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Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Vietnam Project
August 11, 2017
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CAO: So this is Karen Cao with the Dartmouth Vietnam Project, and today is Friday, August 11th, 2017. It’s about 12 p.m. noontime, and I’m in the Rauner Special Collections Library. I’m sitting here today with [Jonathan P.] “Jon” Feltner, who is a Dartmouth alumni [sic] of ’67.

So, Jon, thank you so much for participating in this project. It’s really great to have you.

FELTNER: It’s a pleasure to be here.

CAO: So I actually just wanted to get started off with a little bit of biographical information up front. Could you talk to me a little bit about your childhood, where you grew up, all of that?

FELTNER: I grew up in upstate New York, or actually, ironically, starting at the beginning, I was born in Mary Hitchcock [Memorial] Hospital [now Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center] in 1945, and when my father was in World War II and my mother was living up in Littleton [New Hampshire] and Mary Hitchcock Hospital was the closest hospital to upper New Hampshire.

Then I grew up primarily after my father did some meandering. He was a doctor, and when he finally settled down it was in upstate New York, near Rochester, New York. And grew up in Rochester, New York, and as a kid had a very active father that would have us do all kinds of activities: sports and a variety of cultural events. I went to school in Rochester, a private school, called The Harley School and graduated from that school in ’63.

Was an early admission to Dartmouth. Never really wanted to go any other place. And started in ’63, September of ’63, and early on in my Dartmouth career I joined the NROTC [Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps] program. And one of the things that—one of my ulterior motives that came true was that I got into the program, and I was able to take an exam for the NROTC scholarship, which paid for the rest of

college. The only catch was that you had to do all of your summers in either the [U.S.] Navy or the [U.S.] Marine Corps, some six-week session thereof, and then when you graduated you owed them four years.

So that's essentially how I got into the military. I loved Dartmouth. I was—I played on the freshman golf team. I was a starting—I started, didn't ever get there—the freshman hockey team, and—and tried to be involved—as many things. I was involved in the Chi Phi [Heorot, now Chi Heorot] fraternity, probably known best to you all, if it still is known by any civil name, as the Heorot House.

CAO: Oh, yes.

FELTNER: And—and it was a tremendous experience. The ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] experience was really very good. However, the world evolved during that period of time, '63 to '67, so that in '65 the American activities in Vietnam really—they expanded tremendously, so it was a war. And there was a war on campus, too, because there was people that were in ROTC programs, and then there were antiwar protesters, and it was certainly, the last couple of years, dramatic confrontations, discussions, the whole nine yards.

CAO: Mm-hm. Yeah.

FELTNER: When I graduated in '67, pretty much everybody who was a graduate of '67—this was before they ended the draft, so people—I like to tell people that I think all the graduates had a choice to make: They could either go to the war, or they could go someplace else and hope they stay out of it, or they could be protesters, or they could be—try to be all of the above. But it wasn't a choi- —it wasn't a circumstance where they could do nothing. They had to—they had to make a choice because either they were going to go in the service, they were going to be drafted in the service, or they were going to either get student deferments, which became harder to come by, or in some other fashion attempt to avoid the war, because it was a pretty sure bet that if you were in the service, that there was a high likelihood, if you were going to be—you—you were going to be in—in Vietnam at some point.

And for me it was a certainty because I—in the NROTC I made the decision after my sophomore year to go into the Marine Corps part of it. You had a choice on your scholarship, either to go into the regular Navy or to go into the Marine Corps, so I went into the Marine Corps.

I had a number of friends who were in the Marine Corps. I was 20 years old. I can't say that I knew any better. Loved the uniforms. Loved the idea of the camaraderie. Loved the ethic. Can't honestly say that my—at that point in time, my political thinking had evolved into being for or against the war. I was in the Marine Corps, in the military because I thought it would be a great challenge, not because I was a firm believer that we were correctly in Vietnam or a firm believer that we shouldn't be in Vietnam, so—

And then in those days—and I don't know if it's still the case now—when you graduated, you graduated on a given day. I graduated on June tenth. On June ninth you were commissioned, which meant that if you go through the program, you've spent various summers—as I said, I spent a summer on a Navy destroyer, I spent a summer at a Navy aviation facility, an amphibious facility, and then the last summer was spent in Marine Corps boot camp.

And so if you completed that and you had courses that you took here, upon your getting your graduation and passing the courses, you were commissioned second lieutenant, and the commissioning ceremony was the day before the graduation ceremony.

CAO: Wow. So by then you already knew that—

FELTNER: Well, I knew what I was doing, but I also—it's probably not a good way to put it—I knew what I was doing as much as any 22-year-old knows what he's doing. And we did have confrontations on campus. As I said, we had naval parades that were protested against, and it was a very, very intense issue on campus one way or the other. I don't think there was any animosity directed at the students that were involved in the military, but there was certainly animosity that was directed at the government, which came to be

animosity—the evolution of that was animosity against the students.

CAO: Right. So were most of your friends also in the Navy ROTC, or, you know, you mentioned that there was sort of this decision senior year whether to be in the draft or not.

FELTNER: Right.

CAO: So were most of your friends, you know, in that boat, or did they also, like you, know that this is what they were going to do?

FELTNER: Well, in Chi Phi there were—for some reason there was a significant number of NROTC students and a significant number of Marine option—but I also had friends all over the place, including friends who were demonstrators. I mean, one of the things about Dartmouth is you—you don't have to, and I didn't, segregate myself to people of similar thinking or similar views; it was—it was a tight little group, and we felt that that was sort of—and it was us against the world, but it was plenty of friends and disagreed violently with what I was doing, or disagreed in some fashion, or didn't care. But it wasn't limited just to military types on campus or military types [unintelligible; 8:35] people in the ROTC program.

CAO: Right. And did you guys ever, you know, have conversations about this, or, as you mentioned, there were a lot of protests during that time?

FELTNER: We had—we had conversations about it. I can't honestly—I mean, I knew what they—certainly what the antiwar movement was about, and I understood, sort of, what their—what their political rationale was. And, yeah, you would have conversations about it. But to be candid with you, Dartmouth was Dartmouth, and just as much conversations about enjoying yourself and having a good time and every now and then being concerned about your studies. So that was—we have to say that it wasn't sort of all-consuming.

CAO: Gotcha.

FELTNER: But it was—it was pretty intense.

CAO: Yeah. And what were some of the courses that you took? You mentioned the summers.

FELTNER: Right. Well, I—the—the—the Naval ROTC programs were more about, you know, military history and military tactics and map reading and—and things like that. But I was a history major.

CAO: I'm a history major also.

FELTNER: And I—I—I was—in my senior year I fashioned myself a European history major. I took three terms of Russian.

CAO: Wow.

FELTNER: And I must say I don't know that I remembered much of any thing about Russia other than to say, "How ya doin'?" *Dobri dyen*, good day, or something like that. But it was—it was—I loved the history courses. We had one professor, Adams here, who was phenomenal, and I liked pretty much all of my courses here. I was no star in math or sciences, particularly math—actually, particularly sciences because part of the ROTC program was that you had to take two terms of math and two terms of physics. Two terms of physics—it probably would have been better if I'd had two terms of Swahili! [Both chuckle.]

CAO: I didn't do so hot in physics myself.

FELTNER: I'm not even sure. As a matter of fact, I didn't make it through one of the physics courses, and I had to retake it. I had to retake one course to up for make this sort of academic malfunction. And I, of course, took something extraordinarily difficult. Like, I took oceanography.

CAO: Oh, I've heard—

FELTNER: Oceanography: pass, fail. So I made sure that I was going to take something that would actually be interesting but hopefully, particularly my senior spring semester, wouldn't be—wouldn't be—

CAO: Too hard.

FELTNER: —particularly overwhelming.

CAO: Yes.

FELTNER: I should say one other thing that was kind of interesting is that between my—when I was a junior—between my junior winter term and junior spring term, my parents—I went with them on a ski trip to Europe: Austria and Switzerland, which was—that wasn't so overwhelming, but they took a three-day side trip to Poland and Czechoslovakia. And there was nothing—I mean, it's hard to imagine, to put things in perspective, when you came to the Czechoslovakian border and there were border guards and fences as far as you could see, and dogs, and they had to open up a gate, and they went through everything you had, and I spent- we were three days in—in Czechoslovakia, over to the southern part of Poland, and then made the circle and then came back to Austria.

And an amazing thing that I would say was that the—it was palpable when you were in those countries, the feeling of—I'm not sure what the right word is, sort of paranoia. And—and—and just some strange things. They had—people were selling you things on the black market. It was pretty clear they were not going to be terribly forthcoming about what was going on.

And when we finally got back to Austria again, it kind of felt like I had been let out of prison. And when I say that, I don't mean there wasn't anything in the countries other than the sort of overwhelming paranoia influence, but it was a thing that people couldn't talk, that people were afraid of the government, which they had every right to be, and then when you get back to Austria, it was back to freedom again and skiing and having a great time. But I never forgot that as kind of a—a touchstone of why we have so many great things in America that we take for granted, that it is that freedom to do what you want, say what you want to be and basically go where you want to go and not feel that sort of walls are caving in on you all the way around.

And good education. Nice people, nice countries, but, you know, at that time I was—after three days, I was glad to get

back into—glad to get back into the—Austria and freedom again.

CAO: Freedom. That's the homeland.

So if you could bring us sort of back to your parents, I remember you saying that your father was a doctor.

FELTNER: Right.

CAO: Could you talk a little bit more about your family—you know, your—

FELTNER: Yeah. I'm the—I'm the—I'm the second oldest. I have four brothers and three sisters. My father was a doctor and he went to Dartmouth, Dartmouth Med[ical] School [now Geisel School of Medicine], but he finished up with McGill Med School [McGill University Faculty of Medicine] because the Dartmouth Med School was a two-year school, and he—he finished in McGill in Montreal [Quebec, Canada], where he met my mother, who was in the Royal Victoria Nursing program [sic; Ingram School of Nursing; Royal Victoria Nursing Hospital] in Montreal. And they got married in Montreal, and this was early 1940, I think.

And as I said, my father was a Dartmouth graduate. My mother was very active, very supportive, because my father was a doctor, spent a lot of time being a doctor, and she spent a lot of time taking care of eight kids.

CAO: Wow. Yeah.

FELTNER: So I was fortunate because they were both fantastic parents. But in—in—in—my father really didn't push Dartmouth. I think we came here once during the period of time before I actually came here. And he was very active in a lot of other things, but not necessarily college affairs. But I saw it and decided I wanted to come here, so it made it easy. Maybe his example spurred me on, even though we—as a child, didn't have an awful lot of experience with Dartmouth.

CAO: All right. And was there any particular conflict about you, you know, joining the Navy ROTC and deciding to go to the

Marines between you and your parents at all, or were they supportive of this decision?

FELTNER: They were supportive of the whole thing, at least overtly. I mean, I have no idea what they felt inside. I'll tell you another story about that later on. But, yeah, they were certainly supportive of my getting a scholarship for four years, and my father was—my father was proud of the fact that I joined the ROTC. I think my mother was equally proud but quite a bit more concerned. [Both chuckle.]

CAO: Definitely, as mothers are.

FELTNER: Yes, yes.

CAO: So you, if I recall, went to Vietnam in '68. So that was right after graduation. Could you kind of walk me through that transition?

FELTNER: Yeah. It—it—it—it's a little—a little less—let me put you on hold. I'll show you something.

CAO: Yes. So Jon is pulling out some documents, so the first documents we're going to see.

FELTNER: Let me see if I can find it.

CAO: [Chuckles.] There's a lot here.

FELTNER: Smart enough to put them in here. [Continues to search.] I'm so well organized.

CAO: There are just so many papers.

FELTNER: Possibly—I hope I didn't leave it in the other bag that I had, but I can explain it if I can't find it. What you do when you graduate and become a first—a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps—the first place you go is [the Marine Corps Base in] Quantico [Virginia], and you have a six-month training period. And I was going to show you, I have pictures of my—of my group, and I think there were actually five or six of us from Dartmouth that went down.

CAO: Wow. Okay.

FELTNER: And it's the—they presume that—you go through Officer Candidate School in some fashion. I have a picture of the Officer Candidate class that was—that was the junior year, junior and senior year. That really is basic marching, and it's basically weeding out. In other words, they make it physically and mentally demanding so that if you don't want to be there, or they don't think you should be there, they—you're weeded out, or you voluntarily leave, or whatever.

When you go back into the basic school, you're now a second lieutenant. It's still rigorous, but it's with the idea that you're now part of the Marine Corps, and they want you to know all the things—as many things as they can teach you, to basically to make—make you ready for your first assignment, which in my case was going to be Vietnam, but they wanted six months of intense training of weapons, training in map reading, leadership—broken down by leadership, military skills and physical fitness. And—and very—very demanding, but the idea was to make you a leader. It wasn't designed to weed you out anymore.

Down in Quantico. And Quantico could be really hot in the summer, and always a challenge to sort of keep alert to all these things. And, of course, our mantra was there from our instructors to say, "Lieutenants, stay awake. You know, you may learn something that will keep you alive in this class." That was the—that was the line. So—so, you know, we got used to the line, but we also got used to listening as a result of that. And it's one of *the* finest starting schools of all the military, and it's one that all Marines, with the exception of pilots, go through.

And the point is that they all get the same training and that they are all qualified to be infantry officers, and for those who—when you go to graduate, you request MOS, which are military occupational specialties, and there are a lot of military occupational specialties: communications, artillery, tanks, pilots, supply personnel and infantry officers. But everybody is basically trained as an infantry—everybody *can* be an infantry officer.

As it turned out, and this may sound a little bit crazy, but as it turned out, the most highly sought after by the students that

went there was to be an infantry officer, so that—and after you finished the infantry school, you would—if you weren't an infantry officer, you'd go to communications school, a artillery school to get a specialty in that particular area. Pilots would go another year and a half to learn how to fly jets or helicopters.

But for infantry officers at the six-month ready—six-month level, they were ready to be rifle platoon commanders. The lowest military—the lowest military designation was the infantry company, and part of the infantry company—most infantry companies had, like, three platoons and a weapons platoons. Platoons were broken down to squad leaders, but the lowest level for a second lieutenant was to be a platoon leader.

CAO: Is this where you started?

FELTNER: Yes. So after I—after completing the school, we had a month off, and then a number of us—I think it was, like, 40—were assigned to go to Vietnam. And this was the end of '67, and in '67 the war was really starting to heat up. And by that I mean the government was sending more and more troops, and I'm not sure where the highest level was, but it was a time where the war was becoming more intense in Vietnam. And so basically we were going to arrive there sometime in January of '68.

