Colin C. Blaydon
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

COLLINS: This is Riley Collins at the Rauner Special Collections Library in Hanover, New Hampshire, at Dartmouth College. I am currently speaking with Professor Colin [C.] Blaydon. We are conducting an interview with the Dartmouth Vietnam Projects [sic] to learn a little bit more about the Vietnam era and as it relates to the Dartmouth community. And it August 19th, 2016.

And, Professor Blaydon, where are you interviewing from?

BLAYDON: I am currently in California. We're doing this by telephone, and I am in Grass Valley, California.

COLLINS: Great. So, Professor Blaydon, where—where were you born?

BLAYDON: I was born in Newport News, Virginia, in 1940.

COLLINS: All right. And—and what was it like growing up in—in Virginia? What was your family like?

BLAYDON: It was in an interesting part of Virginia, on what's called the Peninsula, sort of between Williamsburg and Newport News, along the James River. It was rural country, mainly farms, and my father was a naval architect and marine engineer who had come there, who was originally from England. Went to university in this country and then was hired by Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company [now Newport News Shipbuilding], which builds a lot of [U.S.] Navy ships, so it was both a rural, Southern community surrounding what was a large industrial operation, working with the military and with a number of military bases around there. So it was an interesting—interesting place to grow up. It was both part of the great modern military-industrial complex and also the rural South at the same time.

COLLINS: Did you notice any—any tension that might have been caused by that between, you know, people maybe from, you know, where their parents were sort of more agricultural versus people whose parents were, you know, involved with the military base or the ship works?

BLAYDON: No, we were all kids. There wasn't any particular tension. But for what—the families had varied experiences, but it was a relatively small community, so that we all pretty much knew each other well. And I went from kindergarten through high school basically with the same group of kids, and with whom I'm still in touch today, so, no, it was a remarkably harmonious community, with some of the challenges, of course, that—around issues of racial disparities that came from the fact that this was still a very segregated Southern community.

COLLINS: Yeah. That—that's interesting. How—how aware of you—or how aware were you of sort of segregation at this time, or how did you really notice it, growing up?

BLAYDON: It was impossible not to know it and not to feel—have a sense, a feeling that there was something strange about the relationship between the whites and the blacks, because it was defined by the institutions of segregation and the presence of—of just pervasive racism. Middle-class families, which mine was, typically had black servants, even though we were not well-to-do. We were solidly middle class, and I was born right at the end of the [Great] Depression and the beginning of World War II. And so we had "help," as it used to be called, for black maids and black men who worked on the grounds of our home, and that was actually fairly common.

COLLINS: Did your—did your father ever think it was strange, coming from England and then—then be plopped sort of in the American South? Did he ever comment on anything regarding segregation?

BLAYDON: Well, my father was a—was a very disciplined man. I think I have a sense of his values, and as a boy growing up, I would try and provoke him into answering the question you've just asked, Riley. And one other thing that you noted about that place is that these were topics that were highly charged, and

people were very careful in speaking about them. And my father, not having been reared in the South, having come there from the University of Michigan, where he went to school, and having as a boy been raised in England, I think he was particularly careful about language that he used. So when his son, myself, would try to goad him into really telling me what he thought, he always managed to deflect the questions. But I know from his life, from things that he did, actions he took—I'm quite sure I knew what he thought, but I never heard him say it.

COLLINS: And—and would you be comfortable sharing that here, or—

BLAYDON: Yes, I think my—my father was a dyed-in-the-wool liberal Democrat, which was different—Virginia was heavily Democratic politically, as was the entire South, as a legacy of the [American] Civil War. But the Southern Democrats were not what you would characterize as liberal, so my father, for example, was very active in the Democratic Party locally. I remember our—we—our family in [unintelligible] were enthusiastic supporters of Adlai [E.] Stevenson [II] in the election of 1952, when he ran against General [Dwight D.] Eisenhower for the presidency. And that was a controversial position because Stevenson was not a popular figure in that conservative South, and my father, on that subject, was quite open about his support for Stevenson.

So it's from those—from the way he interacted with the various communities, his role in community service in our small town, his work with some of the leaders of the black community that I'm pretty sure I know what his sentiments were, but when it came to discussions of race, that was something that people did not talk about.

COLLINS: Right.

What—what was your education like, growing up in—in this small town?

BLAYDON: Very traditional. We had—it began in kindergarten, and we would go right through and graduate from high school. There were no middle schools in those days, so you went to—you went from kindergarten through elementary school, through seventh grade in one of several very small elementary

schools. The one I went to was called Hilton, Hilton Village [Elementary School]. It was a small, actually planned community that was built in World War I for the professional staff who worked at the shipbuilding company that built a lot of the Navy ships. So it was an unusual little community that looked a bit like an English village plopped down in the rural South.

And so the class sizes were large. I think the typical class in elementary school was 40-some students. Very disciplined, with very well-trained teachers, and we got a great education. I do remember taking a lot, in high school, of foreign language. I took a number of years of French, but it was before the era of language tapes, and I was taught by people who had learned French in teachers college and had never heard it spoken. So we ended up having great vocabularies, to this day I can still read a French newspaper, but if I try and make myself understood in Paris, nobody knows what I'm saying, even though I think I'm speaking French. I basically never heard it, even though I learned it.

So that was sort of an example of the kind of education that we got. Not many Advanced Placement courses. There was no such thing at that time, so it was a basic education, very much based on the fundamentals, but in hindsight, a very good one.

COLLINS: Interesting, yeah. And if you don't mind me circling back sort of towards the origins of your—your town and your father coming over to Virginia—so you said he was involved in sort of building ships. When—when did he come to the U.S.? Was that before World War II or after World War I or—

BLAYDON: Yeah, it was—actually, it was—he came as a boy. His father, my grandfather brought the family over in—in 1910, just before the First World War broke out, and they first came to Canada. So his older brother was seven years older, and he was old enough to actually have served in the First World War, and he and his older brother were very close, but—so his major childhood impressions were—came after he came to Canada at seven or eight years old.

And they moved to Detroit when—oh, I think he was ten or eleven, then he went to the technical high school in Detroit

during the war and then went—after the war ended, won a scholarship and went to the University of Michigan and became a marine engineer and naval architect, and that's how he ended up in Newport News, Virginia, working for a shipbuilding company, whereas most of the people I grew up with largely had—the families had been in the South for a number of generations. So we were a little bit unusual in that sense, but it was—because there were so many military, so many technical people who were hired down in that part of the world, which mixed—I'd say it was about 50:50, people from that kind of community and people who had grown up on farms in Virginia and North Carolina, who were now living in that area, many of them working for the shipbuilding company, but many of them still working in agriculture and in a relatively rural setting. So it was an interesting community.

COLLINS: Yeah. And during World War II, then, was your father still employed at the ship factory, or was he—did he get deployed overseas at all, or—

BLAYDON: No, he was—he was a [U.S. Army] Reserve officer. He had taken ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] when he was at Michigan, so he was a captain in the [U.S.] Army Reserves [sic; Reserve] and was called up at the beginning of the war. But it was discovered then that he had very high blood pressure, and that, coupled with the fact that he was building aircraft carriers and troop transports involved in doing that, he ended up being discharged from the Army because of his high blood pressure and was given, I believe, some sort of, you know, special category about critical occupation because of his role in the shipbuilding industry. So he never—he never went on active duty during the war.

COLLINS: All right.

Yeah, so circling back to—to your education, then, after you—you graduated high school, what did you end up doing, or what did you decide you wanted to do for yourself?

BLAYDON: Well, I made a—a choice that later actually determined how I came to be involved in the military during the Vietnam era. I decided that I wanted to go to [the U.S. Military Academy at] West Point, and our local congressman knew my father. My father got me an interview with him. He nominated me to

West Point, and I went to West Point when I graduated from high school.

COLLINS: And what—what motivated you to—to do that? Why—why West Point?

BLAYDON: I don't know. The world you grew up in that South had a lot of sense of history and a lot of military history. I still to this day will describe it—you know, it felt like the war had ended the weekend before, and the war I was referring to was the Civil War. So you grew up sort of immersed in that history, which still felt very present. Many of my childhood friends—you'd go into their homes, and there'd be portraits hanging on the walls of their grandparents, great-uncles in their Confederate uniforms.

And also there were a lot of military bases around where we grew up, so you just grew up in that world. And my girlfriend in high school was the daughter of a career Army officer, who was based at one of the military bases on the Peninsula there and was going to high school with me. And so we were immersed in that—that world, and I was fascinated by it, without much reflection of what—of what really an Army career would look like. I just sort of went and did it, as much as anything, I think to prove that I could, and then discovered, in fact, that I didn't feel I was very cut out for it and wanted to do something else and changed my mind and left.

COLLINS: So a couple of questions: First, were a lot of your friends also considering careers in the military? Like, do you feel like this was common for people growing up in your community?

BLAYDON: A number of them did. Most of them went through ROTC if they went to college. Not a lot of my classmates went to college. I'd say a fairly small minority did. A number of them did get commissions and went on active duty. A number did enlist and served as enlisted men. But we were of an age—I graduated from high school in 1958, so we were of age to have been in the Army in our late teens to early twenties, in the era of—after Korea [the Korean War] and the major buildup for Vietnam. So those who served basically went in, served a period of time, and then—then left.

COLLINS: And did—I guess sort of America's experience in the Korean War would have been while you were still in—still growing up. That would have put you at, what, thirteen to fifteen while that war was going on., something like that?

BLAYDON: Yes. Yes, it was.

COLLINS: Did—did news of that shape your view of the Army at all? Or were you aware of what was going on?

BLAYDON: It did. The Korean War was very present. I was a teenager who read a lot of military history, and some of the writing about Korea was being done at that time, and I read sort of basically all the major books and was very aware of it. I was very interested in topics of military strategy and things like that.

A lot of it was actually taught in—in history courses and what were in those days called civics courses that began even in elementary school, so we grew up with a real sense of the history of U.S. military and history from, you know, the [American] Revolution up through Korea, probably, I would think, more so than—than most other places or locations would have been exposed to in—in elementary school and high school.

COLLINS: Yeah. Interesting. It sounds like it was a very military-oriented community.

