with the nucleus (after Operation Harvest

Moon) coming from an existing regimental staff and then it dissolved as soon as we finished the operation.

Shulimson: One question, you mentioned that for Operation Utah, I believe General English was Task Force Delta commander at that time.

Platt: No, for Operation Utah I was the task force commander.

Shulimson: You were still the Task Force Delta commander?

Platt: That was my last operation. I was still the ADC.

Frank: It has been suggested that the reason for the task force organization was that, since it had a Marine general commander, we'd get the ARVN generals out in the field. Is this a valid view?

Platt: I don't believe that that was the reason, per se. I think the situation lent itself to the formation of a task force staff.

I do think it helped. I think that it did contribute toward the end that you described and in fact, it culminated in Utah with General Lam moving his command post so that it was co-located with my command post, which I thought was ideal. He left his permanent CP in Quang Ngai, took his staff (as did I from Chu Lai). We went to a hill just north of the river by Quang Ngai which we called colloquially "Buddha Hill." His 3 and my 3, his 2 and my 2 and so forth, were a matter of feet apart; it was a real coordinated USMC-ARVN

operation.

I think it is safe to say that having a Marine general go to the field did contribute to what I consider to be a very desirable idea, the co-location of Vietnamese and Marine staffs.

Frank: What was your personal relationship with General Lam?

Platt: Excellent. It was not only a good relationship during the actual operations that we conducted, but in between as well.

I recall early in my tour, very early in my tour at Chu Lai, I received an invitation to play tennis with him in Quang Ngai. Nobody had asked me to play tennis in World War II or Korea. Quite frankly, I didn't know how to handle the invitation. I asked General Walt and he said, "Go, by all means."

I might add that General Lam was a far better tennis player than I was.

Frank: Where did you get the tennis gear from? Was that part of the rec supply or special services that the division had?

Platt: Yes, we scrounged them from one place or another. As a matter of a little color, I went down there with my aide and the best I could do for a tennis uniform was a rather bedraggled set of shorts and a rather bedraggled skivvy

shirt. But General Lam and a captain and a major (we played doubles) all showed up and looked as though they were dressed for the center court at Wimbledon.

Frank: Impeccably white? Did Lam come out of country with the fall of Viet Nam?

Platt: Yes, I think he is in California.

Frank: You haven't heard from him?

Platt: No, I have not.

Shulimson: Question; there was some question raised that you played tennis with General Lam--there were some Marines who didn't quite believe it. Did that become a regular ritual with you?

Platt: No, it was not a regular ritual at all. As a matter of fact, we only played that one time. I was, however, invited down to his house in Quang Ngai.

I remember Tet in early '66, the two regimental commanders and myself flew down to General Lam's headquarters for an evening party with him and his family, so to speak. Then later on, when I was chief of staff of III MAF and General Lam had become the I Corps commander, he lived in Da Nang with his family and I was asked to dinner at his house.

Frank: What impact did the extended task force search-and-destroy mission have on the units remaining in the base area in Chu Lai?

Platt: Well, what you might expect Ben, when you take battalions out of the line in a base defense situation, it has an impact on patrolling, on counter-guerilla operations, on civic action. They were just stretched thinner.

But as best I can recall, at no time did we have any major incidents because we did thin up the base defenses.

Frank: As a matter of interest, and I don't have too good a picture of it, just what was the layout of Chu Lai? What was the headquarters set up and so on?

Platt: Basically, it was a perimeter defense, an extended perimeter defense of the airfield. We had the 7th Marines on the south with three battalions, and the 4th Marines on the north with two battalions. We had an artillery group, largely located west of the airfield. We had a heliocopter group and a fixed-wing group. There were about 11,000 men involved as I recall.

Frank: What kind of facilities were they, just tent and decking, or were there some deep bunkers or some well built houses?

Platt: As far as the regiments and the ADC command group were concerned, we lived under canvas, strong-backed tents. The wing units lived in somewhat better facilities and I think that was probably pretty logical. As I recall, they

had quite a few wooden buildings by the time I left.

Frank: And your supplies came in from where?

Platt: They came in at the Ky Ha landing; matter of fact, that was a source of some concern because we only had one LST slot down there and we had quite a problem keeping, sometimes, keeping that lifeline open. We were totally dependent on LST resupply and on C-130 resupply. At that time, we were not using Route 1 to bring supplies down from Da Nang area to Chu Lai. That was a source of major concern.

Frank: How did the search-and-destroy affect the pacification effort in this area?

Platt: First, Chu Lai wasn't a heavily populated area, as was Da Nang. We didn't have that many civilians in that area. Certainly, when we had a search-and-destroy operation, it would thin out your counter-guerrilla effort as well as your civic action effort, but it still went on.

What we tried to do during the time I was there, was maintain a balance between the two. The search-and-destroy operations were conducted only when there was good intelligence that such an operation would be worthwhile.

Frank: What degree of success did they have?

Platt: Moderate. I think it depends on how you measure success. In Harvest Moon, we went where no U.S. troops had been before. We went into an area where the town of

Que Son had been surrounded for a long time, where the outposts at Viet An were surrounded and about to be consumed by the VC.

In terms of demonstrating to the VC that we could go into areas where they had long held sway, I think it that valley south of Que Son (which incidentally, we used B-52 strikes on for the first time during the war) General Ky personally told me to be very, very careful because the VC had been hidden in there for a long time.

Going on to Double Eagle I, we operated on the corps boundary between I Corps and II Corps and it had long been felt that the corps boundaries were sanctuaries for the VC.

So to the extent that we showed the South Vietnamese who lived there that we could go into those areas with impunity, we considered that to be a measure of success.

The only one of the four operations where we really had a major confrontation with main force units, was Utah. In the others, they were gone by the time we got there.

Frank: Of the intelligence that you did get, what percentage of it was accurate enough for you to act on? In the action that you took, what percentage proved positive?

Platt: My belief was that the intelligence that we had was good at the time we got it, but it didn't last very long. I felt very strongly, as you can hear on my original tape that was taken just as I left Viet Nam, that the way to conduct search-and-destroy operations was to make sure first that

you had hard intelligence, and then move, and move right then. No long planning phase, no long deliberate process for the operation or you were going to have a dry well. I believe that was true.

In Utah, we got the intelligence one night and we landed the next morning. And we did have a major battle as a result of it.

But even though the intelligence you got was accurate, I also believe their counter-intelligence effort was pretty good. Any operation that depended on a long, drawn-out planning phase, in my opinion, was doomed to failure.

Frank: What source, intelligence source, was your most accurate?

Platt: The one in Utah was a defector. General Lam's people got him and it was good intelligence. I think was the 21st NVA and we moved and practically landed right on top of their CP. we tried to encircle them and admittedly they did slip away. There were a lot less of them that slipped away than there were when we got there.

Shulimson: That seems to be the story of these operations. You have them encircled during the night and somehow they get out of there.

Platt: It's pretty hard to totally encircle somebody, particularly in terrain that they know very well.

Frank: Were you in a position of being intelligence rich

and information poor? Did you have such a mass of intelligence thrown at you that you were unable to evaluate it in a timely, appropriate, and effective fashion? This is a perception I have in talking to some of the other people, that you just have these sophisticated intelligence sources using sophisticated equipment and that as General Nickerson called it, it was really fragile. As you indicated, it broke down; it wasn't timely by the time you could evaluate it and make good use of it.

Platt: Also, I think the point is that even though it was good intelligence, unless you reacted very quickly to it, it became non-intelligence; they were gone. But there were very many sources of intelligence and, as you say, an awful lot of it.

I think there were some instances where the intelligence was probably excellent at the time it was received. The degree to which you could exploit it depended on how fast you could act.

Frank: This next question was what we were discussing coming back from lunch regarding Operation Double Eagle. There was some initial confusion over task command relations between the amphibious force commander and the Task Force Delta.

As CG Task Force Delta, why were you not the commander of the landing force and why was the SLF commander in charge?

Shulimson: Might as well go to the next question, which was "Were you physically on board ship for the operation, or

did you arrive in the objective area directly from Chu Lai?"

Platt: I was not physically on board ship when I went directly to the objective area from Chu Lai by heliocopter the morning the operation took place.

This was a conscious decision. I think it has to be looked at in the context of the scenario for the operation.

In the first place, you had the Chu Lai base coordinator role which meant to me that a prolonged absence from Chu Lai was not necessarily worth it.

Secondly, there were a number of preliminary operations that took place. We helo lifted an artillery battery into Batho, the Special Forces outpost. We also conducted an extensive reconnaissance effort using small teams rather than platoons.

Also, the beaches were such that they were totally And it was our belief that for the landing to be successful, if there was any significant opposition, that hill had to be seized prior to H-hour. We sent in a reinforced company from the 2nd Battaltion, 4th Marines to take that hill prior to the landing.

Another consideration was there were two ARVN outposts in the objective area. There were also significant numbers of civilians in the objective area.

In balancing all those factors, it appeared to me that the best course was to let the SLF commander handle the landing of two out of the four battalions that were involved and for me to remain in Chu Lai and go down the day the

operation took place.

I did go to Subic Bay with the staff prior to the operation for a pre-operation conference with the amphibious task force commander.

I think it's important to keep in mind that we were not landing on a hostile shore; we were landing in an area where there were friendly troops, both Marine and ARVN, and that in consideration of that, it just didn't seem to be as useful to me to go off for a prolonged stay aboard ship as it was to stay in the area, to say nothing of keeping up with the latest intelligence and latest developments that might happen.

Shulimson: As I recall, the weather played a role in delaying giving command of the operation.

Platt: It certainly did. We had heavy surf, we had bad weather, and the over-the-beach operation took a lot longer than we anticipated. I was in the area, I stayed in the area with a small staff. It took us time to build up our communication capability to the point where we could take over.

However, I did have an understanding with the SLF commander that in the event of an emergency, I would take over operations ashore.

It worked; it wasn't as smooth as it should have been particularly, I think, because of the sea conditions. But I still believe it was the right decision at the time.

Shulimson: The SLF commander remarked in his command chrono-

logy, I believe it was Colonel John Burnett, that there was some artificiality to command relations. He "had supposedly control of the landing force but in actuality, you were providing advice as to disposition of units and troops."

Platt: Yes, that's true. I was right there on the beach, from a few hours after H-hour on. I had minimal difficulty with communicating with the battalion commanders, so I guess it's proper for Colonel Burnett to have said that there was some artificiality, but again, I think there was considerable artificiality in all the amphibious operations that took place. in Viet Nam. Artificiality is measured by the classic idea of landing on a hostile beach.

Shulimson: Would you discuss the overall relationship between III MAF, the SLF, CGFMFPac on the use of the SLF and any problems that arose over the use of the SLF in country.

Frank: Let me just ask a quickie before you answer that. For matter of information, how long was the flight between Subic and Chu Lai?

Platt: The flight between Subic and Chu Lai? Oh, I think a couple of hours, but that was a fixed-wing trip then. I went down there and stayed and then came back. But the flight by helicopter from Chu Lai to the amphibious objective area was very short.

Frank: Now I just wondered what kind of ease you had flying

between Chu Lai and Subic for conferences.

Platt: It was a long time ago, I can't recall. It didn't seem to me that it was particularly troublesome.

The SLF problem--I think perhaps the best comments on that are the result of the conference that was held on Okinawa soon after Double Eagle I.

The SLF was primarily used for raids, for reinforcement, for administrative landings. And there problems connected with it. I don't say that the answer we had on Double Eagle was perfect by any stretch of the imagination.

One thing that I do recall that came as quite a shock to me later on was that in Saigon they were actually issuing NOTAMS about the amphibious objective area. These NOTAMS advised pilots, including commercial pilots, not to go in that area. I would strongly suspect that the other side knew about this through the NOTAM device. Again, this reinforces my idea that the deliberately staged, long-planning phase operation in the Vietnam environment was not a very good idea.

Frank: General Simmons commented on this in his writeup for the Naval Review in one of the issues that he wrote about regarding Vietnam. He said that many people in MACV and perhaps on the III MAF staff looked at these SLF landings and the preparations as a ritual dance type of thing that the Marines had to go through, and it was this, rather than having any further meaningfulness.

Platt: I think that that is kind of a drastic viewpoint. I certainly wouldn't call it a "ritual type dance." In some instances, they were very useful. But there was a certain amount of artificiality surrounding it in the classical sense.

Frank: There is a lot of artificiality surrounding the whole Viet Nam war as a matter of fact.

Platt: And you had to adapt your tactics to the situation you found.

Shulimson: There was a difference however, between the way FMFPac viewed the way that the SLF should be used or in the pristineness of amphibious doctrines as opposed to III MAF, would you say?

Platt: I would say from firsthand experience that FMFPac disapproved of the way Double Eagle I was handled, in terms of my being on the beach. So to the extent that that indicates controversy, yes.

As I recall, didn't they have a conference on Okinawa which Johnny Chaisson went to immediately following Double Eagle I to pound out some agreed principles on the use of the SLF.

So I would bow to the result of that conference rather than my personal memories. But there was controversy, yes.

Frank: Was there a feeling of envy or jealousy on the part of III MAF Marines towards the SLF Marines, that they came

in, did the job, then they went back to cushy billets aboard ship or went back to Okinawa or went back to Subic?

Platt: Certainly, Ben, I recall no such attitude. It may have existed on lower echelons, but I have absolutely no memory of any resentment like that at all. They were Marines and we were glad to have them.

Frank: Then the staff and the commanders that you knew viewed the staff as a very positive thing?

Platt: Yes, providing it was employed where it would pay off.

Frank: As chief of staff of III MAF, what were your functions and how was your relationship with General Walt and the rest of the staff? Of course, you and General Walt have had a long-term relationship in the sense that your knowledge of each other and friendship go way back.

Platt: My functions were that I think of a typical chief of staff. My role in support of General Walt went sort of like this--General Walt, as you know, spent a great deal of time in the field visiting Marine units, visiting ARVN units, visiting villages. So our modus operandi was that he would usually come in the CP early in the morning, I would personally brief him about the highlights of the night's activities, then we would go to a staff briefing at which the division commanders and wing commanders were present plus certain members of their staff. Then General Walt would leave. He

would come back fairly late.

He did allow me to go out one day a week, so I wouldn't totally lose touch with reality while I was in Da Nang. Excellent relationship. Staff relationships were excellent. I can honestly recall nothing but just good relationships, there were no problems with any bad staff relationships at all.

Frank: Did it seem like General Walt thrived in this environment, in this atmosphere, that he was doing what he had been destined to do?

Platt: Well, I certainly think that he thrived in the atmosphere. I think he understood the war and did a superb job at it.

I might add a footnote to the chief of staff's functions. In those days, we were at times inundated with visitors: senators, congressmen, movie stars, John Wayne, I might add, who was a delightful guest. One of the functions, not a big one, was to see that the guests were adequately handled when they came to Da Nang.

Frank: Briefly describe the facilities at Da Nang. Was it sort of a permanent establishment? I know General Tompkins was quite critical of what he called the "Marine Tail" out in Viet Nam. He said there was too much of a tail, too much of a logistics and administrative tail. Did you find this to be the case in Da Nang?

Platt: Well, there were two command posts. The first one

was basically the original one, which were French barracks on the west side of the airfield. We were co-located with the 1st Marine Airwing. That was crowded and generally inefficient. We needed a better command post than we had.

Then we moved over to the east side of the river and took over the old ARVN 2nd Division command post. That was a rather elaborate installation. Whether it was too elaborate or not can be debated, but given the nature of the war and the job, I think it probably facilitated the staff functioning to live in better surroundings than we had when we were first crowded with the 1st Marine Airwing.

Frank: What kind of setup did General Walt have there? A bungalow?

Platt: General Walt had a house on the beach, I don't know as I would call it a "bungalow." He also had quarters that he could use right in the III MAF compound. I think the house on the beach served a pretty useful purpose considering the pressures on him to get away from the command post at night. I thought it was a good idea.

Frank: Did the rest of you have these trailers or did you have houses?

Platt: We lived in buildings. The CP was constructed by the Seabees. There were buildings which augmented the existing buildings. The offices were by and large for the main part of the staff in the old 2nd ARVN Division CP rehabilitated. There were a lot of other buildings that were built

for the staff.

Frank: Can you discuss the differences between III MAF and MACV over such matters as battalion days in the field, Marine pacification efforts, and any other sources of discontent between the two commands?

Platt: Well, I think a great deal has been written and said about the fact there was a strong belief on the part of the Marines that providing security, ever-expanding security to the populated areas, was the answer to the war that we were faced with.

We conducted search-and-destroy operations against main force units at such time as we had good intelligence and they would prove to be productive. I think, that at least--I didn't believe that the criterion of, let's see, how did they put it, "man-days in the field" was necessarily a good yardstick to measure the progress in that war.

I think that "controversy" is a pretty strong term. I think there were some distinct differences in philosophy as to how to go about the war. I don't think there was, in the other corps areas, quite as deep seated belief in the value of civic action and counter-guerrilla operations and protection of the populated areas as existed in I Corps.

Frank: One of the incongruities of the Vietnam war is that constant search for a measurement of success, man-days in the field, body count, and so on, number of patrols out per unit, etc. What is your philosophy on this? What do

you feel should have been the measurement by which we indicate success or failure?

Platt: I certainly think that we were overwhelmed with statistical indices that purportedly measured progress or lack of progress. I think that the systems analysts were overwhelming us with their search for the measurement of success.

I'm not sure exactly what the correct measurements were for success. But I certainly don't think that they lay in the area of an overwhelming impetus to gather statistics. I think it was almost self-defeating. That's my personal view.

Shulimson: Well, to go a bit further on that; one Marine officer on the MACV staff mentioned that the Marines were being measured against the battalion days in the field and were coming out looking poor. He suggested that perhaps at Phu Bai the Marines should begin giving all the operations there operational names. He said, "It might be a little dishonest but it was a statistical war and we had to realize that."

I noticed suddenly in May there was an increase in Marine operations at Phu Bai and General Westmoreland remarked "I'm delighted to see the Marines beginning more aggressive actions." Do you have any comment?

Platt: I can't recall that incident. I strongly suspect it happened after I left. Remember, I was out there pretty

early. However, I think whether it is true or not, it certainly indicates how you can come to the position where you worship the statistics rather than what should be going on, and what is going on. Self-defeating in some respects.

Frank: Did you feel that there was an overwhelming requirement, almost an insuperable requirement, laid on you from higher command to provide reports of many types that was almost self-defeating again?

Platt: Well, there certainly was a very sizeable requirement and it required a big staff to keep up with it. I would say to those who criticized the large headquarters, that in order to keep up with the information demands that were placed on III MAF you had to have a large staff. Otherwise, you didn't respond, and if you didn't respond, then all hell broke loose.

Frank: Along with this large staff and large supporting establishment, did this affect battalion days in the field, and maybe fox hole strength of the combat units?

Platt: I don't recall that it did. I don't think that anybody was robbing the battalions in order to build up their headquarters. Certainly if you got into a circumstance where the T/O headquarters was inadequate to cope with realities of that particular situation, then you were forced to build up your headquarters.

Now in some instances, it may have been done

too much. But I think that there was a pretty decent balance between the two.

Shulimson: I have a further question on the difference between MACV and III MAF and perhaps even going a little bit beyond that--General Krulak was not in the direct operational chain of command. But yet, obviously he had some influence over General Walt. General Walt was directly responsible to General Westmoreland.

It's quite clear that General Krulak and General Westmoreland had very different philosophies on how the war should be fought....

End Tape 1, Side 1

Side 2, Tape 1

Shulimson: ...again, perhaps emphasizing the fact that General Krulak emphasized the civic action aspects, the slow expansion of the TAORs, and keeping search-and-destroy to a minimum with the exception of reacting to very hard intelligence.

Platt: Well, I think there was no doubt in General Walt's mind that we were working for General Westmoreland. I think what you refer to as a sympathy for General Krulak's views about expanding the populated areas, and going after the guerrillas was what General Walt believed, too. So to that degree, there was certainly empathy in that that was the right way to go about it, to try and keep a balance between

search-and-destroy operations and counter-guerrilla operations, and civic action, and defending the bases.

That's what we endeavored to do, the whole time that I was there.

Shulimson: Well, the way that the orders were written, it seems that the directives were all-encompassing. You tried to do everything. You think you tried to do too much?

Platt: Well, I thought, fairly early on, that we did not have the resources that were necessary to get the job done right. I didn't articulate that in terms of the staff, but I think it became pretty obvious pretty early in the war that we were not going to be given the essential resources necessary to carry out all the things we were supposed to do. I said that then, and I still believe it. I guess that is about the best way that I can answer that question.

I was asked in a private session, off the record, did I believe the war was going to be won? My answer to that was that that question best be asked back in Washington, not out in Vietnam.

Shulimson: What would have been the resources that would have been required?

Platt: I never made any hard estimate, but certainly it was more than we had to do what we were charged with doing.

Frank: Matter of strategy as well as the resources?

Platt: Certainly, it was a matter of strategy as well as resources. Such things as going north of the DMZ, to bomb or not to bomb, things that were way above our level in the III MAF. Looking at it purely from the III MAF perspective with the missions that were assigned to us, and the extent of the real estate involved, it was obviously going to be a very long war. We obviously, I don't think, had adequate resources to bring it suddenly to a quick solution.

Frank: Getting on, what problems arose, if any, when the 1st Division arrived in country?

Platt: I can recall no problems at all, Ben. They came in by stages. As I recall, it was a pretty smooth process.

Frank: Jeff Fields arrived with the first echelon?

Platt: No.

Shulimson: I think the 7th Marines and the 1st Marines....

Platt: The 7th Marines, of course, were there early on in Operation Starlite. The 1st Marines came in and he came in with the third regiment and the rest of the division.

It was just about ... shortly after I went up as chief of staff of III MAF, which was in March of '66.

Frank: Did the difficulties between Jeff Fields and Lou Walt arise shortly after Jeff Fields arrived in country? As chief of staff, III MAF, you must have been aware of the controversy between the two.

Platt: I don't think it was a major controversy.

Frank: Niggling matters?

Platt: I don't know what "niggling matters" were, but it certainly did not interfere with the prosecution of the war.

Shulimson: You think there were just personal problems between the two men?

Platt: I don't think they saw eye-to-eye on everything. I'm not so sure that General Fields saw eye-to-eye with the chief of staff of III MAF on everything.

Frank: You had your problems with him?

Platt: We just didn't totally agree all the time. I can't recall it as major problems; I think that would be inclined to be making mountains out of molehills. It wasn't that significant.

Frank: It got blown up enough to go up to General Krulak and later on, to General Greene, who got involved with it.

Platt: Well, you are operating from more knowledge than I have, then.

Frank: Okay, I thought you might have known, you being on the ground. What was your personal role during the spring political controversy in I Corps? I guess that was the time of the Buddhist uprising?

Platt: Different.

Frank: What impact did the crisis have on Marine operations and planning during this period? John Chaisson got pretty much personally involved during that time, didn't he?

Platt: Well, again, let's go back to the way we operated. General Walt and Johnny were the field troops and I was minding the store. That was a very interesting period. What can you say about a situation where your allies are fighting each other?

Sometimes I thought my leading role during those days was den mother for Vietnamese generals. At one time, I was host to four of them in the CP, at the same time.

It started out with General Dien, as you know, was the recently-appointed corps commander to relieve General Thuan. When the South Vietnamese marines landed at Da Nang, General Dien evacuated, in fact he thought they were going to try to kill him, and came posthaste to the III MAF CP; that was our first guest.

Then shortly after that, General Thuan, who as I recall, headed up the revolutionary development effort in South Vietnam, showed up in the CP. And then General Cao took over as CG of I Corps, which always intrigued me because he was a profound Catholic and he was put in to cope with a Buddhist insurrection. So that looked like a stacked deck in the beginning. He took refuge in the III MAF CP and also said his life had been threatened. So we had a rather interesting dinner table in the CP for quite a long period of time.

Frank: How long is a long period of time?

Platt: Ben, I can't remember; it just seemed terribly long at the time. It was days, maybe even weeks.

Shulimson: It would go up and down. There would be a period when someone would be in there for a couple of weeks.

Platt: General Thuan didn't stay long.

Shulimson: I think the one that took Thuan's place stayed the longest and seemed to be getting things under control. Then something occurred again and he went out. It was a mixmaster. I just wrote about it about six months ago, and I still can't remember who was who.

The Marines seemed to have a sympathy for the original I Corps commander, General Thi, who was ousted by General Ky. Would you comment on General Thi?

Platt: I don't think I'm the best source to ask about General Thi; I certainly met him. During Double Eagle I he came down and Lowell English and I took him on a jeep ride down U.S. 1 in areas where he hadn't been for years. I took him by helicopter into an area where he had been a prisoner. Going back to Harvest Moon, I had some brief contacts with him.

He impressed me as being a very professional guy in the soldiering department.

Frank: Ky is the one who got rid of him?

Platt: I'd be a little careful about the "sympathy" for Ty. I think III MAF very properly and very well walked a pretty fine line during the whole Buddhist rebellion and that was an extremely difficult thing. I think General Walt handled it masterfully.

So maybe a personal sympathy, but I wouldn't translate that necessarily into a political sympathy.

Frank: Professional respect more than....

Platt: Certainly. And when the Marines first went up there, from everything that I've learned he was extremely helpful and very cooperative.

Going back to the Buddhist uprising, I can recall a couple of incidents. One, we were just at that time finishing up the new CP and we had the headquarters commandant, Colonel Palonis and a small group over there.

Frank: "Big Stoop."

Platt: Yes, "Big Stoop" who was in my battalion in Korea, and a wonderful guy.

They were bombed right on the periphery of the CP and it was getting to be a pretty delicate situation.

I went over there by helicopter one day and flew up the river at a very low altitude and it was rather unusual to see South Vietnamese forces on one side of the river, pointing their weapons at South Vietnamese forces on the other side of the river. It was extremely delicate.

Then there was an incident in Hue. When General Cao took over as the I Corps commander, General Walt very properly felt that the first thing he had to do was go out and visit his troops. That involved a visit to the 1st Division CP in Hue and the 2nd Division CP in Quang Ngai, and I guess that has been adequately recorded about our going to Hue, which was a very, very strange situation. When we came into the CP, the division commander was not there nor was the assistant division commander. to greet the Corps commander. Some lieutenant colonel, one of the G's on the staff, was the senior officer present. They had a full honor guard in the compound. General Cao went through that and we went up to the briefing room and you could slice the tension with a knife. Part way through the briefing, General Cao turned to me and said "Let's leave now" and we left. The honor guard was still there, the band was still there and he went past them very rapidly. The army helicopter that brought us up there was in the compound. General Cao went to that helicopter at a very rapid rate.