CAO: Okay. And at that point, you know, were we optimistic about the prospects of the war? You know, were you going in with "we're going to continue building on what everyone else is"?

FELTNER: Yeah. I think—I think there was an optimism about what we were doing, but it was—it was an unusual war. You couldn't show it on a map. I mean, if you think off World War II and, you know, here's the territory that the Germans—and the lines are being back and forward. It really wasn't. The only lines that were on the map—and I'll show you; maybe I—the first thing I have to do is get you a—

CAO: A real live map.

FELTNER: —if I can find—let's hope I can find *this* anyway. I was such a star finding the other one.

CAO: And while we're looking for—

FELTNER: Yeah, we can just keep talking. I'll—

CAO: Is there a reason why the infantry was so coveted a position? You mentioned earlier that, you know, if you weren't going to be a pilot or anything else, that was sort of a role that everyone wanted to be part of.

FELTNER: Because that's why you became a Marine. That's what Marines do.

CAO: That's what they do.

FELTNER: In other words, it's—it's—it sounds a little bit—it sounds a little bit cliché-ish, but that's why you became a Ma- —that's why you become a Marine.

CAO: Gotcha.

FELTNER: So what I'm doing now—I'm just going to open up—I've given you this sort of Xeroxed one, but I want to give you the full—

CAO: Yes, full color.

FELTNER: [unintelligible; 24:20]

CAO: Yes. So now we have a map of South Vietnam.

FELTNER: South Vietnam.

CAO: Yes.

FELTNER: Glasses. And—Vietnam—basically there's a top and a bottom. The top is North Vietnam, and the South—I'm just showing you really South Vietnam because it's where most of my activities had been.

This is Quảng Trị Province, and this—if I can find the line—the 17th parallel, which is this parallel. Basically is—and that's as wide as it was there. It can be wider down here. And this was called the [Vietnamese] Demilitarized Zone.

And the Demilitarized Zone—I have something that hopefully will show you what that means if I can - The Demilitarized Zone—what they did: That was the border between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. Politically they had divided the country through a series of events, and the North Vietnamese were north of the line, and the Americans and the like were—the Vietnamese, the South Vietnamese were—were south of the line. And that was—that was the purported demarcation, but it certainly wasn't necessarily. [Rustling paper; unintelligible; 26:03].

CAO: Yes, definitely.

FELTNER: Now, this—Vietnam—South Vietnam was broken up into four different corps. Roman letters I, II, III, IV—we were in a place called—we were in I, but it was called I [pronounced like eye] Corps, because it looked like—and that went from Quảng Trị at the 17th parallel, which is—[makes thinking sounds]—where are you, Đông Hà?—right in here, across here. This is the line that goes through here all the way down through the rest of the country that goes down all the way to here.

So IV Corps, III Corps, II Corps, I Corps—I Corps, almost exclusively Marines. And the rationale for that was—I mean, I'm not sure what the rationale for it was, but I Corps was the most active and the most dangerous. Everybody had their own separate issues with the [Mekong] Delta, the [Central] Highlands.

The reason why Quảng Trị--or the reason why I Corps was the most significant is because this is where all the North Vietnamese came across the border. And they—the easiest route would be to come down along the coast or back through the Hồ Chí Minh trail.

Now, my first assignment when I went over there was at a place that was near a town called Đông Hà. Now, just to put this in perspective,—

CAO: That's a mini-map.

FELTNER: Well, yeah, but you—you need it if you were going to be a platoon commander. You couldn't operate on something *that*

size. These are—these are 1,000 meters in terms of—this is a very—so the area that I operated in that initial period was all around here, in this area here. That's the Demilitarized Zone.

CAO: Oh, wow! It's so close to the—

FELTNER: To try to put it into perspective. Where we were operating was closer to the Demilitarized Zone than you are to Lebanon, so it's only in these things here—I mean, that's a space that's probably less than five miles.

CAO: Definitely, yeah.

FELTNER: Now, the significance of that was that this is where the bulk of the North Vietnamese came down. They could also sit back behind the line. And the Demilitarized Zone was really kind of a joke. I mean, they—they were right to the line. They were doing whatever they were doing right here. And—and they could fire artillery here and cover their troops going down. But this is a—and I'll get into this when you have some more questions, but what this—looking [unintelligible; 28:50] is a little tiny square up here, by Đông Hà, which is-- Đông Hà is-- Đông Hà is a little furth- — Đông Hà is a little further down. It's like [cross-talk; unintelligible; 29:05].

CAO: Off the map, off the grid, yeah [cross-talk; 29:05].

FELTNER: Off the map, just—just down in this—I think. Let me take a look. No, Đông Hà is up here.

CAO: Oh, there you go. And so you guys were mostly near the coast.

FELTNER: Well, group. There were—there were—there was quite a few Marines. They were all over the place. But this was our area, so—

CAO: So this was the first place that you were.

FELTNER: Well, the first place I was—I came to—the staging area was Okinawa [Island, Japan]. And a number of Marines got assigned directly to organizations in Vietnam, and so myself and a couple of other people stopped at Okinawa. And we

were immediately discouraged because we didn't get—we weren't going to get into the action. In fact, we were—we were—we were in something called "in the rear," which was—which was a feeding area to come to Vietnam later.

Well, we found out that what that actually meant was that we were parts of organizations called special landing forces, and my organization was 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, and they were one of two designated special landing forces. The other one was 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines. What that meant was that, unlike my brethren who would be assigned to a specific area in here, we would be a special landing force supposedly designed to go wherever there was combat. And if there was combat here, great. Well, if that cools off, we'll move you over here, or over here, or over wherever. And I'll show you some other things in a minute, other places that we went to.

The thing about that was you got some familiarity with where your area was, but you—as soon as the sort of activity lightened, you'd be moved someplace where—which was heavier, whereas other units would stay sort of in their general area. They'd get to know the land and everything else. We got to know it long enough to solve whatever problem was there, and then move on to someplace and start over again.

CAO: Yeah. Wow. Awesome. So, you know, when you were here, was there any sort of paranoia of invasion, since you were so close to the border?

FELTNER: There wasn't any paranoia; it was happening. [Laughs.] Paranoia is when you think it's happening.

CAO: That's true.

FELTNER: I mean, the ironic thing was I arrived—my contemporaries got to—we all went to Okinawa, but then they went on to Okinawa and they started in maybe the first week in January. I got there in January I think it was 18th, something like that.

CAO: This is of '68, 19- —

FELTNER: Nineteen sixty-eight, and they—they—I'll never forget it because when we arrived, there was a Navy person who said, "Lieutenant, you are incredibly lucky. Your timing couldn't be better." I'm trying to think how well my timing was. [unintelligible; 32:07] Vietnam. But the reason for that was there was an event—there is an event, still; it's probably like the Vietnamese—still major holiday, the Tet holiday.

CAO: Tet, yeah.

FELTNER: And the Tet holiday is normally a couple of weeks toward the end of January. And it was—I don't know if "tradition" is the right word, but it was—what happened is that all the fighting stopped for two weeks while people celebrated Tet. So in 1968, I got there, and I was told that I was incredibly lucky because I got there just in time for this two-week celebration, which last all of about 15 minutes, because the North Vietnamese decided that this was going to be year that they made their huge invasion.

They came down, all the way down to Saigon, and they—they—they operated on—into all sections, but the big items that people remember is they attacked Saigon, they attacked Hué (H-u-é), Da Nang. And, of course, we didn't miss our opportunity to have them coming across the border. But the point was that there was no holiday. In fact, it was a pretty intense period of time, and it's—it's one of the things that is, when you read a history of Vietnam, you'll read that it was the turning point, if you will.

CAO: Right.

FELTNER: And the turning point in that—because I think it was sort of pretty much a military disaster for the North Vietnamese because they lost tremendous numbers of people, but it was a tremendous coup in that they persuaded the American press and the American population that the war was not going to be winnable.

CAO: Interesting, yeah.

FELTNER: And the idea was that if they could make these massive attacks through the country [unintelligible; 33:59], you just don't have enough Americans or enough—

CAO: And power.

FELTNER: —power from the South Vietnamese to—to ultimately stop what was going on. It wasn't going to happen in a hurry, but the point was that the perception was the war is ultimately going to be won by them.

So we, of course—you know, we were sort of—at the point in time when you're in the middle of it, you don't see these giant geopolitical trends, but that's what was going on.

CAO: Right, right. That's what was going on.

FELTNER: So with my organization, our job—and [unintelligible; 34:39] this map is of some interest is that this is the Cửa Việt River, which is just sort of circularly working around—our job was to keep the Cửa Việt River free of the North Vietnamese because in order to get down here, they had to get across the river, so if we controlled the river, then they couldn't do it which, of course, meant that they'd go west and down the Hồ Chí Minh trail or someplace else. But at least our job was to sort of interdict them, which I guess sort of split them and keep them north so that they couldn't go south. And it was a pretty—at least for the first three months there—very—pretty intense combat laden in terms of the times that you would have actual contact with them, actual battles with them.

And we would go—we would go from village to village to village, rout out whatever—I think—let me stop for a minute to try to explain a little bit of the differences here. There were indigenous people who were Viet Cong, and they were supportive of the North Vietnamese, and they lived in—they had irregular fighters that were just called to that because they weren't as organized. The North Vietnamese were actually people in uniforms, people with the whole nine yards, the full organization and everything else. The Vietnamese—the Viet Cong were guerillas. But they worked together.

And so as you went further south, by the way, as you went further south, the Viet Cong was more sizeable, and the North Vietnamese Army was less sizeable because they had to get there, and the guerillas were there.

So we faced a combination of—of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, and I should say that the North Vietnamese were—they were superb opponents. They were—they were—

CAO: In what ways were they?

FELTNER: Tremendously disciplined, tremendously skillful, tremendously dedicated, we though in some ways better armed. They had better weaponry than we had in terms of rifles. And they were—they were driven. I mean, they were driven by the popular cause to take over their country. And we had, on our side, the South Vietnamese, who—their influence was from throughout the country but primarily Saigon.

And they were—they were not so good. There was—and nor were they necessarily loved all the way up and down, because they were corrupt. They did a lot of things with the people that the people weren't too excited about so that the North Vietnamese were, if you will, selling them the North Vietnamese way of thinking by—by word but more often by intimidation.

And the South Vietnamese were—they were corrupt to the point where their—their service organizations—some were quite good; some were awful. And when I say "awful," I mean when they got attacked they'd flee the battle side—the battle site. Well, that's not much help if you're relying on them and they decide in the middle of the night this is a little too dicey to stay there, and go. And we often said if you put the South Vietnamese on your flank it was the equivalent of putting nobody on your flank.

CAO: [Chuckles.] [unintelligible; 38:32].

FELTNER: [Chuckles.] So you can't rely on them. So—so this was—this was my life for the first—and—and—and, as an infantry officer, my job would be to be the first platoon or second platoon or whatever it was, in a mission, into a village. And you'd walk into a village, and we were hamstrung a little bit because the—the—the—the rules of the day, rules of engagement were called in Washington, was sort of wanting

to keep away from civilian casualties, which there's nothing wrong with, but which also means that if you're going into a village and you're told you can't take any preparatory activity before going in, you usually find out when they shoot at you first. [Both chuckle.] So that's necessarily the best position to be in.

So—so—I mean, it got to be almost a, if you will—sometimes Marines would shoot into the village so they could say they got opposing fire so that they could then bring in the artillery. And you'd have—Marines had some pretty good support. They had artillery. They had ships over here that would provide naval gunfire. We had something that the Vietnamese didn't have, which was tremendous, in that we had jets and helicopters, which made a tremendous amount of difference in terms of—and I give the North Vietnamese credit for being able to deal with it. They were masters of camouflage. They were masters of deception. Because they had to be.

CAO: Mm-hm. That was their forte in the field, yeah.

FELTNER: Right. And it'll also explain—if you have some questions about Agent Orange. Agent Orange—the theory was that it would clear off the canopy, of the top of it, and—and then it would be easier to see the North Vietnamese going south, which I don't think ever worked all that well, but it had a horrendous side effect, which continues till today.

CAO: So, yeah, building on Agent Orange, that was before '68.

FELTNER: Agent Orange was—we had Agent Orange issues—we didn't have Agent Orange. We didn't know what it was. I mean, we knew they would spray, but it was years later that anybody really assessed the health effect. And I—I to this day think that the Americans or whoever made these decisions at the upper level were really in—in my opinion, really culpable because they unleashed this thing, which certainly had a terrible effect on the Vietnamese but also a terrible effect on their own military.

And—and I would—well, I'll get to that in a minute; we'll talk about it a little bit more because I'm going to try to do this sequentially for you. That way, I can find things sequentially.

CAO: Perfect. Perfect. Logic.

FELTNER: So this was the area that I was in through—January through April.

CAO: Through April, okay. So three to four months.

FELTNER: Yeah.

CAO: Were there any—I was just going to ask you—like, kind of walk me through, you know, the day-to-day basis. Were there any nights you were able to rest at all, or was it just one day to the—

FELTNER: Well, you—you—you—you—there were some places that you would hole up for a while. But when you were—even when you were moving, you had to be in a tactical mode all the time so that if you—even if you were in a—in a outskirts of a village that you'd been before, you still set up a perimeter, you still patrol the outside of the perimeter. Even if you were in an area where you anticipated combat, you would send out patrols to go find it, or maybe more importantly, to let you know where *they* were. So it was a sort of continuous thing. There was no, like, huge safe spot. You were where you were, and—and—I mean, some of the back cities and Saigon and Da Nang and places like that, there would be enclaves where you could be back and at least consider yourself somewhat safe. In these outlying areas in the various spots of Vietnam, no place was safe.

CAO: Gotcha.

FELTNER: At least you had—that had to be your—your thinking.

CAO: Your thinking, right, to sort of—yeah. And so—

FELTNER: Excuse me. My eyes water. It has nothing to do with this.

CAO: So these guys—these were your buddies from Okinawa? You guys all came—

FELTNER: Well, yeah, but we all got dispersed when we went there, so when I—when I got there I—I—I, for example,—it was an

interesting—I think I told you about the—the fact that I was so lucky to get there for the first day of Tet.

CAO: Yeah.

FELTNER: The day I got here was—if I can find it on the map—there was a place called Lam Xuan, and we were—came into this—this little town of My Loc. And when I came there, a ship that I had come from out here was the USS *Valley Forge*, I think. We helicoptered in. And I was one of the new entrants, and when I got to My Loc, my company was sort of very down. And what the—I had been told I was going to be the second platoon commander, and when I got out here, they told me that they had done a—they had been in this little town of Lam Xuan. They'd had a battle that day. My platoon had had 62 people in it, was down to 42, and one of those that was killed was the platoon commander. So instead of getting second platoon, I got third platoon. And it was sort of like, "Here you are, Lieutenant, go to work."