So—so you mentioned when—when you did go to West Point—and it was unusual for people from your town to go to college, but—but you did end up going to college. I guess first let me ask about that. Was that sort of like—what motivated you to—to pursue a university career instead of, you know, going and doing something else after high school?

BLAYDON: I never thought I would do anything else. I think my father had very much enjoyed his university experience. I think in part he enjoyed it so much because, given his family circumstances and the way he came over, it was unlikely that he would have gone to a major university or any university. But when he won a scholarship from when he was a student at Cass Technical High School in Detroit, he

won the scholarship and was able to go to the university if he studied marine engineering and naval architecture, because that's what this specialized scholarship was all about.

Exactly how he won it and how he ended up doing it, how he ended up in that career, I don't know. In many ways, it was unlikely because, among other things, as I discovered later, he was chronically seasick whenever he got on a boat,—

COLLINS: [Chuckles.]

BLAYDON: —and so it was, in a sense, an odd choice of career, and I think it was the opportunity to go to a good university and have it paid for that led him into that particular line of work and that career that he spent his entire working life at.

COLLINS: Interesting, yeah.

BLAYDON: And as a result, he was a rabid University of Michigan alumnus. He listened to all of the football games, and once a year we would travel to Ann Arbor for the last big game of the season. So I always knew I was going to go to a university, and my father did his best to make sure that that was going to be the University of Michigan. But that was not to be.

COLLINS: Wow, yeah. It sounds like quite a trip, going all the way from Virginia to—to Ann Arbor.

BLAYDON: It was.

COLLINS: And—and yeah, so—so you ended up going to West Point, interviewing with your congressman, getting the nomination. But you mentioned you—you didn't love it there. What were—what were sort of your first impressions of West Point?

BLAYDON: Well, the way West Point works is you go there the beginning of the summer, and you go through what effectively is pretty intense basic training that you would if you were going into the Army. But if anything, it was even more intense because of where it was and, you know, who made it up. And so the summer was fully military training, and the academics would begin at the fall.

And so I was there during that military training and—and got a sense of what the Army was like that I had not had before. I was—I did not find it all that enjoyable and decided I really wanted to go to a traditional university if I could, rather than a military college that was training me for a military career.

So during that summer and exposed to that, I really changed my mind and—and decided I was going to leave. But in those days, if you went to West Point you were in the Army. You had the rank of cadet. And you—if you resigned from West Point, it wasn't like you were going to transfer to another college. What you were transferring to was to be a private in the U.S. Army, which is what I did.

But my high school principal heard that I was doing this, and the University of Virginia had offered me a scholarship, and my high school principal—and it's a sense of sort of how close-knit all the families were and knew each other—he knew that I was doing this. I guess he had heard it from my parents. And unbeknownst to me, he got in touch with the University of Virginia and with the U.S. Army, and made arrangements for me to actually transfer to the University of Virginia, and the Army agreed to do that on condition that I would be a member of the Reserves and I would take ROTC, accept a commission if I earned it, and go on active duty after I graduated from UVA, rather than graduating from West Point. I would still be going into the Army as a second lieutenant. And that's what I did.

COLLINS: Yeah, it sounds like a pretty good deal for someone who didn't really want to be in the Army but still sort of had that binding commitment.

BLAYDON: Exactly. And it was more, I think, that I didn't particularly want to spend the next four years at West Point because I ended up going into the Army. I stayed in the Army Reserves and didn't—afterwards, and didn't actually resign from the Army until, oh, the early 1970s. And I—I was very involved in all of that, with the military during those years. I am—I mean, "enjoyed" is sort of —given what was going on at the time is sort of an odd thing to say, but I very much appreciated my Army service. I was very involved in it, and I was in effect in

the Army from 1958 until the 1970s, even though I had decided not to complete my education at West Point.

So when I got out, I was a second lieutenant, and the irony was at the same time my classmates at West Point were graduating, they were all graduating as second lieutenants, but I was senior to them because as I understood at the time, anyway, the rank of cadet did not grant them seniority service, whereas I had been part of a Reserve unit as well as in ROTC, so actually I was four years senior to those who were graduating from West Point, who would have been my classmates. Not that that made any difference whatsoever.

COLLINS: [Chuckles.]

BLAYDON: But it—it was sort of a little ironic.

COLLINS: Yeah, that's—that's really funny. So you transferred to—to UVA, then, in 1958? Is that correct?

BLAYDON: That's correct.

COLLINS: And—and what was it like sort of making that transfer? Did you find that you enjoyed UVA a lot more?

BLAYDON: I—I did. I definitely had a sense that I had—that to make a choice like getting into West Point was hard to do, and then changing my mind in a very short period of time and getting out was something I was sensitive to, and embarrassed by—you know, that I had done this, charged off to do this and then changed my mind. I didn't think it reflected particularly well on me.

So when I got to UVA, I think I was motivated to make sure that I did well, and so when I got there, I just devoted myself initially to my studies. And in those days, UVA was very much dominated by a fraternity culture. It was an all-male university. This may be a model which sounds familiar to you and the school you have gone to, Riley. It had very much the flavor, in those days, of Dartmouth during those days. But once I got there and got settled, I thoroughly enjoyed being there. But I was an engineering major, and I was a bit of a grind, but I did belong to a fraternity, and I did enjoy my time there.

COLLINS: So you—you did have sort of an active campus social life in addition to your studies, then.

BLAYDON: I did. In those days, what you did is your social life was imported from the women's college that were within a bus—a half-day bus trip from Charlottesville, so similar to Smith [College] and Radcliffe [College, now Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University] girls coming to Hanover, New Hampshire.

COLLINS: Yeah, it does sound like there's a lot of parallels there.

Back—back to ROTC on campus: Were a lot of your classmates involved in ROTC at—at UVA?

BLAYDON: There were. And there were units both for Naval ROTC and Army ROTC, and Air Force ROTC. So there were a lot of people who—who did that. But most of us came out—we graduated in 1962, and in 1962 there was not a big demand for junior officers in any of the branches of service. And I can only speak for sure about the Army, but when you got commissioned as an ROTC officer in 1962, your service commitment was to spend six months on active duty and then seven and a half years—or maybe it was six and a half, for a total of seven; I don't remember—in the Reserves, because there were not sufficient demand for junior officers on active duty in 1962. Vietnam had not fully erupted. That buildup really didn't seriously begin until 1965, so most of us who went into ROTC served for six months and then served the rest of the time in the Reserves.

And, of course, with the exception of one or two Reserve units, the Reserves were not called up for Vietnam. They relied on the draft, not on the—the Army Reserve units. So that was the deal coming out in 1962. But mine was a bit different.

COLLINS: And—and so when—when you graduated—and you had studied engineering, you mentioned—

BLAYDON: Yeah.

COLLINS: —what did—what did that Army sort of do with you? Where did you go after graduating?

BLAYDON: Okay. I was commissioned in the—in the [U.S.] Army Corps of Engineers as a—as a cadet. I was a cadet officer in the ROTC. I commanded the ceremonial drill team and all, because one thing I had learned at West Point was sort of all of the—the basic military skills and stuff like that, so I knew a lot of that before I ever got into ROTC, and most of the other—and the other people did not, so I enjoyed ROTC and was very active in it.

But the Army put me in a commission in the—in the Corps of Engineers, and my military occupational specialty was combat engineers, which was basically field fortifications and things like that.

But something happened that changed the path. It was the post-Sputnik [1] era. There were a lot of these national fellowships being given to people who were coming out with science backgrounds to go to graduate schools, and to pay for it. And I won one of those national scholarships. And if I had gone on active duty for six months, I would have had to turn down that scholarship, so I put a request in to the Army that they permit me to go to graduate school for four years and I would then go on active duty at that time, and they granted me permission to do that. So instead of going on active duty in 1962 and serving six months, I went on active duty in 1966 and served a longer period of active duty: two years on active duty and then another year in the same job, as a civilian and a Reserve officer but not an active duty officer. So I got out when nothing much was going on and went in when there was a lot going on.

COLLINS: Yeah, it sounds like in some ways good timing, depending on how you look at it.

BLAYDON: Yes, exactly.

COLLINS: So—so you—you won this national scholarship, and the fellowship—was it specifically for studying a certain branch within STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics], or was it just for anyone with science and mathematical background more generally?

BLAYDON: No, it was a special—a special branch. It was sponsored—it was sponsored by different science and technology entities in the federal government. A big bunch of them were sponsored by the National Science Foundation, and the form of those fellowships is what the other agencies follow. The one I was awarded was what was then the [U.S.] Atomic Energy Commission, so it was the nuclear technology, both weapons and—and nuclear power stuff. I'd been an engineering student. I had an engineering degree, and I'd taken a bunch of courses in nuclear engineering, and so the fellowship that I won was given by the Atomic Energy Commission to not specially say I should study nuclear engineering, but it turned out that that turned on my choice of graduate school.

And if you won one of these scholarships or fellowships, you were—it paid for your tuition in graduate school. It paid directly to the university that same amount of money, in addition, as a direct payment to the university, in recognition that the tuition being paid by graduate students did not cover the full cost of education, and this was a national priority, so the national fellowships said, "We're going to cover the full cost," and so you had a—you got your tuition paid, and then they paid that again, in addition, directly to the university as another supplement, and then they paid you a stipend to live on, and in that case it was $3,000 a year, which was more than enough to live quite comfortably as a—as a graduate student.

So—and these fellowships were portable. You could use them wherever you got admitted and chose to go, as long as it was one of the approved universities, and—which meant that those of us who won these fellowships were suddenly a very attractive commodity to those universities and pretty much got into the universities we wanted to apply to. And that was my case.

COLLINS: And—and so which university did you end up wanting to go to?

BLAYDON: Well, I applied to three, and I got in all three. I applied to the University of Michigan, to MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] and to Harvard [University]. And I ended up—I

got into all three. Michigan and MIT both had big engineering programs, and they—as soon as they saw my fellowship, slotted me into a nuclear engineering graduate program. And I remember going to Harvard. After I'd been down interviewing at MIT about what it would be like to go there and they explained to me the program, I went up to Harvard and met with them, and the people in what was then called the Division of Engineering and Applied Physics at Harvard, and asked them what would my course of study be at Harvard, and the response was, "What would you like it to be?" And I decided this was my kind of place.