About that time, a large crowd of people flooded into the compound and the Vietnamese soldiers in the honor guard--guards and so on--made absolutely no move to check them and we were surrounded by a large and hostile crowd. One individual in the uniform of an ARVN lieutenant pulled his .45 and started shooting. He didn't hit anybody in the helicopter but he did put some holes in the bird.

When we got back to Da Nang, my function was to persuade

General Cao to continue on his command tour of the 2nd Division. He finally relinquished when I told him that General Lam was a very good friend and I'm sure his reception down there would be quite different. But he was rather nervous about the whole affair.

Shulimson: That's the time when the Army gunner in the helicopter killed the man shooting the .45.

Platt: Yes, he was killed. I don't think we had any choice; the man was firing at pointblank range.

Shulimson: General Nguan was the first ARVN division commander who was conveniently ill at strategic points.

Platt: I think that when that lieutenant finally had a funeral in Hue, something like 15,000 people turned out for the funeral. It became quite an incident.

Frank: He was a Buddhist?

Platt: Evidently.

Frank: Why was III MAF, if it was, reluctant to believe the intelligence it received relating to an enemy buildup in the north, and what time was this Jack?

Shulimson: This was during early winter and spring of '66. There is a difference in the perception of how MACV perceives the intelligence of the enemy buildup in the north and the way III MAF does. III MAF reluctantly builds up Phu Bai; it does not as quickly add to its order of battle regimental

strength units as MACV does. There is a comment there where General Westmoreland at one point in April asks General Walt if he has any reason to doubt MACV's figures. General Walt states that "Well, we just haven't found them in any of our reconnaissance operations; if they're there, they are across the border."

Platt: We certainly had extensive Stingray operations and reconnaissance operations going on in that area. Of course, the first time that we sent, I can't remember the dates as it was a long time ago, Jack, when we sent a battalion into Khe Sanh and they marched to the sea, spoiling for a fight the whole way and not a round was fired. (Interviewee's note: 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, March 1966, Operation Virginia.)

Shulimson: "Ding-dong" Bell.

Platt: "Ding-dong" Bell. I think that influenced our evaluation, certainly. I don't recall a single contact and the reconnaissance outfits, as I recall, were not coming up with any hard intelligence. So given that, I think that's kind of a basis for an honest difference of opinion. That's really the extent of my memory of it.

I remember being very impressed with the fact that "Ding Dong" Bell never got into a fight.

Frank: Was that 4th Marines?

Shulimson: No, he had the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. He was under the 4th Marines.

Platt: I flew in to see him several times, and they were totally frustrated.

Shulimson: Bell in his comments also remarked that he believed the Special Forces commander never had really gone out and patrolled and was giving false ... was relying on paid informers rather than hard intelligence. which may very well have been the case.

Platt: There were indications, and as best I can recall, we always followed through with a recon effort in an effort to pin them down. You were asking to shift sizeable forces from protection of populated areas into an unpopulated area and I think there was an understandable reluctance to do that unless you were absolutely sure that it was worthwhile.

Shulimson: You are basically stating what General Chaisson remarked in his interview.

Platt: I never read anything about what Johnny said. I wish he were still around so that I could.

Frank: Did MACV seriously consider going to the A Shau after the base fell?

Shulimson: This is immediately after the base fell. Two battalions were brought up to Hue with the possibility of going in. Now, 1/1, Bell's battalion ... I don't think he had it then, I think Hatch had it....

Platt: What was the date? My knowledge of A Shau is very,

very sketchy. I have ... I think that happened while I was back in Honolulu on R and R. I think I came in very late in the game and I'm not a good source for A Shau.

Frank: One of the unique occurrences during this period, was a situation in which Lieutenant Colonel House (who commanded the helicopter evacuation operation of the Special Forces base) was awarded both the Navy Cross and a letter of reprimand for his actions. Can you commment on this?

Platt: I can shed no light on that at all, Ben.

Frank: I think Marion Carl was involved with this situation.

Platt: He'd be a much better source. I honestly don't remember. The best I can recall, A Shau took place when I was back in Honolulu for a short R and R. Maybe it was still going on.

Shulimson: It was March of '66.

Platt: That was when I was gone.

Frank: Joe, would you describe the Marine pacification and civic action effort in I Corps, the extent of it, its successes, its failures?

Platt: Well, an awful lot's been written on that. I don't know how much I could really add to it.

Frank: I think you were questioned on it in the Russ interview.

Platt: There is an awful lot on it in the other tapes. Also, I think there is some on the tape they took just as I left. I could always refer you to my September 1970 article in the Marine Corps Gazette.

But I think that like any program, it had success and failure; but I think certainly it was well-conceived, and an awful lot was done to make it a success. The Revolutionary Development Council, CAC platoons, the County Fairs, so much has been written about all that.

I think perhaps, in thinking over that question, the only thing that I believe we learned as time went on, was that the best type of civic action is to make sure that the people have a need for it and the people actually do it. In other words, not having the Marines go in and build the school or the Marines go in and repair the bridge; but provide the materials and perhaps the impetus. The most successful projects were those that the Vietnamese themselves were heavily involved in.

But I think we learned that during the time that I was out there. I am not saying that I had anything to do with it; I am just saying that that was sort of an evolutionary process. Originally, I think we were doing too much, rather than have them do it.

Frank: Can you discuss the impact of the NVA thrust into the DMZ on III MAF plans, organizations and resources. This was when?

Shulimson: This was in July, beginning of Hastings/Prairie.

Platt: Well, I think it is pretty evident. We moved the 1st Division to Da Nang, the 3rd Division to Phu Bai, and we shifted our whole weight up to the north. The impact of course, was that that was that much less we could do in heavily populated areas. Perhaps that is exactly why they did it, the Vietnamese. But the impact is pretty obvious.

Frank: It called for a reaction, a definite reaction from III MAF.

Platt: Oh, absolutely, or the troops would not have been deployed that way.

Shulimson: A question that has arisen; there had been some talk that the Army headquarters, Army Pacific Headquarters, on the possibility of a strike force, an Army strike force, and Westmoreland was playing with the idea of the possibility of an Army strike force that could be either stationed within country and/or on Okinawa that could be deployed in an emergency or to key areas. Do you think it would have been feasible to use such a force in the north along the DMZ, rather than taking the Marines out their enclave areas, so to speak?

Platt: I have no memory of that. I do have a memory, albeit rather vague, of some talk about a combined force with Canadians and Australians, the "Canzus Concept".

Shulimson: Yes, that came later; this was before that.

It was very vague, nothing came of it. I was just wondering if you thought that could be a more feasible solution than taking the Marines out of Da Nang and Chu Lai enclaves? And Phu Bai? And using the Army to fight?

Platt: I don't know. Obviously, there would have been additional resources, that is self-evident. But whether it would have been better to put them in the south and echelon of Marines to the north or leave the Marines in place around Da Nang, Phu Bai and Chu Lai and use the Army in the north. I think you sort of have to make a subjective guess on it. I don't have any strong feelings on it.

Shulimson: There was a feeling that there was sort of a beginning of optimism at Da Nang before the thrust in the north; that Operation Liberty had ended about the beginning of July and it was felt that perhaps they were on the right track. Do you recall?

Platt: I think we thought that we were on the right track based on the tape that I made in November of 1966. I think we felt we had a long way to go but that we were headed in the right direction. None of this corny "light at the end of the tunnel" or anything.

One of the very heartening things was the real top level support we were getting for the Revolutionary Development Program from General Lam and his chief of staff, Colonel Nghi.

Up until the time General Lam took over as the corps commander, the I Corps coordinating council was pretty heavy in Marine Corps senior officers, the Army advisor and Tom Weschler, the Navy admiral that was there. But usually the Vietnamese representation was pretty far down the staff of I Corps. When General Lam came over, his chief of staff actually started to attend those meetings. In that area in particular, we felt optimistic because we thought we had convinced the top leadership of the necessity for the ARVN supporting that Revolutionary Development program.

Frank: Who was this, Colonel Nghi?

Platt: Colonel Nghi. I don't know whatever happened to him, but he was a very, very helpful man as General Lam's chief of staff.

Frank: He has been spoken of very highly. Final question on this Viet Nam portion; what is your overall impression of the III MAF conduct of the war during your tour?

Platt: Well, I think we were headed in the right direction, that our concept was basically sound, and I also think that we needed more resources to carry it to a successful conclusion. But I certainly subscribe to the way we were going about fighting that war.

Shulimson: Would you have changed any of the command relationships that we had; would you have made a unified command with the South Vietnamese?

Platt: No, I don't think I would have. I think the idea was that the South Vietnamese eventually would have to stand by themselves and I certainly think a unified command would not have facilitated that goal. I think the idea of our support, our encouragement, a coordinated effort again going in my own experience, the idea of co-located command posts between General Lam and General Platt. Rather than have General Platt tell General Lam "You send your first battalion over here." That's no way to build independent capabilities on their part.

So my answer is no, I don't think a unified command would have been the right thing to do nor do I think it would have worked.

Frank: Do you think that the conduct of the war suffered because the United States forces had to be sensitive to the sensitivities of the Vietnamese instead of running it and directing it, prosecuting it to its fullest and when it was done, to get out.

Platt: I think it would have suffered more if we hadn't been. One of our problems, and I'm using "our" in a broad context, was not being sensitive enough.

Frank: Was this effect of the Americans trying to run the war without consultation or giving lip service to Vietnamese cooperation?

Platt: I think that would have been the wrong way to prosecute

the war in terms of what, at that time, were ostensibly our goals.

Shulimson: In '66, according to the country plan that they were developing for '67, the idea was for the U.S. forces more or less to fight the large unit war and allow the South Vietnamese divisions to fight the pacification war. Do you think this was the right concept at this time?

Platt: At that time, I think it was. I think that one of the problems was to have the South Vietnamese forces show more empathy to their own people and understand that it was a proper function to provide the security for their people. Rather than, as some units did, I think, act in the warlord tradition.

The other side of that coin is that I think that some ARVN commanders were supposed to have said "You are not going to make RF/PF out of my troops." Which in itself is a revealing comment. It was trying to combat that attitude, I think, that that's why the Revolutionary Development concept was developed.

Shulimson: Do you think it should have been so exclusive that the U.S. fight the regular forces and the South Vietnamese....

Platt: I think there was room certainly for some South Vietnamese forces to fight the regular force, and I think that concept didn't provide room for that. The Marines, the air-

borne...I don't think it was intended to be a totally exclusive concept. The emphasis was changing, that's all. I think that was okay.

Interruption

Frank: You were saying that Moshe Dayan came out as a correspondent; he lived with you for awhile.

Platt: Yes, he was a correspondent for the Daily Telegraph. The London Daily Telegraph.

Frank: Jerusalem Daily?

Platt: No, no, London.

Frank: London, yes.

Platt: London Daily Telegraph. He made the point that he was working for a British newspaper. He was trying to find out about the war and the only problem that we had with him was that he wanted to go out on patrol. He wanted to go out on squad and platoon patrols. And General Walt just had to lay the law down. But he lived in the next room to me in Da Nang for oh, three or four days and my impression of him was that he was certainly a wonderful man.

I remember one night, coming back from the office rather late, (and we lived on the second deck of this barracks-like building and there was an outside ladder going up with a two by four frame around a little porch) and Moshe Dayan had done his own laundry and it was hanging out on the two

by fours, a very self-sufficient man. He made a wonderful impression on me.

Frank: There was some correspondence that John Chaisson--commenting on Moshe Dayan. Remember when you were copying that stuff? You told me there were some letters--correspondence.

Shulimson: Oh no, it wasn't from Dayan. I think this was from Rytan, the Israeli chief of staff. It wasn't correspondence with Chaisson. Apparently, they knew each other at Quantico. I don't think it had anything to do with Vietnam.

Frank: I'm sure he discussed the war with Dayan; what did he have to say about it?

Platt: I can't remember; I can just remember he had a hell of a lot of questions about it, but not taking a position himself. Just a great curiousity about the war--how we were fighting the war, particularly the small-unit level. He was just consumed with the idea of going out with small units.

Frank: You never let him go?

Platt: No, I think we let him go down as far as company CP and that's all.

Frank: This was before or after Dickey Chappell and Bernard Fall were killed?

Shulimson: It was probably after. It was after Dickey Chapell because that was very early.

Platt: I have a great memory of John Wayne coming out there.

Frank: Oh, what about him?

Platt: Well, usually when the VIPS were brought up from Da Nang, their planes were invariably late and I think Tom Fields, who had the CIB, was to meet John Wayne. John Wayne's plane showed up a half an hour early; not being met didn't phase him a bit. He just got out of the aircraft and walked to the nearest--it was in the morning--MAG enlisted tent and stuck his head in, and said "How about a beer?" The Marines said "A beer? We don't have any beer, Mr. Wayne." He said, "Oh come on, you guys." He was finally found sitting in there with couple of dozen Marines having a beer. He was a totally delightful guest.

Frank: What did he come out for, a show of some sort?

Platt: I don't know if he put on any shows in Da Nang; we had lunch with him. It was a very short visit.

Frank: Did Bob Heinl or Don Hittle or Bob Williams come out there when you were out there?

Platt: I cannot remember Bob Heinl or Bob Williams; I can definitely remember Don Hittle coming out; I think he came out with the head of the VFW. He went down to the Chu Lai area, where the 1st Division was.

Frank: He was largely instrumental in getting free postage for the military personnel in Vietnam.

Platt: I didn't know that.

Frank: Okay. Now we're going to go back in time and talk about your career as a whole, your early years. You are a native of Rhode Island?

Platt: Born in Brooklyn, New York; brought up in Rhode Island and Oklahoma.

Frank: We talked some time ago about another Jonas Platt in the Marine Corps, who was your uncle. Supposing you give some memoirs about him, some of your reminiscences.

Platt: He was my father's older brother, Jonas H. Platt. He was a newspaper reporter before the War, and he resigned from the newspaper and went into the Marine Corps. He went to France, he was in the Fifth Marines; I believe he was the sole survivor of a company in Belleau Woods. He was given the Navy Cross and the Army Distinguished Service Cross; badly wounded; reported dead. Spent a year in the hospital recovering from a severe leg wound. Got out of the hospital in Philadelphia. Shortly after he got out, he was hit in the same leg by a taxi and put back in the hospital for another year.

He stayed on active duty; he had a great deal to do, with the early days of Marine Corps public relations. In fact, I think somebody wrote a PhD thesis that he was sort

of the father of Marine Corps public relations.

He stayed in and was an aide to the commandant in about 1933 or 34. At that time--when he was in his early '40's--he got cancer and died here in the old Navy hospital on 23rd Street.

He left me his sword and it was through his will that I was able to go to college, so naturally, I grew up with a lot of adoration of my uncle and a rather unbridled enthusiasm for the Marine Corps. I wasn't sure how one went about being a Marine. I went to Norwich University in Vermont, which was an Army horse cavalry school. I was unsuccessful in getting into the Naval or Military Academy.

After two years, when I could have gotten an appointment to the Naval Academy, I elected to continue my college where I was, since I had two years invested in it.

When I graduated, I was commissioned in the Army Reserve. I was offered a Marine Corps commission, a direct commission in the regular Army (providing I waited until I was twenty-one to take it), or a direct appointment to West Point. I obviously took the best course and accepted the commission in the Marine Corps.

Frank: You were telling me before that you went out and lived with your uncle at Fort Sill when he was stationed there.

Platt: That was another uncle. He was a lieutenant colonel in the Army. My parents, knowing that I wanted to make

a career out of the military, together with my uncle decided that the best thing to do was to expose me to it. This was after my Marine uncle had died; so I went out there and lived for seven or eight months and came back with a still undimished enthusiasm for a military career.

Frank: You were twenty and a half when you were commissioned?

Platt: Yes.

Frank: You were in the class of '41 at Basic School?

Platt: Got out in February of '41, the first shortened class. Before that time, I think it had been an eight or nine months' course and I think that they shorted ours up.

Frank: You were still up at Philadelphia?

Platt: Still up at Philadelphia.

Frank: Who were some of your classmates who came to prominence in the Corps?

Platt: C.B. Drake was in the same squad with me; retired as a major general. E.E. Anderson who retired as a four-star general. Tony Antonelli who retired as a brigadier. Brooke Nihart who is the exec down here. Oh, lots of others.

Frank: You are going to have a reunion here I understand.

Platt: Yes, so I understand.

Frank: What was Basic School like?

Platt: Basic School was very heavy on close-order drill, how to wear and maintain a uniform, sea duty, very heavy on weapons. We fired every infantry weapon that was available. We did our field-firing at Indiantown Gap and our range firing at Cape May, New Jersey. Very, very short on tactics. In fact, I can only remember terrain walks in the park at Philadelphia.

Frank: Fairmount Park?

Platt: I think it had another name that wasn't so complimentary.

We were well-prepared in everthing but tactics. A contrast between the tactical instruction that we had and what was given right after World War II when I was on the Basic School staff and then just prior to Viet Nam, when I was CO of the Basic School was really remarkable. We do today and have for many years, a far better job of providing sound tactics instruction for our Basic School graduates.

I don't say that as necessarily being critical; I think it was more a concept of what a lieutenant was supposed to do and that they relied principally on his getting his tactics instruction if he went to the FMF.

Of course, pre-war, the predominant goal of the recently graduated from Basic School was to go to sea. That was the pattern. Basic School, sea, and then the FMF.

Frank: How would you compare your Basic School classmates; personalities, character, the milieu in which they lived with those of the Basic School students that you instructed and later commanded?

Platt: I think the more recent graduates are better than we were.

Frank: In what way?

Platt: Better educated, perhaps more aware of the world around them, more sophisticated, equally if not even more motivated. I was very impressed with the calibre of the Basic School student when I had it in '63 to '65.

I think a couple of other things are very different. Out of the 153 members of my Basic School claas, I think there were a grand total of three automobiles. No wives. Contrast that with the Basic School of today or recent years and that's a very remarkable difference. But that's just society at large.

Frank: Your Basic School class were Depression babies, in a sense. Not babies, but lived through the depression, had contact with people who were veterans of World War I. Certainly your attitudes and concepts must have been shaped by this.

Platt: Yes, and also I think $125 a month was a very, very healthy salary for those days, for a recent college graduate. Not to say that we were motivated by the money, but I don't

think that that was a negative motivation at all.

I think the procurement was interesting. Out of the 153 members of the class, there were 25 Naval Academy graduates; three former enlisted; one or two Navy ROTC; and the rest of us, of course, were all graduates of the Army's ROTC system which made the procurement of Marine second lieutenants very inexpensive indeed for the Marine Corps.

Frank: You didn't have to sell the Marine Corps to these people?

Platt: No! I think a number of us may have been rather ignorant about exactly what the Marine Corps was and what it did, but there was no question of selling it.

Frank: When you were out at Fort Sill, did you meet any of the Marine officers that were students out there?

Platt: No, I was in my third year of high school when I was at Fort Sill.

Frank: Tell me, who were some of the instructors that you remembered? Colonel Cates was CO of the Basic School at that time?

Platt: Colonel Cates was CO of the Basic School; Frank Goettge was the executive officer. Parenthetically, the latter was a very good friend of my uncle's.

Frank: You told me a story about that, when you were out on a machine gun drill.

Platt: Yes, he had no idea I guess, that I even existed. He came up and saw the "J.M.Platt" stenciled on the back of my utilities, and asked me what the "J" stood for. When I told him "Jonas" it almost literally shocked him. After that, he...I think I was in his quarters once and that was about my only contact with him. But I strongly suspected my assignment post-Basic School to a new battleship probably had a lot to do with Frank Goettge.

Frank: Who were some of the instructors?

Platt: Randolph Victory, Ray Crist....

End Side 2, Tape 1

Begin Tape 2, Side 1

Frank: Sam Puller was your platoon commander; you knew Chesty or saw Chesty later. What was Sam like in comparison? Was he trying to emulate his brother who had already achieved quite a reputation in the Marine Corps?

Platt: Well, that's been said before. I'm not necessarily sure it was valid. My memories of him are very good. I think he was a good platoon commander.

My most vivid memory is his telling a classmate of mine named Fred Frazier to shave his mustache off and put it in an envelope and bring it to him in his office, which almost caused Fred to leave the Marine Corps several weeks after he was commissioned. Nevertheless, he did shave the mustache and did bring it to him in an envelope in the office.

Frank: Goettge was a big man.

Platt: Very large man, and of course, a very famous Marine Corps football player.

Frank: 'Course, Hap Deakin was a Naval Academy graduate.

Platt: Yes.

Frank: In March, they sent you out on a recruiting duty; you were saying that this was something of an innovation.

Platt: I'm sure that it was the first time it was ever done, to send Basic School graduates directly to recruiting on temporary duty. The idea was to send us back to the areas from whence we came; I went back to New England. I didn't recruit at my alma mater, Norwich University, because it was an Army school. But I went to Rhode Island State, Yale, University of Connecticut, and Wesleyan.

We were given a corpsman and a Marine clerk, (in my case, a sergeant) and made three trips to each of those campuses. I think it was a very sound concept and it's one which we use today, because it was an easy way of overcoming the communication gap. I might say in three out of four campuses, recruiting was extremely easy. In Yale, as I recall, I tripled my quota with very high calibre people.

The only college where the welcome was not necessarily warm was Wesleyan, which, I think, reflected their attitudes toward national defense.

In contrast, at Yale I was welcomed by, I believe it was

the chancellor; we had tea together. I was given a huge office with beautiful furniture and wide publicity in the campus newspapers. And the same was true of Rhode Island State and the University of Connecticut, within their resources. But at Wesleyan, I was given a corner of the gymnasium and no publicity.

Frank: Did you go to Harvard at all, or M.I.T?

Platt: No, somebody else went there. We each had four schools, as I recall. There was no way that I could get from one school to another by rail or plane, obviously, and even by bus; so I was forced into buying a car. Given my reduced financial status, that was somewhat of a problem. But through the help of a fraternity brother, I managed to get a second-hand car, that is, the Bank of Quantico and I managed to get it; and I went through a succession in a matter of weeks of three second-hand cars and finally went out and hocked my soul for a blue Mercury convertible. It had a dark-blue top, light-blue body and white sidewalls, which was a very nice match with my blue uniform, which we wore all the time on this duty.

A number of years after I recruited at Yale, I was in the 1st Marine Division on Pavuvu and it was a Saturday night; I was at an adjacent battalion having a drink with a good friend. The officer of the day in that battalion came in to make a report to the battalion exec, and as he walked into the tent, dripping wet, yellow from atabrine, a veteran of Guadalcanal and Gloucester, he took one look at me and said,

"There's that son-of-a-bitch with the blue convertible."

Frank: You went aboard the Washington; I think Don Hittle had the detachment, didn't he?

Platt: No, William Bagley McKean had the detachment. Don was the first lieutenant and I was the second lieutenant.

Frank: You of course, were on some of those PQ convoys to Murmansk?

Platt: Yes, we weren't ever actually with the convoy. We always stayed in a position between the known or suspected location of the major German fleet units, specifically the Tirpitz, and the convoy. But we never went around the cape and actually went in.

Frank: You were aboard ship at the time the admiral was lost at sea?

Platt: That's correct.

Frank: Tell me about that.

Platt: Well, that was Rear Admiral Wilcox. We were going from Portland, Maine to Scapa Flow. Very heavy sea conditions, we were taking green water over Number One turret. They passed the word repeatedly for all hands to stay off the weather decks.

During this, the "man overboard" drill sounded and we reacted in the usual way. Made our report that nobody was

missing. We were told to go back and open up all the water-tight fittings and take a sight count of all our people that were on watch.

I remember going down into the lower handling rooms of the 5 inch 38 battery to actually count our people. This, of course, took time and when we finished this, we went back and again reported that everybody was present. Meanwhile, the Marine orderly was looking for the admiral to report to him that there was a man overboard, and of course, he couldn't find him. So eventually they assumed...well, to go back--I think our second search of the ship was based on an assumption that the admiral might have hidden himself, thrown a dummy overboard and was tesing us.

Then after that proved to be negative, why they surmised that the admiral had gone overboard. We went back to look for him and of course, didn't find him.

Frank: Someone actually had seen this body go overboard?

Platt: Yes. He was sighted from the USS Tuscaloosa, a cruiser that was directly astern of us in column. I don't believe that anybody from the Washington ever sighted him go overboard.

A friend of mine, a classmate, Walt Goodpasture, was on watch on the Tuscaloosa; he actually saw the person go by and was waving at the time. The person in the water. We went back of course and did not find him. When we got to Scapa Flow and HMS Manchester came out off Scapa Flow to

welcome us to the home fleet with a blinker signal, we had to signal back that Rear Admiral Wilcox was not aboard. Our British friends for months afterward would ask us to please explain how you lost an admiral overboard; they couldn't quite manage that.

Frank: Anyone every conjecture what happened?

Platt: I think there was conjecture, but I don't have knowledge of what the findings of the board were on it.

Frank: What were some of the experiences you had while on the Washington? I think there was one time some depth charges got loose from KGV?

Platt: Well, the King George V was the flagship of the home fleet and, of course, we were actually an integral part of the home fleet.

One time off Norway in a heavy fog the British destroyer screen was told to close on us. One of the destroyers closed in the fog and actually closed too much; the King George V cut her in half. The depth charges you referred to were those that were going off on the two halfs of the destroyer as they were passing down either the sides of the Washington--very tragic thing.

Frank: All hands lost aboard that destroyer?

Platt: I don't think all hands were lost. Many of the officers were because the collision was right in the ward-

room. I think most of them were lost.

Frank: The sight of a battleship-sized ship like the King George V coming at you....

Platt: Went through that destroyer like a hot knife through butter.

Rather interesting the way the Luftwaffe used to play games with us.

First, while we were in Scapa Flow between sorties the JU88's out of Norway would come over at maximum altitude to photograph. When we first got there, we went to general quarters every time one of them came over. The British found that rather laughable since the JU88's were thousands of feet higher than the maximum trajectory of our 5 inch 38 guns. They never did have a bombing raid on Scapa Flow while I was there. When we were underway on a sortie the large Focke-Wulf Condors would shadow us all the time. They seemed to have an uncanny knowledge of the slant range of the 5 inch 38 battery because they came right at us and a short distance beyond our maximum range, they would do a U-turn almost as though they were thumbing their nose at us. We never did get a shot at any of them.

Frank: Course this was...You were on convoy duty before the United States had ever gotten into the war.

Platt: No. March of '42 we were at war. The ship was actually in Norfolk on December 7, 1941.

Frank: Shaking down exercises and so on?

Platt: Yes, we were anchored at Hampton Roads actually, the date that the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

Frank: Now you were telling me an interesting story at lunch about getting married before your probationary time was over.

Platt: Navy regulations in those days stated that no regular second lieutenant or ensign could get married before he had two years of commissioned service, which was a regulation that I think with one or two exceptions was rather rigidly adhered to.