CAO: [Chuckles.] "It's all yours."

FELTNER: Yeah, "It's all yours." And—and—and needless to say, it was sort of like, *Okay, you're in the real world now, you know? There's not gonna be a whole lot of—there's not gonna be a whole lot of warning, transitioning curve here.*

CAO: Wow. So what *were* the thoughts that were going through your head at this point?

FELTNER: Well, number one, I was scared to death. Number two, I think the biggest concern was would I be capable of leading my platoon? In other words, would they respect me? Because they had all been there, and I hadn't, and I was a second lieutenant, and I was the decision maker, so their—I'm sure their thoughts were, *Oh, God, is this guy gonna get us killed? Does he know how to call in artillery? Does he know how to—does he know tactics? Can he use the radio? Can he do—*

Well, basic school was terrific for that, but it was kind of a question of until you do it, you don't know you can do it. So there was the fear on their part that I'd kill them, and there was a fear on my part that I might kill them. And you just kind

of stumble and bumble along, and—that's really not true. I knew what I was doing, and they knew I knew what I was doing. But I also didn't have any experience.

So what I—you know, the idea of what I thought might have worked in Quantico, as opposed to what was going on here—totally different. You know, you're—you're in the place where it happens now. The enemy knows the place better than you do. And so you've got to make sure that you understand where you are and what you're doing, who your men are and what their strengths and weaknesses are, and what their fears and concerns are, and what their skills are in terms of—Marines are all tremendously well trained, but that doesn't mean they're all equal. You know, some people are—are—are much better at shooting a weapon, and some people are much better in visualizing where things are happening from. Some people—you know, it's the whole level of—skill level. They have a basic level, but some are really good; some are okay.

But they're all—one thing I want to say: At all points, they were fantastic kids. They were fantastic kids. A lot of them didn't have high school educations, but they had street smarts. They had—you know, if they came from a rural area, they might have some tremendous tracking and hunting and shooting skills, and they were real—and they were a true blend. There were a lot of black Marines. There were—I think we had one from Hawaii. Of course, the Marine Corps was immediately—they all get names immediately. The one from Hawaii, of course, was called Pineapple.

CAO: [Chuckles.]

FELTNER: We had one guy that had gone for a limited period of time to a school, to a divinity—or wanted to go to school; he never got into being a—a minister, I think, so they called him Pope.

CAO: [Chuckles.]

FELTNER: And—and they had other names that were—it was, like, you know, the Seven Dwarfs: Dopey and Sleepy and whatever. Dopey and Sleepy weren't names that were usually used, but they all had some name they went by.

CAO: Some sort of name, yeah. Did you have a name also?

FELTNER: Lieutenant. [Chuckles.]

CAO: Sure. Right.

FELTNER: [Laughs.]

CAO: How could I forget?

FELTNER: I mean, that was the name they used when they saw me. I don't know what name they used when I wasn't there, but I know that's the name—there was two names: Lieutenant and Sir. And—and—and just as an example of—of things that you would do that you—I—I—I think back on it—is that they have—your—your lieutenant rank is a gold bar. Well, the North Vietnamese were not dumb, and the North Vietnamese were exceedingly shrewd, and so they had three primary targets that they were—that they had snipers or something. One was the guy who was the medic, a corpsman; he had a red cross on his bag. One was the radio man; he had the radio; you couldn't get away from that. And the third was the lieutenant.

So what—what I—I didn't invent this because everyone else did the same thing—you wear a jacket like that [pantomimes], and you put your bars underneath, and you pull it down so that you're just—

CAO: Yeah, you can't see it.

FELTNER: —might as well be a private, except they can probably figure out that the guy who is talking on the radio and the people coming up to him to get—they probably figured that he might have been something more than—than just the average Marine.

CAO: Right, right.

FELTNER: So, but—those were—those were—those were sort machinations that you would do, just sort of self-protection machin- —but you learn pretty quickly. And other things, like, keep your head down and make sure your bunk—or your foxhole that you dug at night was deep enough, because

they had artillery, and—and—and one, you can be killed, certainly, by rifle fire; it's awfully easy to be killed by artillery, which lands and then the shell spreads out, so you really want to be able to get *down*, get out of sight.

And—and so that was—that was this atmosphere around here. People—the villagers—basically scared to death, you know? They—they—they—

CAO: Did they ever evacuate, or—

FELTNER: Oh, that's—that's—that's another tale I'll get to. But basically, they lived there. This was their place, but they were also—you know, the Viet Cong were coming through and intimidating them, and, you know, maybe somebody was killed to make the point. And then *we* would come through, and they'd be—be just as scared.

One of the scariest thing is—and I can remember one village that we came through down here—let's see if I can find it, a place called [sounds like luh-ZOO-yun]. Where are you, Luh-ZOO-yun]. We came marching in here; the villagers are going out like this. And that tells me, *Hey, guess what's left? Why are the villagers leaving the village? It's not a holiday.* So, you know, if they—if they were leaving the village, it was a bad sign.

CAO: I see. So tell you—

FELTNER: Yeah, tell you that, you know, you were about ready to get some action. So the villagers were—were primarily people that were just caught in the middle. You know, they—they were trying to do their—tend their rice paddy, tried living their life, but they were just watching people [cross-talk 50:39]—

CAO: [cross-talk; unintelligible; 50:39]—

FELTNER: —parading back and forth, and terrible things going on, and shells and their houses getting burned up or blown—blown apart, things like that, so—

And there were—within villages, there were some—some Viet Cong, Viet Cong sympathizers who would be using this part of the village to store—it was a variety of different

things, even in a village. But also the villagers really probably wanted nothing to do with either side. They just wanted to stay alive.

CAO: Yeah. So was there, you know, a particular place here—

FELTNER: Oh, yes, yes.

CAO: —that was full of the action?

FELTNER: Well, what we did, which was—this was—this was—we started out up wherever Lam Xuan is, and just to show you where—just to show you how the North Vietnamese wanted us to know this little town of Nha Trang—they were flying a North Vietnamese flag from the middle of town, so we get the idea, Y*eah, you're there, because you get—you're brazen enough to fly a flag and you know we've got jets.* So we—there was this little town called [Mai Xa Chan? 51:49] [pronounced mah-zee-CHAHN] through here, and it was—then it was called Mai Xa Thi [pronounced mah-zee-tah-TIE], east and west. And we had a whole lot of action in Mai Xa Thi east, including a number of Marines that had gotten killed and whatever.

And then our plan was: Okay, now we're going to move you around, with the idea that the Cửa Việt is the river you're supposed to protect, so we did a series of these through the area, through here, all of the little towns. And we would come in in the morning, and we'd sweep the town for North Vietnamese. And periodically we would get into firefights and full-pitched battles, and—and then we'd move on to the next village and—you know, again, [as I say? 52:33] not like World War II or someplace else; you'd move on through a village, but you couldn't say on a map, "Okay, that's ours." As soon as you go, people might come back in.

CAO: People come back, yeah, exactly.

FELTNER: So we did this grand circle thing around and then came back here to this Mai Xa Thi east. We knew that this place here was called Mai Xa Thi west. And as we were—as we had come back, we knew that when we took this place, that this place was really kind of bad news because there were a lot

of North Vietnamese in it. And so now our—now our job was to go pull them out.

Well, one of the issues was we—there was a significant anticipation that, *Hey you know what's here. There is problems you can see: boats coming across the Cửa Việt to resupply these guys.* And you knew there was a sizeable force over there. I think they ultimately determined that the force was regimental size, which is bigger—they have smaller units than Marines did. Marines had battalion over here; regiments, usually considered about three battalions' worth.

And so we made—that we were ordered to go in and take this Mai Xa Thi—this Mai Xa Thi west, and we did. And it was sort of a horror show. We came in. There's this little creek that was called Jones Creek by us, but I don't know what they called it. But—

CAO: So you're on boats coming in?

FELTNER: We had to cross this little tiny bridge. There was also another—there's a military vehicle called an "amtrak" [a portmanteau for "amphibious tractor"]. It was, like—it's—if you think of the duck boats in Boston—

CAO: Yeah. [Chuckles.]

FELTNER: — armor them and put them in—those are amtraks. So the assault that we made was to come over this little tiny bridge, which was frightening as hell, and then the amtraks to come up and then for us to sweep through and take—take them out. Well, they were well entrenched. They were extraordinarily tough fighters, and so that's the place I was wounded the first time. And with my—with my unit—I'll tell you a semi-humorous story about it, but they shot off the end of my finger in—in—in that place.

CAO: Wow.

FELTNER: And I tell the—tell the story, which is true, but even in the midst of all this horror show, you got to have some humor, even if it's gallows humor. So we're maneuvering, and you can see that the terrain here—these are all rice paddies, and

it's a rice paddy world all around. Everything's a rice paddy. And so we're maneuvering through this rice paddy area, and one of my squads—that's a smaller version—if you think about platoons, it's usually about 40 men; a squad is usually about 10, led by enlisted men.

One of the kids get out there—ran out across the paddy and was shot through the legs, and he was—he was yelling, "I can't move! I can't move!" So yours truly, immortal in this fashion at the time, decided that, notwithstanding the fact that everybody else was—was—was in a place of some security—ran out to get him, at which point the sniper shot me. And so then I—I crawled back, and the—the—the—the—his squad leader, who was, you know, some lance corporal or something like that, from probably West Virginia or something—he [unintelligible; 56:33]. He said, "You know, we've already got the platoon commander shot, and," he said, "you know, you've gonna have to figure a way [outta here? 58:42]. No one else is gonna—no one else"—at which point, the guy who couldn't move got up and ran back. [Laughs.]

CAO: [unintelligible; 56:49].

FELTNER: So I was—I was saying I always tell—tell people that the—you know, that there was some significant—there was humor to it, but it was kind of gallows humor.

CAO: [Laughs.] Yeah. Dark. It was a little dark.

FELTNER: And—and—and—and I think—one of the things that I had learned, by people who had been killed around here and had killed my Marines—just how traumatic that is. I mean, a guy gets up in the morning. He's shaving. You're looking at him. And he gets shot. And he's a 20-year-old kid. Then he's nothing. And you—you—I mean, I—I—I won't go into all the gory details, but there were lots of events like that. And death. And people getting injured. Usually people getting injured.

CAO: It's a commonplace—

FELTNER: Yeah, but it just sort of happens. And if you're—if you're not—you know, you can watch westerns and [unintelligible;

57:43], but until it really happens, you—you—I mean, it's hard to believe that it becomes commonplace. It does. But each time it becomes commonplace, it doesn't change anything; it's still a traumatic experience. And I'm convinced that everybody that was in any of these wars, to some degree, and others to a tremendous degree, have PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder]. I mean, this is not what normal people do.

CAO: No, not at all.

FELTNER: And it's—and their experiences aren't normal, and you can't see, you know, your trusted radio guy, who you've been—you know, he's with you all the time, he's in your foxhole, he's anywhere near—to see him shot and get killed, and he's right next to you—I mean, it's—it's—you can't not be affected by that.

CAO: We're human.

FELTNER: And I think that the question that people would ask—and—and—and—and they say, "Well, how can you function?" I mean, if you're—you know there's a fear there, and you know that can happen. I would think that—I think I'd explain it in two ways, because I've never really been able to sort of rationally explain it, is that your training is so good that you act pursuant to your training: *Okay, somebody's been shot. I've gotta call a helicopter or I gotta figure out who's gonna take this person off* and these kinds of things.

And the other things is I think that, you know, there is a—almost a fatalistic view, and it's almost necessary to say, *Well, if they're gonna shoot me, if it's my time, they're gonna shoot me. Other than that, I'm just gonna do my job.* And the logic is, *You know, I can't—I can't—I can't—I can't prevent fate from doing it. I can use fate as a—as a—as a weapon by saying, you know, if it's my time, it's my time; if it isn't, it isn't.*

And so you just have to—and everybody has to function that way because if everybody thought they were going to die every two seconds, and allowed it to overcome their ability to function, then you just have a unit that is like a bunch of cattle waiting to be slaughtered.

CAO: Yeah, definitely.

FELTNER: And—and so it's those kind of things. And I also think that that were was—as I said, there was this sort of—this immortality complex that lasted until the first time I was shot and I realized that I was not only not immortal but kind of stupid. So—but it—it—it's—it's—it's—it's the factor that makes—and I think the thing that—why I will continue any discussion about Marines is to think that they *can* function, they *can* do these things.

Now, a little bit of political philosophy: Whether they should, whether they—whether it's the right thing to do, the wrong—that's not their decision. Your decision is you've been put there. You've got a job to do. You do it. You just have to hope that the people up the line have made the decision or have made it with enough thought, made it with enough consciousness, morality, whatever to understand what you're doing.

And so when they talk about, you know, sending people off to war, if it's somebody, like 99 percent of our [U.S.] Congress, who's not had a son or not been there, then my own view is that's really—I'm not sure what the right word is, but that's—that's not fair.

CAO: It's not—no. Yeah.

FELTNER: And I always—I really believe that people who make decisions like this should have been put through similar circumstances or their son or, now, their son and their daughter is at risk.

CAO: I understand, yeah.

FELTNER: And if you're not that way, if you can just treat these people as sort of chess pawns, then—I mean, I——I think that's—I don't know what the right word is. There's —there's not a word that I can think of that's horrible enough for people that would make decisions and move people around that, as unfeeling as that. And when you put ego in it and you put foolishness, like we've been hearing lately, bombast and everything else, to say, "We'll do this, and we'll do that," well,

the “we” here are [unintelligible; 1:09:48]. The “we” here was me and my people and the people I worked for and everything else. There is a “we” at the end of—there is a “we” at the end of this thing, and people—people have to at least appreciate it and—and I think should have some idea of what it means.

CAO: Right. Do you think, you know, during your time there, there was animosity towards government within—

FELTNER: Oh, yeah. But, I mean, not anim- —

CAO: [cross-talk; unintelligible; 1:02:12]?

FELTNER: —I mean, I brought—believe it or not, I brought—I brought—[unintelligible; 1:02:22] find, but I brought—brought the letters I wrote home.

CAO: Letters? Oh, wow.

FELTNER: And I’ll show you one that’s particularly interesting in a minute, but the—so—but I can—in those letters, you would see that I was cursing the government. I was doing–but you know what? That doesn’t stop me from doing my job. But—but I would still say, “Who the—who are these people making these decisions? This is”—as is always the case, I always—you’re always—I’m able always to find a little bit of sense of humor.

This one is after I had been wounded the first time. I was sent down to, first of all, a place down here called Phu Bai [Combat Base, Vietnam], which is where they had a hospital. It was the hospital thing. And they—and they went in, and they—they came in, and they took a look at me, and they said, “We’re gonna have to take your—take your finger off.”