And so I chose to go to Harvard. I took no nuclear engineering courses. I got very interested in what was called modern control theory and ended up getting my Ph.D. in applied mathematics.

COLLINS: Would you mind giving, like, a brief synopsis of what modern control theory is, for maybe people who aren't quite as specialized in math as yourself?

BLAYDON: Right. It was—it came out of actually—it was a traditional—a mathematical tradition, if you will, that came out of World War II and the field that became known as operations research, which was apply basically mathematical quantitative analysis to solve particular problems. So they were the ones who were famous for developing the patterns for the bombing raids, for the submarine warfare programs, for planning the logistics to the military operations. So it became a sort of an applied mathematics specialty, trying to look at complex systems and looking at how to optimize certain criteria in the way that you organized activities within those systems. And it's what then led me later to what I ended up doing during the Vietnam War, when I did go on active duty.

So basically, modern control theory was a follow-on to operations research, which had developed during World War II and its aftermath. There were a number of institutes that were established that really did this. The RAND Corporation, which became the best known of the lot, but there were a handful of these things. A lot of that kind of work was being done at the various national laboratories and—like, you know, Oak Ridge [National Laboratory], [Lawrence]

Livermore [National Laboratory], Los Alamos [National Laboratory], Sandia [National Laboratories]. So it was a very vital and active and actively funded set of activities, funded by the Defense Department [sic; U.S. Department of Defense].

COLLINS: And—and what was it about modern control theory that—that really grabbed your attention? What—what did you really enjoy about it?

BLAYDON: Well, basically it was solving interesting and complex problems in a rigorous manner. And so it was both mathematics, but in some ways it was also always impinging on larger issues of public policy. Initially, it was all about the military, but it ended up being a tradition that was applied to problems in the social, you know, sector of how to deliver services and—because basically it was saying, "Here's a set of circumstances, here's something that's operating within that system, and here's a criterion for evaluating how well it does. How do you optimize, to maximize that criterion? How do you optimize the activities that you are trying to organize within that system?

And that was very much then became the questions of when I was in the Pentagon, for example, taking on the issues of what was our strategic deterrent? What did it look like? How did we organize it? And in particular, how did you do things like target the nuclear weapons capability of submarines and strategic bombing resources, of the missile base systems? How did you figure out what to do with all that stuff?

And that is what became sort of the applied approach that you use mathematical techniques for applying to modern control theory. In particular was the innovation that moved it from just being a sort a linear programming type optimization, mathematical programming optimization to things that could be characterized in—in continuous variables. So it ended up being a deviation based on largely the background of the calculus of variations. So it gets into a whole set of different technical things. But that's basically what I was doing.

COLLINS: And, yes, so how did Harvard's modern control theory program sort of relate to—to the developments in the rest of

the country? Was Harvard, like, particularly cutting edge, or was there a professor there that—that you worked with particularly closely, anything like that?

BLAYDON: There were. Harvard and its—what they called their applied physics groups and their applied mathematics group—that played a major role during World War II and the aftermath, with close ties to Los Alamos and the development of the [atomic] bomb and the development of tactics used during the war.

My adviser for my Ph.D. program was Harvey Brooks, who had played a major role. He was a physicist with a strong—with policy interests. Had been part of the group at Los Alamos and at Harvard, and working during the war, and when I was a graduate student, he was a member of the President's Scientific Advisory Committee and was going to Washington [D.C.], consulting on science policy matters all the time.

And it's what really piqued my interest in—in public policy issues. And I came to it through studying mathematics and physics. I worked briefly at one of the national laboratories, at Sandia, on weapons development, while I was a graduate student. And then it's what led me to what I did when I was—when I went on active duty.

So they were well known. They were small. I mean, they were not on the scale of MIT or Michigan or [the University of California,] Berkeley or places like that. But there was a young professor who'd gotten his Ph.D. at MIT, who was a specialist in this, along with another Harvard professor, and I wrote my dissertation for "Larry" Ho, Yu-Chi Ho, who was Chinese, an MIT Ph.D. who was a junior faculty member at Harvard, and Arthur [E.] Bryson [Jr.], who had also come from MIT and was a more senior professor at Harvard at the time, and Harvey Brooks, who was a physicist.

COLLINS: Interesting, yeah. It sounds like, you know, there's a strong Harvard connection to the [President John F.] Kennedy administration, where—I mean, obviously, President Kennedy went to Harvard, I believe.

BLAYDON: Yes.

COLLINS: And a lot of his advisers also had—either went to Harvard or MIT and sort of had this strong connection, so it was interesting to hear how that played out.

BLAYDON: And I—I took a bunch of seminars from a bunch of those people when I was a graduate student that were far—well away from my hard-core mathematics and physics courses that were the bulk of what I was studying, but I was fascinated, and so I took part in a number of graduate public policy seminars dealing with issues, primarily of science policy, that were people who were very active—faculty who were very active as advisers in—you know, of course by this time it was the [President Lyndon B.] Johnson administration.

COLLINS: And—and were a lot of your classmates sort of on that—that similar—similar track? You know, like, STEM majors who—who also took public policy classes on the side? Was that common?

BLAYDON: No. They were STEM majors. They were hard core. And very good. No, you realize that if you had done well in—in college and thought you were maybe pretty good at that stuff, you suddenly found yourself in a cohort where you realized what it meant to be really, really smart. And so my—my classmates in the classes I was taking were very focused on their—their STEM interests and careers, and relatively few with sort of a fascination with the public policy issues. I think I was interested—I don't know, just—I was naturally interested in all of that stuff, and I think Harvey Brooks, who was my adviser, liked having a student who was interested in his other, larger life, not just in his role as a physics researcher and teacher but as a shaper of public policy dealing with scientific policy issues. So he encouraged me, and I—and I—I took a bunch of those seminars. And one of them was one that led to what I did during the Vietnam years.

COLLINS: And so in terms of the actual progression of your studies, you—you went to Harvard and became interested in modern control theory, and you first just pursued a master's degree, correct?

BLAYDON: That is correct. And Harvard—different universities did it different ways. In some cases, they had a very formal progression: master's degree followed by a Ph.D. And—and MIT, for example, and Michigan both had a very formal master's degree, and it was also a terminal degree. So you were pretty well qualified to go out and—and do what you had been studying, with a master's degree. A number of people would go to those places with the intent of getting a master's degree and then getting on with their careers, not then going on and taking—finishing the Ph.D. and going to a research and teaching career.

Harvard was different. You couldn't apply to Harvard in these fields for just a master's degree. You had to be admitted to the Ph.D. program, and if for some reason you didn't pass your qualifying exams or didn't pass your qualifying exams or didn't get—decide to go all the way through to the Ph.D., if you'd taken the full course requirements, which typically took about two years, you would get awarded a master's degree, and you would leave. But it's something that sort of happened to you along the way.

As a matter of fact, I—I—after I finished all my coursework and passed my qualifying exams and was working on my dissertation, I never bothered to formally apply for the degree, and when I was coming up in my last year, coming up towards finishing my Ph.D., the registrar notified me that I had not applied for and received my master's degree.

COLLINS: [Chuckles.]

BLAYDON: So I did that and got my master's degree in 1966, in June, and then stayed through the summer, finishing my—my dissertation and went on active duty in the fall, after I had gotten my dissertation pretty much wrapped up. And then came back for graduation to receive my degree in June of 1967. So my master's is in '66, and my Ph.D. is in '67, but that doesn't at all reflect sort of the pattern of the years that I spent working on one and then completing the other.

COLLINS: Right. And, yeah, so when you did sort of finish your degree work in—in '66, you then had to go to your military service—

BLAYDON: I did.

COLLINS: —because of the deal you'd made with the—the military before. And so how did they decide what to do with you at this point, or where to put you? And— did you have any—

BLAYDON: It is all a little bit mysterious to me, to tell you the truth. Initially, I was going on in a traditional capacity of someone who had taken ROTC, had been a second lieutenant. While I was in school, I was still—I was in the Reserves, but my assignment was to go to graduate school. But I was accruing service credits, so along the way, I got promoted to first lieutenant. So when I was graduating, I was a first lieutenant. Still mostly likely a standard assignment would have been a platoon leader or a—a company staff officer. And, of course, in '66 the buildup was roaring along. It really began in '65. I think by the end of '66, the early part of '67, there were 50,000 troops in Vietnam. And that had really begun in '65.

And so my expectation—and the Army never told me anything any different—as a matter of fact, the communications I had with the assignments officers out of the Pentagon is I was slated for, you know, a—as a junior officer for some kind of troop command assignment, which didn't exactly fit with what I had been studying.

COLLINS: Right.

BLAYDON: And so along the way, my—the initial indications of what I was going to do was that I was going to go to one of the big basic training bases and joined either a combat engineer or infantry platoon as a junior officer. And the—but my orders got changed along the way.

COLLINS: And do you have any idea how that happened or—or is just sort of the military works in mysterious ways?

BLAYDON: No, I—I did. I played a somewhat proactive role in that. I wanted to use what I had been studying, and in my last semester in residence, in the spring of 1966, there was a seminar being taught on national security policy, and I was interested in it. I knew I was going on active duty. It was being taught by actually a fairly newly famous professor, who had just written a book called *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, and his name was Henry [A.] Kissinger. And I—I

asked to audit—because I didn't need any more course credits—the seminar, and he allowed me to do that.

And what he did in this seminar was he largely invited people who were active advisers to the government on—on sort of military policy and particularly strategic issues, and this was, of course, the height of the Cold War, as well as also a hot war in Vietnam.

And so I audited it. He brought in a bunch of speakers, and one of the speakers he brought in was an economist, a young economist from the RAND Corporation, by the name of Alain [C.] Enthoven [pronounced EN-toe-vin]. And Enthoven had just been in the papers a lot, in a story that said that Secretary [of Defense Robert S.] McNamara had requested him to put together an analytical staff to support the secretary in decisions and everything that he had to do. And it was very much in—in the papers at the time.