In my case, I never questioned it until we went to war, but I really didn't think the regulations served a very useful purpose during wartime. So I was married in the Philadelphia Navy Yard behind locked doors at the chapel. Very secretive. I didn't want to jeopardize my Marine Corps career. After the marriage, (and there were only four of us involved plus the chaplain) we went to the Officer's Club for breakfast.

Several members of the Basic School staff, including General Cates, were there at an adjacent table, which didn't help my blood pressure that much.

An aviator from the ship who had found out that I had gotten married came in with an armful of roses to give to my wife. I distinctly remember the members of the Basic School staff, including then-Colonel Cates, reversing their chairs so they wouldn't look at this incident. So nothing

was ever said about my being married.

Frank: Did you discuss this with any of them afterwards?

Platt: No, I never did. Interesting enough, there were five of us on that ship who ignored the rule against marriage. When Navy regulations were changed to permit marriage, we were in Scapa Flow and faced with a problem. Three of us made the decision that we were going to get married when we returned to the States. One of us, amazingly enough, got married by transatlantic telephone, by proxy.
marriage certificate; married again to the same girl.

But one of us, the late Rear Admiral Rod Middleton, went to his boss to seek his advice. His boss said "Oh, the Navy won't mind; you just own up to it." So while we were in Scapa Flow, he owned up to it. The Navy took away his commission (he was an Academy graduate) and gave him a reserve commission as a result of his being married. After the war, he was given his regular commission back and retired as a rear admiral.

Frank: Without loss of numbers?

Platt: I don't know whether he lost numbers or not. I suspect he did.

Frank: Where did the Washington go afterwards, or did it remain in the European theater for all this time?

Platt: We were with the home fleet from March of 1942 until July. We came back to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, had

some 20mm anti-aircraft guns put on, went through the Canal, and went to the Pacific where she remained until I got off.

Frank: You made first lieutenant in April of '42 and the next month you made captain?

Platt: Yes, I think I was a second lieutenant for twenty-two months, a first lieutenant for seventeen days, and a captain for a year. Made major about three months before my twenty-fourth birthday. Which had nothing to do with me; that was just the expansion.

Frank: At any time did you try to get off the ship before...

Platt: I'd say about four times. I didn't like the idea of spending the duration of World War II aboard a battleship.

At one time in Noumea, I thought I had a working arrangement to be transferred to the 1st Raider Battalion--direct transfer, but that fell through.

I put in for glider training; I put in for parachute training; I put in for flight training and finally in sheer desperation because of my anti-aircraft experience aboard ship, I put in for anti-aircraft artillery.

In each instance, Headquarters Marine Corps would write back and tell me my request would be considered upon completion of my tour of sea duty. Actually, I was accepted for flight training after completion of my tour of sea duty. I turned it down because at that time, I was a reasonably senior

major and I didn't think it was a very wise idea to go into Marine Corps aviation at that rank and fly wing on some second lieutenant.

See, the Marine Corps' personnel policy was very simple during the war. You went aboard your ship and you stayed aboard your ship until she was either sunk out from under you or she was heavily damaged. I was transferred off the Washington as a result of her being in a collision with the battleship Indiana.

We rated at the time--we were a flagship-three officers: a captain, a first lieutenant, and a second lieutenant and a hundred enlisted. When I left, I was a pretty senior major. My exec was a major and my junior officer was a captain and I believe I had one PFC in the entire organization and that was as a result of a disciplinary procedure.

Although we got promoted, we never got transferred.

Frank: What was the quality of the enlisted Marine in the detachment?

Platt: Excellent. They were for the most part, pre-World War II Marines. Sea duty was looked upon in those, pre-war days, as a very desirable assignment. In fact, in the old Navy regulations, if a ship pulled into a Navy yard and the Marine detachment commander wanted to transfer some of his people and take aboard new replacements, he could go into the CO of the Marine Barracks and literally commandeer people in exchange.

So as a result of those policies, we had a very high calibre of Marine. I might add that the bulk of them was just as anxious to be transferred to the Fleet Marine Force as I was.

Frank: Did a number of these Marines get commissioned?

Platt: Oh, yes, yes. Both first sergeants landed up as majors and there were a number of other instances of people being made temporary officers. Not while I was on the ship but subsequently.

Frank: That's what I understood, that a lot of these pre-World War II seagoing Marines did.

Platt: Yes, they were high quality.

Frank: In July, you wound up as commander of the detachment.

Platt: Yes, that's correct.

Frank: McKean and Don Hittle successfully....

Platt: Bill McKean was transferred before we went to join the home fleet and as soon as we returned to the Navy Yard in Brooklyn, in the summer of 1942, Don Hittle was transferred.

There I was with a Marine Detachment, as a captain at the tender age of twenty-two.

Frank: Did you get some more officers aboard?

Platt: Yes, for each of them there was a replacement.

Frank: And you wound up the CO?

Platt: Yes, well, they came in from the bottom.

Frank: Were these any of the people who stayed in?

Platt: Bob Knox was the first one. When Bill McKean left, Bob Knox came aboard. Then in New York when Don Hittle left, Ted Abbey came aboard. Bob, I think, stayed and retired after twenty and Ted Abbey I believe resigned after I don't know how many years. Last time I knew, he was still very active in the reserves.

Frank: Where did you go after you went out to the Pacific?

Platt: After going through the Canal, we went to Tongatabu initially. Then based out of Noumea. We went up to Guadalcanal at least three times and took part in the so called second battle of Savo Island in November of 1942.

We got to Noumea I'd say a month and a half or two months after the 1st Division landed on Guadalcanal. After that, we participated in the Tarawa operation; we participated in the bombardment of Naru on our way back to the southwest Pacific; we participated in the Kwajalein invasion.

It was just after the bombardment of Kwajalein that we collided with the battleship Indiana; lost 98 feet of our bow and the ship was sent back to the Bremerton Navy Yard. I left her in Honolulu.

After that, I went directly to Command and Staff School at Quantico, which was the abbreviated three and a half to

four months course. It was sort of like the corny old expression "getting a drink of water out of a fire hose."

The class consisted largely of veterans of Guadalcanal and Tarawa and then a dozen or more ex-seagoing Marines.

Frank: Defense battalion Marines?

Platt: Well, some defense battalion, not very many as I recall, but at least a dozen of us from seagoing assignments. I think there was the normal reaction from the students who had been in combat on Guadalcanal and Tarawa, to be a little bit dubious about the usefulness of some of the instruction they were getting. And conversely, the seagoing Marines with their lack of FMF experience sort of approached the problem like a sponge and soaked up all we could get.

One incident I recall very vividly as were having a class on truck movements. The whole idea of moving Marines in large numbers using serialization; the idea of that in the minds of people who had been in combat in Guadalcanal and Tarawa was skeptical, to put it mildly. They didn't think it was useful at all. It's always stuck in my mind and not too long after that I was S-3 of the 1st Marines on Okinawa. We had to move the regiment by truck from the central part of the island to the southern part of the island.

It was to the credit of Command and Staff School that I knew what field manual to use and I was reasonably familiar with how to organize the movement.

I think it was a good school. They did a very good

job, if you were prepared to listen.

Frank: When you went out to the Pacific, did you take a lot of handouts and so on with you?

Platt: Some, not too many. Travelled pretty light. Of course, they usually had a reasonable kit of field manuals when you got there. Twenty-one of us went out together, straight from Command and Staff to join the 1st Division in Pavuvu.

Frank: This was after seven months after Cape Gloucester, actually the division started floating back there about April or May--to Pavuvu?

Platt: Yes, we got there in July.

Frank: We were in training then for Peleliu?

Platt: That's correct. Peleliu was the ultimate problem that we had in command and staff; that was the large and final course problem. I think that those of us who joined the 1st Marine Division after studying Peleliu were probably almost the only people in that division that were seriously concerned over the operation.

Frank: Did they have good dope, as you recall after the Peleliu operation--did Quantico have good dope about what you were going to face at the Peleliu operation?

Platt: I think they had remarkably good dope. I strongly suspect that it came right from the intelligence files.

Frank: Better information that the division had?

Platt: No, I think the division had the same information, but I think that there was perhaps a greater belief in the effectiveness of naval gunfire. Secondly, the division was a very confident division. They had Guadalcanal and Gloucester behind them; they were good and knew they were good.

Nothing was done by the division commander to build up any sense of serious apprehension about the operation. As a result of that, when we got the very, very stiff opposition on Peleliu, I think it came as a real shock.

The lesson that I personally learned from that, I think, contrasting it to Okinawa, is that if you are going into an operation and the Marines involved believe that it's going to be very tough and it turns out just to be tough, they think they have gotten a bargain. If they go into it and think it is going to be easy, and it turns out to be tough, the shock involved is quite a price to pay.

For example, on Okinawa there was serious apprehension that it was going to be a very, very tough operation. Of course, as you know, we walked ashore with one casualty on L-Day, and even though later on the casualties in the regiment I was in, as I recall, exceeded a hundred percent of our landing strength after fifty-eight days of combat, there still wasn't that feeling of letdown. They expected it to be tough; it turned out later to be tough but that was acceptable.

Frank: As I recall, General Rupertus was rather sanguine about Peleliu. He felt that it was going to be a two or three day operation and as a matter of fact, said as much to the newspaper correspondants with the effect that there wasn't too much coverage of the operation. All of the correspondants went down to cover what they thought was the major operation, which was MacArthur's landing.

Platt: Well, I'm not aware of what he said to any newspaper correspondants, Ben. I do know that we had an officers' briefing on Guadalcanal in which General Rupertus said a few words and they were definitly words of optimism. Something was said about getting the Japanese commander's sword on the first day. It was generally the feeling that it was not going to be a real tough operation and, of course, it was.

Frank: You were assigned as S-3 of the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines. Who had the 3rd Battalion?

Platt: Steve Sabol, and of course, Louis Puller was the regimental commander.

Frank: What are some of your memories of Louis Puller?

Platt: Well, when I first reported in to him, I remember a pyramidal tent with no deck, just a minimum of field gear in the tent and Colonel Puller looking at me and saying, "Major, where have you been all during this war?" It was quite a welcome.

I think the interview, in which he did most of the

talking, although it was a very brief interview, was "Well, we will send you down to 3rd Battalion and see how you do."

General Puller was certainly widely respected in that regiment. There was a saying among the officers that he could lie on his back in his sack and burp, and everybody would automatically come to attention. He was a very colorful character.

Frank: The 2nd Battalion had the extreme left flank.

Platt: No, the battalion I was in had the left flank, the 3rd Battalion.

Frank: I had the impression that Hunt's Company E had the left flank.

Platt: Hunt's Company K. George Hunt was the left flank company of the two assault companies. As you know, it was a concave beach and the Japanese were very heavily dug in on a promontory on the left flank. They had enfilade fire with I believe, thirty-seven's, and it was imperative that that point be taken. George Hunt did a magnificent job of taking that point.

I am not sure of the precise figures but I believe at landing, his reinforced company consisted of seven officers and 235 men. Two hours after we hit the beach, he had the point, but all he could account for under his control were three officers something like and thirty men. He did a superb job, for which he was given the Navy Cross and which

he certainly earned.

Frank: Probably deserved something better. I understand also that....

Platt: Getting a Navy Cross in General Puller's regiment was rather a remarkable achievement.

Frank: So was getting a Navy Cross in General Rupertus' division; he was rather chintzy with awards.

Platt: Yes.

Frank: That was a matter of conversation after Peleliu?

Platt: Yes. I don't think that General Rupertus was...he believed very seriously in the awards system and that it should only be given where it was manifestly deserved.

Frank: I know a number of awards went up to the division board and where Navy Crosses or better were deserved, he would knock them down to a letter of commendation or something like that. This engendered no good feelings towards General Rupertus, as I understand.

Platt: Well, I do remember that there was certainly talk about the fact that getting an award in that organization was pretty. Now, whether that was good or bad, you can argue both sides of the coin.

Frank: Well, I just recall an awards ceremony after Okinawa where Chaplain got a Bronze Star after carrying water cans

up, so I just equate that with what the situation was after Peleliu.

Platt: It was different. I think I am about as proud of my letter of commendation out of Peleliu, as I am about any other citation I have.

Frank: You earned it, you deserved it. What do you remember about the operation on Peleliu in particular? Much has been written about it, but certainly you must have some personal observation.

Platt: Well, my first memory is that in making out the boat assignment tables and the free tractor for getting ashore, it was sort of my conviction that we ought to get in as fast as we could after the first wave, which Steve Sabol went along with. I am sure glad he did because it was a lot easier in the ship-to-shore movement in the first, second, and third waves than it was in the subsequent waves.

I think our fifth or sixth wave was made up of DUKWS and only two or three of them ever got to the beach.

When we got ashore, there was a lot of incoming mortar, artillery, direct small arms fire; we scrambled out of the tractor. I think the first hole that I went in with the L Company commander, we had rounds ahead of us and rounds behind us. We got up, broke, and ran. Sure enough, the third salvo from the Japanese landed right in the hole where we had been. It was a very, very hot beach.

That night, a Japanese tank drove down the beach from

the left, practically with one tread in the water, until somebody stopped it with a bazooka.

I remember taking over naval gunfire from a destroyer. Of course, I had been aboard ship a long time, so I was not totally new to the 5 inch 38 game. We were under intensive artillery or rather mortar fire and all I could assume was that it was from the nearest high ground up on the ridge.

So using a map, I called a mission on that. The destroyer kept coming back and saying, "Can you observe? Can you observe?" My answer was "Hell no, if I try to observe, I am not going to be at the other end of the radio because we are taking grazing fire right over the holes."

It was a very, very hot beach. I also remember the heat,and the smell, and the fanatical resistance of the Japanese.

Frank: I think that Company K was there in that position for almost a day, almost isolated.

Platt: Yes, they were. I don't think we broke through to them. We were reinforcing them by LVT with ammunition and supplies. I don't think we made physical contact with them until D plus one or perhaps even D plus two. They were literally cut off.

Frank: When were you able to join the battalion command group?

Platt: I was with the battalion command group. I landed

with the battalion commander.

Frank: With Hunt?

Platt: No, Hunt was the CO of K Company and Steve Sabol was the battalion commander.

Frank: No, I mean, you said you were with the...were you in a foxhole with Sabol or Hunt?

Platt: No, not with Hunt.

Frank: You were Sabol?

Platt: Yes. We landed more or less in the center of the beach.

Frank: How were your communications with regiment?

Platt: Pretty grim at first. I think, I'm not sure, that they were pretty good at the end of D-Day. But I also think that for our orders for the night of D-Day, that we got those orders by messenger or by somebody going up. I say "up" because the regimental command post was further in than we were. Got our orders for that day by messenger or by an officer going up there and coming back.

Frank: Did you think regiment had a pretty good handle on the situation?

Platt: I think they had as good a handle on it as anybody could have under the circumstances.

Frank: You weren't very much on your own, then?

Platt: No, I wouldn't say so.

Frank: Unless you have other things to remember about Peleliu, it has been written about. You've been following that series in the Gazette?

Platt: Yes, I certainly have. I thought he did an exceptionally good job. After that, I was transferred to Ray Davis' 1st Battalion.

Frank You were his exec?

Platt: I started out as his 3. Then he was transferred and Jim Murray came in and I moved up to be Jim Murray's exec. And I landed on Okinawa as his exec in the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines.

Frank: In January, you had a period of a week temporary duty with the 6th Division, which was over on Guadalacanal. You remember what that was for?

Platt: Yes, I was an umpire for 6th Division maneuvers. There were a number of us that went over there from the 1st Division to act as umpires for a 6th Division maneuver on the eastern part of the island.

Frank: Then of course, the first to the fifteenth, the 1st Marines had the maneuver on Guadalcanal. I remember going over to Gudalcanal for these.

What was the anticipation with respect to Okinawa?

Platt: Much, much greater than the anticipation for the operation on Peleliu. Among other things, of course, everybody was concerned with the poisonous snakes.

Frank: Yes, the habus.

Platt: People were talking about "My God, if I dig a hole, I'll be afraid to get in it. There will be a habu in there." Of course, I never did see a habu the whole time I was in Okinawa.

Frank: Scared them off. I recall, going through the training cycle, that much was made of training for fighting in cities and villages.

Platt: Yes.

Frank: In anticipation that this would be a considerable part of the nature of the combat on Okinawa.

Platt: Yes. I have a vague memory of that, Ben. I can't recall that street fighting was really intensified in the training, but it was certainly considered. But I don't recall an awfully lot of it.

Frank: At that time also, there was great emphasis on the assault squad; teaching the individual Marine the use of demolitons.

Platt: Heavy emphasis on it. The coordinated use of bazookas

and flame throwers and demolition.

Frank: Fire-team tactics came out about that time.

Platt: Yes, and tank-infantry tactics, with the fire team being right at the rear end of the tank. Incidentally, this wasn't very good when we got to Okinawa.

Frank: Tanks were good targets.

Platt: Well, it was more open terrain. The jungle...having the fire-team connected with the fire-team leader talking to the tank commander with a sound-powered phone I think was excellent. But when you got to more open terrain of Okinawa it was far better to have those fire-teams lie back and protect those tanks by fire.

Frank: You took over as exec and then you became the 3 of the regiment.

Platt: Yes, I can't recall the exact date. But, I was executive officer of the 1st Marines when we crossed the center part of the island.

Of course, during that phase, there was practically no combat at all. That was a breeze. Then I took over as 3 just before we moved south.

Frank: Colonel Chappell was still regimental commander? And the exec was?

Platt: Yes, Colonel Chappell was still the regimental com-

mander and the exec was Buddy Ross.

Frank: Who later got a battalion--was the first man into Shuri line--got the flag up--he was a Mississippian or an Alabaman. He raised the stars and bars on....

Platt: No, I don't think he raised it; one of his company commanders.

Frank: Oh, yes, he was a druggist from down in South Carolina or Florida.

Platt: Didn't he become a state senator - Dusenberry? Am I right?

Frank: That's right, Julian Dusenberry. The company commander raised the stars and bars and this created quite a stink.

Platt: I recall it did. I'm not sure he was in the 1st Marines; was he in the 7th Marines?

Frank: No, Dusenberry, 1st Marines. Do you remember the circumstances surrounding the relief of Colonel Chappell as regimental commander? The 1st Marines had had...I think at the time of the relief, was down about sixty-five percent, at least that's what I wrote, in combat efficiency. They had been pretty badly hit.

Platt: Well, we were pretty badly hit the minute we went south and bumped into very stiff resistance and had very heavy

casualties.

Frank: Shuri line.

Platt: Yes. It was a little bit north of the Shuri line. We were on the...when we took over, we relieved an Army regiment--the 27th Infantry--on the western side of the island, where the 6th Division latter slipped in. In fact, I think they almost put a whole division in the sector that we took over originally as a regiment.

Frank: Think that was the Awacha Pocket, 5th Marines went into that; 5th Marines had been hit very heavily there, too. The 27th had really been smeared there.

Then the 1st Marines also took considerable fire from Sugar Loaf, which is directly in front of the 6th Division. Had enfilade fire....

Platt: That was later on, thought, after the 6th Division slipped in there and we moved over to the east when we took that heavy fire from Sugar Loaf. The 7th Marines were in the high ground, up in Dakeshi Ridge.

Frank: That's right, and the peninsula we're thinking about, when the 6th Division came, that was Oroku Peninsula. You said that you were fortunately relieved shortly after Colonel Butler, uh Mason, came in.

Platt: No. Colonel Mason relieved Colonel Chappell. I stayed as Colonel Mason's 3 until the end of the Okinawa campaign

and we moved up to Motobu Peninsula. Then I was transferred temporary duty, to the FMFPac Board of Awards about a week before the regiment left for China.

Frank: You never did get to China?

Platt: No, I did not. I was on TDY at Headquarters, FMFPac on the Board of Awards.

Frank: Actually, it was about four and a half months, five months that you were at FMFPac.

Platt: Yes, and then somebody found out that I had been overseas for forty-four out of forty-eight months and that caused quite a stir in the Force Adjutant section and I was transferred home. I exceeded by considerable time the stipulation for overseas time.

Frank: Was there much squabbling or argument, or dissension on the Board of Awards? FMFPac was getting the awards from all six divisions now.

Platt: That's correct.

Frank: What were you concerned with, all the awards, or primarily the Navy Cross and the Medal of Honor?

Platt: No, we were concerned with all of them; but I don't recall a significant amount of dissension. They were pretty well processed by the time they got up there.

Frank: Well, was there any discussion? For instance, did

anybody say "Well, look at the 4th Division, they are coming in with a load of awards. How does that equate with what the 1st Division was recommending?" Or, "The 2d Division was recommending...."

Platt: I guess some. There was an effort to try and equalize the load, but I don't remember any serious dissension. Colonel Clyde Metcalf headed up the Board of Awards; he was a very fair-minded individual. The other divisions had representatives on there and I honestly don't remember serious dissension on the board.

Frank: You were the 1st Division representative?

Platt: Yes.

Frank: Were you given any special instructions? Just fight like like hell for the 1st Division.

Platt: No, just to represent the 1st Division.

Frank: Metcalf, of course, was an old-time Marine; he was an historian. His history of the Marine Corps had come out in the '30's. What was he like, the old-school gentlmanly sort?

Platt: Old-school, gentlemanly, very fine and pleasant to work for. A real gentleman.

Frank: Did you get asked where you would like to go next?

Platt: When? You mean from the 1st Marines to the Board

of Awards?

Frank: Yes, from FMFPac.

Platt: No, I was not asked. I came back, went home on leave and had a hell of a time trying to buy an automobile. I received orders to the Marine Barracks, Naval Ammunition Depot....

End Tape 2, Side 1

Begin Side 2, Tape 2

Platt: ...Hastings, Nebraska, which sounded like the end of the world.

Frank: Hastings, Nebraska is a surprise and a shock.

Platt: Yes, I wasn't too keen on it, but I didn't do anything about it, you know. In those days, I don't think you would have thought too much about trying to do anything about it.

My former battalion commander, Jim Murray was then a special assistant to General Thomas.

Frank: He had been badly wounded in Okinawa, I understand.

Platt: Very badly; shot through the lung. He was the one who arranged my transfer to Plans and Policies Division in Washington. I did not ask for it, but I was delighted to get it, as contrasted to Hastings.

Frank: He caught this thing?

Platt: He saw it, yes.

Frank: What was your initial assignment in Plans and Policies?

Platt: I came in and I don't think they had a job for me, so I was the guided missiles officer and spent most of my time reading translations from the German about guided missiles, an area in which I had no expertise whatsoever. But that lasted for a very short period of time; I think it was a holding action.

Then General Snedeker was then the G-3 in Plans and Policies, and he sent for me late one afternoon and said that General Thomas wanted to see me. I went up to General Thomas' office and he asked me if I think of any reasons why I shouldn't command the Provisional Marine Guard at the United Nations? And to do it like tomorrow.

Frank: Had you known General Thomas before this?

Platt: No, I had not.

Frank: Were you now a major?

Platt: I was a major and I was almost speechless when he said it. He said of course, you have got your blues and your sword and everything since you were seagoing.

I said that my blues and my sword were in a foot-locker at the Marine Barracks, Naval Air Station, Quonset Point, Rhode Island last time I saw them. He said, "Well, you get on the phone and find out if they were still there. I didn't even know how to call them.

So General Snedeker very helpfully got hold of the CO

of the Marine Barracks and he inquired as to whether or not my gear was there. I think that shook them up quite a bit; I don't think they were used to having calls from Headquarters. It turned out that it was there. So the next day I was given an airplane and I flew to Quonset Point, put my foot-locker in the airplane, went back to New York and started looking for a place for the Provisional Marine Guard to live in the city of New York.

Frank: Did you have any assistance in New York City from anyone?

Platt: Damned little. I went back to Headquarters for a very brief time for a little more briefing and I was shown a copy of the dispatch that the Commandant sent out to the Depot of Supplies at Philadelphia, and to the Marine Barracks in Philadelphia, and the Marine Barracks in Brooklyn to give all possible assistance to the CO of the Provisional Marine Guard, that he might call on them. It was a rather heady thing for a young major.

My troops came from Camp Lejeune and General Thomas had specified that they all be combat veterans. Also I was the first organization to get the new Marine blue uniform and I was told in no uncertain terms that we were supposed to be a credit to the Marine Corps in the city of New York and the arena of the United Nations; and certainly not be be a discredit.

Then I flew back to Brooklyn and discovered that the

United Nations was at Hunter College in the Bronx. I talked to the security officer of the United Nations (it was Tony Cook, he was British and the security officer at the time) and found out that they had some pretty heavy requirements in terms of the numbers of guards at Hunter College. It was impossible to meet their requirements and still live in the Marine Barracks in Brooklyn.

So, I started to look for a place to live for me and my troops and my officers. I went down to the 1st Naval District headquarters in Manhattan and introduced myself to the chief of staff; told him my story and he said there was an empty LST barracks ship in the Hudson River and that I was at liberty to use that for as long as it was there. Well, that was significantly closer to Hunter College, but still not ideal.

Then I stumbled on the fact that of the four buildings on the Hunter College campus which the Navy had had on lease during World War II, that three of the four buildings had been turned over to the United Nations and one of them was still under Navy control and would not be turned over for a week. So I immediately said that that was where I wanted my Marines to live.

I took a quick run up there and looked at it; it had adequate head space, reasonable billeting space and a basement that had the great virtue of being right on the scene.

So while the Navy still controlled that building, I moved my troops in; the United Nations didn't like this. But I

was there and they weren't about to evict me. At the end of the week, it became their property but I still had a base camp.

Then I flew back to Philadelphia, met my troops at midnight in the railroad station, took them to the Navy Yard, inspected them; found that six or seven of them certainly did not meet the requirements physically of looking like ideal Marines. I put the arm on the barracks for replacements and got an overwhelming number of volunteers. I had one small problem that I vividly remember: I rated one field music. There was no field music at the Philadelphia Marine Barracks who was a veteran. There was one who was fresh out of field music school. So I took him anyhow, and the first sergeant and I authorized him, on our own initiative, to wear a seagoing patch and an American theatre ribbon, but never on liberty, only during duty hours.

So I met the criteria of having 100% veterans through trickery. A little footnote on that: General Shapley was the IG and after I had been up there about forty-five days he came up for an IG inspection. Wonderful man. He had a marvelous way of inspecting. He would go down in front of each Marine and say "Now, where did you get that Purple Heart, where did you get your Asiatic...what campaigns, what regiment were you in?" And as he approached the end of of the line where that field music was, you could almost feel the tension rising.

Frank: Through that whole unit, because they knew....

Platt: Yes, the first sergeant, I thought, was going to faint. When he got to the music, for some inexplicable reason, he stopped questioning and the kid was white as a sheet because he could hear these questions coming down the line. So I --General Shapley was so doggone nice and understanding, that after the inspection I told him about it. He got a great laugh out of it and never did a thing to upset my arrangements.