CAO: Wow.

FELTNER: Because it was hanging on by some—listen, if I’m—if I’m graphic, just—

CAO: No, no. This is—I wanted to be a doctor at one point. This is—[Chuckles.].

FELTNER: So—so I said, "Well, you gotta do what you gotta do." So I had the finger that was hanging down by a little piece of skin, so the doctor comes and clips it off and sews it up. And big tough-guy Marine was fine until they did it, and then he passed out. [Laughter.]

CAO: The adrenaline's got you going.

FELTNER: So I just show you this, and I'll—I'll—I'll let you take a look at it. I decided that the thing to do—because I knew what would happen; I knew that when they—when you were wounded or killed, the Marines, and I think all the services, but the Marines especially—they send a casualty team to your family. And they're people that tell you—tell you—tell you what's—what's—what's happened and all the rest.

The first time they came, my mother thought this was great, thought, *Hey, the Marines kind of come, give us a whole update on our son.* Well, she thought that was great till the—till the Marines told her what happened. "Your son's been shot in Vietnam," so—and it happened—because I got wounded a second time. The second time they came, she wouldn't let them in, because she wasn't sure what they were going to say.

So in my own defense, I decided, *Well, hey, nothin' better than a—nothin' better than a letter home to—to—*

CAO: Cheer them up.

FELTNER: *—cheer them up.*

CAO: Let them know, yeah.

FELTNER: So I wrote them a letter left handed. And I'm sure when they get that, they're going to completely feel there was no problem whatsoever with me.

CAO: This is actu- —[Chuckles.] Wow. I'm actually trying to teach myself to write left-handed right now. [Chuckles.]

FELTNER: Well, let me just say I wasn't all that successful. If this letter was designed to cheer them up and think there was nothing wrong, I thought about I—I look at it today and say, *Hey, you*

could have sent a ransom note. That might have been more appropriate. But so I wrote them this letter left handed, and I ended up by saying, "I'm fine."

CAO: "I'm fine. Love, Jonny." [Laughter.]

FELTNER: And they said,—

CAO: "We're doing well."

FELTNER: —"that was great. Thanks for the help. Thanks for the"—but, you know, at least it showed me that—showed *them* that I was still around. And I think—you know, that's *my* story. I imagine other people did other things.

Let me ask you a question.

CAO: Yes.

FELTNER: Because I don't—it doesn't really bother me. If—I don't mind leaving these letters with you if you'd like to look at them for part of your thing—

CAO: I would actually love to, yeah.

FELTNER: —and—and—and send them back to me.

CAO: Yeah.

FELTNER: And you're going to see that—

CAO: Thank you for being so generous.

FELTNER: Well, I think it's—I think it's—I think it's—it's something I want to do.

CAO: [unintelligible; 1:06:05] you experienced, yeah.

FELTNER: And let me just simply say that if you find anything in it—you know, it's—it's—it's going to be some rants and raves in there; it's going to be some craziness; it's going to be a lot of other stuff. But it is coincidental with being there, so it's—it's—it's—it's a—it's a—at the same time review of how I was feeling, so that it—it wasn't—

CAO: This is great, yeah.

FELTNER: —this is—this is not an author sitting back and writing it; this is whatever this crazy 22-year-old kid was when he was writing it. As I say, one of the things that—one of the things that I find in some ways, in a lot of ways being inspired by was thinking, *Man, I'm not that 22-year-old kid. I mean, where—where did he find whatever he had, the courage, whatever it was?* And sooner—you know, as you grew up, you learn more and whatever, but *where did we—where did he find whatever was motivating him at the time?* So that's—if that's—if that's of any use to you, use it as you want. Just give it back to me at the end.

CAO: Of course, yeah.

FELTNER: And I don't mind if they're quoted or whatever, because that's how I felt at the time, and that's what I was—you know, you may have to get somebody who reads hieroglyphics from time to time to be able to read it. I'll leave that to you.

CAO: Awesome. No, I'm very, very excited. Do you still keep a journal or a diary throughout—

FELTNER: No, not like that. I mean, this was a—this was a time that was—I mean, ironically I do. I mean, in some regard, when I went back to Vietnam, I kept a little diary. When I go on some trips, I do it, but—well, actually, I don't know what I'm talking about. I'm a—I am a compulsive list maker because as I get older, I'm—my concern is, *Am I—is everything early onset Alzheimer's?* So I write down—I have a list of everything that I'm going to do that day, and then at the end of the month I—so—

CAO: Compile it, yeah.

FELTNER: Compile it. And, of course, what you had to do is you had a little notebook with you, and you would write down all the things you had to do, because, you know, "we're going to go over here" -

CAO: To remember it, yeah.

FELTNER: —or “the password is X” or “these are the coordinates where you’re supposed to be,” so get used to sort of taking—

CAO: Filing away different things.

FELTNER: Well, not necessarily filing away, but having this little notebook, which was pretty [scrawny? 1:08:28] by the time I got down with it, but it was so you could tell your men what—“We were going to this town; it’s five kilometers this way, and when we get here, we’re gonna do this and that.” And you had to kind of write it down so you didn’t screw it up. Changing the password, changing the call sign for the—for the communications, ‘cause you periodically change it so that somebody wouldn’t get used to who you are.

So, yeah, that’s the—that’s the—that’s the—

CAO: Christmas party?

FELTNER: This is—this is the story at this particular [cross-talk; unintelligible; 1:08:54].

CAO: [cross-talk; unintelligible; 1:08:54], yeah.

FELTNER: And I—I was going to wait, but I think it’s kind of appropriate to maybe jump ahead, and then I’ll go back to the rest of it.

CAO: Yeah, definitely.

FELTNER: I went back in 2010 to—to this little town, which is—the name is Mai Xa Chan. Now it was called Mai Xa Thi, T-h-i. And—and I went to Viet- —actually went to Vietnam for three weeks, but I set two days to go to the places where I was wounded. And this one was more meaningful because—and I’ll show you; the other one was so far in [sic] the beaten track, I couldn’t get there. It wasn’t like I didn’t need a five-mile walk through the jungle to get to the other place.

But I went back, and I had a fantastic Vietnamese guide. Spoke English. More learned than a lot of Americans about American history, articulate. The thing that was great about it is he had obviously done these kinds of things in terms of tours, so he knew the people. He could know [unintelligible;

1:10:01] say, “Put this guy up to the front of the line” or whatever. This—if you—you or somebody else ever goes to Vietnam, it is a fantastic vacation spot.

CAO: Yeah, I would love to.

FELTNER: Absolutely fantastic. So I went back to Saigon, which his where I—where I flew into, and the guide who was running the tour is a former serviceman. And what they do is they—you get a guide and a driver assigned to you in the various different places in Vietnam. And this fellow was working out of Da Nang. But he’d been up here—in fact, one of the things he loved to do is to take veterans to where they were before.

So the thing was, could we find this place? if you—see, there are so many of these little—and the towns have the same name, and sometimes they’re known as Mai Xa Thi 1, 2, 3, 4. Sometimes east and west. And it’s—and—and—and, of course, after the North Vietnamese have come through, some of them would change their names. Every town has a little—at least the Mai Xa Chan here had a—had a—had a—let me get oriented here—had—had a—

CAO: [Whispers; unintelligible; 1:11:09].

FELTNER: Yes. They had—you know, they had their own little Communist Party, but—and the people there function, basically, despite them. But they’re there. And they’re making it pretty clear they’re in charge, but the people—I didn’t get the same feeling of sort of—of the same level of paranoia that I had in Poland and Czechoslovakia. It’s not to say, by the way, that they aren’t there and don’t exert some paranoia at things, particularly politically and speech wise, but they—people really function pretty well without [unintelligible; 1:11:39].

So I went back, and one of the other cute things that people do now is to tell you, “This is where you were. And by the way”—so they can get a little money for the tour or whatever it is. So the question was, when driving—you finally found and decided, with the river and this river coming down, what was the right place. And the right place had

changed because we'd flattened it. Everybody flattened it, between us and the—

And in this battle I was telling you about, 27 Marines were killed, and I don't know, 100 were wounded or whatever, but also the Viet- —the—the North Vietnamese were—were badly hurt, too. We—you really don't know, because it's not like—nobody tallies up the other side. They carry their dead away. You don't know how many there were. But you can guess that there were a lot, just from a lot of the things that you saw, and what was left.

So we finally found the right place, and then I asked three villagers that were there, could they help me go out and find this location where I thought I'd been shot. Well, schools are up now, and kids are in their uniforms. I mean, it's a—it's a—it's a different place.

CAO: It's a full-blown village, yeah.

FELTNER: But there was—they have these little grave- —graveyards where they have little temples and things for families. And I had told my—I had told my guide—I said, "Look, I want to have a service for the Marines who were killed. Do you think that would be appropriate?" "Yes." "Would you—can you tell me how"—"I'll take care of it."

So he went and got jasmine sticks to burn and flowers and a few other things and gave me some tips, so we were going to go and try to find this place, which I'm going to guess we never found, but it was, like, I'm going to guess there was a surrogate, which was fine. You know, it was close enough.

So we found one of these family temples, and they had a place where they could make offerings and all the rest of it, so the three guys that came around with me—two guys were very friendly. One guy had a—I don't know—poor circumstances in terms of the—he had a plastic leg. That was his—their form of their—their injuries for amputees. I—I don't know what happened to him. He may have stepped on a mine. I don't know whether he was in the war or not, but he looked young enough to perhaps not be there.

The third guy was this guy. He looked like a complete river—

CAO: [Chuckles.]

FELTNER: —pirate. Scars. And they kind of stepped—they kind of—they kind of were stand-offish a little bit. And I said to my guy—I said, "What's the story with the third guy over here?" Who seemed to know, by the way, where to go. And—and he said—he said, "Well, they're—they're—they're a little less enthusiastic about him," because he was a Viet Cong, okay. He's a Viet Cong. So I said, "Let's talk to the Viet Cong." So we did, and we grudgingly started talking, and then he said, "You Marine." He said, "You were here March 1968?" I said, "Yes, I was." And he said, "You were in the battle in the beginning of March of twenty- —1928—or '68?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "You lose 27 Marines." And I said, "You seem to know a lot about it." He said, "I was in the battle on the other side."

CAO: Oh, my God!

FELTNER: So I said—and you can imagine this was a goose-bump moment, a max—max goose-bump moment.

CAO: Yeah, really, ooh!

FELTNER: So I said, "All right." I talked to my guide, and I said, "Let's make the service for *everybody* who was killed that day." So I brought this, and you can have this because I've got copies of it. But, as I say, let's see if I can find this.

CAO: Now, what a coincidence or fate or whatever it was.

FELTNER: Let's see. Please, please be—this is the one. [unintelligible; 1;15:48]. The trouble when you get too much stuff, trouble finding what you want.

CAO: That's just means there's so much more to tell.

FELTNER: [Continues to go through documents.] All right. You [unintelligible; 1:16:20] to put up with somebody bumbling through—

CAO: Oh, no worries.

FELTNER: —bringing too damn much stuff.

CAO: [Chuckles.] Yeah, my next question would have been: Have you had any interactions with Viet Cong just after the war? And I guess what have those been like?

FELTNER: [Continues looking through documents.]

CAO: This one clearly was a—a good one.

FELTNER: I've been back to Vietnam before—since then, but yes. [Continues to go through documents.] [Mumbles; unintelligible; 1:18:50]. I know I'm going to find it; I just have to be patient. *You* have to be patient.

CAO: I'm very patient. [Chuckles.] Very much so.

FELTNER: [Continues to go through documents.]

CAO: How often were you able to write back to home?

FELTNER: Well, that's an interesting topic.

CAO: Ah, here you go.

FELTNER: This is for you.

CAO: Yes. Oh, wow!

FELTNER: To prove that it happened.

CAO: Yeah, yeah.

FELTNER: And you can take a look at the guy and see—[Chuckles.]

CAO: It's a small world.

FELTNER: Yeah. But look at the stoic face.

CAO: Yeah. Oh, I can tell.

FELTNER: He was—but, no, you—you can have that because I made a copy of it, and I also thought it was one of the messages I want to send at the end—

CAO: Definitely, yeah.

FELTNER: —of going back and reconciling, if that's the right word.

CAO: Yeah. This is where—is this—

FELTNER: That's the temple. I have no idea what it means. I know that these are two little—these are two little, like, probably family—things were—burned things. This is an altar back there. That's—

CAO: And you just decided to come on this—

FELTNER: He decided that he was going to—he had somebody out there that was going to show—show where this happened. He probably figured that, *Hey, I'm gonna get into the action. I got nothing better to do* that day. He had scars on the side of his face, and he was still stoic at whatever age—he—he had to be—you know, this was 40 years after the fact. He—he had to be—this was 2010. And he was going to—he was going to go along, and—'and we outed him, figured—figured out what he was, and he didn't become emotional. He didn't become—you know, we didn't—didn't treat me as his long-lost brother, but there was respect. That's about all I can say with respect to that. But I just thought that was—

CAO: A cherished—

FELTNER: —a tremendous experience and one that I think is appropriate for you guys when you think about—because I think that's kind of full circle.

I brought this thing that my secretary made for me. I have no idea why she got that picture, but here is a sort of—second lieutenants graduating from basic school: me, [F.] Beirne Lovely [Jr., Class of 1967], Dartmouth Chi Phi '67; [Andrew J.] "Drew" Ley [pronounced LIE] Dartmouth '67, Chi Phi.

Sometime in one of the medal ceremonies I got, and I can show you some of those things—that's my wife, the general, me, and then circling back to that at the end. So that's kind of the microcosm. I want to try to put this in a way that doesn't sound egotistical because, you know, a lot of this is me and everything else, and I don't want to think I'm any

different than anybody else who was over there. I'm not trying to impress you that that's the case, but I thought you might like to see these things anyway.

CAO: I'm very—yeah, yeah.

FELTNER: So, so—

CAO: [unintelligible; 1:19:57]. Thank you. Wow.

FELTNER: So that's the—and that's the *eastern* coast stuff. And then we—when I came back from the hospital, they'd moved to a different part of Vietnam, [unintelligible; 1:20:12].

CAO: And did they transport you on a helicopter?

FELTNER: Yeah. Helicopter was the way—was the way to go. So we moved—it's so damn small, I cannot even show you, but I do have something that'll be—we're at Đông Hà, here. Here's this river that splits the way, and we were somewhere in here. But we moved over here. And I don't know if you've ever read the book—do they—do they have—in your course, do you have any required reading or any books you can read? Because I have one I'm going to give you.

CAO: Okay, yeah.