And so Alain Enthoven, Dr. Enthoven was invited to be a speaker, and I was in the class, and I—after the class was over, I went up and introduced myself to him. I remember I rehearsed the speech because I knew there were lots of students and people clustered around him because, I mean, he was sort of a very public figure by this time, and everybody was interested in what he was going to be doing.

So I sort of worked my way to the front of the crowd, stuck my hand out and said, "Dr. Enthoven, I'm Lieutenant Colin Blaydon. I'm going on active duty in—in a month and would like to use my Ph.D. training in applied mathematics on active duty. Do you have a job?" And he looked at me, and he said—and he gave me his card and said—he wrote on the back of it, as I remember, the name of his military assistant, Captain "Bud"—I'm forgetting his last name. He said, "Get in touch with him, and come down to Washington and see me, and let's talk about this."

And so the next week, I did that. Got invited down. I met with him. Also met with a number of other people that in effect were in this—if you will, in the STEM world, in organizations that were doing operations research, analytical stuff in the military. And wandered the halls of the Pentagon. You could

do that in those days. You could walk in as a tourist and just wander the halls of the Pentagon.

And I had a cousin who was a career Air Force officer, who gave—said, "Here are some names of people you ought to look up that are in—you know, go talk to them." So I did that. I got a couple of other names.

So I went down. I met with Alain Enthoven and his senior staff, and I wandered the halls of the Pentagon for about two days, meeting with various people, and out of that arose several possibilities. But the one that dominated—and I got a phone call a couple of weeks later from the assignments officer for the Corps of Engineers—telling me that they were in possession of a letter from the Secretary of Defense requesting that my assignment be changed and that I be assigned to his staff. And so that's what happened.

COLLINS: Wow! That's incredible. And—and so how do you think Secretary McNamara [which he mispronounces as mac-nuh-MAH-ruh instead of mac-nuh-MARE-uh] or at least his staff became aware? Do you think it was Alain Enthoven who—who really pushed for you—

BLAYDON: Yeah.

COLLINS: —to be on that staff?

BLAYDON: Yeah, it was Alain—basically, it was—the request was signed by Secretary McNamara, but the request was actually from Alain Enthoven, who was by this time now officially the assistant secretary of defense, systems analysis. And he was staffing up the systems analysis group in the office of the secretary of defense. So when I say I was a staff aide to Secretary McNamara, I was part of a group of about—eventually it ended up being around a hundred people, who really worked for Alain Enthoven on this systems analysis staff. But we were all staff officers in the office of the secretary of defense.

COLLINS: And what was your work like when—when you were involved in this—this office? Or I guess, did they—they hired you right in '66, sort of after you finished your degree work but before you were actually awarded your degree.

BLAYDON: That is correct.

COLLINS: And they were able to—to sort of get your military service to be transferred to the Defense Department rather than putting you on active duty sort of as an officer leading troops. And so, like, what was your—your work like initially? What was it like being a part of this office as they were assembling it?

BLAYDON: I—I was an officer. I would say of this group that formed the systems analysis staff, about half of us were active duty officers. A number of them were career officers. A number of them had seen combat service already. And then the other half were civilians, some, like myself, coming out of Ph.D. programs. A handful had been Rhodes Scholars but were civilian. Some of them were Rhodes Scholars who were military officers.

So it was an interesting collection of folks. We—Secretary McNamara issued instructions that we were to not wear our military uniforms. We were to dress as civilians, which typically meant white shirts, ties and a blue suit, and highly polished shoes, but not our military uniforms because he wanted us and the staff to be identified as the staff to the secretary of defense in our dealings with the military, with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the senior military staff. And many of us were lieutenants and captains, and the people we were dealing with were much more senior officers, and I think who wanted that kind of rank distinction, to not be worn day in and day out in our—in our interactions. He thought it was more useful for us to be dressed as—as civilians, though quite interestingly, the military all knew who we were and what rank we were and everything, and you certainly knew when you were meeting with the senior officer. You were addressed as “Lieutenant Blaydon,” so the distinction was still there. But that’s sort of the way it worked.

And then the systems analysis group was divided into several different types of groups. For example, there was the Southeast Asia team or group—I forget the exact label—that had the primary responsibility, day in, day out, of analyzing what was going on in Vietnam and in the war. And that was probably the largest group within systems analysis.

And all of us who were in different parts of systems analysis did a lot with them and did—a lot of the things we worked on were directly involving the war, but often we worked on other things as well.

So I was—I was assigned as part of their very small group that dealt with intelligence programs. And it was headed by a guy who was a civilian. He was Dr. Ivan Selin. He had his Ph.D. in applied mathematics with a specialty in modern control theory, from Yale. I knew who he was. He was a distinguished young scholar, who was on the staff of the RAND Corporation, where Alain Enthoven had been. So Alain knew Ivan and asked Ivan to come and put together—head a group that dealt with intelligence matters in the systems analysis group.

And it was that group—when I came in, I interviewed with a bunch of different groups, and that's the one that either picked me or I expressed my preferences. Any- —somehow, that's where I ended up. And so I worked on—on intelligence matters in this group that was headed by Ivan Selin.

COLLINS: And—and so what exactly is meant by "intelligence matters"?

BLAYDON: Okay. What it was really—it was systems analysis,—

COLLINS: Right.

BLAYDON: —so what we were—what we were doing, we were looking at the systems. Probably the best known thing that that group had done—and this had been done before I got there—was not looking at the Vietnam War but looking at the Cold War and the Soviet Union and working at what would be a nuclear confrontation between these two superpowers and how would it play out, what should be our strategy. And what the McNamara administration had discovered was that each branch of service was sort of a world unto itself, so the Army, the [U.S.] Navy, the [U.S.] Air Force, the [U.S.] Marine Corps were all separate and distinct.

And each of them—less so the Marine Corps, but the other three had their own nuclear capabilities. And when they did a first look at what were their plans for a confrontation in a

nuclear exchange, should it come to that, basically all three services were targeting their weapons primarily on Moscow. And so if it had ever happened, there would have been enough nuclear armament dropped on Moscow to drill a hole down through the Earth. I mean—and the rest of the Soviet Union would have been untouched.

And so the first analysis, if you will, was where are crucial military targets, how should the targeting be allocated so as to be most effective, how should our defense against a Soviet nuclear attack be organized among the three different branches? And they established an organization at Moffett Air Force Base [sic; Naval Air Station, Moffett Field; now Moffett Federal Airfield], which was a Strategic Air Command base where the major [Boeing] B-52 [Stratofortress] strategic bomber force was—was based and where the command center for them was, called the [spells it out] S-T-O-P, the Strategic Target Operation Planning [sic; SIOP (Single Integrated Operational Plan)] staff or something.

And I participated in studies and went out there and worked with them on different things later on, but in the very first initial days, that was established as a military command to coordinate all the different pieces in the different military branches so that they would be more effective. And that was sort of *the* classic example of what systems analysis was and would be.

And then that type of thinking and applying those kinds of system-wide analyses was what we were charged to do, and over the next several years, with the war going on, much of the work was focused on that, but not all. So I participated in analyses, studies that involved all the different military services, dealing with strategic issues and the strategic deterrent issues in the Cold War, where it was dealing mainly with—with the Soviet Union.

And that involved satellites, missiles, submarines, so I'd say about half of the things I worked on in the three years that I was in the Pentagon or on that staff, I dealt with the larger Cold War strategic issues, and about half with the war in Vietnam.

COLLINS: Wow, that's incredibly interesting. I've got plenty of questions to go off of there, but one that strikes me right away, sort of as you were talking about systems analysis—is there any, like, example of, like, a specific problem that you were able to optimize that—that you remember, that you could maybe talk about to just give, like, a concrete sample of how this kind of thinking plays out?

BLAYDON: Yes. Probably the most—the best example was one that—that directly involved the war—was that—of course, a big part of the—of the force that was being brought to bear by the U.S. was, you know, that we had command of—of the air. We had war planes that were attacking, you know, infantry units of the—of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army in the South and strategic targets in the North.

And there was a very large effort to assess how effective those air strikes and bombing missions were. Were they really successfully attacking the targets that they were being sent out? Were the missing them? Did things need to be adjusted? And so there were satellites. There were—there were manned reconnaissance planes, basically fighter jets with cameras that would fly over and, you know, take pictures. And there were drones that were basically slower, unmanned aircraft that were programmed remotely, that were used primarily over the North because the North Vietnamese had built an extensive system, with Russian support, using Russian antiaircraft missiles. The surface-to-air missiles were what were known as the SAMs. And that's how John [S.] McCain [III], of course, ended up being shot down and becoming a prisoner of war. So they were—they were shooting down a lot of our aircraft.

And so we needed to know how well we were doing. And a major part of it were these drones that we would fly over, and they were remotely controlled. And if the drones—so we needed to decide where are we going to send them, what are they going to take pictures of, and how successful are they going to be? So if they flew over—some of them got shot down by the SAMs, because they were extensive in the North, so we didn't get those pictures.

Sometimes the weather was awful, and that would prohibit them getting the photographs they needed to get of the particular sites. So we needed to know how many of these drones should we have, how many—how should they be deployed? And so our team went in to analyze that in a joint project with the military.

And so there was something called the JC- —Joint—JRC, the Joint Reconnaissance Center. It was a command center in the Pentagon. Out of that center, basically the instructions for all reconnaissance—satellite coverage, manned reconnaissance planes and drones—all of those missions were organized and commanded from the Joint Reconnaissance Center.

And so the staff of the JRC and our little group in systems analysis, under a memo sent out by Secretary McNamara—and this is typically the way it was done, is that a particular study or analysis that was going to require a lot of resources and a lot of coordination would be—the instructions to do this would come out as a memo from the secretary of defense to the systems analysis group and to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, saying, you know, “Go do this thing.”

And so there was this study of the reconnaissance operations and how big they ought to be. In particular, the part that I worked on was how big—how many drones should we have? And so we built a little mathematical model that incorporated weather data, about how likely it was going to be that the weather would permit the pictures to be taken; how likely would it be that they were going to be shot down. We had lots of data on all of this stuff, and we built an enormous model of reconnaissance and the reconnaissance targets in the North.