Frank: What was the mission that the guard was assigned? Who assigned it? Who did you report to?

Platt: I reported first to this Cook, who was later replaced by a man by the name of Frank Begley, who was then, and remained for some years, as the security officer at the United Nations. He was a former University of Connecticut graduate; he came out during the Depression, was a Connecticut state trooper and then during the war, got tied up with Mayor O'Dwyer when Mayor O'Dwyer was in the Air Force. And so he was very influential in his getting his appointment. He was a great guy. Incidentally, he was killed, you may recall, when Count Bernadotte was in Israel and they went after him and Begley was in the car and was shot and killed over there.

But our job was very interesting. In the first place, there were twenty-two different varieties of passes--different colors, different shapes, different printing. So guard school took up a great deal of our time, trying to teach these Marines the significance of where one pass could go,

where another pass could or couldn't go.

We guarded the Security Council chambers, which were in almost continuous session. We did it in three-man teams. A Marine in blues with a bayonet and scabbard, but no weapon. A New York patrolman in uniform with no weapon and a New York plainclothesman in the background with a weapon. And believe it or not, my arrangement with the New York police department, the Marine was in charge of the three-man team. The police were very, very impressed with the ability of the Marines to handle VIPs. Respect for that Marine uniform was marked; they had little or no respect for New York patrolmen. They just pushed by them. But with a few exceptions, they certainly obeyed the Marines.

Frank: Who gave the instructions that the Marine and the policmen would not be armed?

Platt: It was extraterritorial ground and the United Nations did not want them armed. We had weapons in the basement where we lived, but no weapons while we were on duty.

Frank: Set up your own galley and everything?

Platt: No, we did not--we ate in the United Nations cafeteria which turned out to be very tough indeed, pricewise for the Marines. That's one of the things General Shapley did for me. I suggested that since we were on extraterritorial ground, we ought to receive foreign service pay and he thought that that was a pretty good idea. We didn't, but we got an aug-

mented pay that provided the Marines with enough money to eat adequately.

Frank: Who were your officers?

Platt: I had three: a first lieutenant and two second lieutenants, all ex-enlisted. My exec had five Purple Hearts as a matter of fact. That sort of leads into another story.

My wife was in Washington at the time and the United Nations never had any functions on the weekend. So periodically, I would fly to Washington to see my wife, whom I hadn't seen much of in the last four years, then fly back to Newark airport.

I came back one night at about eight or nine o'clock, and the driver picked me up--a young corporal. And as we were headed into Newark toward the United Nations, he said "It has sure been exciting this weekend." That of course, aroused a certain amount of apprehension.

He said, "Lieutenant Wilcox has given us bayonets and issued us ammunition." I said, "What on earth happened?" He said, "Well, there was a big fight with the Marines and some of the local people in the Bronx. People from the Bronx have been circling the fenced-in campus and it is very tense." It was a pretty accurate description. When I got back, that was exactly what had happened.

Why it happened was because two of my officers and two of the staff NCO's were out with some girls in the neighborhood. Now in those days, we could not wear civilian

clothes; we had to wear blues. The presence of a Marine in blues was not overwhelmingly popular among some of the male residents of that particular part of the Bronx.

But, at any rate, when these Marines with their young ladies left the restaurant, they got in a verbal disagreement and then landed up in a physical disagreement. They were outnumbered; they were jumped by these guys from the Bronx. So they wrapped their belts around their fists, one of them ran and made a break for the telephone and the others took on the opposition.

Well, the NCO who ran to the telephone did not call the police, he called the officer of the day at the United Nations Provisional Guards, a typical wartime reaction. So they broke out the off-duty guard and really cleaned house on the opposition. In fact, they put two or three of them in the hospital. That was strongly resented by the locals. So it was almost a state of open warfare when we got back.

It never did get in to the press, fortunately. But the New York City police department was--the deputy commissioner came to see me personally the next morning. He said, "You've got a very serious situation on your hands," and they put extra police protection around the Hunter College campus. Whenever my men wanted to go on liberty in downtown Manhattan ...First place, I put all of the Bronx off-limits to the whole detachment. And if they...When they went on liberty they had to go out of the Bronx area and they got a personal police escort from the gate of Hunter College to the nearest

elevated station. And that is how we existed.

Frank: For the rest of the time you were there?

Platt: For the rest of the time I was there.

Frank: It never cleared up afterwards?

Platt: No, they moved the guard down to the old World's Fair site right after I was relieved--Lake Success. And that is the only thing that corrected that situation.

That was never recorded anywhere; fortunately, it never broke in the press. That's amazing, because we were in the press all the time we were there. They would interview my Marines on-post; we made all the major papers--Time. Well, the first press conference I had, there were twenty-two members of the Fourth Estate there. It was rather a....

Frank: You held a press conference?

Platt: I had to; I had no choice. We were big news. There was a Marine Reserve who used to work for Look Magazine named Johnny Rice who was the PIO in New York. He held my hand, and very effectively held my hand, but I distinctly remember a series of questions that went sort of like this: "Major, how many men are in your guard?" "There are seventy-five." "Where did they come from." "Camp Lejeune." "Are they all combat veterans?" "Yes." "Who is the commander at Camp Lejuene?" I said "Major General Marston." "How many Marines are at Camp Lejeune?" I said, "I honestly don't know, but I

guess about 20,000." And that was the course of the questioning, and it came up on the Herald Tribune as "Marine guard commander says every one of his 75 combat veterans were personally handpicked by Major General Marston." This led me to be a little skeptical of reporting.

Then we had a press conference the following day for--there was no TV--movies and still photographers. And that was done on the Hunter College grounds. They took a whole bunch of shots and then a photographer from PM Magazine, which was quite anti-military....

Frank: It was a tabloid; and the editor of that was Ralph Ingersoll, who....

Platt: He asked me if I would have the Marines do the letters "U N O" against a green grassy bank. And I said "Under these conditions: that we fall out and do it." Well, first I asked Johnny Rice, "Is this was a good idea?" And he said that it was. So I said "Let me have the troops fall out, and they will form the letters 'U N O'. But please don't take any pictures until I am ready." They agreed to that, so we did form the letters "U N O" and used white covers for periods against a green background. They took a lot of shots. It made just about everything, including Time.

Shortly afterward, I called General Thomas' office to get hold of Jim Murray, because I needed supplies of some nature. I was told that when I needed anything, just to

telephone Headquarters. I got the then G-4 on the phone, a gentleman by the name of David Shoup. He read me off like I had never been read off before, about how that photograph was beneath the dignity of the Marine Corps and what did I think I was running, a circus?

I was somewhat shaken by this, but I was a lot less shaken when the photograph went up through other channels and the Marine Corps used it for a recruiting poster.

Frank: Did you get your supplies from them? Who was your reporting senior, still General Thomas?

Platt: I got the supplies. General Thomas was my reporting senior. We were there on a thirty-day arrangement--the United Nations asked for us through the State Department, they specifically asked for Marines and they renewed the request every thirty days. But they would never do it until about the twenty-ninth day so it was a rather uncertain state of affairs.

Frank: Were there any anti-U.N. incidents or attempted assassinations or things like that?

Platt: No, none. We were apprehensive about them. We had a variety of VIPs who came up there: Batista, Sinatra, and so on.

Frank: Let's see, who was the first secretary?

Platt: What was his name?

Frank: Trygve Lie?

Platt: I think it was Trygve Lie, sure it was. I remember Gromyko, who was then the Soviet Union's representative to the United Nations. His car ran over my sergeant of the guard's foot one day at the main gate and I duly reported that to the secretary-general. I never got an apology, but they never did it again.

In another incident, the Military Staff Committee of the United Nations was having a meeting. The Soviets, Americans, French, British, Chinese--and I had a young Iowa farm boy who had that particular post. His orders were that nobody could pass unless they had a particular variety of pass, pink-purple with square corners. I can't remember. A Soviet general, without a pass, who was a member of the committee, tried to get past that Marine. I didn't see this, but I talked to people who saw it. The Marine just kept his hands behind him, in a parade rest stance, and everytime the general would try to push by him, he would just block him with his 200 pounds. He never would let him by. So when this was reported to me, I was curious as to what would come out of it.

What came out of it was that at the next party I went to, where the Soviety military was present, a raft of compliments about the Marine Corps; they thought that was great. No complaint at all.

Frank: Oh, wonderful. Did you make any long-lasting friends there?

Platt: Well, Frank Begley; I went back and saw him when I was a student at the National War College. But that is the only one.

Frank: How about these young Marines--did any international romances take place there?

Platt: No international romances at all but wearing their blues in New York City at that particular time in our history was hardly a hardship. In fact, discipline was a cinch because all I had to do was vaguely threaten to transfer them back to Camp Lejeune if they didn't toe the line. So, it was a very easy outfit to command from that perspective.

Frank: Who were your lieutenants? Did any of them stay in as regulars?

Platt: Lieutenant Wilcox was my exec; Lieutenant Lowe was the second lieutenant; and the other one I can't remember his name, but he did stay in, the one whose name I can't remember. The other two, I believe, reverted to enlisted status. They were all temporary officers.

Frank: Were they picked for size, height and so on? Or just the fact that they had to be combat veterans, pretty good physical shape?

Platt: I don't know how they were picked. They were good-looking Marines, but they weren't of any particular height; just were, as you say, in good physical shape; heavily decorated.

Wilcox had a Navy Cross, Silver Star and several Bronze Stars and five Purple Hearts. And still thought the war was going on.

He was the one who did not call the police when we had that incident, which, of course, was the obvious thing to do. He had the Marines, "take care of it."

Frank: And they did.

Platt: I think it would have been better if we had let the police take care of it.

Frank: You say the guard moved to Lake Success after you left?

Platt: After I left.

Frank: Why did you leave, why didn't you stay on?

Platt: I was sent up there for thirty days. I think General Thomas just felt that for a man who had been asked to stay thirty days, after you left him there over three months, it was time for a change. So, he assigned a classmate of mine who had just come back from China named Walt Holloman (a very good friend, who was also a bachelor) to relieve me. I was ready to come home.

Frank: Enough of this weekend commuting?

Platt: And the harassment that went with the job.

Frank: Was there much harassment?

Platt: Oh, yes. There were always kooky things going on. Things like some gal showing up in a cap and gown at one of the gates, and demanding to see the Marine commander. When they told her I wasn't available, she immediately displayed that she didn't have anything on under the cap and gown; you know, kooky type, no serious demonstrations.

The problems of providing security to so many VIPs, I mean, getting into the Security Council on one of those days was like trying to get tickets to a real Broadway show.

And the intensive attention of the press. It was a very interesting experience, but not something one would like to do for a long time.

Frank: Back to Washington--you were in the S-3 shop? Or the G-3 shop of pots and pans, working for Colonel Snedeker, Uncle Eddie? And what were you doing? You didn't immediately get involved with the Edson Board did you?

Platt: No, when I came back, I was no longer the unqualfied guided missile officer; I was put in as the G-3 infantry desk officer. So I took that over from Bill Chamberlin.

Frank: What was your primary concern at this time, reorganizing for peacetime?

Platt: Tables of Organization, training programs, universal military training, which was a big thing then. Drawing up a detailed plan for the expansion of Marine facilities; T/O's

for universal military training--in a very primitive way, trying to calculate the cost. The through-put in terms of the people we could take; fortunately, it never came to pass.

Frank: UMT fortunately?

Platt: I said that.

Frank: Why?

Platt: Because we had many more people than we could profitably use. I think the dollars could be spent in a much better way than in semi-training hundreds of thousands of people.

Frank: UMT would have been the answer to the draft, in the sense that it was universal; that we would not have had the problems we had during Vietnam, wherein, all the college boys got off.

Platt: Well, to that extent, yes. But I think that's not a strong point for UMT; that's rather a weak point for the draft system as we ran it in Vietnam.

As I say, semi-train all the available males would, even in those days without the techniques of systems analysis, you could see that it would be so overwhelmingly expensive; that those dollars could have been utilized much more profitably for national defense than UMT. I was against it then and I am against it now.

Frank: The Marine Corps was facing the situation of demobilization where units were getting down to basic skeleton strength. You had a problem of manning the battalions, the 1st Division in China, to a lesser degree the 2d Division in Japan. The 2nd Division did not face as difficult a time. So it must have been really scraping the bottom to maintain manning levels of the divisions out there; at the same time to try to carry on a going program in the States.

Platt: That's right.

Frank: How did you do it?

Platt: Well, I wasn't in the midst of the manning levels for the FMF. My functions were on a much lower order than that. I was worried about T/O's for Marine Barracks, T/O's for Troop Training Unit Lant and Pac and that sort of thing.

Sure, it was very tough. Nobody wanted to lose people, yet we just didn't have the people.

Interruption

That was the principal problems--trying to spread a limited number of people over a lot of commitments.

Frank: How did you get involved with this particular aspect of planning?

Platt: For quite a length of time then, I was full-time on the Edson Board.

Frank: The Edson Board went into being on the 14th of March, 1947. Who were the members of the Edson Board?

Platt: General Edson, General Twining....

Frank: Twining was down at Quantico wasn't he?

Platt: Yes, but he was still a member of the Board.

Frank: General Thomas?

Platt: General Thomas was sort of the guiding light directly over General Edson; now whether he was named as a member of the board ... technically, it was the Board for Legislative Research and Liaison. Bob Heinl, Sam Shaw, Hunter Hurst, Dutch Schatzel, Don Hittle....

Frank: Jim Murray?

Platt: Jim Murray. There was an awful lot of brainpower on the Board. I was just the junior member; I was the administrative officer and the recorder.

Frank: How did you feel about what they were doing?

Platt: Well, it was absolutely vital, the destiny of the Marine Corps was clearly at stake. The threat was very real and it was absolutely mandatory to get our roles and missions embodied in permanent legislation.

(SLIGHT LAPSE IN TAPE)

Frank: Did you have any contact with him afterward? You

were always friendly with him?

Platt: Sure. We disagreed on a few things, including.... well, everybody has an opinion on the evening parades at the Marine Barracks; we had some arguements over that.

Frank: Well, he was quite opinionated. We were talking off tape. In my interview with General Thomas, Bob Heinl was involved with it. We were discussing the Edson Board, and he discussed who the members were. He said, (this is Heinl speaking) "Now, we will footnote this with regard to Platt. The function of Platt, then a major, was a secretary-recorder of the organization, and he undertook no operations. He was strictly an inside man and I think this is developed later on in his career." (I don't know what he means by that.) "To the best of my observation, he is the only member of the Edson Board who ever winced when he was reminded of it."

Platt: Well, first that is totally surprising to me; it is shocking, because I have been proud that I was a member of the Edson Board ever since I was. His description of my function on the board is absolutely correct; I was the administrative officer, I was an inside man. Never pretended to be anything else. But in terms of my wincing that I was a member of the Board, that is inexplicable to me.

As a matter of fact, when General Edson retired, and went up and took over director of the Department of Public Safety in Vermont, he offered me a job to come up there and

work for him. So General Edson obviously did not share the view that I was not an enthusiastic member of the Board. That is just shocking to me. I don't know....

Frank: I don't know why Bob would have made that statement, except that he at times had his little peccadillos. If something happened besides that (and you were talking about his unhappiness when you had the barracks with the drill and so on) maybe he thought this was a little jab that he might put in for posterity. Well, I'm glad you cleared that up.

How would you characterize some of the people on the board? For instance, General Edson?

Platt: Extremely smart, very dedicated to the rightness in what he was doing; an immense capacity for work, and just a beautiful man to work for. In all sorts of little ways. I remember one night we worked very late at night; there were two or maybe three women Marines and we were putting out a very large tabulated brochure for distribution to general officers documenting our case. The women Marines had worked extremely hard and at about 19:30 or 20:00, whatever it was, General Edson said "I want to take you all to dinner downtown, to the Occidental." They demurred, and General Edson got me off to one side, and said "I really want to take those girls to dinner. Now, you go persuade them they ought to go."

Little things, but the kind of thing that just inspired immense loyalty for the man, and admiration.

Frank: Were you in on all the deliberations and the things

that were going on, whenever the committee met, or did the members each have their own task to do?

Platt: I think it was sort of more the latter than the former; I mean, we operated out of a board room in Headquarters, Marine Corps.

Frank: Yes, that's where the Commandant's mess is, right?

Platt: No, it is in the same ... where they used to have the big selection board room, I've forgetton what is there now. But it was all one great big sort of bullpen. It was an ad hoc arrangement. Yes, individual people had their own assignments, and I can't really remember any formal meetings, more ad hoc meetings of three, four and five, six people it wasn't the formal board type of action that we think of say in terms of selection boards.

Frank: Was there a sense of urgency?

Platt: Oh yes, very definitly a sense of urgency. An educational process too, an educational process with the front office to try and convince them that there really was a threat.

Frank: The front office wouldn't believe it?

Platt: I don't think they wanted to believe it.

Frank: Jerry Thomas believed it.

Platt: Oh, he most certainly did.

Frank: And Bill Twining believed it.

Platt: Oh, yes. Every member of the board believed it.

Frank: What relationship did you have with the special committee down at ... the Marine Corps Board down at Quantico that Twining headed up? I think Krulak was on it, I think Hogaboom may have been part of it--they were doing some things down there at the same time you were.

Platt: I think there was a very close connection between them. I don't think it was a formal connection; I can't recall. Certainly the contributions that were coming from Quantico were immense.

Frank: For instance, I think General Twining wrote General Vandegrift's "bended knee" speech.

Platt: That's right.

Frank: There was a Lyford Hutchins....

Platt: Yes, he was very definitly....And Colonel Earle; I think that includes all of them.

Frank: I don't know Colonel Earle.

Platt: I remember when the White House put out a directive that all Congressional speeches would be delivered to the White House on this subject, before they were used. I was given the job of delivering that speech to Clark Clifford's office. We had it timed to the point where it was turned in

about five minutes before the Commandant testified.

The contribution of that Board, in terms of the Marine Corps as we know it, just can't be exaggerated.

Frank: How did your assignment to the Edson Board affect your later career, if at all? Associations have any effect?

Platt: I don't know as it had a postive effect; it certainly did not have a negative effect.

Frank: There were some people, and I think Shoup was one, he may have associated everybody who was involved with this as being "Twining men" and of course, Twining was a very great front runner, contender, for the commandancy, and as such, a competitor of Shoup's. This may have colored his thinking.

But there were certainly....You indicated that you were preparing these packages for the general officers. There were a lot of general officers, O.P. Smith I understand, was cnt too....

Platt: I'm not sure, Ben, that those packages (of which I still have one at home) went to all the general officers. Maybe they did, or maybe they went to a selected list of general officers.

Frank: Do you still have one of those?

Platt: Yes, in the original.

Frank: Maybe we ought to have one for the....

would be called in again on an ad hoc basis, to put out whatever fire came up.

Frank: Looks like you were getting full-time in the personnel business. You got assigned to the postgraduate course at Ohio State University; went out there in June of '48.

Platt: I volunteered for that, after a very serious discussion with General Edson. The way that course ran, we had three different campuses as I recall: Stanford, Northwestern and Ohio State. It was, in light of today, a very sort of liberal approach. In other words, you took the academic background experience that you had to the course, set a goal for yourself that would contribute to the Marine Corps, then built the bridge. Had a wide selection of the courses you could take, there was no prescribed core curriculum.

Bill McKean had gone to the one at Northwestern, my first CO on the Washington. He is the one that exposed me to that and I decided that I would like to do it, and as a matter of fact, I never did get a degree in personnel administration. I got an MA in educational psychology.

Frank: Oh, is that what you got out of it?

Platt: That's correct. I went out there and took the first semester on a sort of trial basis and they let me come into psychology, and I completed my MA in that. It became very useful in ensuing years in Marine Corps Schools, I put it to

very good use.

Frank: Educational psychology? That's interesting, yes, I could see where it would be.

Platt: Well see, I had been a 3 before, and that was the training, if you will, educational aspects of the thing that attracted me the most.

Frank: Where did you live out in Ohio?

Platt: Ruskin Avenue, in the southeast section of the city, rented a house.

Frank: Did you have a family by this time?

Platt: I had a wife and one daughter. And I worked. But it was an interesting experience, particularly from somebody who went to an undergraduate school with a maximum student body of 500 to go out to a great big degree factory like that.

Frank: How were you received as an active duty officer?

Platt: We wore civilian clothes.

Frank: Were there other service people there?

Platt: Oh, yes. There was another Marine, Ross McCaskill, was there when I was there. There were Navy officers in the course. We wore civilian clothes; I think some of my professors didn't even know that we were full-time military. We didn't really hide it, but we never stuck it under their noses, either.

I think that I got a lot more out of school at that age and after being out of school for awhile than I would by going straight into graduate work. It was a very interesting experience, and as I said, a lot that I could put to good use later on.

Frank: Did you have to write a thesis?

Platt: Yes, I wrote on reading improvement in service schools.

Frank: Were you able to use that later on?

Platt: Mainly in trying to combat reading improvement programs that I didn't think were worthwhile.

Frank: Had you known that you were going to go to the Basic School and to Quantico after this?

Platt: No, I did not. I knew I was going to Quantico, but they never told me what my job would be. My hopes were that I would get into the schools in an instructional capacity.

When I got to Quantico, Jim Wilbur had the personnel administration section and I had heard that that is where I was headed. But I made a big point of the fact that I had not gotten a degree in personnel administration but that it was more in the training and educational business, and General Snedeker had me assigned to the Basic School as a result of that.

Frank: What did you teach, infantry?

Platt: I took over...They had a defensive and offensive tactics section and merged the two when I had what was then known as the "tactics section."

Frank: You had that for how long?

Platt: Seems to me about a year. Yes, exactly a year.

Side 2, Tape 2

Begin Tape 3, Side 1

Frank: We were talking about your assignment to Basic School. Now, were you the first instructor in the IOC? Had been going on for some time.

Platt: No, Johnny Chaisson was the founder of it. No, there was one before that, a gentleman who came from Princeton during the war, who was the founder of it, I believe.

Frank: Gordon Craig?

Platt: Yes, then Johnny, then Dave Randall, then I relieved Dave Randall.

Frank: Dave Randall had it too? A great friend; Helen died a couple of years ago.

Platt: I'm going to see him in a month or so.

Frank: Is he coming here?

Platt: No, I'm going there.

Frank: Give him my regards will you?

Platt: I sure will.

Frank: He is a great guy. What exactly...We talked earlier, it has been called the "charm school", which is....

Platt: That is a colloquialism that is kind of hard to kill. But I think the basic idea of the IOC was to teach people how to teach. The philosophy that John Chaisson, Dave Randall, and I advocated and, I think, is advocated to this day, based on a recent conversation, is that you are trying to get learning to take place; you are trying to change behavior. And how you hold your hands, or your feet, or whether you have your hands in your pockets is not important, only to the extent that it might distract from what you are trying to teach. That to me, was never teaching "charm" but that is an uphill fight, so....

Frank: Was it part of the curriculum of the IOC that every instructor had to know at least one good dirty joke to open the class with?

Platt: Absolutely not. As a matter of fact, we actively discouraged people from using a joke as an attention-gainer unless they were good story-tellers. That is just one of a battery of techniques--absolutely not.

Frank: I remember one session at the reserve junior course which a mutual friend of ours taught and there must have been

about a hundred captains and majors in the session. It seemed that the instructor was going to be master of ceremonies at a stag dinner that night and he needed some good stories. So the whole three hour session was historic. That I take it was not part of the curriculum?

Platt: Absolutely not.

Frank: Were you able to use any of the educational psychology?

Interruption

Platt: Oh, yes. I think the most rewarding thing about IOC was to give the new instructor confidence and with small class sizes that was possible.

Frank: Were the classes small at this time?

Platt: Except during the height of the Korean War, it was generally limited fifteen to eighteen. But then, in the early days of the Korean War, we had to take on more than that. But, in the classes where the instructors gave practice instruction, we always kept them down to fifteen.

Before I went to IOC, I might add, it was part of the Marine Corps' policy to send you to school. They sent me to Northwestern for a quarter in the summer of 1950 to the School of Speech.

Frank: Oh, really?

Platt: This was more direct educational preparation for the job and that was extremely helpful and a very good school.

Frank: What would they teach you, speech and communication?

Platt: Persuasion, speech, organization of speeches with different objectives - with a friendly audience, with a hostile audience, with a neutral audience. That type of thing. Excellent school.

Frank: You were involved with Basic School for the most part of course; that was a sort of a captive audience. But, the students who were going to the schools after the war - were they eager to go? Was this sort of a recognition that this was sort of a prerequisite for promotion for professional advancement?

Platt: To the Command and Staff College in the and the Amphibious Warfare School? Oh, yes, I think so.

Frank: What were they doing, studying lessons learned, refighting World War II?

Platt: You mean between World War II and Korea?

Frank: Yes. The emphasis, for instance, for instruction at the Basic School, when you were instructing there. Or were you just dealing with basic....

Platt: The emphasis was on basic tactical principles and techniques. World War II experiences were used as illustra-

tions to reinforce what was being taught. I suppose you could say that we were refighting World War II. I think that's a little unfair; I think the eyes were opened quite a bit wider. than that.

Frank: Well, of course, shortly after that, you had the Bikini Atoll explosion, where General Geiger wrote a letter to the Commandant indicating that we had to rethink our way of doing amphibious warfare. I don't think that those changes came about until late '40's.

Platt: I think so. But that was more in the Junior School and the Senior School, than it would be in the Basic School.

Frank: Were you involved, while you were an instructor in the Basic School, in the techniques and assault of a fortified position?

Platt: Oh, yes.

Frank: And as I recall, that particular scenario in a locale, (I think it was in the Guadalcanal area) they set up the exact type of situation that faced George Hunt on Peleliu. Am I correct on that?

Platt: Yes, I think that is where the origin of that whole problem came from.

Frank: The mutually-supporting pillboxes and so on exactly as it had been on Peleliu.

Platt: As I recall, that is correct.

Frank: Now, Korea was on, but you were assigned to the 2nd ITR. What were you, CO?

Platt: No, I was running the IOC during the early days of Korea and wanted to get to Korea very much. I finally was successful and I went to the 2nd ITR as merely temporary duty until I was due to go to Korea. It was sort of a holding area for me. In other words, I was relieved from Quantico and sent to the 2nd ITR. I did take a large replacement battalion through Pickle Meadows and also Jim Tinsley had the 2nd ITR and I sort of worked as an inspector for him. That was just a short period of time.

Frank: Did you fly out there?

Platt: Oh, yes.

Frank: We left by boat and got there in December of '52 also; 59th Replacement.

Platt: I flew out as an individual replacement with Tommy Randall, Dave's younger brother.

Frank: Artillery officer?

Platt: Yes.