FELTNER: You have? But the latest, good combat book, combat/psychoan- —is called *Matterhorn*[*:A Novel of the Vietnam War*] by Steve [sic] Karl Marlantes. And it's—it's particularly good, and it's a little bit—you know, it's a little bit over the top in terms of some of the things, but it was in the same area I was. That's what I recall. And you have to remember, this whole—this whole thing is—

CAO: Huge.

FELTNER: —you know, just huge. But this area isn't so huge, but battle areas are—you know, they seem pretty huge at the time. So any event—so we're over here, and I need now to show you what that meant. I mean, can you—

CAO: Oh, I can take it.

FELTNER: —can you—can you take all this—

CAO: Oh, definitely.

FELTNER: —you know, foolishness of me looking around?

CAO: Of course. This is so fun! [Chuckles.] So did *he* speak English at all, this guy?

FELTNER: No. No, we did it through the translator.

And the second place that we moved—from—

CAO: So first we were at the river.

FELTNER: River, and then the second—and that's the Cửa Việt area, known as the Cửa Việt River, which is a significant point. And this road that runs the whole length of Vietnam—it's [National] Route 1; it's also the one called Street Without Joy—which is a Bernard [B.] Fall book [*Street Without Joy: The French Debacle in Indochina*], which you may have read. But that's—Street Without Joy is Route 1, and that—that goes the whole length of Vietnam up, right up into—in that map, right up into—this is—in fact, this is—that's Route 1.

CAO: Oh, okay, this red line.

FELTNER: This red line, yeah. Now, the real Wild West is [National] Route 9. And Route 9 goes from the coast here into Laos. And why I call the real Wild West is because there was—if—if you've done any—had a chance to read some of the histories, one of the spots along the way is Khe Sanh, and there was a series of these mountains and battles and whatever. *This* is where we moved to, and I'll give you that map for—for real. Highway 9, looking east from Khe Sanh toward Ca Lu [Combat Base]. Back out here about 20 miles, because it isn't very wide there, is where I was talking about.

And I was stationed here, on top of Hill 512, just so you have an idea of where it is and how much—when I—you know, I decided *not* to go back there because it would take about two miles of hacking through the jungle to get there, so I

said, *The hell with that.* But it's also pretty isolated up there, as you can imagine.

CAO: Yeah. Were there anyone—like, were people living up here, or it was just—

FELTNER: Well, the people would live down here.

CAO: In the valley, okay.

FELTNER: Because—and this is just uninhabitable. This is just lush jungles and all kinds of—of—well, overgrowth and—and—and—so I'm going to tell you some tales as we around with it, but as you come out here at Khe Sanh, which is—again, my map—oh, good Lord—Khe Sanh is out here some- —well, it's got to be—Khe Sanh—Khe—oops—Khe Sanh Combat Base. And that distance is, from there to there, maybe 50 miles. And there's Laos.

So—and Khe Sanh was a big—in 1968, it was—was a—first of all, it was a ridiculous place to be, but—and I'll get into that in a minute. You recall that—in your history, if you—when the French were beaten or—they were in a place called Điện Biên Phủ.

CAO: Yes, yeah, Điện Biên Phủ massacre.

FELTNER: We learned a lot from Điện Biên Phủ because this is—it's on the other side of the map, on the northern side. And once—they—they had this base at the bottom of a bunch of mountains. So what's Khe Sanh? An air base on the bottom of the [unintelligible; 1:24:54], ringed by mountains! So, like I say, we learned a lot. In—in—in '68 they were bombarding Khe Sanh. My friend Beirne Lovely is in the picture. He was on—put on one of these mountains to try to help with Khe Sanh. Andy Ley was the other picture—guy in the picture, a fighter pilot. But this place was just short of it. You can go down here—other—Khe Sanh.

But this Highway 9 was, so to say, the Wild West because there were very few people, and the terrain was unbelievable—to get, you know—

CAO: At a forty-five degree angle!

FELTNER: And there's—you see this little bald top. That's it. Everything else is jungle.

CAO: Wow.

FELTNER: So they—they would take platoons, and the idea was, "Okay, we'll put the platoons up here, and they will—their job is now to keep the North Vietnamese from getting down onto Route 9 and going into Vietnam that way." I wasn't quite sure, you know, how much effect that was going to have up here—

CAO: At the top of a mountain.

FELTNER: --you know, two miles from the—from the—from the road. So that's where—that's where my second—that's where we were—my second venture into Vietnam was. We did do some operating in between, but this is the second sort of significant place I can remember.

CAO: So just for my own understanding, these little dots—are these rice paddies you mentioned?

FELTNER: On the map, the rice paddies are these six, and the little blocks are individual houses, or what they think are individual houses. But the rice paddies are all over the place. And as you move west, it becomes mountainous and jungle-ous [sic] until you get out here, where really, really mountain and jungle—and just—

CAO: [Chuckles.] This is crazy.

FELTNER: —just a little crazy, yeah.

CAO: Yeah. So how did, like, the tactics sort of [cross-talk; unintelligible; 1:26:51]?

FELTNER: Well, the tactics were you stayed on top of the hill, and they supposedly attack you, because the idea was to keep—you had a presence there. Well, in "Indian country," as we used to call it, just because it was, like,—I was always figuring, *What in the hell are we doin' out <u>here</u>?* And the intelligence would say there are, you know, like, several, *several* North

Vietnamese elements here, coming in. And I always thought to myself, *What are they doing here for?*

Well, on—on this map there is—there is a—the Quang Tri River, which is this river that is—I don't know if it's on here or not. I think it's a little south—no, this is—I think it comes here and goes down. The Quang Tri River—and Quang Tri is the name of the city, it's the name of the province, the northern province. And—and so I was trying to figure, *Why in God's name are we up here?*

CAO: On the top of the mountain.

FELTNER: Up on top of the mountain and all these other things, and *why are we surrounded?* Now, it was just as hard for them to get at us as for us to get at them, but it wasn't—the thing that was a little concerning (to put it mild) is, *Well, where do <u>we</u> go if somebody attacks us?* The only way anybody could—any way that anybody could really quickly respond to us is by helicopter. You're going through the jungle, it's going to take you—you would take—

CAO: Days?

FELTNER: Well, it would take you at least a day, two miles through the jun- —because you have to chop your way through—a bunch of other things. So we're up—I'm up here. A lesson I learned 40 years later, when I went back in 2010, was when I came back up here, once I was coming along, I said, *Hey, look, this is ridiculous, and this is eerie. It's in the fog. It's all this good stuff. Most importantly, it's two miles up into the jungle. So I'm not goin' back there!*

So I went over to Khe Sanh, which is now a museum, but there's a—there's a little bridge here, which I think is a brand-new bridge right—right here. And I remember because it's called the Dakrong, D-a-k-r-o-n-g, Bridge, and it goes over here. Well, there was no bridge going over anywhere here. And then on the other side, there's a—there's a monument. And I said, *This is interesting. You know, there's certainly no bridge. There was certainly no road on the other side. There was certainly no monument. What's <u>this</u> all about?*

So what—this is—where is my—Khe Sanh is—[Makes sounds.] I got to keep using Dong Ha as my starting point here. Khe Sanh is—

CAO: Got two pairs of eyes on this.

FELTNER: We just had it, too. I should have gotten a bigger map, but—all right, if this is—

CAO: Get a projector next time, huh?

FELTNER: Well, Route 9 still goes in the same place, so where is that?

CAO: I definitely saw it, Khe Sanh.

FELTNER: Quang Tri.

CAO: Khe Sanh.

FELTNER: Khe Sanh. Okay, so here we are, and here's the Quang Tri River that goes out here. Well,—and now there's a road that goes all the way down the western side. Well, I was trying to figure out, still, *What are we doin' out here?* Well, when I went back out and in 19- —in 2010, and Monument Road and everything else—had said Big Monuments. This is the beginning of the Hồ Chí Minh trail. So that's the answer. The answer was that's how everybody came into the country when they couldn't go down the coast, and that's why they were plenty of—

CAO: [unintelligible; 1:30:44]?

FELTNER: —NV- —yeah, NVA [North Vietnamese Army] here, because they were going south. And the whole thing was a road at the time that was under the canopy.

CAO: Wow!

FELTNER: So they would drive trucks, they would do—I mean,—and they would go all the way along—sometimes they would go—sometimes the road goes in and out of Laos and Cambodia, but that's how they avoided American detection. They were under the trees. The planes couldn't find them. That's just why they tried to do the Agent Orange thing.

And—and the—came all the way down to Saigon, came all the way down south. But this was their route, which is now a road, which is now a road in—in—in Vietnam, and it's a four-lane highway. I mean, it isn't—it isn't quite—we haven't—we have—I think it's a two-lane highway. They don't have many four-lane highways. But this is—this was something that I couldn't figure out, and the forty-year secret was they're all around here because this is where they're infiltrating [unintelligible; 1:31:43] Laos and all the way down, and taking the road down the Hồ Chí Minh trail.

CAO: Wow. And that one's Route 9, or that one's—

FELTNER: Well, Route 9 just goes over to here. This is—I don't know what—I don't know what the number is called now. Then, it was the Hồ Chí Minh trail.

CAO: Hồ Chí Minh trail, okay.

FELTNER: But now they can drive and everything without having to be under the canopy. But you'll see pictures, if you do anything—these people actually driving trucks and everything through the water and people doing all the—carrying things and everything. [unintelligible; 1:32:08] they carry all their weapons and everything down, and they were able to infiltrate as they went along.

CAO: Wow. And Laos and Cambodia were [cross-talk; unintelligible; 1:32:16] other side?

FELTNER: This is—this is—this is—

CAO: Oh, this right here.

FELTNER: This is Laos. This is Cambodia.

CAO: Okay. And they were helpful to the Viet Cong? They were—

FELTNER: Just let them go. Just stayed out of their way. I mean, they might have been helpful, but, I mean, I—I think these were people, village people that really didn't have any interest in getting involved in a war other than to stay out.

The other thing that's of interest for this is this is a—this is a thing somebody sent me after the fact, and this shows—

CAO: It's nicely labeled.

FELTNER: —that shows operating area where we argued, and one of these things that I don't have is that this was an area where they sprayed Agent Orange. You can—you can get these things. They're all—you can—you can get—by a Freedom of Information Act request. You can get the spray areas. And I couldn't find the maps, one of the places there that had the actual areas where people sprayed. And they sprayed down through here. And they would—they would—they would—and I have some other records, again—and I'm going to kill you with records; I still have too many, but, you know, that they would keep track of where they had sprayed. And it's used—well, it isn't used anymore, but, I mean, to prove your case if you have an Agent Orange problem, you could get these records.

Now if you have Agent Orange-related physical issues the presumptive—that presumptive—that you were in Vietnam—you were in an area where they had Agent Orange, it's connected; you get—and I'm—I have that capacity [sic]. I have a slight heart condition that's one of the—one of the symptoms from Agent Orange. And my wife is absolutely—because my two older daughters are Dartmouth graduates. Laura is a great kid, but she has a learning disability, and she believes Agent Orange—they're trying to prove now, and they haven't done it yet—they're trying to prove that veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange have a chance to having kids with—with—

CAO: Higher rates for—

FELTNER: —for—absolutely, for Agent Orange kinds of things. When you go to Vietnam, North Vietnam now, it's not North Vietnam—it's Vietnam. And they're—Vietnam from tip to the other end. And they have plenty of war museums, lots of war museums. And there's always a section on Vietnam—always a section on Agent Orange. And when I say "a section," you know, 200,000—200,000 people killed. Birth defects. Still poisoning up the water. Crops that don't come up. I mean, it's a horror show. I mean, we—we owe these people. And I

think that some of the—there is some efforts—and one of the heroes, by the way, of getting Vietnam and—two real congressional heroes of getting Vietnam and the U.S. back together again: Senator [John. F.] Kerry and [Senator] John [S.] McCain [Jr.]. And—and—and—and—and including some initiatives to help with the people of Vietnam, and they're battling still with Agent Orange, and the people that were killed and birth defects and—they have it because, you know, for whatever—whatever our percentage was, you can just multiply it by ten or something, and it's a real residual effect of war that's awful.

Because the purpose was to do it to burn off the cover from these things, but it had so many other effects, and that I can't—if the government knew what those other effects are, then, you know, had we been in a different circumstances, they would have been considered war criminals.

CAO: This was coming after the atomic bombs, right?

FELTNER: Yeah.

CAO: And they had been testing for radiation.

FELTNER: But—well, no,— but this isn't—this isn't—this isn't herbicide. This is, like, biological warfare. And—and—and the idea of defoliating is fine, maybe, except it has all these effects when it falls to the ground and infiltrates the ground water and infiltrates the—the ground itself that is—and the impacts of it are pretty severe.

CAO: Detrimental, yeah.

FELTNER: And certainly we don't have to live with them. They do.

CAO: They do, yeah.

FELTNER: So—

CAO: Does it still impact their economy at all right now?

FELTNER: Well, they've—they've—they've—they're—they're on the verge of becoming another one of these tiger—Asian—

CHIN: Yeah, Vietnam is rising right now [cross-talk; unintelligible; 1;36:50], emerging.

FELTNER: Vietnam is—Vietnam is enjoying—it really has a—has a pretty good economy, mainly because they've gotten out of the Russian sphere of influence, and so that's the—that's the second part of this, Hill 512. And with—with that—I was on Hill 512 for three weeks.

CHIN: So this was 1968 also.

FELTNER: Still—this is now April of 1968. And—and in the process—it also shows you sort of the dubious tactics we used from time to time. After having been up here, we were helicoptered off—off of it. We went back to a place called Ca Lu, which was a staging area.

And then somebody though it would be a great idea—"Well, let's go back on the hill and see what's there now." Well, I could have told them what was going to be there, because we were surrounded by NVA. We now had a—we now had a—a summit that had bunkers built and everything else in it. So, of course, we—we went back to there, and they were there. And so we had a battle to take back the—the—the hill.

And I'm going to manage to cover all the subjects. I was—we were so close to the top of the hill, and we had an Army helicopter support. Well, it fired on us. And—and—I think it had a malfunction, but it—it killed a couple of my men, put shrapnel in my leg, and I was wounded a second time. So that was my—my 1968 career. Was wounded once in this other place and then wounded up here. I got a chance to see a few far eastern Asian hospitals along the way and ended up in Japan.