And we built the model. The JRC staff critiqued our model. They participated with us. They knew what we were doing. But we were responsible for the model. They were responsible for the data that got fed into the model. And so they would—they were developing the data, we were developing the model, and then when all was good to go, their data was fed into our model. And basically it was an optimization model that said, you know, how to best do the job and how many aircraft were going to be needed. And so

that was probably the best and clearest example of the kind of work we did and how it related to the war.

Other groups did things like look at some of the new infantry tactics that involved the—this new concept of air cavalry, which I'd been introduced to in my officer training at—at Fort Bragg [North Carolina], where we were—you know, what had been cavalry units now became helicopter units and were known as air cavalry, and they played a big role in Vietnam, in infantry operations.

So there was a lot of analysis being done with some of that, and we would get involved in those things. So it was all types of things like that, but that one was probably the best example.

COLLINS: Yeah, that's—that's incredibly interesting. I—I have lots of questions, but the next one I'll ask you is—and you might not be able to speak to it, speak to this, but—so you were working on this model of sort of how do we figure out how many drones we need to send out in order to be able to evaluate effectively whether or not our bombing campaigns are working in North Vietnam. What—what is the ultimate metric that—that would have been used, though, to determine whether or not these bombing campaigns were successful? That might have been outside the scope of—of what you specifically were working on, but—but I guess I'm just curious.

BLAYDON: No, it was crucial to it. It's a very good question, Riley, because basically what we were building was a mathematical optimization model, so we built a model of how the reconnaissance worked: how the flights were, and if you sent a drone off on a particular path, how successful were they going to be? And it was a probabilistic model. Okay, what was the probability of cloud cover along that route, or getting a SAM missile shooting down one of these aircraft so that it didn't succeed?

So the criterion function was the coverage of the specified set of strategic targets that were being attacked on a regular and repeated basis. These might be military manufacturing facilities. They might be logistics things: train routes, bridges, things like that that were being targeted. And what we were

doing was trying to maximize, for a given level of—of size of drone force and numbers of missions—what was the level of coverage and—and then what we needed was being specified actually by the military.

So the—the JRC, which was an arm of the Joint Chiefs, would specify that, you know, given their—their military opinion, to be able to adequately program the bombing missions. What kind of information—how often did these strategic targets need to be assessed?

And so we were trying to meet that level of coverage with the minimum drone force. So what was the smallest drone force that would meet the needs of the military for the intelligence they needed on an ongoing basis, on a regular, periodic basis?

Or we could flip it around and run it the other way. For a given drone force, we could maximize the coverage that we could get. So how—how often and effectively *could* we get photographic intelligence of the key strategic targets that they needed to track, with a particular given size of drone force?

So we cut it both ways, but it was basically the same problem. And we would run different iterations of it and go back and forth, and that's—and we were quite surprised when we first ran the model that if we optimized the way the drones were to be used, we could get a lot more—we could get a specified level of coverage with a lot smaller number of aircraft than anybody had at first thought or that, with the drone force that we had built up, we could get much more effective coverage out of them than current operational—you know, the way they were doing it was getting them. They could get better coverage.

So that's basically what we were doing. And it was an iterative process back and forth. I do have to say it became a little bit political, and it made us get a little suspect because the data was coming from the field, and so it was coming from MACV, the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.

And, you know, it—so it was an interactive process between them and us, and so it wasn't—and they, of course, wanted

to do—have as big a force to do the job they needed to do, and our job was to make sure that it was—that resources were being used as effectively as they could be. And that occasionally would give some—some tensions back and forth.

And years later, actually, when I was a new assistant professor at the Harvard Business School, I got a visit from Seymour [M.] Hersh, who had of course most famously, I guess—his most famous story was the Mỹ Lai Massacre. But he was an investigative reporter, and he showed up at my office at the Harvard Business School with a sort of conspiracy theory about the bombing of the North and wanting to talk to me about it. So these issues were highly sensitive, and, you know,—and so a lot of careful attention was paid.

COLLINS: Yeah. So—so what—what was he sort of accusing you of being involved in, or what was his—his theory, if you don't mind talking about that quickly.

BLAYDON: Say the question again, Riley. I'm not sure I understand.

COLLINS: Yeah. Yeah, so you—you just mentioned that I believe his name was Steven Hersh. Was that correct?

BLAYDON: Seymour Hersh, "Sy" Hersh.

COLLINS: Seymour Hersh. Right.

BLAYDON: Yeah. H-e-r-s-h.

COLLINS: He—he came to your office and asked to talk to you about your work on the bombing campaigns in North Vietnam, and he sort of had—

BLAYDON: Yeah.

COLLINS: —sort of a conspiracy theory. Did—did you ever talk to him about that or—or remember sort of what—

BLAYDON: Well, I listened to him. I listened to him, and I wasn't sure what I could or could not say. It turns out that what he was thinking of I actually had no knowledge of, and I had to tell

him that. And the story he was telling me that he said was about to come out in *The New York Times Sunday Magazine* [sic; *The New York Times Magazine*] just needed somebody else who had been there and saw this going on. He just wanted me to confirm that his story was correct.

I said, "I don't know whether it's correct or not. I never heard or saw anything like this," which was absolutely the truth. And so I never had to face the dilemma, which I'm sure others did, of, *Okay, if I had known something like this, would I talk to an investigative reporter about it or not?* So I—in effect, he—I breathed a sigh of relief that I did not know because he had a theory that somehow the Joint Reconnaissance Center was collaborating with the military command in Vietnam in a period when the president had ordered a stand-down in the bombing campaign, because the—because the way those campaigns worked was that we—the U.S. told—announced and told the Vietnamese that we were standing down the bombing campaign while negotiations were going on in Paris [France] about ending the war and—but that if we were—we were going to monitor what they were doing, and if they fired on our reconnaissance aircraft, we would retaliate with bombing strikes.

And so I think Hersh sort of thought, *Gee, I wonder if the military could ever conspire to continue the bombing under this type of regimen or not*. And the story never appeared, and I've never seen any evidence that it ever happened, so I don't really know what was going on, but such a story never emerged. And I just assumed that it was possibly a hypothesis of something that could have gone on, but there was no evidence that anything like that was actually happening, and no such story was ever written.

COLLINS: Yeah. That's—that's extremely interesting to me because it sort of touches on this—this popular fear that I think started to emerge during the Vietnam War that sort of dealt with mission creep, this idea that, you know, as we got further and further involved in the Vietnam War, the military's priorities sort of strayed a little bit away from—from national defense or public interest priorities. And there is this sort of collective fear that, you know, the military was getting out of hand, and some of McNamara's sort of, you know, turning to

systems analysis, turning to a more number-driven approach sort of obscured I guess the national interest in the war and led to this sort of over-involvement in the war, beyond what was actually necessary for national security, and therefore the sort of unnecessary loss in life of American soldiers in Vietnam.

Yeah, so that's just a--a particularly interesting story because even though the conspiracy theory never got published in the *New York Post* or *New York* magazine, it still seems to be very much a part of that, that tangible fear that—that was going on at the time.

Which leads me to another question that I was sort of wondering, if maybe you—you have any thoughts on this, which is a lot of people were—were afraid that McNamara was getting too focused on the numbers, or the Defense Department under McNamara was getting too focused on numbers, so much so that they were, you know, missing out on—on other priorities or losing sight of the big picture of the war. Did—did you have a sense that this was going on or that people thought that this was going on while—while you were doing this work?

BLAYDON: The—the answer is that we were all very aware of the national debates and concerns that were going on. I mean, all of us came from campuses. Many of us later were in academic careers back on those campuses, where many of these concerns were being voiced, and so we were very aware of the environment we were operating in. And, you know, it—the—you know, the protests, the National Guard [of the U.S.] ending up ringing the Pentagon when there were protesters out front. You know, those of us who were on the staff and sitting inside the building knew a bunch of the people who were outside, protesting the war. And we understood where they were coming from.

And years later, I had lots of conversations about those years and wars. When I was on the faculty at Harvard and became friends with "Bill" Coffin, William Sloane Coffin [Jr.], who had been one of the chief antiwar protesters, and we spent a lot of time talking because he retired to Strafford, Vermont, and lived across the river from Dartmouth. And I got to know Bill, and we had a number of conversations in

his home about the role he was playing as a protester opposed to the war while I was working on the staff and sitting inside.

So we were all very aware of all of that. We also had a great admiration to Robert McNamara. He was such a clear, analytical mind. I mean, if you were presenting to him or presenting an analysis or giving a briefing, you couldn't help but be impressed by this guy. Because I worked on intelligence matters, I attended the weekly briefings that the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and the intelligence community put on as the big, formal briefing once a week. And it covered—about half of it was about the war, and the other half of it was intelligence about the Cold War. So I got to see Robert McNamara operate in that world, the questions he asked, the way he probed, and all of us who were on that staff were incredibly impressed with his analytical mind.

What we never heard, and he was an incredibly disciplined man—now, he didn't sit around and have probing discussions with his junior officers about the larger questions of the war, which we were all more than familiar with, but they were not things that we heard discussed in those settings. It was why I found some of the work by Professor [Michael R.] Beschloss, who analyzed some of the—the Oval Office tapes and the Pentagon tapes of conversations between McNamara and President Johnson, that—some of which dealt with the war most- —about other matters, of course, but hearing some of the kind of agonizing that went on in those conversations were kinds of things that we, as junior officers, were well aware of but knew we were not going to hear discussed in the Pentagon. And they were not.

I'm sure at more senior levels, they were, but we were the lieutenants, the captains, the majors on—on the staff. If those conversations were going on, we were not present for those. We were present for the formal briefings. We gave the briefings, and we knew how sharp a mind Secretary McNamara had, but they were not conversations he was going to have with us.

COLLINS: Yeah, that's—that's a very interesting perspective. I think you—you were coming from a very unique position to be

able to—to speak on sort of—sort of this sort of contested legacy of McNamara.

Another question that I did have was sort of about the process of—of institutional reform within the Defense Department, where—when McNamara was appointed secretary of defense, he came a little bit as an outside, coming from the Ford [Motor] Company, as opposed to directly from a military position, although he did have previous military experience. Was there ever any tension within the Pentagon or—or within the Defense Department more broadly or the military complex between sort of bringing in more civilian academics to—to analyze these problems? Was there any push-back from sort of the old guard of officers or anything like that?