Frank: You went down to 1/5? Took over 1/5?

Platt: That's correct.

Frank: This was December of '52, winter had set in, it was pretty cold, as I recall, when I finally got there. Things didn't heat up on the lines until March with Reno, Carson and Vegas.

Platt: That's correct, although we ran some operations before then. When I actually got to the 5th Marines, they were just in the process of coming off the line and going into reserve, so I spent about a month or more, maybe, in reserve. We used some of the reserve battalion troops to conduct raids then I took over in an MR position.

When the regiment was pulled back off the line again, Lew Walt (who was regimental commander) went up to be G-3, and I went up to be G-3 plans.

Frank: Colonel Tschirgi had the regiment?

Platt: Colonel Tschirgi had the regiment during my last couple of weeks before I went up to the division.

Frank: Then of course he was relieved by Tommy Tompkins? So you were there when Joe Tschirgi....

Platt: Just a matter of two weeks.

Frank: I think in the reserve, we were involved with the Jamestown Line, building the Jamestown Line?

Platt: Jamestown Line, Kansas Line, I can't remember all the names of those lines. Yes, we were. In fact, that is what the battalion was doing when I left.

Frank: Who were your company commanders?

Platt: Doc Blanchard had "A" Company, as we used to call it then, Ted Milner had "B" Company and "Big Dog" Young had "C" Company.

Frank: George Young?

Platt: Yes. Bill Doughty was the exec and Will Simlik was the 3.

Frank: All good people.

Platt: I think so.

Frank: So that was a good battalion.

Platt: Good regiment.

Frank: Yes, it was. Let's see, when I went up there, Bill Finch had the 2nd Battalion.

Platt: He had relieved Oscar Peatross.

Frank: Colonel Peatross had gone down to 362, and I forget who his exec was. Then later, Andy Geer came over and took over the battalion; Tom Field was his exec.

Platt: When I joined the regiment, Ed Wheeler was the exec, Ross Dwyer was the 3 and Jake Poillon was the 2. Quite a few general officers came out of that regiment.

Frank: Jake Pollion is a retired major general, Ross Dwyer

a retired major general, Will Simlik retired major general.

Platt: Ed Wheeler retired major general.

Frank: It was pretty quiet when you had the battalion actually?

Platt: Lots of incoming; as a matter of fact I think we were the high battalion in the division for incoming for weeks and weeks. We did conduct several raids and then of course, it culminated with Reno, Carson and Vegas, which was the last big operation.

Frank: So you were still up there for Reno, Carson and Vegas?

Platt: Yes, I was.

Frank: What was the situation?

Platt: Well, we had three outposts: as you know, Reno, Carson and Vegas; and Reno was the furthest out. I manned Reno and Carson and the 2nd Battalion manned Vegas. There were an officer and about forty or forty-five men in each one.

The Chinese, several days before the attack, appeared to be obviously registering on the trails that led from the MLR out to the outposts. When they hit us, it was late, I believe, in the day, I think I was walking back from chow when it hit.

They put simultaneous artillery and mortar barrages on the three outposts, and all three of my front line companies

as well as on the companies on either side of me; on our direct support artillery battalion, and our battalion dump, and the battalion CP. It was an impressive exercise in artillery and mortar fire.

As you know, Reno fell and Vegas fell; Carson held--that was the closest one in. And then Vegas was eventually recaptured, but we never did recapture Reno. Matter of fact, we never made any serious attempt to recapture, it was so far out.

Frank: Yes, this whole concept of combat outposts, which we found in Korea, certainly was a form of fighting that the Marine Corps was not too familiar with.

Platt: It was different.

Frank: We were fighting World War I type ground warfare.

Platt: That is correct, but as long as we held those outposts, we kept them off the MLR for as long as we could. So I think the outposts did serve a useful purpose.

Frank: Actually, they never did hit the MLR?

Platt: Not until the very end of the war, in any serious way. That was a major attack on the MLR.

Frank: Did you man COP-1 at all? I think that was a reinforced company that manned that one?

Platt: Over by Panmunjom?

Frank: Yes.

Platt: When I came up to take over the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, Ed Wheeler had it. I did not actually succeed to command until after we had fallen off the line to go back in reserve. But when I was up there with Ed, we did have that outpost, yes.

Frank: Actually, I think that was a reinforced company and that was sort of a rescue company for the Americans in the truce village.

Platt: As I remember, that was the concept.

Frank: Some people have commented that experience of the Marine Corps in Korea, for the three years of the war and more for as long as the division remained there, required a whole new rethinking and re-education of young officers who have never experienced amphibious warfare. Do you find that to be the case?

Platt: I think that's reasonably valid. Although I can remember that the division did go to great lengths to keep our amphibious skills in hand because battalions were pulled off the line; or at least when they were in reserve. I went down and conducted an amphibious landing one time when I was a battalion commander. So there was a distinct effort on the part of the division to maintain proficiency in amphibious landings.

Frank: Now, what were you doing down as the G-3 Plans?

Platt: I was the G-3 Plans; Lew Walt was the G-3 and later Bill Jones relieved him.

Frank: Just planning for infantry operations, front line operations?

Platt: Planning, counter-attack plans, fallback plans, the movement of the division back into the reserve back at Camp Casey--you know, the whole battery of contingency plans.

Frank: How effective do you think the division was up on the line?

Platt: I think it was very effective.

Frank: I remember there were a number of joint operations assisted by air; trench-busting operations and snatch raids, and so on. Didn't seem to me to be too effective. We certainly could never get prisoners.

Platt: No, we tried very hard to get prisoners and we certainly never succeeded.

Frank: Whenever we went out, busting up the trenches, the next night they were all repaired again.

Platt: I'm not sure that all of them were repaired the next night, but let's say that we never really intended to go out there and hold the ground. They were raids to keep them off

balance.

Frank: Let's see, we went through two division commanders when you were out there, Pollock and then General Pate came out there. From your point of view, did their method of operation change much?

Platt: I don't recall that, from where I sat, their method of operation changed much.

Frank: How about relationship with the I Corps? Or was it the X Corps? X Corps, I think it was.

Platt: No, it was I Corps, wasn't it?

Frank: I Corps.

Platt: Yes, it was I Corps. They were...Again you've got to remember that I, at the level that I was, I don't think that I can depict with any great accuracy, but I don't remember significant problems.

I can remember some arguments over in-place weapons when we were relieved on the line; that's about the only one I can remember. There was quite a difference of opinion when we were being relieved by an Army division over what weapons we'd leave and what weapons we'd take.

Frank: Now, this was the time that General Shepherd was Commandant?

Platt: That's correct.

Frank: Did you know that you were going to go back to Headquarters for duty?

Platt: I was told before I left Korea that I was going back to Headquarters, yes.

Frank: Did you get advanced warning, advanced orders, or a letter from Headquarters?

Platt: Yes, I can't recall whether it was a formal letter or whether it was word-of-mouth. But, I knew where I was headed before I ever left Korea.

Frank: Your family had remained here?

Platt: Yes, stayed in Washington.

Frank: You were a special plans officer, then became head of the Personnel, Plans and Policies Branch of the Personnel Department. Who was the director of personnel at this time?

Platt: Well, not in the Personnel Department. I was actually under the G-1, who was General Nels Nelson. I was not in the Personnel Department.

When I came in, I was special plans officer, Don Sherman headed the Personnel, Policies and Plans Branch and then he was transferred out in the normal course of events. I took over his job. I think I had eleven officers working for me, working in the G-1 area the whole time.

As special plans officer, one of my assignments was

to come up with the Marine Corps' position on the hump problem, and we did develop hump legislation.

We were ... I think we convinced Albie Pratt (who was the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Personnel at that time; Johnny Chaisson was one of his assistants) that we needed the hump legislation, but the Bureau of Naval Personnel were opposed to seeking the legislation at that time. That required a major effort.

Another thing we did was the revamping and updating of the warrant officer program, which is something that General Thomas was very interested in.

Frank: Let's go back to this hump legislation. Exactly what was the situation that required correction by legislation?

Platt: Well, you had a very large group of officers who had all been commissioned within a four year span as a result of World War II. There was no way that administratively you could change their birthdates. So they would all reach certain ages, retirement ages, at the same time.

Given the grade structure that was authorized by law, you could only play around with the three variables. Well, let me back off: you could seek an increased grade distribution and therefore, allow this hump to pass through the system without excessive forced attrition. And maintaining a flow of promotions so they didn't stagnate as they did prior to World War II.

Frank: In which rank was there the hump?

Platt: The hump spread among, as I recall in those days, from senior captain to lieutenant colonel. All within a three-four year span of original commissioning dates. All the services suffered from it, except that it was more severe in the Navy and the Marine Corps because of our very large proportion of regular officers.

If you had a sizable population of reserve officers, you could terminate their active duty and send them home. This was one of the things the Army and Air Force could do, that we could not do.

Various schemes were tried by other services of changing dates of rank to smooth out the hump, and of course, putting people in the so-called "valley" behind the hump by changing their date of rank. None of that changed their birthday and that was the inescapable fact about the hump problem. You could'nt by policy or administrative fiat, change any man's age.

Our proposal was generally to take a moderate increase in grade distribution, increase the forced attrition (which up until that time had been absolutely minimal) and thereby maintain a reasonable flow of promotions so that people didn't age in grade. So the average ages of officers in the various grades stayed within reasonable limits.

And, as I say, we had legislation perfected, a plan perfected, and Albie Pratt convinced, but the opposition from the Bureau of Naval Personnel at that time was pretty severe.

General Phil Berkeley came in as G-1 after General Nelson. Finally toward the end of his watch it was pushed through, and the emergency legislation for the hump was passed.

Frank: And what did it effectively do?

Platt: Well, it effectively allowed certain increases in grade distribution. For example, the Marine Corps' position as part of the original plan was to go from 500 to 600 colonels. And there were certain increases in the grade of lieutenant colonel, as well as certain forced attritions and forced early retirement after two passovers, all in order to create vacancies to keep the more junior officers going through the system at a reasonable rate.

Frank: There hadn't been forced retirement after two passovers before this?

Platt: There was forced retirement after two passovers, yes; for major, lieutenant colonel and colonel.

When that law, the Officer Personnel Act, was originally conceived, the idea was that they would come up for their first passover about two to three years maximum away from their forced retirement point. But we had promoted so much earlier due to the World War II expansion, that a man could be passed over twice and still be years and years away from his mandatory retirement point.

So unless he got out voluntarily, he was sitting there

fulfilling a vacancy which you needed, so the more junior officer could have a reasonable career opportunity.

Frank: I think what the Officer Promotion Act, or was it Officer Personnel?

Platt: Officer Personnel Act of 1947.

Frank: Which also was paralleled by the Reserve Officer Personnel Act.

Platt: It followed after several years.

Frank: What it did effectively was that if a major had more than eighteen years in, he would be allowed to finish up twenty after two passovers. A lieutenant colonel was what?

Platt: Twenty-six.

Frank: And a colonel....

Platt: Was thirty.

Frank: That is what is in effect today, I believe.

Platt: Well, they've recently passed legislation (I'm not sure that both houses have passed it yet, I think they have) the Officer Grade Limitation Act of whatever year it's passed in, which changes the Officer Personnel Act and improves it. Basically it is more of a modification to that act, than a whole new concept.

Frank: And so, the fact that they didn't have these various factors--for instance, for field grade officers who couldn't possibly have twenty in or were forced to either resign or be honorably discharged with two months' pay for each year of active service. That was an aspect of the Officer Personnel Act.

Platt: No, that was for captain. Once you achieved the rank of permanent major, you were retained until twenty years, were guaranteed minimal retirement.

Frank: How has that worked out?

Platt: There have been problems with it. In fact, Defense started in 1971 to try and come up with a new Officer Grade Limitation Act. Here it is, 1980 and it is either just recently been passed or is about to be passed. I think it's recently been passed. I think its law now.

Frank: What would be the obstacles to passing what appears to be a reasonable act? Besides vested interests?

Platt: No, you have first a built-in resistance to grade distribution. There is always the perennial cry that there are too many colonels, too many lieutenant colonels, and too many majors. You have to get down to "what do you mean by 'too many'?"

If you run it strictly on a requirements approach, whatever a "requirement" is (and I've never been totally sure how you decide whether a specific job should be a

colonel, lieutenant colonel or a major except in obviously line positions such as battalions and squadrons) you find that you either have got to have overwhelmingly high forced attrition in order to maintain a reasonable rate of promotion. which in turn produces the average ages of officers in each grade.

Or, if you have low promotional attrition, everything backs up and people age in grade. We went through that prior to World War II and paid quite a severe price for it.

But you have the opposition to that. You also have the opposition to separating or forcibly retiring a twice passed-over officer. Say the man is trained, why get rid of him just because he has been passed over twice?

Then you get into a serious debate about what is the effectiveness, on the average of twice-passed over officers. There are many, many officers who have been twice passed over who still operate very effectively, but you've got norms and averages. Generally speaking, it is my conclusion that if you have sizable numbers of people who know they are not going any further, and stay in, their motivation certainly suffers. So this is a long, long argument with a long, long history.

Historically, of course, prior to World War II, we didn't have forced attrition. Therefore, at the start of World War II in the early days, as you're well aware, many senior officers in all services just couldn't hack it. I think it is a shame to try and relearn that lesson.

Frank: Well, the lesson was also learned I think in 1933 or 1934 when the selection process came in.

Platt: Well, that's what I'm talking, that was the first attempt to do it, but it was a small attempt, and you still had at the eve of World War II, many, many senior officers who just were too old to perform effectively.

Frank: You also had a situation, I recall, in Korea. I am not quite certain how the personnel department handled this.

Interruption

It came up during the Korean War where guys who had been twice passed over were kept in because it was a national emergency and they needed them on active duty. They had done nothing to qualify them for promotion, but all of a sudden they were blooming heroes and they wind up with a Navy Cross for something in Korea.

How were you able to deep-six them? This must have created a problem. I don't think there were many. I know several cases.

Platt: Well, you can always focus in on the individual case. But certainly, going to your first premise, you can't be involuntarily retiring regular officers at the same time you are calling up reserves, no matter how many times the regular has been passed over.

It is just a matter of common sense. However, it was tried, I think in the Navy. And it was stopped by Congress.

It is perfectly feasible that a man could be twice passed over before say Korea, go into the Korean environment and do an absolutely superb job. If so, so be it.

Frank: The Marine Corps has a history of many people who were lousy garrison soldiers but damn good field soldiers. And while they may have done a good job in World War II, the post-World War II era hadn't been too kind to them, and they were only saved by the bell of the Korean War. I'm sure you could probably think of one or two people along that line.

Platt: I'm trying, I'm sure there are some. I didn't know anyone. Of course, that is an old saw, that there are people who are superb in combat and not very good in garrison and conversely, I might add.

Certainly, in individual cases it's true. But you have to design personnel policies and systems norms, not on the individual case basis.

Frank: What exactly were you doing when you went back to G-1?

Platt: What I outlined. As special plans officer I was working on the hump problem, the limited duty officer problem, the warrant officer program, the new warrant officer program; we brought back the Marine Gunner for example, which we had not had since World War II.

Then, of course, the normal budgetary presentations

on the Marine Corps' manpower plan. How many men we needed, why we needed them, where they were going to be used, Congressional testimony, and so on.

Frank: The LDO problem, was that something new? They hadn't had LDO's in the pre-World War II period had they?

Platt: The LDO program was an outgrowth of the Officer Personnel Act of 1947. It was designed basically to give the long service enlisted man or warrant officer an outlet into the officer grades for limited service, generally in a speciality. It was designed as a speciality program.

Frank: He would have to retire upon thirty years' service or upon reaching the rank of lieutenant colonel?

Platt: It was terminal for lieutenant colonel, but I think they changed it to colonel.

Frank: No, it never was. D'Arcy Greiser, who was the admin officer....

Platt: I'm not so sure it wasn't changed in that recent act.... But then, the idea of the warrant officer program, General Thomas' concept, and a very good one, was to give the fairly junior NCO who was very promising an entree into the warrant officer grades, which in turn would lead to the LDO grades, to sort of link the three into a system.

Frank: Did it work out?

Platt: Yes. It is still working today. And as a process of that, we brought back the Marine Gunner.

Frank: But the Marine Gunner didn't last too long.

Platt: No, but I think it was a good idea.

Frank: Why didn't it last?

Platt: I don't know. That's after my time.

Frank: Did the matter of the SDO come up during your time there?

Platt: No, not in the course of changing the course of legislation. The SDO legislation was changed under General Shoup after I left.

Frank: He did away with it.

Platt: That is correct.

Frank: To the unhappiness of many SDO's.

Platt: That too is correct.

Frank: You were not involved with that.

Platt: No, I was not.

Frank: You had nearly a three year tour at Headquarters. Get tired of Headquarters by this time?

Platt: Oh, yes. That was a quite a sweatshop. It was not

unusual to work full days, maybe go home and grab a bite to eat; come back and work till eleven o'clock at night; do this six or sometimes seven days a week.

Frank: Was there a necessity for this?

Platt: Oh yes, we were...The requirements were far greater than the number of people we had. It wasn't just making work; the work was there. It was a question of just how much you could get done in the time you had. We had some very dedicated people.

Frank: The whole Headquarters was burning the midnight oil?

Platt: I wouldn't say the whole Headquarters. It was spotty, but certainly in the G-3 section, G-1, the Division of Aviation, particularly around budget time or times when special bills were up, yes. That was pretty much the norm.

Frank: Of course, you also had to concern yourself with the redeployment of the division from Korea. Or didn't that come under you?

Platt: No, that would be more of a Personnel Department action, not a G-1 action.

Frank: How did you escape to England?

Platt: I was supposed to go out and be executive officer of 4th Marines in Kaneohe under Jim Masters. I was very happy about this. What happened (I am not sure of all the details),

but what happened was there was no vacancy, or somebody else took over Jim's job and there wasn't a vacancy. Anyhow, the vacancy dried up.

Frank: Were you a colonel by now?

Platt: No, I was lieutenant colonel. The vacancy dried up and I was told that of course, we could always transfer somebody from Kaneohe over to FMFPac and create a vacancy, which I think was a ploy. Of course, I said I wouldn't be any part of that sort of deal.

So then this officer detailer reached down in his lower drawer and said, "We just have a vacancy coming up on the staff of CINCNELM in London; how would you like to go over there?" I said, "I'll take it." That's how I got to London.

I remember General Twining stopping me in the corridor and saying, "What good is this going to do you or the Marine Corps?" Which is one perspective.

Frank: It hasn't hurt any of the people who filled that position.

Platt: No, I don't think so. It was a very fascinating tour. When I went out there, I was on a joint planning group on the CINCNELM staff because Admiral Boone, who was the CINCNELM then, had the Middle East. In fact, he had planning cognizance all the way to what's now Bangladesh, East Pakistan.

We had an Air Force colonel, an Army lieutenant

colonel, and a Marine lieutenant colonel, and a Navy captain or commander. We were working on plans for the Middle East, principally what the United States military did in the event the Arab-Israeli conflict cut loose again. It was pretty interesting.

After about six months of that, I was sent in to be assistant Marine officer to the Force Marine officer. He rated an assistant, so I moved out of joint plans and into that billet.

Frank: Who was the force Marine officer?

Platt: Barney Barninger. And then later, Jack Miller.

Frank: Yes, I know Jack Miller.

Platt: Barney was a prisoner of war in World War II, he had the original job and then Jack came in and relieved him.

Frank: At the time of Lebanon. You were involved there?

Platt: More involved in the Suez than Lebanon.

Going back to the joint planning: Admiral Boone gave us his airplane, put this joint planning group on it and turned us loose. We flew all over the Middle East, including Khyber Pass, Peshawar, all the places that are in the news now. Tehran, Bahrain, Baghdad, Beirut...So that was highly interesting.

Then as force Marine officer, we became heavily involved in the Suez planning, with a lot of debate as to

whether the British would intervene or not.

I remember a congressman coming over and asking us if the British would intervene in Suez. I voted the right way; I said that they would.

But as a result of Suez, they packed off a good percentage of the staff and we climbed on airplanes with lockers full of top secret material and flew to Iskenderun, Turkey and went aboard an AGC in the Mediterranean. Admiral Boone went afloat and I went with that group. It was a very interesting time.

Frank: Was this the group that interfered with a landing group, a British landing operation?

Platt: No, we didn't interfere with it. I can say that the naval traffic in the eastern Mediterranean was very heavy at that time, with French, British, and American ships.

I think one of the interesting sidelights of course, was Soviet missile blackmail: that was the first time that they threatened to use missiles on London and Paris.

Here we were in the Mediterranean with our families back in London; that was a rather vivid memory.

Frank: They actually threatened to....

Platt: Oh, yes, that was the first time the Soviets ever used missile blackmail, and they used it very successfully right up until Cuba.

Frank: How come that never gets into the news?

Platt: I don't know; I did my National War College paper on that--that's an area that has always fascinated me. They very definitly threatened to use them for political purposes, of course.

Frank: Who was the client at the time, Nasser?

Platt: Nasser was their client. Of course, they threatened to use them when the U-2 flew out of Peshawar and Gary Powers was shot down.

There was a B...I forgotten what type of aircraft was shot down over the North Sea, and they threatened to use them because of that. There was a whole series of them.

Frank: That's right; the crew was held prisoner for some time.

Platt: They used missile blackmail very effectively up until Cuba when we faced them down.

I was in on some of the original Lebanon planning but I was transferred before the Marines landed in Lebanon.

Frank: Do you know why General Pollock and his staff were not allowed to come and take charge?

Platt: Take charge in Lebanon? Well, the Army had already moved in and taken command. They had some airborne general whose name escapes me.

Frank: Who later was head of strike command, I think.

Platt: Who was that, I've forgotten. But there was quite a struggle over that.

Frank: Paul Adams, I think it was.

Platt: Paul Adams. As I say, I left before that took place.

Frank: Where did you live in London?

Platt: In London, just on the boundaries of Chelsea, in a place called Earl's Court, right off Earl's Court Road. In a big, beautiful old British flat.

It was very interesting duty--lots of travel. As a sidelight, of course, like any large major headquarters, we had our quota of VIPs, congressmen, senators, secretaries of defense. We had a command briefing like any large headquarters. The original briefing officer when I got there was Chester Nimitz' son, a commander in the Navy.

General Pate came out for a staff visit out there. After he had a coffee klatsch with Admiral Boone, I was sent for. I was asked by Admiral Boone if I had had any briefing experience. I could see a stacked deck coming. I allowed as how; and he said that he was going to try me out as a command briefer.

So I ended up as the command briefer in CINCNELM, which I didn't mind particularly. It was additional duty but the trouble is, when I was explaining the deployment of ships in the Mediterranean, Admiral Boone kept insisting that I

say "our carriers are here" or "our destroyers are there". Every time I used that word "our" (which he directed me to do) I could see a visible shudder go through every blue suit in the room.

Then, Admiral Holloway took over from Admiral Boone. The time came for me to leave; I was under orders. Ross Dwyer was my relief. I wrote Ross before I ever left London and sent him copies of the briefing, copies of the charts, and said, "Have this memorized by the time you get here." Ross, being a very fine speaker, did just that. When I took Ross Dwyer up to say my goodbyes to Admiral Holloway and to introduce Ross, Admiral Holloway leaned back and said, "Oh, you're going home, Platt. Who is going to be the command briefer?" I said, "Right here sir, Lieutenant Colonel Dwyer." Would you believe that he held it the whole time that he was there too.

Frank: Before we finish up this afternoon, talking about briefing, we should repeat on tape the story you told me at lunch when you were at G-1 and briefing JCS and Secretary Wilson.

Platt: Oh, yes, that's when I was in G-1. Of course, one of the functions was to come up with the Marine Corps' overall manpower plan. At that time, the Marine Corps' objective was 215,000 Marines and all the Defense Department would let us have was 190,000.

Hunter Hurst from G-3 had the lead part of the briefing,

and then I had the personnel part of the briefing for Charlie Wilson, who was then Secretary of Defense.

I went over with General Shepherd and Secretary of Defense Wilson was perhaps one of the most impolite people I have ever briefed. He obviously was not interested, we were making no headway whatsoever. But I was going through the briefing.

End Tape 3, Side 1

Begin Tape 3, Side 2

Platt: And Secretary of Defense Wilson, who had been doodling on his pad in front of him, was not even looking at the charts. Finally, for the first time, he looked up at me and said, with rather acid tones, "Colonel, if you really looked at these figures, you could come up with another whole division." There was a bit of silence, very short, and then General Shepherd looked the Secretary square in the eye and shook his finger right in his face and said, "Mr. Secretary," he said, "that is my Colonel up there giving my briefing, and if you have got anymore questions like that, you address them to me, not to him." Which, of course, endeared General Shepherd to me, he was already endeared , but that solidified it. He really stuck up for his people.

Frank: What was the reaction of the other chiefs? Were they glad that Wilson got it?

Platt: I think there were smiles going all over the room, but the Secretary of Defense backed down and was quite differ-

ent for the rest of the briefing, although, we still didn't get anymore than 190,000 Marines.

Frank: Okay, that's a good place to end.

Platt: Okay.

End of Session I, Tape 3, Side 1

Begin Session II, February 1980, Tape 1, Side 1

Frank: Joe, the last time we left off we were talking about CinCNELM. Now, you talked about your job, you were in plans, and then you were a briefing officer, and you turned your job over to Ross Dyer. How involved were you with the Lebanon thing?

Platt: Well, let me go back...I never was a briefing officer full time. That was additional duty. I started out in Joint Plans in a small joint section Admiral Boone had there to do primarily Middle East planning--and at that time principally focused on the Arab-Israeli conflict; and then moved over as the Assistant Force Marine Officer to Colonel Barninger. And we were involved in Lebanon planning from the level of that headquarters, but I actually left the headquarters before the Lebanon landing took place.

Frank: So, it was just a matter of contingency planning.

Platt: Yes, it was contingency planning. And, of course, you may recall that after Suez, we kept the Marine brigade

in the Mediterranean for rather an extensive period of time. Of course, we were involved in the planning as far as they were concerned from the CINCNELM level.

Frank: Had the Brits given you any advance notice of what they were going to do at Suez?

Platt: Certainly not at my level. I recall and, maybe I mentioned it previously, that Representative Jack Brooks and one other representative--both Marine Reserve officers--came over there and we had a session with them in which they asked us if we thought the British would intervene militarily in Suez. We were all guessing rather than operating on any firm information. I thought they would. It turned out historically I was right.

Frank: What was this Clarence Barninger that was there with you?

Platt: Clarence Barniger, yes.

Frank: And he had been on the Marine Corps Board, I believe, at one time.

Platt: That's correct.

Frank: Okay. Did you have any advance notice that you were going to get the 8th & Eye Barracks?