There was a—ships out here that—they had hospital ships that they would evacuate the injured Marines, Army, whatever it was, and then they'd fix you up, and then ultimately you would be put on—some fashion—you'd get to whatever—the—Guam had a hospital, and the Philippines had a hospital, and I went to Japan and then went back to Okinawa, where I spent the rest of the—the rest of my 1968 tour, wanting to get back, but nevertheless, you know, they—they were far more sensible than I was in saying, you

know, “That’s—you don’t get to”—they’d had some—they’ve had some things that they’ve done over the years, in which they’ve decided that for humane purposes of the family, they don’t just keep shoving people back and try not to put three brothers in the same unit and things like that, and not have three—if one person is in the combat zone and you got a brother, maybe he isn’t. And got a little more sensible about things like that.

So that was 1968. And—and—and—and—I keep trying not to—not to tell war stories, but I can’t help it.

CAO: Oh, I’d love to hear them, so—

FELTNER: When we were taken off this peak the—the--the first time, before we came back again, they said, “There are three—the helicopter ships are here. They would fly and then pick you up.” One of the problems in Vietnam with helicopters was that the humidity is so high—when you have high humidity, it cuts the ability of the helicopter to have lift. So they can’t carry as much. So, right?—45 people left. So we’re up on top of this mountain, and the helicopters are out at sea about 30 minutes. So for there [sic] to go and come back, it’s a—it’s a hour-long trip. So they came out in a flight of three.

Now, we knew what was out here because we’d been shooting—having great fun with these guys for the whole time we were out here. In come the three helicopters. And I had my—had my platoon broken down to 15-person heliteams. In comes one. Okay, out go 15. In comes two, and as two comes in—or, no, out goes 15. In comes three, and three says, “Sorry, guys, I can only carry eight.” So now there’s seven of us left on top, and we know that the round trip is an hour, and we know that as the last helicopter leaves, they take some machine gun fire from the NVA, so we said, ‘This is gonna be a lotta fun here, being all by ourselves.” Seven Marines, cursing and swearing. The helicopters can’t carry any more. And-and—and—

CAO: So what happened?

FELTNER: Well, we stayed there, and one of them came back and picked us up.

CAO: Okay, perfect.

FELTNER: So, you know, a good result, but at least one hour of incredible—of being, like, "What in God's name have we gotten ourselves into?" So that's one of—that's one of my war stories.

But then the other thing is, in addition to that we had—in various places we had large hospitals, and I'm not sure if I can find the place that I was treated the first time. It's an absolutely spectacular place called—it's not Nha Trang. It's—

CAO: Were these American hospitals?

FELTNER: Yes, yes, and it was called Cam Ranh Bay, which is somewhere down here along the—the place is now—it's now a North Vietnamese navy—a Vietnamese navy base. And it was near Vũng Tàu. Nha Trang—where are we? Can't find it, but it's called—

CAO: Somewhere down here.

FELTNER: It's somewhere down here, but it was a—it was a beautiful hospital, right? And it was like—absolutely like—beaches and everything. It was like the Pacific—

CAO: Oh, yeah, the South Pacific [Ocean]. Gorgeous beaches. And they did have other hospitals at other places, but Cam Ranh Bay was a big hospital. So they had—and the medical care was pretty good. I mean, they—they did a good job of getting you into care and—to be taken care of, and you had a pretty good chance of survival if they could get you there. Much better now, by the way, because of all the advances.

And one of the things that's sad but true is that many of the medical advances that are in our medical system have been the result of having wars. An example—and this one you might—might get a kick out of what the result is, not how it got there. People coming back from—from World War I were disfigured from mustard gas and things like that, and it did terrible things to their faces. So that was the beginning of cosmetic surgery, because—because cosmetic surgery was too expensive, too—too scary, too unknown. But if you have

100,000 people with the symptoms, you develop a whole industry around it because you can then do it en masse and learn how to do it.

CAO: That's crazy.

FELTNER: But it's true. That's how—that's how it happened. I mean, World War I was cosmetic surgery. World War II was the use of quinine and some of these anti- —drugs dealing with the kind of fevers and things you run into in the tropics. Korea [The Korean War] was sort of the advent of helicopters, if you watch *M*A*S*H*. Vietnam [The Vietnam War] was the massive use of hospital ships and helicopters and the whole nine yards. And [The Iraq War] and [the War in] Afghanistan are sort of the forerunners for PTSD, because it's the fir- —we'd always had "combat fatigue," "shell shock," whatever you want to call it, but PTSD became a treatable—first of all, something they were cognizant of. Also tremendous work with amputations because most of the—a lot of the casualties from Afghanistan and Iraq are [a result of] IEDs—that's explo- —individual explosive devices [sic; improvised explosive devices] that blow up people, blow up vehicles and whatever, so there's more—that's why there has been a—

CAO: Advance in that.

FELTNER: In your—in your little picture, I think—I was presenting it [unintelligible; 1:45:49] for my sister, who is a—is a major in the—major in the Army, as a surgeon. She went in at 50. She went back to be a—to be a surgeon. And—and—was I smart enough to have this on here?

CAO: Are any of your other eight siblings also—

FELTNER: I have a brother who is—I—I retired as a colonel—he retired as a lieutenant. I retired as a lieutenant colonel. He retired as a colonel. And he was in a ship off Vietnam, somewhere in here, if I can find it. Eh, it doesn't look like I can.

I had—I had done a pitch for them—oh, okay. Medical. Some of the medical issues that came up with—

CAO: Vietnam.

FELTNER: —with Vietnam. And big problems in Vietnam were—were immersion foot, which was called—it's—well, you'd lose people because they'd be in—feet would be in the water so much that their feet would just—I mean, the idea was to keep changing socks, but you couldn't. Your feet would become sore to the point you couldn't walk. And it has another name other than immersion foot. [Transcriber's note: trench foot.] I can't remember what.

CAO: Oh, I see the wet—the [unintelligible; 1:47;10] conditions here.

FELTNER: Yeah. And—and—and—

CAO: Jungle heat.

So I was going to say, could you, like, kind of describe the climate [cross-talk; unintelligible; 1:47:20]?

FELTNER: Oh, yeah. Well, the—the—the—the immersion foot, heat strokes, jungle, bacterial leeches. I'll tell you a lovely story about that in a minute.

CAO: Bacterial leeches. [Chuckles.]

FELTNER: Drugs was a problem for the—for the—for the—

CAO: Alcohol also, or—

FELTNER: Whatever you could get your hands on. [Both chuckle.] But refugee—well, that's a different—that's a different story. Get to that. PTSD, Agent Orange, defoliants, casualties—just to give you some numbers and [unintelligible; 1:47:48] work with.

CAO: Wow.

FELTNER: In terms of—what was the question you just asked me?

CAO: Oh, describe the—

FELTNER: The climate.

CAO: The climate, yes.

FELTNER: Climate was—you had three—you had the coastal—the—the one area—this is all rice paddies, and the issues with rice paddies was heat and—and—and humidity. But as you went further west, you ran into first sort of a piedmont, hill-ish country and then into the mountains and the jungles.

The jungles were—had their own set of problems: snakes, cobras, When I talked about hacking your way through the jungle to get to the top of things, one of my most disgusting problems and one of the ones that, again, just tell me no if—

CAO: [Chuckles.] I'm ready.

FELTNER: Leeches. I don't—you probably—I don't know if you ever had a leech on you.

CAO: Never. My dad has before. He's described how the—

FELTNER: Okay. Leeches sit. They like wet places. They're on the top of the leaves, and so as you're hacking down, they fall down you. And, you know, it got to be kind of a—kind of a—kind of gruesome. But, again, we always had a little bit of gallows humor with it. "Who's got more leeches on him?" And at one time, I—I—and the way you get rid of them, because they—they—they dig in and they suck—the blood is there. You either have to put a cigarette and burn them out, or if you are—depending on—you just take your knife and just cut them off. I think I set the record for myself at one time. I did decide to do a count: 24. And, I mean, they were all over the body.

CAO: On your back, all—

FELTNER: All over the place.

CAO: And you could feel them?

FELTNER: You can *see* them. I mean, you—and if you're—if you—if you have—and for some reason, they could get through your uniform, and you'd look at your—your arm and uniform, you'd see the blood coming out. *What the hell is this?* And you open it up, and there's this lovely little—but they—they—they—they are part a parcel [sic; part and parcel] of wet

climates and on top of the vegetation you're going through, and so it's a little grim, but it's one more problem you had to deal with.

CAO: Yeah. And do they have seasons in Vietnam?

FELTNER: Yes, yes. And they—they have monsoon—the—the—the big, important thing is to know that there's the monsoon season and the other seasons. When I visited Vietnam, I deliberately picked a time that wa- —well, I shouldn't say that. I picked a time that wasn't supposed to be a monsoon season, but then I realized the monsoons—you don't—just because—the whole tip to stem of—of Vietnam is 1,000 miles long. It's bigger than California length wise. Yeah, it has 100 million people in it, 95 percent of whom are illiterate. Amazing statistic, but true.

CAO: Wow! Okay.

FELTNER: Not poor or not—not necessarily wealthy and all the other thing, but the government makes it a point that these people would get educated. And I can remember up in the north, where I was, up in the—where the hill people area, we'd go hiking. Went hiking with—it was wonderful. They—the hill people—the—the tribesmen are designated by color. When I say "designated," that's what they wear. If you're a member of the Red Hmong you wear red outfits. If you're a member of the Black Hmong, you wear black. If you're a member of the Blue [Tang? 1:51:14], you wear blue. And—and—these are their native, I'd say, costumes. That's what they wear. They're not costumes.

So—and in each one of these places, they—they treat their—these tribesmen kind of like Indians on a reservation, but they have a government school, and they teach *them*. And so everybody gets taught Vietnamese.

CAO: Education, yeah. So this was in '68, even?

FELTNER: No, this was—no, no, this was 2010. So—so the—the—going up to—to these places and—and—and seeing them, I learned—the point I'm trying to get back to, if I can remember what it was, is the—the different parts of the country. When we were there in November, the central part

of the country—*they* had the monsoon season. They [indicating on the map] didn't, and they didn't. So there is—there is different times—

When the monsoons come, you're wet all the time, and I don't think I've ever been as cold in my life. Temperatures would be in maybe 50s or something like that, but you're just—

CAO: Wet and—

FELTNER: Continuously wet. And you go to sleep wet, and you get up wet, and everything that's—you know, everything is—is—immersion foot—I would describe it as dishpan feet. You know, if you wash the dishes without gloves or something, your hands get all wrinkled, so that's what your feet look like.

CAO: Ohhh!

FELTNER: And—and—

CAO: Dishpan feet.

FELTNER: So monsoon season—we were there during part of the monsoon season, and monsoon season is just miserable, because not terrific visibility but, more importantly, some significant health issues with trying to have dry socks, dry clothes and just to be more alert because you're shivering. So, yes, they have the jungles and the heat, and down in Saigon it gets pretty hot and—and other places during the—but then the monsoon season is it's just wet, and it's a cold, raw wet, and the wind comes down and makes it worse. So the—the seasons in Vietnam are—are very much a player, the whole thing, depending on when you were—what time it was and that kind of thing.

CAO: Gotcha. Wow.

FELTNER: So this is—we're now—you've gotten me—you've finally gotten me—you've finally gotten me ho- —well, you haven't gotten me home yet. So we—

CAO: So just finished—

FELTNER: —just—just—just—

CAO: —1968.

FELTNER: Finished 1968. Sixty-nine, I fly back to the U.S., and this is—I think will be significant from another perspective, with at least one of my friends who had flown over with me. And—and—because you would lose people along the way or might get injured or might get killed, or they'd go back for other reasons. So we fly back.

We come into San Francisco, and when we get off the plane, we're met by a bunch of demonstrators. And we're in our uniforms, so they're calling us "baby k[illers]," so it's, like, "Thanks a lot, guys. You did a helluva job, but"—

CAO: [cross-talk; unintelligible; 1:54:27].

FELTNER: Yeah. So "happy—happy to see we were missed." So it was—you know, that's—that's—that's a little bit discouraging.

CAO: What was *that* like?

FELTNER: Well, it was—you know, internal—internal—just being infuriating. But you know? So you understood that when you came back, you weren't real popular.

And then I went back and was in [Marine Corps Base] Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. I—I had a five-year hiatus before I went back, five years, something like that. But I went to—to North Carolina. I was in the Mediterranean [Sea] for cruises. And these are routine stuff they do now, and—although, interestingly enough, we did have a couple of issues where we were—one of the things that happened during this period of time was the antiwar movement, and on a couple of occasions, we were a reaction force.

I can remember one in particular, where we went to Newport, Rhode Island. Went to Newport, Rhode Island, because they anticipated a huge riot with one of the trials of one of the Black Panthers, [Robert G.] "Bobby" Seale. Didn't happen, but we were there, and they did use—they did use the military as a force to be used when there was significant

riots or things along—[the U.S.] National Guard was primarily that, but periodically, if they expected something to happen quickly, we had a reaction force in North Carolina that would—if your number came up but you were on that duty, then you went to whatever it was. Never—never actually got used for anything, but we were there—

CAO: Just in case, yeah.

FELTNER: —and trained for riot control, the gas masks and the tear gas and everything. Just didn't—didn't have to use it, thank goodness.

So then, in 1975, I come back, and what's happened? In 1972, the end of the draft. I think it's '72. Also, in 1971, '72—I'm not sure—all the Americans are pulled out of Vietnam. So they're—at that point in time, because the Americans are pulling out, the South Vietnamese—South Vietnam is falling apart.

CAO: Right, right. Was that '73, '74?

FELTNER: That's when it really started to get—some I'm back in '75, when it—when they've collapsed. They fully collapsed. The whole place collapses. The North Vietnamese are roaring down the coast, and we're on—on maneuvers in the South China Sea. They—the Marines try to have—or they have a deployable force in the Mediterranean, the Caribbean [Sea], South China Sea. I'm not sure where they all are now. But the point was, they were there to sort of be a ready force if there was a hot spot.

So '75, we're in the Philippines, and the South China—ready force—when all hell breaks loose, because Saigon needs to be—well, first of all, Phnom Penh, which is Cambodia—they are—they're overrun by the Khmer Rouge, and so they need a huge heli-lift to get everybody out of the embassy and everything else. That was the beginning of [cross-talk; unintelligible; 1:57:57].

CAO: The—the communists were—

FELTNER: The Khmer Rouge were—were extreme form of communists. And I'm not even sure I'd call them communists.

[Transcriber's note: They were repressive Cambodian communists.] They were their own brand of horror shows. Pol Pot—they killed two million of their own people. There was a genocide. And that—that story—I'll tell you that story when we get there.

So when we—we—we first came in, our first operation was we were—we were involved in sort of three significant things and then the fourth that I'll tell you about.

One was we were involved in the evacuation of Phnom Penh. That was April of—early April, late March of 1975. Saigon was next. Saigon is a—and it's a great PBS show on Saigon, if you've seen that one.

CAO: Yep.