BLAYDON: By the time I got there, those tensions were largely resolved. From what I heard in the early days, they were certainly there. “Now, who are these pointy-headed, you know, academics who are coming in?” And, you know, what on earth did they know? But what had happened by the time I got there is that many of the officer corps were themselves—you know, there was a big tradition of sending sort of the best and the brightest, if you will, of the officer corps to graduate school programs, to those military colleges, but—you know, to MIT, to Harvard, to Berkeley, to Stanford [University] and then, you know, to continue on with their careers in the military.

So a lot of the career military staff, on our staff, for example, had by this time gone through programs like that, and the military, themselves, had created a lot of this. So a lot of the traditional traditions of analysis coming out of World War II and then in the early days of the old Cold War, in these military institutes that *were* basically—the Air Force had their own—the Institute for Defense Analyses, which was located in—near the Pentagon, was a—basically a think tank that was sponsored by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, comprised of both civilian and military analysts, the RAND Corporation—so the Aerospace Corporation, sponsored by the Air Force , which was in El Segundo in Los Angeles.

So it was beginning to be really embedded. But in the first days, the stories you heard of that were certainly present,

and even in things like—you could see the residual tension occasionally. And I had a couple of personal experiences where it sort of arose. I can think of two of them that are maybe illustrative for what you're asking about.

One was a big study that we were leading about electronic surveillance. We flew these big airplanes, for example, with big radars or electronic gathering stuff built on top of them, and they were used up and down the coast of the Soviet Union, monitoring their data: their telemetry on their missiles, the way their air defense systems operated. We had satellites that were electronic satellites. So we were doing a look at how did we coordinate all of that stuff. How should it work?

And I was sent to the strategic target operations center at Offutt Air Force Base [in Nebraska], which was a military command. And I was sent accompanied by a senior officer for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and I went out, and I met with the senior officers at—at Offutt and, you know, went through briefings, and they were helping me with holding my end of the study of what we were going to be doing.

And at the time, I was a lieutenant, and so on all the meetings and everything, I was identified as a Lieutenant Blaydon. And when I got back, the officer who had accompanied me, been my escort, came down and said, "I want to show you"—he said, "I think the visit went very well, but I want to show you a cable I got from one of my buddies."

And it said something like, you know, "Dear So-and-so, it was great to see you. I just wondered: Who was that four-star lieutenant that you were accompanying around the base last week?" And so this was the kind of joking humor about, you know, a young lieutenant who, from this staff, was going around, you know, probing about this stuff. What on earth is that all about? So it was good humored, but the attitudes were still there.

COLLINS: Right.

BLAYDON: And, you know—and the other one was at one point I stayed in the job but stayed for another year as a civilian. I was a

Reserve officer. By this time, I was a captain. And I was going to a meeting with a group from the Joint staff, so all military, and me representing the Office of [the] Secretary of Defense. And this group had been meeting—it was a series of meetings, and this was maybe the fifth or sixth in a series that was going to continue for a while. I'm not even remembering exactly what study it was.

And when you would go to these, there were generally a lot of people around the table, and each one had a name tag in front of them. And mine for the first ones had read, "Captain Blaydon," because by then I had been promoted. The staff in the Office of Secretary of Defense, who were coordinating the meeting, instructed—because it was held in the Joint Chiefs' area of the Pentagon, in one of their conference rooms—and instructed them to change my name tag from "Captain Blaydon" to "Dr. Blaydon" because I was no longer on active duty; I was now a civilian. And I guess somebody wanted to send a signal. So—so it—

COLLINS: Wow.

BLAYDON: —the tensions—

COLLINS: Yeah.

BLAYDON: —the tensions and the recognition of it were there, but it sort of—you know, in a sense, they were s because there were as many senior officers sitting around that table—you know, there were at least a half dozen of them that also had Ph.D.s from the same universities, and they were career military officers, so, you know, they were us, and we were they. But the tensions were still there.

COLLINS: Right. Yeah, that's incredibly interesting.

At this point, we've been on the phone for about two and a half hours, and I do want to be respectful of your time.

BLAYDON: Okay. If you want to do a follow-up, I do have some things, Riley, that I've got to do. I would say there are things we have not touched on that ought to be of some interest. Have to do with—more directly with Dartmouth. We've talked about my experience in the war, in the job that I was in. I

could give you a quick summary, if you want to do it right now, or if you have to get to class or an exam, just say so and we can pick up later.

COLLINS: Right.

BLAYDON: But the topic I would talk about would be basically—I think I mentioned have some acquaintance with what happened at Dartmouth with the eruption of the campus unrest in the spring of 1970 around [the] Kent State [University shootings] and what happened to ROTC on the Dartmouth campus and what I knew about that, because I knew about it later because I knew the people involved. That. And then some involvement of Dartmouth faculty in Hanoi, with the [Vietnam] National University in many—later years about collaborating with them to open a business school that Dartmouth faculty helped with. Those would be the two main things that—that I would think might be useful in this record.

COLLINS: Yeah. And—and one more thing that comes to mind is you were a professor at Harvard for a little while, after your time at the Defense Department, correct?

BLAYDON: I was, yes.

COLLINS: I'm sure there were—there was campus unrest on Harvard's campus as well, which—which could be of interest to us, just sort of to see how—how Dartmouth's campus protests sort of fit into the broader framework of college campus protests in general.

BLAYDON: Yeah.

COLLINS: And so I think that can also be—

BLAYDON: And I—I arrived at Harvard, at the Business School. I'd been on the other side of the river as a graduate student, so my Ph.D. was in sort of the arts and sciences side of the university, on the other side of the river from the Business School. And I came back to teach at the Business School. And I came back in the fall of 1969. The Kent State eruptions were the spring of 1970, and so it was in the spring of my first year teaching at Harvard. And the campus that spring shut down its courses, suspended its courses and abolished

ROTC. And so I was there, having just come back from my participation in these activities involving the war, and as—as an officer to find myself as a faculty member on that campus when that was going on.

So, yeah, I'd be happy to tell you about it.

COLLINS: Yeah. All that sounds intensely interesting, but unfortunately you—you were—hit the nail on the head, and I do have to get to class soon to take an exam.

BLAYDON: Okay. Send me a message and tell me when would work, and I'll promise to keep it within an hour. I thought would keep this short, but you touch an important part of my life, and I can't resist talking about it, so I'm happy to do it if it's useful for you.

COLLINS: Absolutely.

BLAYDON: Send me a message, and tell me when, and we could even do it over the weekend if you wanted to do it.

COLLINS: Here, let me end the recording of our interview, to be continued later.

[End August 19, 2016, interview. Begin August 22, 2016 interview.]

COLLINS: This is Riley Collins at Rauner [Special Collections] Library at Dartmouth College. The date is August 22nd, 2016. I am here with Professor Colin Blaydon, conducting an interview for the Dartmouth Vietnam Project.

And Professor Blaydon, where are you interviewing from?

BLAYDON: I am in—in California, in a little town called Chicago Park.

COLLINS: Awesome.

So we—we left off, the last segment of our interview, talking a little bit about your time at the Defense Department. How did your—your service at the Defense Department come to a close?

BLAYDON: Well, I had been on active duty for two years. I went off active duty the end of 1968, but stayed in the same position on the systems analysis staff, as a civilian through—to finish up some things I was working on—through the following summer. And at the—at the end of that, I went to the Harvard Business School as an assistant professor, teaching first quantitative analysis and then finance and—and started doing that in September of 1969.

COLLINS: And did you sort of always know that you would want to transition to academia while you were at the Defense Department, or did this just sort of—you just sort of—

BLAYDON: No.

COLLINS: —stumbled into it?

BLAYDON: Yeah. No, pretty much I did. I'd gotten my Ph.D. at Harvard in applied mathematics before I went on active duty, and my intent always was to return to a career in academics.

COLLINS: Okay. And—and so your—your active duty military service ended in 1968, which sort of—you had negotiated that beforehand with the Defense Department, correct?—sort of how long you would be serving on active duty before they let you go back to Reserves, or sort of—or did they put you in the Reserves after that or sort of end your military career ?

BLAYDON: They did.

COLLINS: —altogether?

BLAYDON: My active duty ended in November of 1968, and the agreement had been—or my—my commitment was for two years of active duty and then moving to the Reserves, so I was a captain on active duty until November of '68 and then became a Reserve officer not on active duty at that point but stayed in the same job until—until September of 1969, when I started teaching at Harvard.

COLLINS: Okay. Cool. And when—when you switched to Harvard, what was the—the campus climate like there at the time in terms of student attitudes toward the Vietnam War?

BLAYDON: Well, at this point, you know, the—it was nearing the height of the—of the campus disaffection with regard to the—to the war and student protests, and, you know, the—the draft around that time was pretty much at its peak, and so a lot of—of- strong feeling about the war.

COLLINS: Okay. Did you ever have students sort of question you about your time at the Defense Department, or people who were particularly curious about what—your role in the Vietnam War?

BLAYDON: Yes. When I began teaching, I was teaching in the MBA program at the Business School. A large number of the entering students were in fact people who were returning from active duty. Many of them, combat veterans from Vietnam, were coming back, and these were people generally who had been junior officers, had gone through ROTC as undergraduates, had gone to Vietnam and were coming off active duty and applied to the Business School to come back and get their MBA.

So where I was teaching was a good bit different from other places on the Harvard campus. The students at—at the B School who were there were largely people who were—had alrea-—had graduated some time before and not been drafted or were returning—students returning from the military, who had been officers primarily, who had gotten their commissions through ROTC.

So in some ways, I was down front as—as the teacher in the classroom, but a lot of people sitting in the—in the seats were pretty close to my age and were coming back from the military, so we had a lot of discussions about our experiences, but it was not a group that was feeling, you know, actively opposed to the war. There were a whole mix of feelings on everybody's part about it, but it was very different than the student atti- —feelings and the way they were being expressed across the river by the undergraduate student body.

So it was a sort of odd thing. I was also teaching in the joint program with applied mathematics and the economics department on the other side of the river, so—and I started

doing that in the winter of 1970, so I was teaching both at the Business School and in arts and sciences across the river in Cambridge.