Platt: Yes, and I must say it came as a real surprise. I was told in advance that I was going to the Barracks

and also, the Commandant (then General Pate) allowed me to take 30 days leave between the time I left London and the time I got to the Barracks. So that when I took over the Barracks, General Chapman had, in fact, left on the first of July, and a Lieutenant Colonel Miller was the acting CO, I came in in August after a leave in Europe.

Frank: Right at the top of the parade season.

Platt: At the top of the parade season Ben, and one of the first shocks I had was that President Eisenhower was going to Newport and that required the bulk of our guard company, so at the top of the parade season we had to reduce from six to four platoons, which I might add, the Commandant was rather shocked about, but that's the way it was.

Frank: What kind of a briefing did you get as far as your duties were concerned at the Barracks?

Platt: Well, a very good friend of mine died in that summer and I escorted his body back here--Lieutenant Colonel Jack Kelsey, who was CO of the Marine Barracks in Naples. While I was back here for Jack's funeral, I had the chance to spend two days with then-Colonel Chapman and that was my briefing. He was good--very effective and very helpful. But then when I came back, we immediately--the relief was immediate. As a matter of fact, it took place, I think, two days after I got there and makes rather an interesting story. I was in the quarters suiting up for the parade and

my sergeant major came in--I think it was about two hours before Adjutant's Call--with a sergeant from the local police precinct who said that they had received information they were going to plant a bomb in the Barracks during the parade, and the police took it very seriously.

Frank: Who was "they?"

Platt: Nobody knew who "they" was. The police had received an anonymous phone call that a bomb was going to be planted in the Barracks. What we did was we asked the police to have a bomb disposal squad prepared to come on call but we didn't want large numbers of police around the parade without better information than that. We did search the barracks, searched the basements of all the quarters, plus looked very carefully under the bleachers and then organized two staff NCOs on each gate to look for suspicious characters. One of the members of the Band was coming in one of the gates that night in civilian clothes with a shoebox--he had just bought a new pair of shoes--under his arm, and two of the Marine staff NCOs apprehended him. They didn't know who he was and they took him in the Band Hall and shook him down in spite of his protest. But that was the only thing that happened. I do remember that when Bill Miller passed me the colors he said, "Now if that bomb goes off, it'll be on your watch."

Frank: Oh, Bill Miller was your exec?

Platt: Yes.

Frank: Yes, he retired as colonel artilleryman.

Platt: That's correct.

Frank: He used to be head of the Historical Division.

Platt: I didn't--yes, I remember that.

Frank: That was his twilight cruise. Did you have much problem-as I recall, on the 9th Street side of the Barracks was a whole row--whole street full of rowhouses which at that time--which now are, as of this date, are pretty expensive townhouses--have been--in those days they were mostly occupied by blacks and, of course, parade season the parking situation was such that the barracks would, I guess, usurp, have to clear the road. Did you have much problem with those people?

Platt: We never had any serious problems at all.

Frank: The neighbors.

Platt: Never any significant problems, as I recall, the two years I was there, none.

Frank: Exactly what were your functions as CO of the Barracks?

Platt: Well, I believe the same functions that the CO has now--conducting ceremonies, not only the parade and the Iwo Jima ceremony which was then in the afternoon; but the funerals, many arrival ceremonies, and providing

security with one platoon at Camp David on a rotational basis which, whenever President Eisenhower elected to go up there on the weekend, which he did frequently on very short notice, then we had to augment that platoon. And providing toward the latter part of the watch security at Blair House when a head of state was living there. Then additionally, of course, I was director of the Marine Corps Institute and functioned in that capacity as well. Those were the principal functions--ceremonial, presidential security, and the Marine Corps Institute functions.

Frank: Did it make you nervous having the Commandant and his lady looking over your shoulder all the time?

Platt: Well, I don't know that nervous is exactly the right point, but there is no doubt when running a Marine organization in the Commandant's front yard there is a certain amount of pressure involved.

Frank: You were talking about a lot of kibbitzing from outsiders who had suggestions for changing ceremonies. I know that Bob Heinl, for instance, was always complaining about the Drum and Bugle Corps. He thought that there were enough old traditional songs--they didn't have to play all these so-called candy-ass tunes.

Platt: Yes, that was not uncommon. It seemed like many active duty and retired Marines in the area had some very definite thoughts about how the parade should be run.

In the final analysis, however, that parade was run the way the Commandant wanted it. I, too, felt that there were times when we got too far away from martial music. However, on occasion, the Commandant had some favorite tunes and the Drum and Bugle Corps played them.

Frank: Now, you were there under two Commandants.

Platt: Yes.

Frank: Under Pate and....

Platt: ...and General Shoup.

Frank: How would you characterize the differences between the two from your point of view as CO of the Barracks?

Platt: Well, actually they were both very supportive and very understanding of what the Barracks did. I remember the first parade we had--it was a public parade, a parade that they may still have and which--it's a dress rehearsal--is the first parade of the season. For this parade, the officers of the Barracks and their wives and the staff NCOs and their wives were encouraged to attend and the great bulk of them attended. We asked General Shoup to be the reviewing officer for that parade since it was the first one on his watch. He was making a talk at the Army War College and at the last minute we were informed that he couldn't come, so General McCaul, the Assistant Commandant, took over as the reviewing officer. After the parade we were having a cocktail

party for the Barracks officers and their wives in my quarters. I remember just as the party got started General Shoup came in and he handed me a pencil written note. As we shook hands he just left it in my hand and said, "Hey, Platt, that's for you." And then went he rejoined the party. I opened it up, obviously being very curious, and it said, "I have just witnessed the first parade in my tour as Commandant from the second floor of the Commandant's house," and it went on to be most complimentary about the performance of the parade and the troops. It was a very nice gesture and it was something that could be read to the troops and I did read it to them at the next opportunity. However, he never said anything like that verbally--just in that pencil-written note, which I still may have.

Frank: I don't think it was his nature to be too complimentary face to face.

Platt: I had worked with General Shoup before.

Frank: Well, then you knew.

Platt: He was very, very supportive of what those Marines did.

Frank: You made colonel over in England, right?

Platt: Yes, just before I came back to take over the Barracks.

Frank: Traditionally, there are several positions, billets

in the Marine Corps which, unless one stubs his toes, leads to a star. Basic School, supposedly is one, and the Barracks command at 8th & Eye is another. Did you foresee the stars at this point?

Platt: I don't think I foresaw them. Certainly, I wanted them, but I wasn't counting on them. I think there are only two of us in recent history that ever commanded both the Basic School and 8th & Eye and that's my very good friend Ed Wheeler. He relieved me at the Basic School and then he took over as CO of the Marine barracks, I think--one CO removed from me.

Frank: That's a very prestigious billet, at 8th & Eye, I would think. Certainly you're in the public eye perhaps more than any other Marine officer in the Corps.

Platt: Well, yes. It's also very rewarding because of the caliber of the Marines that you serve with daily. It never ceased to amaze me really what they put up with that you didn't see behind the scenes. I think that lots of people think that the ceremonial guard company, for example, just gets involved in parades and Iwo ceremonies and they forget about the tremendous number of funerals which, of course, all during my tour and in subsequent tours were rising everyday as the World War I and World War II Marines aged. And then the security aspects of it which at that time were very little known. Camp David and Newport. So what they put up with was really remarkable. On the other side of the

coin, the Marine Corps Institute Company that performed extremely well in ceremonies and yet still conducted the business of the Marine Corps Institue again never ceased to amaze me.

Frank: Was this a pretty good....

Platt: It was a very enjoyable tour. I wouldn't have wanted three years--two years was enough.

Frank: Did you work, for instance, closely with the Secret Service?

Platt: Yes, very closely, particularly in Newport and at Camp David.

Frank: You were directly involved?

Platt: Yes. Basically what we did in both places was provide the perimeter security and the secret service provided the close intermediate security for the President. As a matter of fact, during my two years Khrushechev came to Camp David, which was a pretty interesting experience.

Frank: Tell me about it.

Platt: Well, we, of course, worked closely with the Secret Service in planning for it, and we augmented the security up there. I have forgotten how many people, but it was in the vicinity of almost the full guard company. Khrushechev showed up with four bodyguards, one of which always sat

outside of his room in the President's house with a Walther P-38 in a shoulder holster and a machine pistol in his lap. The first several days--the first day was very tense on the part of all hands I think. And then as I recall, I had a Marine who spoke a little bit of Russian and during the meal hours he became quite friendly with one of the Soviet party and I think that sort of precipitated a relaxation. Toward the end of the tour it was really quite friendly. As a matter of fact, the last day General Zaharov, whom I was told was the Commandant of the Kremlin, and a Colonel Bordine, who spoke colloquial English--the general didn't but the colonel did--invited me for a drink at the cottage in which they were staying. At the time we were in utilities and we had small radio receivers worn underneath our utility jacket. I had one on and it was turned on, and right in the midst of that drinking session--Bloody Marys as I recall--one of the members of the guard called the sergeant of the guard on the radio and this blatted out in the room and caused some immediate tension on the part of the Soviet bodyguards. I took the radio out rather gently and everybody laughed and that sort of relaxed the tension. I was impressed with the fact that the four Soviet bodyguards, whom I was told were majors, the way they reacted to the Russian leaders was something you wouldn't be inclined to forget. If General Zaharov or Colonel Bordine's glass got even partially empty, they would almost run to remix their drink or my drink. Generally they really popped and cracked around those people.

Frank: What about your relations with the band, an independent organization? Al Schoepper, I guess, was the leader of the Marine band during your tour.

Platt: Yes.

Frank: Somewhat of a martinet, too.

Platt: My thought of the band was this: I fully understood the immense commitments they had that didn't involve the Barracks, but at the same time I believe that when they marched in the parades or performed at the Iwo ceremony, that the people that viewed them expected and always got a very high level of musical performance. My view was that they also had a right to expect a pretty high level of performance insofar as military appearance and drill was concerned. And I believe that--I know that they did achieve that. I inspected the band and looked upon the band as a major component of the total Barracks. My second year there the band gave me a surprise band concert for my birthday and that's a memory that I will always treasure. I have nothing but the tremendous respect for that band. It was really a remarkable organization. I can't recall the exact statistics, but I think in the vicinity of 70 percent of that band were college graduates when I came in.

Frank: Yes, well, I think, well they were all professional musicians and most of them--that 70 percent--were all conservatory graduates, and anyone who isn't, came into

band after high school, had to be pretty much of a child prodigy.

Platt: Absolutely.

Frank: Was there any problem with discipline and with the band?

Platt: No, there was no problem. I did want that component of the band that performed in the parade to rehearse along with the rest of the troops. I think at first that was resented in a minor way, but it didn't seem to last.

Sending Marines up to Newport was rather an interesting evolution. I don't know that has happened since, but when President Eisenhower went up there and took over the quarters of the Commandant of the Naval War College, we furnished, well, I think 125 Marines to provide security. We had a wonderful sergeant by the name of Sergeant Gary Bennett who was at least 6'5" and was impeccable in appearance. In fact, in the guard company, I think the smallest lieutenant at that time was 6'1". They called him shrimp. The CO of the guard company was 6'5" and several of the lieutenants were 6'3" or 6'4". At any rate, Sergeant Bennett was detailed to be the President's Orderly when the President was in his office; and he and the President struck up a very good relationship. I think the President was very fond of Sergeant Bennett. One story that has always stuck in my mind, is the summer that President Eisenhower was up there was one of the summers when we hold the America's Cup and the Naval

aide invited the President to go out on a destroyer to see the races, or one of the trials of the races, I forget which. But anyway, my guard company commander, Dick Hatch, told me this story. The President with Sergeant Bennett in attendance and Vice Admiral Ingersoll, who was then the President of the Naval War College, were standing on the deck of a destroyer. Sergeant Bennett had been given some binoculars specifically for the Presidential use and I don't know how, but Vice Admiral Ingersoll was very interested in the cup races and was using them. The President was standing there chatting with Sergeant Bennett, eating potato chips or something like that, not terribly interested in the cup races, but he happened to--something caught his eye and he said, "Sergeant Bennett, where are my binoculars?" At that particular time Vice Admiral Ingersoll was using them, but Sergeant Bennett just reached out, grabbed them, snapped them away from the admiral, said "Here they are, Mr. President," almost beheading the admiral. Sergeant Bennett was the kind of Marine if you told him to do something, he did it regardless of the consequences. Nothing ever came of it, but I don't think the admiral was very happy about it.

Frank: Well, of course, Newport--when Harry Truman went down to Key West, the Marine detachment went down there with him....

Platt: That's correct.

Frank: ...and let's see, Kennedy went down to Key West--well,

Kennedy was up in Massachusetts at the Cape Hyannisport. The Marine detachment went up to Hyannisport, I guess.

Platt: I cannot recall that.

Frank: Camp David, of course, is the major thing. Now, did General Shoup say that--ask you where you wanted to go upon your detachment, or had you been promised the National War College?

Platt: Well, I had been selected for the National War College before I went to the Marine barracks.

Frank: Oh.

Platt: Then I was removed from the list, and of course, I was very interested in going to the National War College, and during the two year tour was very concerned as to whether or not I would be selected again. I was, and I went.

Frank: Where did you go on your trip?

Platt: I went to the Far East.

Frank: Far East. What did you write your paper on?

Platt: On The Political Implications of Soviet Missile Blackmail.

Frank: Oh, yes, as a result of--you told me that.

Platt: Yes, as a result of my Suez experience when the Soviets threatened to launch missiles at Paris and London.

And I wanted to pick something, as my paper in the National War College, that first was of great personal interest and secondly I didn't want to pick a paper in the middle of--well, something that was closely allied to the Marine Corps. I thought it was an opportunity to broaden one's horizons.

Frank: Was it classified?

Platt: No, it was not. Primarily, the research was done by scrutinizing The New York Times. At that time only one article had been written on this. My faculty advisor is the one that encouraged me to write it. It was later presented at the Council on Foreign Relations at one of their small group meetings, and of course, the whole episode culminated with Cuba. That made it interesting again from a personal standpoint.

Frank: Who were some of the other Marines that were your classmates?

Platt: Donn Robertson, Jess Ferrill, George Dooley, Dave Marshall. Those are the ones that come immediately to mind. Charlie Brush. I almost forgot Charlie. Wonderful man.

Frank: Oh, yes. He is probably senior to all of you, wasn't he?

Platt: I believe that Donn Robertson was the senior.

Frank: Donn was the senior?

Platt: Yes. Either Donn or--no, maybe it was Jess Ferrill. Jess Ferrill was the senior Marine.

Frank: This was a full year at the National War College that you spent, then.

Platt: Yes, almost.

Frank: Okay, next tour--that was August '60 to June '61. Your next tour you had the 6th Marines down at the Second Division at Camp Lejeune.

Platt: I don't want to prolong the one about the Barracks, but since the building that you're sitting in had something to do with my tour at the Barracks, I thought you might want to record that. Well, when I took over the Barracks, we had a very large number of Marines who were living on the town because we just didn't have enough room in the Barracks to provide quarters for all of them. And this made for a difficult situation, difficult from a disciplinary standpoint, from a reaction time standpoint; and none of the company commanders were very happy with the situation. At the same time, coincidentally, the Marine Barracks here in the Navy Yard was being phased out and, of course, they were in this building, and it occurred to me that the Barracks at 8th & Eye would be a lot better off if we could get all of our men off the street by using this building for Guard Company.

And I made that recommendation to the Commandant. The Potomac River Naval Command was not very interested in relinquishing this building or letting the Marines retain the building. They wanted it, I think, for a headquarters or an annex to their headquarters. So the negotiations for this eventually got to the CNO-CMC level. And one of the terms of the retention of the building by the Marine Corps was that we would continue to provide sentries for the main gate, and they are still there. I have always heard this story, although I could never prove it--never find anything to prove it, that that's the oldest sentry post in the Marine Corps since the Navy Yard predated the Barracks, so it stands to reason. But at any rate, the deal was completed and after renovating this building, this is where we quartered Guard Company. But for a very short period of time--or not a short period of time--a rather prolonged period of time--it appeared that we would not be able to retain the building, and if we hadn't retained the building, then this organization wouldn't be here.

Frank: So the guard came over during your tour?

Platt: Yes.

Frank: Had plans for the new bachelor enlisted quarters begun during the time you were CO of the barracks?

Platt: We drew up a schematic which would have involved taking over the block just to the east of the barracks.

Bud Schmidt, now deceased, was my 4--wonderful man--and we actually drew up a concept and presented it to the Commandant. We never were able to get anywhere with it during the two years that I was there beyond the conceptual stage, but it had--it was a goal of ours to expand the Barracks as it has now been expanded.

Frank: Before the Southwest Freeway here was....

Platt: It was one of the stumbling blocks.

Frank: Yes. Well, I remember hearing about this. As a matter of fact, they were talking about making this a whole headquarters Marine Corps complex. Is that right?

Platt: No--I don't--I have no knowledge of that at all.

Frank: You were just talking about expanding the barracks then?

Platt: We were. We wanted to take over one more block.

Frank: Right down to the Navy Yard--right down M Street.

Platt: No, just east of the Barracks between 9th and 10th.

Frank: Oh, in back of the Barracks instead of....

Platt: That's correct.

Frank: ...extending it--that's east--instead of south.

Platt: Two blocks. That was our plan--to put another

quadrangle there and take over that section of the street--9th Street.

Frank: Actually, the BEQ concept in the building took place --well, it had to take place long after you left.

Platt: Oh, yes--much longer.

Frank: Because we have been here in the building--this is our third--fourth year?

Platt: Oh, I went to the commissioning of the new BEQ up here and it was quite awhile after I was retired that it was added on.

Frank: Yes, okay--well, I think we were here--well, the BEQ was completed long before this place came in--I think this took two years plus to build, to fix it. That was--yes, I know there was quite a problem there as far as the housing of all the enlisted members of the command.

Platt: A very serious problem.

Frank: Did you have much of a disciplinary problem at the Barracks?

Platt: No, certainly nothing like the disciplinary problems we have, say, in a battalion from time to time. The problem with the kinds of things that happened was that you landed up in the public eye, and that enhanced individual problems. But the number of problems was way down--a direct reflection

of the caliber of people you are working with.

Frank: I was remembering several years ago they had a big scandal--some Marine from the Barracks--there was a couple of Marines involved with a theft ring of some sort--do you remember?

Platt: I recall reading about it in the papers, yes. I recall having a lot of sympathy for the then CO of the Barracks.

Frank: Yes, and, of course, during the Vietnam war you had the pick of returned veterans which you didn't have at the time, if you were trying to.

Platt: Well, we didn't have the pick of the veterans but we actually went out and recruited, almost on a worldwide basis. The CO of the Guard Company would go to the 2d Division or the 1st Division, and I believe even out to the 3rd Division, so there was a great deal of selectivity involved in the people we had in the Barracks, and additionally, of course, insofar as guard company went, they all had to pass a full background investigation. The White House insisted upon that, and they insisted upon the power of veto over whether or not a Marine could be used for Presidential security.

Frank: Did--well, would you take someone just out of bootcamp if he was a good looking Marine, or did you want someone who was more seasoned?

Platt: The goal was to have someone that was more seasoned. If we couldn't get the numbers of people that we wanted to meet the standards we were looking for--I can't remember whether we actually directly recruited out of bootcamp or not. It was considered and we may have taken some, but we much preferred a man who had graduated from bootcamp, done a tour, and then would come back to the Barracks on the basis he would be more mature and more experienced.

Frank: It just seems to me you would get someone fresh out of bootcamp to an assignment like 8th & Eye, it would ruin them for the rest of service.

Platt: I'm not sure it would ruin him for the rest of the service.

Frank: Well, you know--it's--doing duty at 8th & Eye and doing duty out in the field in the FMF is as different as day is from night.

Platt: It certainly is different, but in terms of the pressures on the individual--not combat pressures, but just the daily pressures--the pressures on the individual Marine here at 8th & Eye--the length of his workweek-made me admire those Marines. I would not characterize it as easy duty at all. I think there is a certain amount of glamour to it in the first six months, and then it becomes pretty harrassing. The standards of maintaining their uniform--what it costs them to maintain their uniform, what

some of the staff NCOs had for cleaning bills, for example.

Frank: They had to sustain them themselves?

Platt: Well, yes, they did, in those days.

Frank: They'd sometimes go through....

Platt: And the lengths that they would go to to maintain the highest standards of personal appearance were one of the components which made it pretty darn tough duty.

Frank: They would have to go through two or three sets of uniforms in a day.

Platt: Oh yes, absolutely. I recall one incident where the uniform manufacturer downtown--at the time I was there, the word came out of Headquarters that staff NCOs could wear officer's summer uniform. It was garbled--it was a mistake--and I think one or two months after it came out it was rescinded as a mistake, but several of my staff NCOs immediately went downtown to a uniform shop and ordered staff NCO uniforms. As a matter of fact--I mean ordered officer uniforms as a matter of pride, and when the word came out that it was a mistake from Headquarters and that they could not wear these uniforms, they had already made this commitment. It was my view that the uniform organization--the uniform shop--should break the contract. It was not the view of the uniform shop they should break it. I think my approach to that after consulting a classmate who was a

lawyer was quite simple. I went down and talked to the man who owned the shop and said that certainly he was within his rights technically not to take the uniforms back, but from a moral standpoint I thought it was wrong, particularly with the compensation that a staff NCO was receiving, and said my only reaction to it was to make sure that if they refused to take them back that it would be widely known among the officers at 8th & Eye and I'm sure it would spread from that. They took them back.

Frank: Did you bring any innovations about doing during your tour there as far as ceremony or uniforms or anything else?

Platt: No, there were no innovations. General Chapman, as you well know was the father of the evening parade, and all I did was continue what he had started. I can recall no innovations.

Frank: Of course, in these days, getting a seat--getting a ticket to the parade is like getting a ticket to a hit play or musical--very difficult. Did you find the place was as crowded during your tour as it is today?

Platt: It was jammed. We did put in the wooden bleachers during my tour to accommodate bigger crowds. We had a contract and they'd come in and set them up Friday and then break them down during the weekend. Now, of course, they are permanent. But that was one of the things that

we did, and getting a seat was very hard, even then. Frequently, you would have congressional administrative assistants calling up and saying their boss was coming down with three or four constituents at the last minute, and the sergeant who ran that parade seating and reservations had a really full time, harrassing job.

Frank: I can imagine. Who were some of the VIPs that reviewed the parade--came to the parade during your tour?

Platt: There were so many of them, it's hard to recall. Prince Constantine of Greece was here; some ambassadors from some South American countries; Prince Philip, of course, came on General Chapman's watch, not mine. But those are the ones that come to mind--first the Secretary of Defense and always the Secretary of the Navy.

Frank: Going down to Lejeune, you got there in July of '61 and immediately took over the 6th Marines. Let's see--how long--you didn't hold that for too long, did you?

Platt: One year, which was normal in those days.

Frank: A one-year tour.

Platt: And then one year as a G-3.

Frank: Who had the division at that time?

Platt: General Phil Berkeley had it initially. He was relieved by General Fred Weiseman.

Frank: Oh, Freddie Weiseman had it. What were you doing down there for the most part? Training, maneuvers?

Platt: Well, it started off with maintaining battalion in the Med and a battaion in the Caribbean. There was continuous and emphasis on training, emphasis on bringing up battalions to a state of readiness where they could deploy, and then toward the end of my first two years the biggest assignment we received was to put on a demonstration for President Kennedy at the White House's request, which was quite a drill.

Frank: I think that famous shot of helicopters at the landing was shot at that time.

Platt: Oh, there were--as I recall--about 8,000 Marines involved in that demonstration.

Frank: You were a G-3 at that time.

Platt: No, I was CO of the 6th Marines and I was given that as a project. I was the narrator for it as well as the planner and organizer.

Frank: How did it go?

Platt: On the day we did it, it went without a flaw. On the dress rehearsal, it was probably one of the worst demonstrations I've ever seen.

Frank: How so? Ragged?

Platt: Well, the Navy elected to move up H hour by ten minutes without notifying me or anybody else on the beach. We got a number of VIPs down there on the pier to watch it from Headquarters for the dress rehearsal. I had to narrate it with my back to the landing. You'll recall the pier there at Onslow Beach, and, of course, I had to face the stands. And Paul Graham, who had the reconnaisance battalion, was my number one assistant, and I recall narrating about pre-H hour bombardment, and the activities of UDT, and all the customary things in a landing and he held up a big impromptu card which said, "Turn around. They are landing." The first Marines were hitting the beach exactly ten minutes before they were supposed to. The beach was loaded with demolitions which were planned to go off on a phase basis--pre-HR bombardment, pre-H and R strafing and bombing, and we were quite concerned that the Marines wouldn't be on the beach before the demolitions were expended. When I turned and saw the first Amtraks unloading the Marines on the beach I just said "blow it all," and we did, and to this day General Berkeley says there is a crack in the post theater down at Camp Lejeune which was caused by the resulting explosion. Needless to say, on the actual demonstration day there were many apprehensive people as to whether it would go off right, and we were very Platt lucky it went off without a flaw.

Frank: Let's see, I think it was either your time or shortly after you left Lejeune that the pier was swept away in a big storm.

Platt: It was after I left.

Frank: After you left.

Platt: We did have a load of VIPs for that demonstration--President Kennedy, Vice President Johnson, The Shah of Iran, Secretary of Defense, about 50 members of the Diplomatic Corps mostly from Latin American, South American, and some African nations, Middle East. The whole idea was, as you know, was a coordinated series of demonstrations which included that group being on board carriers, and then they were helicoptered home to Camp Lejeune and then moved up to Cherry Point and then on their way.

Frank: Did the missile crisis occur during your time down there?

Platt: The Cuban missile crisis? Yes, when I was G-3.

Frank: What were your duties at that time--what did you have to do?

Platt: Well, that was the first time the 2nd Marine Division had embarked....

Frank: As a whole.

Platt: ...since World War II, so G-1, 2, 3, 4 and every other member of the staff were pretty busy and were not able to go through the planning phase. We had a BLT in the Caribbean, we had a BLT in the Mediterranean, and it was

necessary to concentrate them all for the potential landing on Cuba. I recall then-Lieutenant Colonel, now retired Major General Ross Dwyer, who had the Med Battalion, brought the Med Battalion into Norfolk one night, had a car, drove down to Camp Lejeune, arrived about 2:00 in the morning. As I recall, he and I stood in front of a map of Cuba and I handed him a simple overlay, he climbed in the car, went back to his BLT, and sailed the next morning. Those were all the orders he had.

Another instance, we had to get in touch with a BLT, well, actually it was more than a BLT because the ADC, General Tompkins, was running our exercise and I believe it was in Haiti or it was planned for Haiti, and they were recalled and there was the necessity for getting the orders to them, and I flew down to the Naval Air Station at Mayport, Florida one night, climbed in a helicopter the next morning, and we went out looking for them--for the ships. As a matter of fact, it is kind of interesting....