FELTNER: That was kind of a mess. Our unit didn't get particularly involved. We were more of a support group. There were—I mean, Saigon was horrendous. They were taking so many people out, they were pushing South Korean [sic] helicopters off the ships, because there was no place for them to land.

CAO: Yeah. Jeez.

FELTNER: And they got as many people out as they could. What *our* job was, is we were responsible for picking up the boat people. Out of every one of these places, the boat people would—would—they'd get on a—they'd—they'd—they'd just go to sea, because they were trying to avoid the North Vietnamese. And the U.S. had a series of—initially, they had a series of container ships that would pick these people up and take them to the Philippines. At least that was the—the gist of things.

And—and—and so it—it was quite—quite an operation. We had Marine boarding parties we would put on these ships to provide security in picking up these people, and I—this is a—Marine goes out—

CAO: Oh, wow.

FELTNER: I was involved in—let's see if I've got—write a story about our efforts in that one.

CAO: You're a writer, yeah.

FELTNER: Well, look, this is military writing. This is—this is not—this is—nobody will—nobody will be worried if there's no Pulitzer prize involved or if there's anything else. But it is interesting, and it is interesting because, just to show you what I think that thing I just gave you—

CAO: This one?

FELTNER: No, the—the—the package at the beginning, underneath—underneath your thing. You couldn't believe how many people were escaping and getting on these ships to go. And we would have—we'd put them—a group of Marines out—when I say "a group of Marines," about 20. And—

CAO: To take care of them.

FELTNER: Take care of them. And one of the ships—this particularly amazing picture that's on the back of—if I can find it—hope I can—

CAO: So these are all refugees that were—

FELTNER: Refugees. This was the *Pioneer Contender*. This was a ship that they just kept picking up people and picking up people, and it was so overwhelming, Karen, that to feed them—and it was a young second lieutenant, whose name was Robert E. Lee the—the—the—Robert E. Lee III.

CAO: The third.

FELTNER: And—and—and—and the admiral loved him because he's from the South, and he thought this was great. He was one of my—one of my officers. What they had to do was in order to feed these people—I mean—I'll tell you the numbers in a minute—to feed them—every time they'd feed them, there'd be a riot because you've got umpteen people starving to death. They're being fed by resupply. So how do you keep that—

CAO: Under control.

FELTNER: —how do you—everybody wants to eat, so—and then some of them are so desperate. So what the young lieutenant would do is that he would call out that they were going to have a feeding. They were going to serve the people the food. You get a guy up with a machine gun, and he'd fire machine guns over their head, into the water, so they knew that—

CAO: It's time.

FELTNER: —you know, do it the right way here. And then he'd feed them. And—and—and—and that's—and I can imagine—I mean, when I so "do it," I mean, this was a population living, dying, having kids—

CAO: Oh, my God.

FELTNER: --you know, the sexual, social, whole nine yards. This ship—they just kept putting people on. And—and when they got to a place in the Philippines and they discharged the people, that was the only time they knew how many people, because they counted as they came off. You know how many people were on that ship in this picture? Seventeen thousand.

CAO: Oh!

FELTNER: On one ship. Now, this was—this was an extreme case. I think there is a story in there. But I guess the point that I'm trying to say is that there—this was documented. That's the picture. And so our job was to get the boat people to safety if we could, and took them back to the Philippines and other places.

And—and—so finally this—this was April of '75 that the place collapsed, and it was—there was this breather of sort of like, "That's it. Ballgame's over. The U.S. is finally finished in this part of the world. It's all—you know, everything is"—

So what you had was—at the same time, you had the South—the North Vietnamese, and I've seen the pictures when I went back, when they stormed the gates of Saigon, the presidential palace and—and took over the country, which—the country basically fell apart. The South Vietnamese—they were so corrupt, and they're so bad that

they couldn't really—they couldn't mount anything. They just marched down here and took over.

Well, missed—not by us but probably by—by—by a lot of people was immediately before this happened, the Cambodians had—were taken over by this group called the Khmer Rouge—that means "red scarves." And they were sort of just crazy extremist communists. And they took over their country and immediately began killing everybody. Two - guess that the genocide was 200 m- —I mean, they were almost apocalyptical. They—they—they called themselves, or they—they—they said that when they took over, that was Year One. So they were going to clean out all the people that were non-believers. And there's a fantastic movie, if you ever get a chance to see it—brutal---but it's called *The Killing Fields*. And—and it's about the—the—the Cambodian genocide and the people that took over. And they just literally wiped everybody out.

CAO: Wow.

FELTNER: And totally undisciplined. And the name of the dictator was a guy named Pol Pot, P-o-l P-o-t. And he was Hitlerian, certainly in his genocide. And he just literally killed anybody that had a brain, anybody—the doctors, teachers, anybody—you know, they're all going to back to Year One. They were all going to be this idealistic, agrarian society.

CAO: Yeah. How did they grow their—their group?

FELTNER: I don't know. As is the usual case—what usually happens in these things is that you get resistance in the countryside, and somebody gets together. The people in charge are weak or don't have any support anymore, and they just come over because they have a mission and they do it. They just kill everything in sight.

So that leads to the final tale I'll tell you about, is that after the aftermath of [noise; unintelligible; 3:-05:49]. This is now Vietnam, not North and South Vietnam. This is crazy Cambodia. And there was immediately things you wouldn't think about, but I guess if you're—if you're—if you're a—someone who's in the country, you do. All these lands, these islands and everything—they're all up for grabs, so what

better way to show that you're a new, young power than to go and seize something?

So this little place out here, which I will try to show you—oh, where is it? Koh Tang [Cambodia]. There's an American ship, the [SS] *Mayague*z that is—and I—once again—excuse me while I get a little carried away here. [Leafs through documents.]

CAO: I do recall you gave the 2009 speech.

FELTNER: Yes, yes, that was—

CAO: Very exciting.

FELTNER: —was another sort of—in that place.

CAO: [unintelligible; 2:06:52], yeah.

FELTNER: As I said, for me, I visited all these low-risk [unintelligible; 2:06:57]. Here's a picture of me when I—back—back when I was—

CAO: Wow! Captain Jon Feltner.

FELTNER: —a younger character, just to show you that I wasn't always 72.

CAO: [Chuckles.] Still looking good. Nation's fourth highest military [unintelligible; 2:07:13].

FELTNER: Where is this? C'mon! Oh, here it is. I found it. Couldn't—couldn't—

CAO: Oh, wow! Wow!

FELTNER: And—

CAO: Oh, *Newsweek* had a—

FELTNER: Yeah, right in *News*- —on the cover of *Newsweek*, albeit—albeit in—albeit in artist's depiction form. So what happens is this ship, the *Mayaguez*, is the U.S. tramp steamer, and it's chug- —chugging away down here. It's coming through the

Gulf of Thailand. It's supposedly coming through the South China Sea, and it's going to go to a place in—in Thailand. And they had dry goods of some kind. We didn't know—one of the problems is we didn't know, and we weren't sure what was on—

As they come through, they go past this little place, Koh Tang, wherever it is. And a dis- —the problem with Cambodia was—at this time was their—their—they've taken over, but everything's rogue. I mean, they had rogue commanders. They—they—they sort of had an army, but it was sort of like, you know, a bunch of war lords together—you know, did whatever they wanted, so a group, who was based in Koh Tang, and then they're basically pirates—they decided, "Here's a nice ship. We're gonna show that we're the big boys now. We're gonna seize the ship." So they seize the sh- —there's 50 crewmen on the *Mayaguez*. They seize it. They take the—they take the—the crew. They—they anchor this boat off of Koh Tang, a mile off of this little island called Koh Tang.

So we are—the way these things work when you're in the reaction force—we were the reaction force—in the Philippines—there's a—there's a—there's a—some sort of emergency that happens, and that's the—that's the—that's the group that reacts, because they have a group that's always ready to react. So we're that group. Okay, great.

So we had—we had gotten some expert- —which was good—we—we had had some expertise because, as I had mentioned, we had been supporting all these tramp steamers, so we knew something about tramp steamers in terms of what they looked like, you know, what are their issues. So we were a good fit. But where this place is located is the Phil- —and from the Philippines it was 2,000 miles. So we're there, and they said, "Okay."

Came in one night, and—and—when I say—sometimes it sounds a little bizarre in an age where you get all of your stuff on—on e-mails and you—you have instantaneous stock markets and what's going on. We didn't know what they were talking about. They said, "The Cambodian communists have seized the ship, on the high seas, and—and we have to go and recover it." And it was—it was a time in American

history where they just lost Vietnam, they just lost Cambodia. We didn't lose the because they weren't ours, but we were there, and we were supporting who *was* there, and it just collapsed.

So this was just like one more black eye, only this time it was *your* people they stole, or they seized, so—okay, that's great. So as—as Marines, we can do anything. And then, of course, reality sets in, and doing everything—doing anything you want is, *how* are you going to do it? The nearest force to this little gambit over here was us, 2,000 miles away. How were we going to get the ship back?

Well, there's an Air Force base around here in Thailand. Several of them, but I think the name was—Udorn [Royal Thai Air Force Base] was the place we—they flew us in. We didn't know—they didn't know where the ship was. They didn't know where the crew was. They just knew it was down here someplace. They'd gotten an SOS. And so—as we're flying—and we're leaving at 12 o'clock midnight. We're putting this plan together, how we're going to do this, if they do find the ship.

CAO: Yeah, if it's actually there.

FELTNER: And if it's actually there. And—and that's our plan. I mean, you don't—nobody has a plan of how this is going to happen because nobody ever expected it *to* happen. So as we—as we're flying down, we're putting this thing together, and we get to Thailand, and when we get to Thailand—I mean, our original plan was we were just going to be taken over by helicopters. We were going to go down some nets and get on the ship and take it back. Sure. Great idea.

So we get—we got there, and we got a little bit more information. It turns out that they had fixated where it was going to be. We still had a problem, though, because other than the helicopters there, we didn't have any way—way to get there. So what the services had done is they sent two destroyers to come down here. Now, it sounds like you're—you're—you're taking destroyers and sending them to Boston except they're 3,000 miles away, so it's going to take a day and a half for them to get there.

There is another force—we're on Okinawa. There's two forces: our force and the other force, so we've been [cast force? 2:12:32]. We're about 100 people strong, and we're supposed to retake the ship. And it's going to be a special group of people. And this sounds like one of the movies you see except it wasn't nearly that coordinated. But we had Cambodian interpreters. We had special people who were qualified, maritime people from the U.S. in terms of how to start the ship when it gets stopped and all the rest of—and we had these crazy Marines.

So then they decided that—again, wrong way, as it turns out—that the crew had been taken to Koh Tang, so the—it evolved from us retaking the ship to somebody's still got to retake the ship because the ship's still there, and somebody's got to go save the crew on Koh Tang, which they thought the—the merchant—it turns out they weren't, but that's—that'll be a different problem.

So now we—they're—they're a bigger force than [us? 2:13:34]. We were a company. We're about 100 or so. They're a battalion. They have 1,200. And they're—they're going to attack this island. We're going to go—we're going to recover the ship.

But when they came, there was—again, the resources and everything had been—been sort of scaling back because the war in Southeast Asia is over, so they only have about 12 helicopters, so they split the—so our 100 became 60, and the other group was supposed to be—supposed to pick—get the—take them in.

And I think the story that you may have read—in a very prophetic moment, I said, *This is all foolishness. None of this is gonna happen*. Fifteen minutes later, "Get on the helicopters!"

CAO: "Helicopter. Here we go!"

FELTNER: So I said, *I guess, don't listen to him. As a matter of fact, if you listen to him, you're gonna be in big trouble because the exact opposite is gonna happen.*

So we flew down, and—flew down and—let's see where this story is—oops—I'll leave this with you—

CAO: Oh, yes.

FELTNER: —if you promise to return it to me.

CAO: Promise. I promise. This is the letters. And this is from 1975.

FELTNER: Nineteen seventy-five.

CAO: Wow.

FELTNER: And—where's—

CAO: It's kept in really good shape.

FELTNER: Well, some of these things you keep in really good shape. That's the way it is.

Again, I was there—I—I—these were great. I had fun, but I wasn't any great hero; I was just doing my job, alright?

CAO: Yeah, yeah.

FELTNER: So the—the—there's the—there's the sort of the—the sort of overview of what happens. This is a destroyer, and they decided that what we would do, our ultimate thing—and this was before a lot of these special operations that you hear—Delta Force and all these things you see on movies. We were "make it up as you go, make it up as you go." Our job, if you can imagine, was this—this destroyer pulled up next to the *Mayaguez*, and we jumped over. Jumped over and—and—recovered the ship. It's like the Barbary pirates.

CAO: Yeah, I was going to say.

FELTNER: And as I said somewhere, it was the first ship [unintelligible; 2:15:59] in 150 years. So—so—but to do it, we left at 4:30 in the morning, and we went by helicopters, and we went by these Air Force helicopters. We're used to Marine helicopters. The biggest Air Force helicopter there is for carrying people is the [Sikorsky] HH-53 ["Super Jolly Green Giant"], and the Marines have a [Sikorsky] CH-53 [Sea

Stallion], but the difference is that the Air Force helicopters are designed—they're much heavier. They're designed to carry a lot of cargo, and the Marines' are designed to carry Marines, but they're not as heavy as cargo.

So the problem with that is that's the target. This is the—I mean, the target is not as big as this room, the helipad. So—so to get on—get on the helipad, the helicopter, as you can see, can't—it can't—it can't land, because it's just not big enough.

CAO: Yeah, so small.

FELTNER: And you have to—you have to get them off because—the Marines have to get off so they don't jump in the water. And the—and the helicopter can't land because it's not big enough. So you get on a rope, and you jump down to the—jump to the helipad and go on. And—and—and as we're—that was—our mission was to jump on the ship.

In the meantime, they're on the island, where the—the—the—the battalion that's going to recover the crew in Koh Tang—they land on the island, and immediately three helicopters are just blown up. We saw them blow up. And they were supposed to land first light. Somebody screwed up. They landed at, like, ten minutes after first light, so instead of being dark, they're silhouetted.

So, I mean, it was—it was kind of a horror show. So they—they get on the island, and they really have a real problem. I don't know how many were killed, but anyway, we didn't lose anybody because we didn't find anybody. They—they had gotten off, and—they had gotten off. This is a mile from shore. And it turns out that what the Cambodians had done is they had been spiriting the crew along various parts of their coast. Apparently they were either never on Koh Tang or they were never on Koh Tang for very long.

The other problem was that the intelligence reports were that Koh Tang was help by irregulars. I mean, nobody knew what the Cambodians were, and they were supposedly ill trained and not very many of them and not very—they weren't very well supported. And, well, they got on, and there were, like,

200 of them with all kinds of weapons and things to shoot helicopters out of the sky for [sic].