COLLINS: And did the students at the undergraduate college treat you a little bit differently than the graduate students, or—or were there discussions with you regarding the war a little bit more—

BLAYDON: No, not—not really. Because I was over there, I was closer to it and to what was going on and some of the student protests that were being held, but I think it was largely by the nature of what I was—was teaching. And, again, most of my—the students taking my course there, because it was an advanced statistical decision theory course—they were largely graduate students in statistics, mathematics or economics, but there were a number of juniors and seniors who also took the course, but by nature, sort of of the course and that—that it was in—being a highly technical course, there was not much interaction or discussion about what was going on on campus or about attitudes towards the war.

So while I was over there and able to observe it, there wasn't much of a discussion, and I think the students over there had no idea that I was just recently returned from active duty in the Army. So it just didn't come up.

COLLINS: Did your, like, coworkers, the other faculty at Dart- —or at Harvard ever talk about the student protests with you?

BLAYDON: Not until the spring of 1970, and that is when the campuses really erupted about the war. It was when the shootings at Kent State occurred, and in that spring, basically all of the campuses erupted in opposition to what had happened and to the war, and that was true across the campus. At that point, there were no real difference in sort of what was going on in the graduate school, in the undergraduate school, in the Business School or the undergraduate college. It was all very similar.

Classes were stopped, at student insistence and in response to student demonstrations. There were faculty meetings across the—the university about what to do, and some of the—a lot of it dealing with saying, "All right, is the faculty

agreeing to stop classes at this point?" And if so, what were we going to do about assigning grades and giving people academic credit? And different faculties handled it different ways.

There were meetings of the faculty at the Business School about what we, as a school, were going to do and how we were going to respond to this. And the—the things that the B School faculty came up with were a bit different, I think, than how the undergraduate college handled it. But the debate in the—in the faculty at the Business School was I think very similar to the debate that was being reported in the general faculty of the undergraduate college.

And the outcome was the same. We stopped classes. There were a lot of seminars, discussions about the war, and that was the time, in the spring of 1970, that the students who were aware that—you know, that people like me, who had been in the Army, had been involved with the war were part of the discussions about what was going on. And they were fairly curious about what we thought.

COLLINS: And so—so you mentioned that there was a faculty debate going on within the Business School as to how to respond to the student unrest. What were sort of the two sides of that debate, and where did you fall on it?

BLAYDON: The two sides were basically were we really going to shut down classes or not? And by the time the discussion got very far along, it was pretty clear that there was a broad consensus that we were going to shut it down, and the question began to be more: How were we going to handle it, and sort of what our goals were going to be.

And I believe my part in that discussion—I was a junior faculty member. It was a large faculty, a hundred-and-some faculty at the Business School at that time. And, you know, the only thing I remember—and some of the meetings were jointly held with students present, some in the large auditorium there. And as I remember, the only time I sort of spoke up, sort of pointing back to what I'd been doing when I'd been on active duty was to make the point that a lot of the student anger that was directed at the military and at the people who had served during the war was misplaced and

that they were demonizing a group of people, of which I was one, and the—and that, you know, those people had—had served also as a group, had a lot of questions and many of the same feelings about the war as the students who were there and had not yet gone into the military.

But I spoke out briefly, not at any great length, to say that they ought to focus their attention on what was important and not demonize those who had been drafted or had become, like myself, a Reserve officer who went on active duty, that—you know, that—that that group of people were not—not the villains in their story. And that sometimes wasn't always clear.

COLLINS: Did you feel like sometimes the students were targeting not just sort of the top level policy makers who were making the decisions on the Vietnam War but also soldiers, officers and more mid-level policy makers, like yourself, who were participating in the war?

BLAYDON: I think they did, but it was expressed—the students, particularly undergraduate students—their views were not that nuanced about the different roles people were playing. It was much more a strong gut reaction against the war, about, you know, all of the horrible things and damage, you know, and—and death that was being caused by this war. And so there was a lot of just lashing out, probably. Particularly the strongest sort of expressions of it were, you know, the—the student demonstrations where the troops were vilified as "baby killers," you know, and—and so it was—there was a lot of strong feeling, and it—and it came out in that way. So it was not a very differentiated view of who you were if you'd been a veteran. The undergraduates sort of lumped everybody all in the same pot, as best I could tell.

COLLINS: And did you feel like the graduate students then had more nuanced positions on it, maybe because a lot of them were formerly soldiers themselves?

BLAYDON: Yes. There is no doubt about that. The discussion on the—at the Business School student body was much more sort of a reaction to the horrors of Kent State, definitely an abhorrence of the war and wanting to see it ended, but it was not the same feeling about the role of the—the troops in

the war that was present in the undergraduate student body because they were—the undergraduates were, in many ways, reacting to the pictures that were coming out of Vietnam, the stories that were coming out of Vietnam, and a lot of blaming of—it seemed in our minds, anyway—the combat—the American combat troops who were there and what some of them were doing. The Business School wasn't that reaction. Their reaction was more about the horror of the war, ending the war, and the reaction to what had happened at Kent State.

COLLINS: And did you ever feel sort of personally vilified from—from what some of the undergrads were saying about soldiers or—or military personnel throughout the war?

BLAYDON: Not really. You didn't see any people, including people who were still on active duty and being sent to school as graduate students, and there were those on campus. I mean, nobody was going to wear their uniform or anything that indicated their—their identification with the military and walking around the campus. That was for sure.

But, no, I didn't feel from those who knew me and knew what I had done and that I had been on active duty—I never felt the object of anything really directed at me.

COLLINS: And how long were you a professor at Harvard?

BLAYDON: I was there for four years, and I left to go back into the government. I actually took a two-year leave to go back in the summer of 1973. There was a new group being established at the Office of Management and Budget that was trying to establish more disciplined management practices at the—at the cabinet level in the government. And there was a new division, actually a group of four different divisions, each called a Presidential Management Division, that was established in OMB, reporting to Roy [L.] Ash, who was the president's chief economic adviser and had headed something called the Ash Commission about management in the federal government. So Roy was in the-in the West Wing. He was the president's chief economic adviser and also the director of OMB. And he and his team put together these divisions. They were brand new. They were supposed

to help instill some more disciplined management oversight of the cabinet departments.

And I was invited to come back and head one of those groups, so I headed the Presidential Management Division, and it got renamed Presidential Management and Special Studies, and I—the group I headed dealt with the domestic social programs. So we dealt with oversight of the [U.S.] Department of HEW (Health, Education and Welfare then) [now U.S. Department of Health and Human Services], and the Labor Department [sic; U.S. Department of Labor], the Veterans Administration [sic; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs], actually, and [the U.S. Department of] Housing and Urban Development.

And so those were the major ones that we oversaw and interacted with, as well as being the staff, really, on issues of, in our case, our education finance, the welfare programs, the education programs, including a major one that I headed the task force on, basically trying to reform the retirement system in the U.S.

So that's what—so I left and came back then. I was there for two years, and when I was leaving to go back to academic life, the last thing I was asked to help with was the task force that was trying to manage the evacuation of Vietnam when Saigon fell in the spring of 1975. So we had withdrawn from the war—I think it was two years earlier—as a direct combat role in the war, but the war continued for another two years before the South Vietnamese government and Army collapsed and the North Vietnamese Army finally overran Saigon. And that really marked a massive evacuation of people fleeing Vietnam. And I was part of the task force, operating out of Washington, trying to coordinate the ships that were picking up people at sea, the evacuations of people who were fleeing Vietnam who had worked with the Americans and were trying to get out of the country.

And I do remember thinking at the time that when I was a graduate student about to go on active duty in 1966, there was a lot of language about the war was about to be over. "The light at the end of the tunnel" was the phrase. And there was a part of me that wondered, as I knew I was going on active duty and didn't yet know what my assignment would

be, if the war was going to be over before I ever actually got onto active duty and got my assignment in the Army.

And that's sort of my attitude in the summer of 1966. And in the summer of 1975, I found myself part of trying to assist with the evacuation when the South Vietnamese government finally fell and Saigon fell, and I thought I—I would never have thought the war would have lasted that long.

COLLINS: And—and so the task force that was responsible for coordinating our policy towards the evacuation efforts—was that just run by the Office of the Management and Budget, or is that sort of like an inter-agency working group?

BLAYDON: It was definitely an inter-agency working group. In fact, it operated out of the operations center in the State Department [sic; U.S. Department of State]. It was not even operated out of the Pentagon or any of the other military- or White House-related command centers. It was operated actually out of the State Department. The person who was picked to head it was Julia [Vadala] Taft, who had been an official at HEW and at the State Department. And she was the senior person running it.

The people really conducting the operations were the military. It was the military ships that were picking people up. The initial camps that people were taken to were established by the military, generally on U.S. bases in and around Southeast Asia, primarily the Philippines but other places as well, and then arranging for people and transportation to bring them to the United States and have the relocated and resettled throughout the U.S.

So this task force handled everything from coordinating the logistics in Southeast Asia of what was going on and also trying to build the network that would bring people into the U.S. and find towns and organizations and people who would take them in, and resettling them and working a lot with church groups and with the [American] Red Cross to try and get people and communities who were willing to take these refugees and make a home for them.

COLLINS: And what was your—

BLAYDON: So that's the full spectrum.

COLLINS: What was your role within the—this group?

BLAYDON: Well, I was basically seconded [pronounced seh-CON-ded] from OMB. I had—I had let them know that I was leaving the end of the summer because my academic leave was going to be up, and so I'd always taken the job with the idea that I was only going to be there for two years. So basically I was more an individual than part of an official group. I was still overseeing the division that I was the head of, but I was spending a lot of time at the command center, working on first trying to coordinate what was going on in setting up the camps in Southeast Asia and then working to build support in the U.S. for taking in the refugees and working with the different organizations.

We did set up—and I was a part of all of that, of an advisory group of sort of basically celebrities, who would give talks, go to rallies, things like that to try and build public support for the refugee resettlement activities that were going on, that we were trying to get going.

COLLINS: And so were you sort of in more of a managerial role, rather than sort of doing more systems analysis, quantitative work like you were doing for the Defense Department?