End of Tape 1 Side 1

Begin Side 2, Tape 1

Platt: ...we almost overshot the LP they were on, but we did find them, and landed on the deck, and delivered them a copy of their orders, briefed them and then kept going--we went back. Of course, there was a great need for secrecy in this, in trying to deliver the orders and brief people. It

was different.

I flew into the Naval Air Station at Mayport one afternoon just before these embarked Marines under General Tompkins were due to come in, and the duty officer was a naval aviator--a lieutenant commander, as I recall--and I asked him if he knew the whereabouts of the Frances Marion, which was the newest APA we had in which General Thompkins was embarked, and he said, "Frances Marion? What's that?" He had never heard of it and didn't know anything about amphibious shipping, and I said, "Well, you can expect a large influx of Marines here in a very short order." We went out, landed--wasn't on an LPH--Joe Fegan was on an LPH, but we landed on the Frances Marion, and they came in the next day and then as we loaded out of Lejeune, one BLT after another plus division troops all descended on Mayport until we had the entire division there aboard ship.

Several days later, I was leaving to fly to Fort Benning on a liaison trip with the Army and the same officer was on duty. This was about five days after my first landing. He just looked at me and shook his head and said, "I've never seen so damn many Marines in my life." You were exactly right."

But it was a problem--getting exercise for them. We wanted a rehearsal area. We didn't want to land in Cuba without a rehearsal. This involved a helicopter reconnaisance for me all the way up to Savannah and all the way down to Cape Canaveral. We finally found a place in a state park

just north of Jacksonville. By that time the Russians had blinked and it was all over.

I think the underlying lesson of it for that era was that we had no chance to go through the step-by-step proper planning phase for an amphibious operation. We had troops coming in from the Mediterranean, troops coming in from the Caribbean, we had no chance to reload, they had to go as they were. At that time, I believe that the biggest lesson that was learned is when a Marine unit embarks, they have got to have standard landing plans to fit almost any type of contingency, because they won't get a chance to reload.

Frank: Well, hadn't the--hadn't there been these exercises down at Culebra and Vieques that there was always a battalion from the 2nd Division going down there?

Platt: Oh, of course. There was always a BLT, actually, on the Vieques, or afloat in the Caribbean and we had a company with an artillery battery at Gitmo and then we maintained a BLT in the Meditteranean.

Frank: I was thinking--one of the criticisms, for instance, of the SLF in Vietnam--a lot of people made it and General Simmons wrote about it in one of his Naval Review articles--you probably saw a review of the war--that a lot of people were critical of the Marines--the SLF--because every time it prepared for a landing, it went through this so-called "ritual dance," preparation, all this type of thing, and it--for an organization that was slated to do this type of operation,

and Marines in the amphibious environment--is their environment--doing this exercise, was a landing--it was a training exercise--needed--exercise needed.

Platt: It shouldn't be, I guess is my point, because there may be times when you won't be able to do it. I think Cuba was a classic example. You need the flexibility in a variety of landing plans because if you don't know the target and you don't know the intelligence before you embark, you can't come up with a specific scheme of maneuver before you embark, therefore, that affects your landing plan, your embarkation plans, the whole thing. The process itself is exactly right if you have the opportunity to do it. What we thought, as a result of Cuba, was that you have got to have several landing plans so you will be able to come up with a scheme of maneuver that will fit as closely as you can the characteristics of the beach and the enemy situation ashore.

Frank: Another example of that is the Med Battalion being sent to Korea. It became a battalion of the 7th Marines.

Platt: That's correct.

Frank: It went through the--through Suez Canal, I believe, to get out there, and they certainly didn't have any prior training. I mean, they got their orders when they landed.

Platt: That's correct, and I believe the brigade that we had afloat as a result of the Suez crisis--I'm dredging my memory now--but after--I can only recall an incident where

they embarked in the summertime and it became necessary for them to have winter clothing, and, of course, we had to airlift it out there.

Frank: What would they need the winter clothing for?

Platt: Because there was a contingency plan, I think in Turkey, at a time of year when it got pretty chilly. Not winter clothing per se, but certainly heavier clothing than they had.

Frank: Going back to your CINCNELM days, what was this BLT to have done in case of the Suez landing?

Platt: Well, it was more than a BLT at that time, I think. As I recall, the main idea was to seize the Canal and act as a buffer between the two sides.

Frank: In other words, it would have gone in at the same time the British and the French landed, and the Israelis were coming?

Platt: Either that or before, or after they had landed, to go in, and seize the Canal, and act as a buffer. That's a long time ago, Ben, but as I recall it, that was....

Frank: I was just thinking, that could not have made us--couldn't have made the Brits and the French too happy with the idea of the Americans' interfering.

Platt: The British were very happy with us at the time of

Suez and for quite awhile afterward. I lived in London, I was exposed to it first-hand.

Frank: I remember the stories of the 6th Fleet shipping going in between the shipping of the French and the British--the invasion shipping, disrupting the movement entirely.

Platt: There were a great many ships of several nationalities in the Eastern Mediterranean and it was pretty crowded.

Frank: Yes. Was there anything of particular interest during your tour down there--your two-year tour--exactly at Lejeune besides the landing for President Kennedy and the Cuban missile crisis.

Platt: Well, those were highlights, but the whole tour was very interesting.

Frank: Professionally rewarding.

Platt: Oh, extremely so.

Frank: The 6th Marines was still, and of course, still does wear the fourragere.

Platt: Yes. I used to present that to each officer personally as he reported into the regiment, and both the officers and the men were proud of that fourragere.

Frank: I haven't seen a Marine wearing one for God knows how many years.

Platt: I haven't either.

Frank: But, I imagine they still do.

Platt: I honestly don't know, but they certainly did at that time.

Frank: Next stop was Basic School--August of '63. Was this an unexpected assignment, or again did you know ahead of time that you were getting it?

Platt: Oh, I think I knew--I can't remember how long beforehand, but I recall flying up to Quantico once before I reported in, so I had my orders somewhat in advance of going up there, yes.

Frank: Whom did you relieve?

Platt: I relieved Colonel McDonough.

Frank: Well, that disproves the theory I had. McDonough never made brigadier general.

Platt: I'd say that is a popular theory, but it doesn't necessarily follow, either in the case of the CO, Marine Barracks or the CO Basic School.

Frank: More times than not....

Platt: I've never figured it out. I would say probably more times than not.

Frank: Well, the popular--the popular thought has it

that if you get either one or both of them, then you are destined for a star.

Platt: Yes, that's the popular thought. I don't necessarily think when your board comes up that that provides you with any immense peace of mind.

Frank: Oh, okay. What did you find the situation to be at The Basic School when you had it?

Platt: Well, The Basic School is The Basic School. What are you driving at?

Frank: Well, no, I mean--did--was there any change of direction--was there any change in curriculum?

Platt: There were changes in both. Two points, I guess--one, I believe that the time to screen officer candidates, the time to bear down, is in OCS, and that once an officer was commissioned, he should be treated like an officer. To put it in a nutshell, I did not believe that goddamnlieutenant was all one non-hyphenated expression. I felt there should be a distinct change between the OCS environment which was very proper for what it was supposed to do, and The Basic School environment which was to provide the fundamentals to the newly-commissioned lieutenants. In other words, to give them confidence rather than harrassment.

Frank: Were you successful in that?

Platt: I think so. I certainly took an extremely dull

view of any staff member that had the idea that goddamn lieutenant was all one non-hyphenated expression.

Frank: We talked earlier about the second lieutenants that were at Basic Shool when you had it as opposed to your fellow second lieutenants when you were--had just come in--the quality, the character, personality.

Platt: I can't recall that we talked about the character and personality so much as to emphasize the difference in tactical training.

Frank: Right.

Platt: There was such a vast difference on the eve of World War II. I'm not fault-finding--it's just the natural evolution of time. We were extremely well-trained in terms of how to wear a uniform, in terms of close-order drill, in terms of formal guard mount, in terms of the total mastery of all the infantry weapons that were available, in terms of sea duty. We did drill on 5-inch guns, we studied miliary justice in detail, we had lectures on small wars, but in terms of conducting field exercises in small unit tactics, we did practically nothing. That is where the difference was.

Frank: More opportunity during--when you had the Basic School.

Platt: Not just when I had the Basic School, no--going way back to the tour in 1948.

Frank: Well, after the Basic School moved from Philadelphia to Quantico.

Platt: And that had something to do with it, you know, except for Indiantown Gap, where you really didn't have the terrain, and probably--I was just a lieutenant at the time--probably there wasn't the money for some of the types of training you have in Quantico today. But it was vastly different, and the lieutenant that got out of Basic School as early as 1948 was far much better prepared form as a rifle platoon leader than we were in 1940. And I think the idea, then, was this will come in due course. It will be done in the FMF, not in the Basic School.

Frank: How about--basic traditions were being kept up in the curriculum.

Platt: Oh, absolutely, throughout. I think they still are.

Frank: Okay. I'm thinking of the character, the individual. Now, your fellow Basic School students when you were there, I think I mentioned this, were children of the depression, your attitude about money, about a lot of other things, had to be different from the Basic School students of the 63-65 period, this latter day period.

Platt: It was a different world, as I mentioned. I think that out of 150 lieutenants in my Basic School class, there were three automobiles. There were extensive parking

lots in the Basic School in Quantico in 1963.

Frank: Oh, sure.

Platt: Today, the Marine lieutenants come equipped with automobile and wife.

Frank: With wives, yes.

Platt: In my day, few if any automobiles and no wives.

Frank: Do you think that made a difference? Do you think the austerity the first two years of commissioned service made for a better officer?

Platt: I think it was a very good policy for the society in which we lived at that time. I think such a policy today would be doomed to defeat, would be a self-defeating policy.

Frank: It can't even keep privates first class and corporals from getting married in today's services.

Platt: That's correct, and it would be silly to try.

Frank: And they're making more money than you made as a second lieutenant.

Platt: Well, now, they are making more money in current dollars, Ben, but not in constant dollars.

Frank: Right. And, of course, there are a lot more perks given to service people today--BAQs and all the other

amenities that go along with service life.

Platt: I don't follow that exactly. What do you mean?

Frank: Well, I don't think you had BAQ in your day--basic allotment for quarters--did you? I think the ration allowance is a lot more today.

Platt: I can't recall whether we had the basic allowance for quarters then because--but, it seems to me that when I was on recruiting duty I received something similar to that while I didn't live in a BOQ, but I wouldn't be wanting to swear on that.

Frank: Of course, per diem and everything has gone up, but then this is....

Platt: Well, again....

Frank: Yes, this is a different situation. How close were you to the students at the Basic School? Did you get to know them--a lot of them personally?

Platt: Yes--not all of them, certainly. There were just too many involved. I think the CO of the Basic School gets to know the ones that are most outstanding and the ones that get in trouble.

Frank: Did you have many get in trouble?

Platt: Not many--some.

Frank: What kind of trouble would that be?

Platt: Oh, it varied. I know we did have some rather unpleasant incidents just prior to graduation in O'Bannon Hall, where a few lieutenants got carried away. We had problems with people coming in after having a few drinks, using the fire extinguishers for ways they were not intended to be used, and we had problems that some of the mess nights with people jumping off the flying bridge in O'Bannon Hall-that seemed to be sort of a favorite escapade. Nothing that wasn't pretty easy to solve once you established a standard fine for doing that type of antic and the CG at Quantico, General Weiseman, backed you up, it was pretty easy to change the direction.

Frank: High jinks for the most part.

Platt: Well, high jinks and then occasionally some cheating, but not--well, very, very isolated cases, and with the CG at Quantico, and Headquarters Marine Corps and the Department of the Navy prepared to back you up in the case of a revocation of an officer's commission where it was clearly justified, dealing with a very tiny minority, it was no particular trouble at all. They were a very high caliber group. I never ceased to be amazed at how high caliber--how high the caliber was among the lieutenants.

Frank: They were there because they wanted to be there.

There was no pressure, no war or anything else.

Platt: It certainly seemed that way to me.

Frank: They wanted to be Marines.

Platt: Absolutely.

Frank: Well, now, have you followed the careers of any of these people? They should, at this time, say 63-65, '65, be senior lieutenant colonels and in some case colonels.

Platt: I have been out of the Marine Corps for ten years, so it's a little hard to follow the careers of people in that particular age group.

Frank: When you were down at Basic School, you were selected for promotion to brigadier general.

Platt: Yes, just before I--just before I left.

Frank: July?

Platt: Yes, in the summer.

Frank: I imagine that must have been very pleasant to get that news.

Platt: Naturally.

Frank: Did anyone sneak it out to you ahead of time, or you received it through....

Platt: No.

Frank: ...appropriate channels. And, of course, by this time Vietnam had started and your first assignment was ADC, the 3rd Division, to General....

Platt: Walt.

Frank: ...Walt had it. Of course, we have spoken about that period, so that I don't think there is any incident to repeat unless there is anything that sticks in your mind as being particularly spectacular.

Platt: No, I think we covered all the points of that tour

Frank: The III MAF--III MAF period. And then you got your second star while you were out there.

Platt: No. I got my second star after I came back to Headquarters Marine Corps.

Frank: Headquarters--I see. You were G-1 as a brigadier general?

Platt: I was--no, I was the assistant G-1 to Major General Ray Davis when I first came in.

Frank: Oh, I see.

Platt: For the first year I was the assistant G-1, and the last two years I was the G-1.

Frank: Okay. You were three years up there. I guess

your major problem at this time was supplying people for Vietnam.

Platt: Precisely.

Frank: Yes. And what were some of the problems in feeding that pipeline?

Platt: Well, I'm not sure it's widely realized that we had more Marines go through that process than we have had in the total Marine Corps in World War II. The distinct difference between the two situations from a manpower standpoint was really remarkable. I mean, a man went overseas in World War II and he stayed by and large. We had a 13 month tour in Vietnam. I might add that I believe in that 13 month tour. I think asking people to serve in Vietnam under those conditions, particularly in view of the fact that we weren't totally mobilized and we were not involved in the total war such as we were in World War II that the 13 month tour was precisely correct, but from a manpower standpoint, we were feeding almost insatiable demands, both in terms of the first tour and then toward the end of my period as G-1 in terms of the second tour.

Frank: We discussed this with General Chapman--I guess he was Commandant at the time--and one of the tremendous problems with keeping that pipeline from getting unclogged. I think....

Platt: Exactly.

Frank: I think Jim Marsh may have been--or this may have been a little bit later---yes, I think it was--no, it may have been about this time.

Platt: Jim Marsh worked for me while I was....

Frank: Yes, he was the G-1 planner.

Platt: I think he came back on a second tour.

Frank: Yes.

Platt: I'm sure he did, but he was there during my tour He was a very, very brilliant Marine with insights into the variables on the manpower program that were shared by very few.

Well, Jim Marsh and Jerry Mathis and Sam Jaskilka were doing some very innovative and very excellent things with computers which were essential to feed that pipeline and I believe that in terms of the use of computers, thanks to people like that, that the Marine Corps at that time was out ahead of the other services--the application of computers to a very complex manpower program.

Frank: Personnel procurement came under you also, did it not?

Platt: No, that came under the Personnel Department.

Frank: That came under Personnel Department. Yours was strictly the planning and....

Platt: Strictly the planning--how many men did we need each

month, the draft calls for each month, all the manpower planning involved.

Frank: Were you involved at the time that Enthoven and his crew had to be continually briefed on what Marine Corps formations were, identifying a five team and the strength of BLTs and this type of thing?

Platt: Yes, I dealt with them, but we were not involved in that type of briefing that I recall, but we certainly had to deal with the systems analysts in the Pentagon. I remember one of the very serious bones of contention was proving how many infantry replacements we had to have mathematically, and the position on the part of the analyst that unless you could prove it with numbers, it wasn't true. In fact, one of our biggest problems during that whole era, was to actually prove our needs for manpower and to do it in a very concrete, analytical way that would be acceptable to the Pentagon.

Frank: One of the problems was that the Commandant would never know at any particular time just how many Marines there were on active duty at that time.

Platt: There were problems like that. There certainly were.

Frank: And there was no solution--there was no way of finding out, even if you held everybody in place for a nose count at any particular time.

Platt: It was difficult. It sounds ridiculous, but with the tremendous turbulence involved in the Marine Corps at that time, with that long pipeline, it was very difficult to pin it down.

Frank: You were talking about the briefing papers that you wish you had.

Platt: Well, the briefing papers for the annual general officer's conference. That painted the whole manpower history. I think I've got them somewhere at home.

But let me make these points--from a G-1 standpoint--from a manpower standpoint--in the early years of the Vietnamese War, the whole emphasis was on the buildup. The administration was anxious in those early years to get people over there. It was not terribly difficult to prove how many people you needed. They were quite willing to give you, in the early years, whatever you asked for; that's point one. Point two, the personnel accounting system of the Marine Corps and the relatively primitive computer programs we had then were in their infancy; and also they were designed for a stable Marine Corps, that is, stable compared to the buildup and the prolongation of the Vietnam conflict. But all of a sudden, on my watch as G-1, the emphasis changed to whenever you wanted more people, you had to prove it in accordance with the procedures of systems analysis. You had to have an air-tight case to get more and that change was very rapid, and the manpower machinery that we had in place, very under-

standably, was not designed to cope with that. This was new. If you needed more infantry replacements in that pipeline, you had to prove right down to the man how many you needed, which was a tremendous shifting of gears, and that was the principal emphasis we had for the end of my tour, was proving to the Pentagon what we needed to maintain the forces over there and to prove it in infinite detail. I think that we became fairly successful at it. It was a very rapid--I can't overestimate how rapidly the attitude changed of the people we had to go to with our program.

Frank: I know General Chapman was talking about one of the problems. This pilot/seat ratio....

Platt: Absolutely.

Frank: ...was a real difficult bear to handle.

Platt: And, of course, pilot training was immensely expensive and that was one of the areas that they homed in on first.

Frank: Well, but the Marine Corps wouldn't have been any--the Navy was just as liable to be hit with this question of the cost of pilot training.

Platt: Everybody was hit with it, but we were hit with it pretty hard.

Frank: Did you find the people over at the Pentagon-the systems analysts and the McNamara whiz-kids a little arrogant and difficult to deal with, or were they cooperative?

Platt: It varied with the individual. Some of them were the personification of arrogance. They seemed to consider themselves as a fount of all wisdom and they were difficult to deal with--very difficult. Others were not so difficult, more open-minded.

Frank: I just can't visualize running a war by computers and by systems analysis.

Platt: Everything had to be quantified then. Everything had to be quantified. No room left for judgment. I can recall some long and prolonged and very heated debates with the analysts.

Frank: How can you quantify....

Platt: There are certain things that you can't quantify. Now systems analysis in its purest form on the basis without any foregone conclusions is really trying to develop the best course of action in an idealistic sense. To that degree, I think it is a very worthwhile science. I'm not always sure that the analysts that we dealt with stuck to the principles of what real analysis is. Sometimes, I suspect they had a foregone conclusion, no matter what kind of evidence we came up with.

Frank: Well, how did this affect the Marine Corps as a whole, though? FMFLant, certainly the 2nd Division, Force Troops had to be drawn on very heavily with the result that they had a problem meeting their commitments and fulfilling

their mission?

Platt: Yes, of course. It was a tremendous drain on our resources to maintain these forces in Vietnam. I think there's another point that I would like to stress about that period that made a tremendous impression on me and I don't think I covered it in the Vietnam interview. If I did, forgive me, but what we asked the individual Marine to do in Vietnam was vastly different in a broad sense than in what we asked him to do in Korea and in World War II. In World War II, when you came back from combat, you couldn't buy a drink. I can remember personal experiences outside 21 Club in New York in August of '42. There was a whole line of people trying to get in and I was standing in that line at the end with my wife. Whoever was running the line for 21 came back and picked me out of the line and escorted me into 21 and ordered up free drinks and nobody in the line was the least bit upset. I'm only using that as an example of the attitude of people toward the people that were fighting the war.

In Korea, when you came back, it was different but still I think that Marines were looked upon with admiration in their hometown communities--not nationwide necessarily. But when they returned from a tour in Korea, they were respected for what they had done in their hometown.

Now, contrast that with Vietnam when the average Marine came back, he was considered a sucker for going. When you consider what they had to put up with in terms of public

attitude and lay against that the job that they did in Vietnam, we really asked more of our fighting men in that war than we did in the previous two wars, and it is just downright remarkable to me that they performed so well.

Frank: There's no difference between any of the service coming back from Vietnam.

Platt: I can only talk from the reaction on the Marines. I can't--no, I dare say it was a national attitude.

Frank: Did you talk to any of the other services about their personnel problems? Did you exchange any minutes or notes with, say, the Army G-1 or the....

Platt: With the pace that we were running, we just didn't have the opportunity to compare notes--at least at my level with the other services. I knew who those people were--my opposite numbers, so to speak, but we couldn't handle comparing of notes. We each had our own problems and we needed 24 hours a day to solve them.

Frank: What about the situation of rotating pilots, helicopter pilots. There was a period there where they were putting in to get out by droves. They took a tour over in Vietnam and then they knew that when they got back--to New River and they're on Vieques tour or a Mediterranean tour....

Platt: One of the great things that General Chapman did, when the requirement for second tours came up, was to insist

that no one would go back for a second tour until everybody else holding that MOS had gone for one. It was a hard policy to adhere to but it was a sound policy if you made it work. But the second tour rotation was a problem.

Frank: Well, was it difficult--of course, we were taking draftees at that time, for a period of time, and we had had no problems in meeting our quotas then, our personnel quotas.

Platt: By use of the draft?

Frank: By use of the draft.

Platt: Without the draft we never would have mantained that number of men in the Marine Corps during Vietnam, not only in terms of the draft calls per se, but in terms of the pressure of the draft where you have got draft-induced volunteers.

Frank: Then also with having to take draftees, it meant that the quality of the personnel that you were forced to take went down considerably and then we got involved with that Project 100,000, I think it was called.

Platt: Well, on the former, I'm not so sure that taking draftees caused a loss in quality. I think Project 100,000 being force-fed certain numbers of mental group IXs most certainly did result in a loss of quality as measured by mental tests. I think the thing to remember, there was pressure on us, on the draft. There was also some pressure

of not sending draftees to Vietnam which was a ridiculous idea that came out of the White House.

One of the things that I think we looked at for the first time was just what a power the draft was to keep us fed with "volunteers." We did some surveys in recruit camps and found out that a very, very high percentage of people that walked in were going in because of the draft and if they were going to be drafted, they wanted to be Marines. This did not necessarily result in a loss of quality, but what it did result was in a realistic understanding in the manpower business of just how important the draft was to maintain the large Marine Corps of that period.

Frank: How about race problems? That came under your purview as G-1.

Platt: That's correct, but the serious race problems happened after I left.

Frank: After you left. Did any of it rear its head while--any of these race problems rear their heads while you were a G-1? Did you have to start planning for....

Platt: We certainly were planning. We had a section in G-1 specifically designed for that.

Frank: That was the one that Ray Henri began?

Platt: Ray Henri was in on it, Ken Berthoud, initially, and later, Frank Peterson, both of them did a superlative job.

It was a serious problem but it became more serious later on, not that we had it under any better control, it's just there was less manifestation of it in those days.

Frank: Drug problems?

Platt: Not significant. Not to the degree that they were later on. I think one of the things that worried us, of course, was that because of the ways of assigning people to the various MOS's...The higher educational requirements and the more technical MOS natuarlly produced more people with lower scores in the infantry, and with Project 100,000 and the draft and the draft pressure, you obviously had a disproportionate number of blacks in the infantry. It therefore followed that you got a disproportionate number of casualties among the blacks which didn't, at that time, receive an awful lot of attention in the higher levels of government. But nevertheless, it was a serious problem, and I think it's a serious problem today. Now, I want to put a footnote on that that when I'm saying it's a serious problem today I'm talking from terms of reading the newspapers, not from terms of being involved with it.

Frank: Well, which way--you know, based on your knowledge of your last tour, which way did the Marine Corps seem to be heading in regards to personnel, and mission, and so on?

Platt: Well, my last tour was 1970, and prime concern in the whole manpower field was Vietnam. We were so involved

in meeting the day-to-day requirements of that war and the huge numbers of people that we had involved in it that we gave very little time to postwar planning.

Frank: A lot of people were startled when you retired. You were considered Commandant material, and many people considered that you were going to be Commandant.

Platt: I think that's overdrawn.

Frank: Well, I don't think it was--is. As they say about the cardinals, you were "Papabelia."

Platt: I retired for physical reasons. I had had problems for some time with rheumatoid arthritis. It was not diagnosed as that until well after I came back from Vietnam. During my tour in G-1, I was hospitalized at Bethesda several times, was actually incapable of walking, I couldn't raise my hand to even return a salute, and it was pretty obvious that I was seriously incapacitated from doing what a Marine should do, and although I didn't advertise it at the time, that was the reason that I retired, and the Commandant knew about it.

Frank: So you went out after, well, 30 years.

Platt: Thirty years almost to the day.

Frank: Almost to the day. When did you come back on duty as a supergrade in the Pentagon? That was personnel also that you were working in too, were you?

Platt: Yes, I was working in the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower, a desk job, which I could perform. But I couldn't see remaining on active duty in a desk job. I didn't think that was fair to the Marine Corps.

Frank: Did you leave with regrets?

Platt: Immense regrets. In fact, I would be highly dubious of any Marine who left the Marine Corps without regrets. Leaving is a traumatic experience.

Frank: Have you kept close to the Marine Corps since that time?

Platt: Certainly. During my seven years in the Pentagon, I dealt as a matter of routine with Marine Corps manpower. You asked me when I went back--when I went to work in the Pentagon--the day after I retired from the Marine Corps--and stayed for seven years. I might say it was my first tour of duty in the Pentagon.

Frank: Let's see, you were at Headquarters a couple of times only.

Platt: Not in the Pentagon.

Frank: Not in the Pentagon, no. You--we were talking about your tour--it was good at first, and then it kind of soured.

Platt: Yes, it did. When I first came in there, the job was very interesting and you felt a significant amount of

job satisfaction. Those were in the early days of the all volunteer force. Later on, I become heavily involved in developing manpower systems.

End Tape 1 Side 2

Begin Tape 2, Side 1 3

Frank: Okay.

Platt: Developing manpower systems, both for the officer and the enlisted side of the house. Not a single system for the four services--nothing was further from our minds, but encouraging and working with the services to develop manpower systems for their own particular problems. In fact, in the enlisted area, or in the enlisted area prior to that time, with the possible exception of the Air Force, nobody had looked upon manpower as a system with the enlisted population. They had looked on manpower systems for officers, particularly under the Officer Grade Limitation Act. I'm talking a system which goes all the way from procurement through promotion until retirement. That was exciting work marked, I might add, by immense cooperation on the part of all the services. As the all-volunteer force aged--remember, it passed with an overwhelming majority in the House and Senate, more and more so-called fiscal restraints came in, compensation of the service man went down in the real terms, the programs that you believed were absolutely necessary for effective functioning of a volunteer force were ignored.

It got to be pretty frustrating. To put it in a nutshell, it seemed to me that we were not willing to pay the price that was necessary to make the all-volunteer force work, and under those conditions, I found it very discouraging and that's why I resigned after seven years. I think we are only beginning to see a glimmering of having to do the necessary things for manpower that we have to do if we are going to have effective forces. You can procure all the exotic weapons in the world, but if you don't have the skilled, trained people to use them, it's not going to work.

Frank: What about draft? Is that one of the things--your resumption of draft--I'm sure it must have been a consideration.

Platt: Let me illustrate by a sea story. You remember the origin of the all-volunteer force was in the Gates Commission under former Secretary of Defense Gates, and during my last daysd of active duty they were waiting for the Administration to come up with a report on the all-volunteer force. On a Saturday afternoon each of the services briefed them in the Pentagon--all the members of Gates' Commission. It was a long afternoon. When we finished, Mr. Gates leaned back and he said, "I think what you're telling me is that with proper resources the all-volunteer force will work for the active forces but not for the reserve. In my view I think that was a pretty prophetic statement. I think the all-volunteer force can work providing Congress and the administration is willing to provide the funds to make it work, but in terms

of maintaining a reliable reserve, particularly in the Army, I think it falls way short of the mark.

Frank: Well, you keep reading stories in the papers that each of the services has not met its quota.

Platt: That's correct.

Frank: And, of course, there's a lot of recruiting cheating going on. Pressures must be immense on recruiters out in the field.

Platt: That's why you get cheats--because of the pressure.

Frank: Now, the answer--and, of course, the answer--the critics of the all-volunteer force say that you're not getting a truly democratic force, that the draft is the only answer--a draft which will affect everybody.

Platt: A properly run draft, and it's my understanding that if we do go back to the draft, the gross inequities of the draft that prevailed during Vietnam would be fewer, that the only people that would be exempted are in the ministry or in medicine. Everybody else would go regardless of their college aspirations.

Frank: Yes, well, the other things....

Interruption

...we were talking about the draft and the all-volunteer force--well, this goes back to the argument--the discussion,

not argument--the discussion we had before about UMT, which you don't think is feasible.

Platt: I do not. I think what you would pay for universal military training in terms of taxpayers' dollars would not yield the effectiveness that an all-volunteer force or a volunteer force supported by the draft--a selective draft. You just don't need that many people. You bring them in for six months and train them, and then turn them loose in the Reserve would be a tremendously costly project. I think it sounds fine, but when you come down to the dollars and cents implications of it, which I haven't seen anybody really face up to in print, it's not a good concept.

Frank: Except that it would be a hell of a lot more equitable.

Platt: Well, sure it would be equitable, but what are you trying to do--raise manpower for the Armed Forces or come up with something that is equitable regardless of its impact on the Armed Forces?

Frank: Well, I don't know. I've never thought about the influence on the Armed Forces. Of course, another thing that the planners have been thrown--another thing that has been thrown to the planners is the question of drafting women, which is going to be very, very interesting. Now, you have got the ERAers out saying that women shouldn't be drafted. And it seems to me that if this country goes to war, the whole population is going to have to be mobilized.

Platt: I have no argument with that, but it doesn't necessarily follow that that means women in combat units.

I think, you know--we are confusing a couple of issues. One is, what is combat? Are we talking about assignment to ground combat units engaged with the enemy, or are we talking about assignment of women as fighter pilots or women as part of a ship's crew, or women in support units who could be subject to artillery fire, and I might add if it's an atomic war, where are you going to draw the line? I personally have no argument with the utilization of women in rear echelon staffs or units. But assignment to those units where the probability of close combat with the enemy is high, there I agree with you 100 percent. I cannot see it. I just don't think it is practical among other things, but I have no argument with a woman as a fighter pilot. I don't have any personal argument with women aboard ship--certain types of ships. I have no argument with women registering for the draft. I think that's imperative--the registration process, and if we need them, I would have no particular argrument with women being drafted. Now, I may be in a minority, but that is the way I look at it. The women in the so-called foxholes and the trenches, outside of all the other considerations, I just don't believe it's even practical.

Frank: No, I don't think so, and, of course, it's all conjectural since we have to see what the President is going to say about it, but I--notwithstanding the experi-

ence of women as snipers in the Russian forces in World War II and Israeli women fighting, I doubt very much whether they were in front line units. I think they may have been in combat support units as communicators and so on and supply, but I--unless we are reduced to basic primitive--to a basically very primitive situation where you are fighting with rocks and spears and so on, I con't see women up there in the forn lines, which I think is just about a good place to stop.

Platt: Sure.

Frank: Joe, thank you very much.

Platt: You're welcome. I enjoyed it.

End of Interview

MARINE CORPS ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE: Major General Jonas Platt

INTERVIEWER: Martin Russ, Carnegie-Mellon Institute

PLACE AND DATE OF INTERVIEW: Arlington, Virginia, 5 August 1976

Russ: Your dates into Viet Nam and then out and your title while you were there...

Platt: Well, I arrived in mid-November of 1966...'65 and left thirteen months later. I was originally assigned as one of the two assistant division commanders of the 3d Marine Division and my specific assignment was in Chu Lai. I stayed there for approximately four or five months _____(?)_____ (interference). I was General Walt's representative in Chu Lai, as I recall we had about 11,000 American men. And during that time, I conducted four major operations, which the Marine component was usually anywhere from three to five battalions and on most of them there were also anywhere from three to six Vietnamese battalions.

At the end of that first four to five months I was chief of staff of the III MAF, until I left, in Da Nang, obviously.

Russ: Could you give me a comment regarding the uh...the effectiveness of the combined operations that Marines would go on with the Vietnamese?

Platt: I think initially, as might be expected, the ability to coordinate was moderately effective. But I think in the course of the four operations that I particiated in, culminating

in operation Utah that our coordination came increasingly better and I attribute that primarily to the fact that in the latter stages we co-located my command post with the Vietnamese Commander's command post. At that time it was Brigadier General Lam. He had the second Vietnamese division headquartered in Quang Ngai. And he actually moved the command post to the field, and we operated side by side and that way I think our ability to conduct combined operations improved significantly.

Russ: When you said "moved the command to the field," did it continue to move or was it a central command post?

Platt: Those operations were such that we had one command post and did not displace it.

Russ: Where was that?

Platt: It was up a hill, north of the river in Quang Ngai. I forget the name of it. But he actually set his command post there and I had mine there.

Russ: Can you compare General Lam with General Thi regarding cooperation overall?

Platt: No. I don't believe that I have sufficient knowledge of General Thi to make a worthwhile comment on that. I thought that General Lam was extremely sincere in his efforts to conduct combined operations with us. And I think that their ability to do it improved during that time span. But I never did conduct any combined operations with General Thi. I did observe

that his relations with General Walt were very good and I think they were very close.

Russ: One of the people I interviewed told me that, in his opinion, every combined operation was compromised. When I asked what he meant, he said the enemy knew what we were going to do before we did it. He blamed this on terrible security within the Vietnamese high command. Do you have any comment on this?

Platt: I think that's a very logical suspicion. I have no proof of it. I do believe that the operations we conducted where we went through an extensive preparatory phase, and particularly in some of the operations where we...actually I found out after the fact that they had issued Notams insofar as aircraft was concerned.

Russ: Notam?

Platt: I think that was the abbreviation for it, an acronym and I can't really define it. But there were notifications to divert aircraft from certain areas. And where you went through the classical long preparatory phase for an operation, I feel convinced in my mind, that that type of operation was compromised. On the other hand, where you developed the capability to act very rapidly to intelligence, I think those operations were effective and with the kind of operations that I advocate, particularly where you had sizeable number of helicopters available to you and aircraft where you could keep

the helicopters very close to your command post and utilize them on targets of opportunity. Then I think you'd diminished materially, the problem with compromise, which we all believed was probable if not real. And I think you overcame it by that.

Russ: Were you in on the origin of the combined action program? Can you tell me things that, perhaps, General Walt and the other people could not tell me.

Platt: No, I don't believe so. I think that the time I came in the combined action program was, perhaps, in its infancy. But the doctrine was pretty well established. I don't believe that I could add anything to what General Walt probably already told you.

Russ: Before I forget sir, what's your job now?

Platt: Well, I'm the staff director for the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy and also Director of Personnel Management...Military Personnel Management.

Russ: Could you give me your evaluation of the combined action program?

Platt: I think overall, that it was very effective. And I think it rested on a pretty sound philosophy.

Occasionally I think that some people got perhaps more carried away with the more obvious aspects of combined action. But essentially, I think it was a good program and it was

effective under the circumstances.

Russ: Why wasn't the combinedaction tried in the other corps areas? Do you have an opinion on that?

Platt: I don't know why it wasn't. I would assume that it was because they doubted the effectiveness of it.

Russ: Do you know if what you call military civic action in your article in the Marine Corps Gazette, is being taught in the Marine Corps? Has this become part of the training?

Platt: I've been out of the Marine Corps for six years and I couldn't answer that. I very firmly believe in it and I think that in any large...my philosophy is that the Armed Forces of any large industrial country that developing the capability, you have military civic action that's extremely important today.

Russ: Can you see the applicability of the CAG principle in the future?

Platt: Well, that of course would depend upon where you commit your forces, and it would totally depend upon the local situation, the attitudes of the local people; what the objectives of our Armed Forces were. I don't think you can generalize on that. I certainly think that there are probably some countries...I can visualize scenarios where it would be effective. But you would have to take in consideration all those factors.

I do believe that to the extent that combined action develops an empathy on the part of our forces for the so-called indigenous people whereven we're oprating, then it is effective.

Russ: General Walt mentioned the proposed landing at Vinh, the idea of the getting cut off by the North Vietnamese. He said the reason Vinh was chosen, that would have been the place where he would have landed had he been allowed, because that was the point for the supply trail...infilitration trail went around through Laos. In what detail was this planned?

Platt: I honestly was not in on that plan.

Russ: You weren't in on it...o.k.

Platt: I don't think that that was conceived. I was out there very early and I believe that plan came along after that, as far as I know.

Well, I have no memory of our staff being involved in that plan while I was there.

Russ: Do you have an opinion regarding the purpose and the effect of Tet that might be unusual as opposed to the consensus of what the North Vietnamese were trying to do an what they did do?

Platt: Again, I was not there.

Russ: Even so.

Platt: I think I'd probably subscribe to conventional thinking on Tet.

Russ: At the time you were in Viet Nam, what were your long-range expectations with respect to the outcome of the war.

Platt: Well, my personal belief in 1966 was that that war would be won in Washington, not Viet Nam. And that it seemed to me that at that time we were not willing to commit the resources that were necessary to complete the war. I so stated in an interview in 1966, and I still believe it.

Russ: Did this mean that you were pessimistic?

Platt: Yes.

Pessimistic to the extent that we were not prepared politically to put in the resources that were necessary to bring it to an effective conclusion.

I don't think that was a wise wide-held belief. You asked me for my personal view and that's what I believe.

I might say that I did not make that belief explicit in my job but I felt that way.

Russ: But believing this, did you try to conceive a method by which you might be successful with what we had, what resources we had been given?

Platt: Well, I believe that the fundamental approach of gradually expanding en-claves around Da Nang and Phu Bai and Chu Lai was essentially correct, given the resources that we had and the job that we had to do.

In other words, it was a population control...it was basically an exercise in population control and I do not believe that large-scale penetrations, going after the Vietnamese major units, at that time, were really worthwhile. I rather believe that we should gradually expand those enclaves and go after them on the basis of quick reaction, reacting to good sound intelligence and being able to react almost instaneously was the better way of doing it.

Russ: You were just to spell it out, you were against search and destroy tactics?

Platt: Yes.

Russ: Was that a tactic or was that a strategy?

Platt: Well...

Russ: You've never figured that out?

Platt: No, I've never figured that out exactly. I think where tactics end and strategy begins, depends on your position. If you're in a fox-hole, strategy sort of begins at the maximum range of your weapon.

Russ: But you didn't approve of that policy as far as...

Platt: I didn't think, given the resources we had and the nature of the enemy and situation which we were confronted with, that it was worth while. In some instances where we could react quickly, it most certainly was, but not large-scale efforts which

involved a lot of preparatory work.

Russ: Perhaps I'm not clear on what chief staff functions are, but I have a question anyway. Did you, as General Walt's chief of staff, try to influence him in any way regarding strategy of the Marines?

Platt: I don't believe that General Walt needed any help regarding strategy. I felt that his concepts were sound and I don't believe that I contributed much.

Russ: Am I wrong in thinking then that General Walt was also against search and destroy and yet he had to continue using his strategy?

Platt: I think you'd have to address that question to him. We did what we were told. And we advocated the tactics that we believed were the soundest.

Russ: Did your attitude change later, not necessarily while you were there, but so you followed the course of the war, did you think that we began to have a chance of being successful in Viet Nam as many of the people I've talked to did? Most of the pacification people would say that it was pacified. We were successful, we won that war, said William Colby yesterday. Did your attitude change in this war?

Platt: My fundanmental attitude that we, in Washington, were not prepared to commit the resources necessary to bring it to an effective end persisted.

Russ: Beyong that, can you give me a more elaborate evaluation of the conduct of the war? What should have been done?

Platt: Well I fundamentally believe that we should've committed more troops. That we should have mobilized the reserves. And we should've recognized it for what it was, major military effort. And people that were in a much better position than I to evaluate what this country would do, made the decisions. Perhaps they were right. But given the job that we had to do, I just firmly believe that it took more resources than we were committing to them.

Russ: Here, we're getting into more objective-type questions, which you may or may not want to answer, but I'll go ahead. What was your subjective reaction to the anti-war movement in the United States?

Platt: Well, at the time I was appalled by it. And what never ceases to amaze me and still does not, is the job that our people did in Viet Nam, given the attitudes that they encountered when they came home. To put it from the erspective of participating in three wars, when you came back from World War II, you were pretty generally recognized...a hero. You could hardly buy a drink a beer. You were, if not lionized, you were certainly looked upon with a great deal of respect.

When you came back from Korea, as I saw it, you were still treated with respect in your own community for having participated in it. It certainly wasn't nationwide by any stretch

of imagination. It was a significant difference.

But those young guys that fought that war in Viet Nam, when they came back after their tour, they were treated in many instances, with down-right hostility. And I've always thought that it was really remarkable that the individual soldier or Marine, did so well under those circumstances as they did in Viet Nam. I think it was a tribute to their generation, I firmly believe it.

Russ: Why do you think they di so well? How do you account for that?

Platt: Well, fundamentally I think they were better trained and better educated on balance than those people who had participated in World War II, and later in Korea, although the training was better, and certainly better prepared. I think we entered Viet Nam with an effective military force. We had a very effective standing force, prepared professionally to do what had to be done. And that basically is what attributed it to.

Russ: From all the people that I've been talking to, I get the impression that people in the field believed in what they're doing, and that this is a gorss generality but I still believe it's basically true, that the American populace did not understand what they were doing. With the conflict between the two of course was the news media. Could you comment on the news media's interpretation of the facts about Viet Nam?

Platt: That's a difficult question to answer. I think my personal view is that there was a tendency in a general sense, to be hypercritical of the news media.

My personal contacts, with exceptions, with the media representatives that I dealt with, were pretty satisfactory, with some exceptions. I think that there were representatives of the press out there who were inexperienced and who really didn't have the background to understand what they were seeing and what was going on. On the other hand, there were many others who did. I believe that it's always extremely difficult to fight a war when you are under the direct scrutiny of television cameras with instantaneous transmission back here and the ability of editors to edit the copy to come out with what they believe should be presented to the press is always difficult. I wish I could remember his name, but a representative of one of the major networks came out there and spent at least a full day with me on an operation called "Double Eagle - II." We made no effort to hide anything, we let him go anywhere he wanted to. We made no effort to significantly influence his views. All we did was expose him to what was going on. And at the end of that period of time, he came to me and said that he had a whole different perspective than he had before he left the states. And basically his perspective was one of admiration and increased understanding of what we were trying to do. He was later killed.

I know several other representatives of the press who complained to me that the editorial policies really changed the thrust of what they were trying to report. Now those are isolated incidents. But I wouldn't be prepared to totally blame the media for the outcome of Viet Nam.

Russ: How do you account for the fact that all of the people I've interviewed were disappointed or worse w hen the phase-out was begun, whereas the American public was generally relieved at coming out the mess?

Platt: Repeat that question.

Russ: How do you account for the fact that all the people I interviewed were disappointed, or worse, some made bitter comments about this, when our pull-out from Vietnam was begun. General Fred Haynes said he cried bitterly, while at the same time, the American public breathed a general sigh of relief, "at last we're getting out of this bloody mess."

Platt: Well, in my judgment those were natural perspectives from perhaps both sides. The American public look upon it as something they wanted, as I view it, they wanted it over; they wanted it behind them. Whereas the people who were there, and who became involved with the South Vietnamese had a feeling bordering on rage that we were abandoning them. I can understand, I think, both perspectives. Perhaps that sounds a little bit too objective, but they were looking at the thing through entirely different sets of values. Certainly, I shared the view that we were abandoning people, which made, in my judgement, a very valiant effort. To that extent, I think it was extremely sad.

Russ: You were sad?

Platt: Yes! Very much so.

Russ: What did the Marines do to sell, so to speak, the government of Viet Nam to the people? A lot of lip service is paid to this, as you know, but I haven't yet found any program that really caused the populace to say, "We like the government of Viet Nam. In the long range you're better than the other side. We're glad you Marines are here, but after you leave it's another show."

Platt: Well, we went through great lengths to protect the elections, that I recall. And to try to insure within the best of our capabilities, that those elections were fairly conducted. Now, that's a pretty darn difficult thing to do in a foreign country. But to the extent we could protect the populace and we could allow them to vote, that kind of measure that was within our capabilities we certainly tried to do.

I think, too, that we did great a deal to try to explain to the individual Marines just what the war was about and what the South Vietnamese government was trying to accomplish. I don't think we were totally blind to some of the difficulties, some of the very difficult problems of the government of South Viet Nam was having. I was there during the Buddhist uprising and it was pretty difficult to try to explain that in coherent terms. We weren't really sure ourselves exactly what was going on except that we had South Vietnamese units fighting South Vietnamese units right in our area. Trying to remain, not aloof, but trying to support the government's efforts within reason, got to be rather difficult.

Russ: Do you recall who severely criticized General Walt's concentration against the guerrillas opposed to the NVA? I'm trying to find people to talk to but I can't get any names.

Platt: Well, I don't recall anybody overtly seriously criticizing him. It was a general understanding that the views that we were advocating on the conduct of the war weren't subscribed to in the other three Corps areas. I'm trying to remember the name of the general that had II Corps. You could look it up...Army general...he's long since retired.

Russ: Tolson, wasn't it?

Platt: No, it was not Tolson. Uh...I want to say Larson. Check back and see who had the II Corps area during '66, and interview him to get the other side of the story.

Russ: You think that it may have been General Larson?

Platt: That's my memory.

Russ: O.K.

Platt: But I have no memory of any face to face, overt, public criticism of the way we were conducting the war. I think there were, certainly it was there, but I can't pinpoint it.

I can add along those lines, that in one of the operations I conducted, on the I Corps-II Corps boundary, an operation called Double Eagle I, where I had a command post set up not oo far north of the northern boundary of II Corps, working very very

closely with the 1st AirCav and actually crossed over into their area and had Marine rifle companies guarding Army artiller batteries. We had the closest kind of cooperation between the 1st AirCav and my people. It was nothing but a very rewarding experience. There was no friction, no antagonism. We were both conducting basically a search and destroy type operation, but there was no lack of harmony in that at all.

Russ: Do you have an interpretation of the charge that MACV became dissatisfied with the Marine command and took over at one point, which is what Robert Asprey says in his book, War In the Shadows?

Platt: Well, as I recall, that happened long after I was there. So I don't think I'd be a worthwhile source on that. All I know is, basically, what I've read and what I've heard.

Russ: Would you be willing to give me some consensus as Marines understood what happened?

Platt: No, I don't think I'm in a position to, because I was out of the Marine Corps at that time. I'm not being coy with you, I just have no answers, I don't want to give you answers that aren't based on something substantial.

Russ: Were you familiar with Colonel Corsor's work in Viet Nam? Did you have any dealings with him?

Platt: No. To the best of my knowledge, I never even met Colonel Corsor.

Russ: General Walt said, "I don't think we're going to live it down in Viet Nam." I couldn't get him to expand on that. Do you feel the same way in the sense that a mark will be held against us internationally for a long time to come?

Platt: Yes, I would tend toward that conclusion. It's pretty hard to say in the context that we may do things that would counterbalance that. But unless we do something that will counterbalance it, I think probably it will make the conduct of international relations pretty difficult for along, long time to the extent that we made a commitment and then walked away from it. But I'm not sure that I hold a totally pessimistic ivew that we can't overcome that given time. A lot depends on how strong we're willing to remain and a lot depends on how we're willing to use that strength.

Russ: Did you have any direct involvement with the so-called "other war?" Anything that you did in this regard?

Platt: So-called "Other war"!

Russ: Pacification.

Platt: Well, I was on the I Corps coordinating committee. I was one of the original members of it. To that extent, yes, we worked very closely with the USAID representative, with Vietnamese representatives. We did everything we could to effectively utilize our resources. Such things as using Marine Corps trucks to move...

Russ: You gave us the example in your article, right.

Platt: I think although it was in it's embryonic stage when I was there, that it was a reasonably effective instrument for combining our resources and using them to the best advantage. And I firmly believe in it.

Russ: Did the Joint Coordinating Council continue all the way through until '71?

Platt: I have no idea. It certainly had the full support of General Walt and General Lam when we had it in '66.

Russ: Can you give me another example, such as the one you gave in the Gazette article regarding how it works. Let's say an anecdote that would demonstrate the kind of things that you were able to do.

Platt: I can't, tangibly, bring up one other than that. That was a pretty dramatic one. But we'd have items on the agenda where the Vietnamese would table a particular problem and then to the extent that we could utilize the resources of USAID, the resources of III MAF, or the resources of the Army advisors, we approached the problem on the basis. And I;m sure there were others, it's just that in ten years, I can't recall them.

Russ: General Walt said, on one occasion, "in the fall of '65, I had a battalion in bad shape." He was trying to illustrate how cooperative General Thi was. "There was a battalion in bad shape down south of Da Nang, about twenty miles. And it was cut off. I had nobody to send down there to help them out.

And Thi immediately committed two battalions." So at that point he had a lot of confidence in General Thi. Can you give me a lead on that? What battalion that was?

Platt: I think that happened before my time.

Russ: Before your time. One more question. General Walt has explained publicly that when he assumed command in Viet Nam, I mean of III MAF, he did not understand the nature of the war. Can you give me any insight on that? The kind of things that he learned, the kind of changes he made in his own attitude, how he went about understanding, studying the war?

Platt: Well, the first thing is, that General Walt got around a great deal and spent the bulk of every day in a helicopter going from one end of the I Corps to the other. Both to his own units and to Vietnamese units, and to Vietnamese villages. And I think that he began to understand very quickly the plight of the Vietnamese people, the conditions under which they were living, the fact that basically they wanted security and the fact that our major contribution would be to provide that security to the maximum number of people. And that iw would therefore follow that if we could provide to the populace and deny the populace to the other side, the we could bring it to a successful conclusion.

I think General Walt developed a deep sense of understanding of just what the average Vietnamese was putting up with in that war. I think we all did. Well, that's kind of a generalized statement, but I think a great many people did, under his leadership. I can recall a real sense of outrage at buses with innocent

people on them having a grenade tossed in the middle. I recall once up in Hue, they were having a carnival which there were a lot of Vietnamese people involved as well as Vietnamese soldiers, and the V.C. dropping a satchel charge right in the midst of it and killing women and children. You don't have to see very much of that to develop a pretty deep-seated sympathy for the people who'd get in the way of a war. And uh...pretty deep-seated antagonism for people that used that kind of tactic.

Russ: What is your interpretation of what happened last year as a newspaper reader? I know you weren't involved.

Platt: Well...I think that after we got out they just basically fell apart.

I have one other little thought, trying to dredge in my mind, the first operation I went on was in a valley south of Da Nang in which we had our command post set up in a little village; Khe Sanh, Que Sanh, the two of them got confined. And I spent, as I remember, about seven to nine days living in this little village which had been cut off for years. It had a little Popular Force platoon, a very feisty little captain and when I had a great deal of admiration for, I went back in to see him later. But the attitude of those people toward us, was a pretty heart-warming thing. They invited us into their homes. It was not hostile at all, it was just down-right friendly. I think it stemmed from the fact that they believed that we were at long-last going to provide them with the security which they so desperately

wanted.

I went back in there later, Tet in 1966, to bring a present to that little captain.

Russ: A Cow.

Platt: I'm sorry, that I've forgotten his name. Oh yes, the cow? I didn't intend to bring that up. You'd heard about that didn't you?

But that was just from a sense of real admiration for those people and what they were trying to do and particularly what they were putting up with.

I liked the Vietnamese people very much. I'm very fond of General Lam.

Russ: Really?

Platt: Very much so. I used to eat dinner in his house. The only American present. He used to kid me unmercifully because I didn't like fish and couldn't stand Nue Mamh. So he'd provide a good French omelette for me while the rest of the family ate Vietnamese food. No, I thought very highly of General Lam. I know nothing about what happened afterwards. While was there, from the time I got there until the time I left, I saw a relatively young man develop from a very inexperienced division commander and I thought, given the circumstances that he had to put up with, into an effective Corps commander.

Russ: Where did he live, by the way?

Platt: He lived in downtown Da Nang with his wife and three children.

Russ: Anything else that you would like to put on tape that might illuminate my project?

Platt: No, I guess the only footnote that I want to say is when I told you that early in '66, I believe we weren't to commit the resources to bring that war to a successful conclusion and I told you that I said it publicly. I was beling interviewed by a pretty prominent reporter and he asked me the question point blank and I answered him point blank. But it was not for attribution, and I don't want you to think that I demonstrated that attitude in doing my job. You wanted to know how I felt about it and that's how I felt about and that's how I still feel.

Russ: Can you give me the name of the interviewer?

Platt: Yes, Stewart Alsop. It was a Saturday Evening Post article that we wrote in '66.

Platt: Your comment was published but not attributed to you.

Russ: Anything else?

Platt: No, I hope you haven't wasted your time.

Russ: No, I haven't.

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