BLAYDON: Yes, very definitely. I mean, it was, you know, just a lot of people from across the government ended up being active in this, and you would spend time over there, manning the desk, making calls, trying to coordinate stuff that was going on, and then you'd go back to what was your regular job to do and take some part in what was still going on in the day-to-day business of your job, whichever department you had come from. So it was a collection, actually, of probably a couple of hundred people from a lot of different departments in the—in the government that ended up being the group working out of the State Department, running the resettlement—the evacuation and resettlement program.

COLLINS: And did you feel like the government was prepared for the evacuation of—of Vietnamese refugees or did it feel a little bit more ad hoc, as though they hadn't done as much preparation as they should?

BLAYDON: Well, I don't know what they sh- —what should have been. It was clearly unanticipated on this scale, so it was very ad hoc. It was being invented day by day. Somebody would come up with another bright idea for a resettlement center or getting another group involved with us. And so it—it was very—very ad hoc, being invented along the way.

But the group that was—you know, was the core of a well-organized operation was the military. And they are the ones who did the evacuation physically, picked up people, brought them to camps, got them into the U.S. We opened military camps as the resettlement centers that people were brought into, and it was the military operations that did all of that, and that went smoothly, even though it was chaotic.

What was brand new and had to be invented out of whole cloth was how to build networks of support and communities that would then bring these refugees in, and these refugees—you can still see the concentrations of Vietnamese in these later years around the country, and you can see the patterns of where they got resettled. So you'll see Vietnamese restaurants in North Dakota and things like that because they got resettled everywhere.

And then people continued to come out of Vietnam for a pretty long period of time after that, and families were reunited and finding each other in the places were families had been settled in the U.S., so it continued for a long while, but that's the part of it that was not—certainly not planned for.

COLLINS: And did you feel that—that your work or the work of the working group was generally successful?

BLAYDON: It was. I think it was remarkably so. Julia Taft, who has since passed away, became something a hero of—of this entire effort and then had, for a number of years later, a fairly distinguished career in issues of refugees and U.S. policies with regard to refugees that began to extend well beyond just what had happened in Vietnam, but as other refugee populations emerged from wars going on around the world, this sort of became her career, and she certainly was an

expert in it and was highly regarded. And she passed away several years ago now.

COLLINS: And did you ever have the opportunity to meet her or work closely with her?

BLAYDON: Oh, yes. No, I knew her, and I knew her husband well. Her husband was William Howard Taft IV, and Will was a lawyer who had been the general counsel at HEW (Health Education and Welfare). Had been general counsel I think when Elliot [L.] Richardson was secretary and then Richardson, who was the attorney general at the time of Watergate and part of the famous Saturday Night Massacre—Will was on his staff, but then Will worked for Casper [W.] Weinberger, who became a secretary of HEW and then later the secretary of defense, and Will later became deputy secretary of defense. So I—I worked a lot with Will, more so, actually, than with Julia, his wife, but they were—yeah, I knew them well.

COLLINS: Awesome. Yeah, so after your—your time at the OMB, then, you sort of went back to a career in—in academia. Is that correct?

BLAYDON: That's correct.

COLLINS: And—and one thing you were mentioning to me earlier was, in particular, a lot of your work in—in academia is probably a little bit outside the scope of the purpose of this interview,—

BLAYDON: Yeah.

COLLINS: —but you were mentioning that while you were a professor at Tuck, you took part in projects run by Dartmouth to—to help build economic development in Vietnam—in Vietnam. Is that correct? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

BLAYDON: Yes. The Tuck School had done a couple of things like that. In the period when I was dean, we had helped get a—a business school, an English-language, international business school started in Japan in the late '80s. And in the '90s, when Vietnam began to open up more, the National University of Vietnam decided it was going to start a business school. And a Tuck faculty member, [Joseph A.]

"Joe" Massey, who had been in international trade stuff and was an Asia expert—he had been on the staff in the embassy in Tokyo. But he came to talk in the early '90s, having been the U.S. trade representative for—for Japan and China, actually, and began teaching international business matters.

Joe was the person that was approached by the Vietnamese about whether Tuck would help and provide some assistance in developing an MBA program in Hanoi, at the National University. And a group of about a half dozen of us at different times over a period of several years took part in that program, went over and helped develop the courses and taught courses, generally, you know, through short visits of a few weeks teaching a compressed course in a program in Hanoi and helping design the curriculum.

And this would have been in the late 1990s, so it was, you know, pretty much just about 20, 25 years after the war had ended that we were doing this. And one of the most interesting things for those of us who had had experience with the war and with Vietnam was how incredibly open the Vietnamese were to Americans. I think most of us were surprised at how warmly we were received and how open people were, given what had happened in what *they* refer to as "the American war."

And probably the single-most unusual feature was that the person who was—a young man, still, and the North Vietnamese point person at the university for developing this program was a man by the name of [Truong Gia] Binh [pronounced BIN], B-i-n-h. I forget his full name at this point. But he was the lead for developing this school within the university, and he was the son-in-law of General [Võ Nguyên] Giáp, who had been the commander of the North Vietnamese Army from the time they were fighting the French all through when they were fighting the Americans. And he was a national hero, and he was still alive.

And I remember I—on one of my visits over there, Binh and I had gotten to know each other. We had talked about the war, about his experiences in it. He was part of the northern—North Vietnamese elite, quite clearly, and most of the war he had spent in Moscow at university, and basically

returned home and took on a role in the government after the war had ended.

But on one of the visits after we had gotten to know each other, I was invited to the family compound for dinner, and the general was still alive. And I went out there for dinner, and I remember thinking at the time, *If anybody had told me in 1966, when I was going into the Army and the—and the war was just raging, the top of the American build-up, that I was going to be having dinner in—in Hanoi with General Giáp, there's no way I could have imagined that outcome.*

And so I went out to dinner, and the general was still very active, and it turned out *he* was off on a speaking tour, and so I did not meet him, but I had dinner with the family. And [chuckles] I just thought it was sort of an amazing example of—of how this war—what had it been all about, how it had played out, who the Vietnamese were, how naturally allied they were in so many ways with us and not with their patrons that we so much feared, the Chinese and the Russians.

It was like the Vietnamese and particularly the Vietnamese people were much more our natural allies, with common interests with us, than the Chinese and the Russians that—whose influence we thought we were countering when we went to war in Vietnam. So it—it just, for my mind, sort of brought the whole thing full circle.

COLLINS: And was it ever awkward or were you ever questioned for your background during the Vietnam War as sort of a participant in the military effort?

BLAYDON: Only a few odd things, just a few incidents, like I—I took a couple of my Tuck colleagues, and we visited what I think they call their National War Crimes Museum [sic; Museum of Chinese and American War Crimes, now War Remnants Museum], basically, you know, documenting what the Americans did in Vietnam, in this museum.

And so we went to see this. And on the wall were the patches of—taken from Americans who were American prisoners, people who had been captured or as trophies, I guess, on the battlefields, that were the patches, the unit patches of the American units that had fought in Vietnam.

And we were—we were looking at that wall, and I was pointing out the—the patch from the unit that I'd gone through officer training with, that had been, you know, fought in Vietnam. It was the 82nd Airborne [Division].

And I was pointing to it when a teacher came by with a group of young schoolchildren, and they were on a school tour, and these were kids who were 10, 11, 12, something like that, and they sort of ran into these Americans standing there in front of these patches in this museum about war crimes. And they [chuckles]—I looked around and felt very uneasy. And instead, they were all these young faces, who were just thrilled to be bumping into a group of Americans and being introduced to them. And this was taking place in this museum, in front of this wall! It was just quite amazing.

So it was a handful of things like that, when you would be noticed on the street as an American. There were not that many Americans in Hanoi, much more in Hồ Chí Minh City (which had been Saigon), and occasionally you would have interactions. I actually had caught some kind of bug, and I was in Saigon, and the heat was stifling, and I collapsed on the street. I passed out. And a group of Vietnamese carried me into a café, stretched me out on a bench, propped up my feet, got me some water, sort of—and took care of me. And I finally came around. I mean, basically, you know, I was dehydrated, and it was very hot, and I had not yet acclimated to being there. And so, you know, they asked me about being an American, but there was nothing about the war. You know, the war never really ended up being discussed.

Or the time I met a North Viet- —in Hanoi, an artist who was becoming somewhat known as a painter, and I went to his studio, and I bought a painting from him. And it was a self-portrait that he had done, a small one that was small enough—actually, it's hanging in my office at Tuck to this day. And he and I began talking, and he had—he was my age. He had gone south with the North Vietnamese Army and for nine years had fought in the jungles. He was actually a combat engineer, and he had dug the tunnels that are outside of Saigon that were the complex in which the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong—the bases from which they operated.

And when the war ended, he returned to Hanoi after having been in the war and gone from home for nearly a decade, and studied art and became an artist. And so that was probably the only real time I sat down with anyone and sort of compared personal stories about what *his* life had been and—during the war and sort of what I had been doing.

And so it was just a few incidents like that that sort of made clear how much more we had in common than what defined us as enemies in a very vicious war. So a remarkable circle.

COLLINS: Yeah. That's—that's extremely interesting, especially considering sort of the renewed importance of Vietnamese-American relations in—in the Asian Pacific now.

BLAYDON: Yes. And I now have friends in the private equity business, a good friend who is a partner in something called Mekong Capital, who is a senior adviser—I think we called him special fellow of our private equity center at Tuck, who teaches as a guest lecturer in our course on private equity. And he has established a private equity investment fund in Vietnam because of what he and his partners see as the business opportunities there.

I've got, sitting in my office, several plaques and things thanking me for my role in helping get the MBA program at the National University. And then I've got this self-portrait of this Vietnamese office- —officer, and now artist, hanging above the fireplace in my office.

So nothing like that would have been anticipated, I think, when I was involved in what was going on in the war.

COLLINS: Certainly. Yeah, that's really fascinating.

I—I do want to be respectful of your time, and—and I know that we've—

BLAYDON: Yes, I think—and you've got to get on, and so do I, Riley, so I appreciate this. If you have any further questions or things you want me to elaborate on, certainly feel free to get in touch, and I'll look forward to seeing the transcript.

COLLINS: Awesome. Here, I'll—I'll hit—or I'll hit "Stop Recording."

[End of interview.]