So the next morning, after—well, I said the next morning "it's a matter of timing." We—by the early morning, we had finished getting the ship back, and at that point, we received word that the Cambodians had put the—because at this stage of the game [unintelligible; 2:19:04] didn't have anything to do with it. Americans. They put them on a Thai fishing boat, and the Thai fishing boat went over to one of the destroyers, and the people were all recovered. Of course, the people on the island don't know that. They're still in the middle of a mess.

And the story is—is—on—[Gerald R.] Ford [Jr.] is the president, and he announces this, you know, big recovery and the other stories that you've read about, except these guys now have to get off, and they have to do it in the dark. And if—if you can imagine kind of what they're doing: There's very few places to land the helicopters, so they have to sort of—like my issue with the—on the hill, with sort of shrinking, shrinking, shrinking—only imagine that with—in the dark, and with people scattered on an island that there's no maps on. And they don't really know where they are to begin with because they were just put in the same morning. And—and they're also—they're also disrupted because some of the helicopters have some of the leaders and some of the commanding coordination stuff, so they withdraw, attempt to withdraw, and they—unfortunately they leave [three mornings? 2:20:20] there.

And there's the speculation—my belief is—I think it's true, that the Marines were ultimately captured by the Cambodians and executed. That's what I think makes sense. They're clearly not there. And including that there—they've gone back. They've at least found one of the bodies there. They think a couple of them were killed in Cambodian prisons or something. But that's—that's a somewhat inglorious end to it.

But it was viewed—I mean, it was viewed as a—this was a—was a psychological win, but not necessarily a physical win. So that's—that's the story of the *Mayaguez*, which is a

footnote in history. Nobody probably remembers it now. Really kind of literally the last battle of Vietnam.

CAO: Yeah. It's still just a—

FELTNER: We've got plenty of time.

CAO: Yeah.

FELTNER: But I haven't had—you haven't had a chance—I do—I do want to show you a—let's see if there's something else I can pull out of my goody chest for you.

CAO: Yeah. I will definitely take a look at those. [unintelligible; 2:21:38].

FELTNER: Just so you can see—

CAO: Oh, wow!

FELTNER: —let me do this thing. This is—these are—these are some of the award things I got through my career.

CAO: Wow.

FELTNER: [Sound of metal hitting desk.] Those are the—those are the pieces I think I have—where's the other one? I have it here.

CAO: So here you have one, two, three, four, five, six, seven medals.

FELTNER: Well, yes and no.

CAO: Yes and no, all right. Let's explain.

FELTNER: Some of them are campaign ribbons. Those are: I was alive, and I was there. They're not—they're not—there a miniature version of those. That's the Bronze Star. Purple Heart. Navy Commendation for the *Mayaguez* operation. Naval Achievement Award for actually recruiting minorities in North Carolina—recruiting all kinds of people but especially-Vietnamese—I don't know what that is. Oh, the Combat Action Ribbon, Vietnamese Service Ribbon, and Vietnamese

Campaign—Campaign Medal. So there—those are miniaturized of these.

And the reason why I showed them is—isn't it great? A lot of people had much bigger things than—than—than I've got here, but I think—you know, one of the things that military types do is they—they are entranced by medals, so that gives a—

CAO: As you should be, yeah.

FELTNER: —but—but the point is, this is one—it's the easiest one to get and the hardest one to keep. In other words, you have to be around to get it, and—and so I—I—I brought (a) I got to show off a little bit, but also to give you—give you a chance to just see what—

CAO: Purple Heart is.

FELTNER: Purple Heart, yeah.

CAO: And this is for the two [unintelligible; 2:23:37]—

FELTNER: Yeah.

CAO: —that you in 1968.

FELTNER: Right. And as I say, you don't have to work very hard to get it. It's just—it's just you take a big—it's just that you take a big risk that you never get a chance to wear.

CAO: [unintelligible; 2:23:47], yeah.

FELTNER: So—but—but I brought those along because I think it's part of the—

CAO: It's significant, yeah.

FELTNER: —it's part of the thing, and, you know, people do things for ribbons and badges that, you know, may be a little crazy. And some people—I mean, if you see some of these [unintelligible; 2:24:05]—I saw a picture the other day of North Korean generals, and they have, like—

CAO: Rows!

FELTNER: [cross-talk; unintelligible; 2:24:08]. And—at least in the Marine Corps, you have to earn these.

CAO: There you go. [Chuckles.]

FELTNER: You have to earn these. And this is kind of old and crusty, but this is what the *Mayaguez* people sent us.

CAO: Wow!

FELTNER: It's just a belt buckle that—that—they actually made this—they actually made this for their own crew, but they had some left over, and they gave it to—to us. These are—this is just—when they give you something, they give you a ceremony and all sort of stuff, assuming you're around to be at the ceremony.

So—and—I mean, it makes a difference. In the military, aside from the sort of prestige thing, I mean, it makes a difference. If you've been in combat and you get an award, you're more likely to be promoted than someone who hasn't. I mean, people—I also think it makes people do some things that are probably a little crazy, because the fact that they can get a medal or something like that doesn't make them better human beings.

CAO: No.

FELTNER: It means they—in some cases, it—it—it makes them—you know, they do—do things. Maybe they take chances with people's lives they shouldn't, or maybe they take their—maybe more likely, since they go to—enlisted guys, who are really the ones who are getting the Congressional Medals of Honor, and getting killed to do it—maybe it gives them the inspiration to do things from time to time that are not too smart, that you wouldn't do in your own right but, you know, you're in the moment and you do it.

I—I don't think, as I look back on it—you know, it's great to think, *Well, I would've have gotten an XYZ or not an XYZ award*, but then when you realize, well, to get it you have to earn it, and you have to earn it by doing something that is

meaningful. And I would say, very cynically, that I think that's truer from the lower levels to the top. I think the private who gets an award has earned it; the general who gets an award may have earned it but probably didn't have the same level of risk.

CAO: Yeah, I agree.

DO: And—and—and—and a lot of the awards that are given are given to people who are dismembered, who are dead, who are psychologically screwed up. Not because of that but because in getting the award they did things that got them killed or got them dismembered or got them to have horrible nightmares and whatever. So it's a—it's really a—it's—it's not a—they're not free. They're not free either in terms of what they have to do, or not free in what terms you—what you have to give up. But I figured, what the hell, I'd show you anyway, just to—just to make it a little bit more interesting.

Now, one of the things I—I've done all the talking. I wanted to talk. I want you to ask me whatever you—whatever you want.

CAO: Oh, wow, whatever I want.

FELTNER: I mean that's related to this.

CAO: Yes, of course.

FELTNER: Other kinds of questions, I don't know what kind of an answer I'll give you, but these, I might know what—

CAO: Definitely. So I guess one of my questions would be—you know, you mentioned coming back in between—to North Carolina in between '68 and '75. Were you able to go home at all, or—

FELTNER: Oh, yes, yes. I mean, you—

CAO: You [cross-talk; unintelligible; 2:27:28] both.

FELTNER: Yeah. You—you—you had the—you had the—oh, the Marine Corps, you have 90 days or—90!—30 days of vacation that you can take anytime you want, assuming

operationally you could take them. And Vietnam would usually have—the tours were usually 13 months, and then when you came back to the States it was usually 30 days' vacation or two weeks va- —or whatever you could spare.

But, yeah, plenty of—it wasn't—wasn't a life sentence. You weren't stuck doing these things. And you—you know—and people would leave Vietnam if they had, like, a family situation or, you know, some rationale, humanitarian circumstances or whatever it was that qualified for getting leave out of—although to leave a combat zone, it had to be pretty good, when your mother, your father died or something like that. It wasn't just because you missed them.

CAO: And—okay, interesting.

So you spoke a little bit about PTSD and also the fact that in '72 the draft was ended.

FELTNER: Right.

CAO: Was there a certain I guess reason why you decide to return in '75, and—

FELTNER: Well, I was going to make the Marine Corps a career.

CAO: Oh, okay.

FELTNER: And—and—and in '75 the other event is I get married, and my wife was a Army captain in the [U.S. Army] Nursing Corps at the Walter Reed—Walter Reed special [sic; Water Reed National Military Medical Center]. Walter Reed was—was a special hospital for all kinds of significant diseases, dismemberments, psychological and whatever. And I think she just said, "Hey, look, you know, you've had your fun. You played cowboys and Indians for a while. If we're gonna get married, that's it."

CAO: [Chuckles.]

FELTNER: So—so I stayed in the—I stayed in the Reserves [U.S. Navy Reserve]. I went to law school. I was thinking about going—well, I was initially going to be a Marine lawyer, and then I went and got out there, and I said, *Look, if you're gonna be a*

lawyer, change professions. Just be—you can still do your things in the—in the Reserves—which, by the way, included teaching Marines how to ski in New Hampshire and Vermont.

CAO: So you've been up here—

FELTNER: So that was tough duty, but somebody had to do it. So—but—but—but basically in law school or been a lawyer ever since. But basically she didn't want to have to deal with getting phone calls or getting my mother's visit from the two Marines, saying, "Too bad about your son." So I—although the one remaining thing is that my—she—she was a little upset with me when I got called up for [Operation] Desert Storm.

CAO: Yeah, I saw it on your [cross-talk; unintelligible; 2:30:27].

FELTNER: I only got as far as California, so I didn't do much. And they asked me—they said, "Now you can stay here and do certain things." I said, "I'm not going. Let me get this straight: I'm not going to Iraq." "No, you've got some medical disabilities that won't let you go." I said, "Well, then, send me home. There's nothing out here I prefer to do, rather than doing this." So, yeah, that was a—that was—

CAO: That was in the '90s?

FELTNER: Nineteen ninety- —well, it had to be 1991, because that's when—that's when the Desert Storm happened. Desert—Desert Storm and Desert something else. But it was fighting Saddam [Hussein], fighting Saddam. So I never got there. I must have scared them because they ended it in a month. It didn't—didn't get anywhere, which was fine. They certainly didn't need some guy that hadn't been doing any active Marine work for 20 years in between, so—and I was just as happy, too. So that was the—it was the end of it, other than sort of continuous—you know, we go to all the Marine Corps lunches and various different Marine Corps groups and have tons of Marine Corps friends that—we had our 40th reunion of our basic school class that met in—what was it?—in '67, in Quantico. We had that a couple of years ago.

So that's—I mean, that's a lengthy career. I can't honestly say that I effected any major changes other than I was part—I was part of it, so—

CAO: Yeah. Well, yeah, that actually was going to be my next question. Yeah, there are some people who served for maybe a year or two, but you have been—

FELTNER: Right. Well, I had plans, but '75—I got out in 1976.

CAO: Yeah. I guess how has this affected, you know, who you are now?

FELTNER: I have to say, extremely positively. And I say that because there was a—take a little bit of a psychological analysis here. Most or many Marines who came back from Vietnam were kind of shattered emotionally: drinkers, drug users, broken marriages. I had the good fortune to have some wonderful parents and some great opportunities in the law, and I didn't have those kinds of issues, but there were a lot that did.

Aside from the fact—and I think maybe the biggest psychological problem is that when you came back, nobody wanted you around. Nobody wanted to hear you talk about it. Nobody—and in fact, a lot of the younger Marines—do you—can I get a glass of water?

CAO: Definitely.

FELTNER: Before I get sort of unhinged here.

CAO: Oh, of course, of course. [She gets a glass of water.]

Okay, so we were talking about—what were we talking about? Oh, so as I said, you were there for quite a long period of time and how that has affected—you know, and you said it was positive.

FELTNER: Oh, okay. Yeah, and—and—and I think—I mean, it's—it's just kind of an interesting sort of view—Marines didn't want to talk—"Marines"—veterans didn't want to talk about it. I mean, I went through a period when I came back of—a long time, when I was in Reserves, and you meet, talk, but that was kind of like it. Nobody was terribly interested about what

you did or didn't do. In fact, they were—arguably, you felt, whether it was true or not, that—not so much that there wasn't thanks for it, but let's put it this way: There was no overt thanks for it. Nobody went out of their way to thank you. There were no victory parades or no anythings.

But you almost got the feeling that, hey, the war—and it's—it's—it's a partial belief that I had, too like, this was a stupid war and those who went to it aren't terribly smart. I mean, they allowed themselves to not find a way to get out of it, and—and it's discredited with a terrible president at the time, who left, and America wanted to free us because it involved a bad war, it involved [President Richard M.] Nixon, it involved things they wanted to forget about it.

And maybe most importantly for us, the veterans. They're just as soon out of sight, out of mind, because, you know, what—it's something—it's not a—it's not a proud—or it's not, like, World War II, so it's just a war, and let's put it behind us. Let's not talk about it. Let's—and more than that. I mean, I think a lot of veterans were thought to be—they must be drug users. They must have personal problems. A lot of them did. And so do you want to hire them? There was a stigma attached to it.

And—and—I mean, I saw that when I was recruiting in North Carolina. There would be demonstrations. There were people that would have no problem about telling *you* what they thought of you. [Chuckles.]

Along those lines, we went to the University of North Carolina one time, and I was recruiting, and there was a bunch of demonstrators that came up to me, and I was working with a gunnery sergeant who—older guy, who was a lot more experienced than I am about how to handle these things. And they—they were saying, you know, "baby killer" or certain—whatever wonderful things they wanted to say. And I was like one of these thermometers, right?

CAO: Rising.

FELTNER: The red was going up here. So the—the gunnery sergeant called these three guys who were particularly vocal, and they [sic] said, "You know, I just want to tell you guys that you do

have freedom of speech and what you have to say, and there's a lot of truth in what you have to say, but," he said, "I'm not sure you really want to do that." And so they said—you know, they started—"What you guy—you're all the same." He said, "No, no, no. You're missing my point." He said, "I just want to tell you," he said, the young captain there. He said, "He just got out of a mental hospital for nearly killing somebody, so spend as much time as you want." [Both chuckle.] We didn't see them—we didn't see them again for the rest of the—the rest of the time we were there. So he just picked his experience—picked—picked their sort of belief that that was true anyway, and we didn't have any more—we didn't have any more trouble from that group at all, because they were—he had skillfully used their perceptions of what I was anyway to fulfill their—to fulfill their belief and decided that it was not worth it.

But it was—it was—and I went on. I mean, I went on and did plenty—legal and everything. Lots of other things to worry about, so it wasn't—I wasn't weighed down by the fact that I was in Vietnam, because it'd be, you know, I couldn't get a job or I couldn't this or I couldn't anything. And—and—and so I didn't have any problem with it, but, by the same token, it wasn't something that I wanted to tout or even talk about very much.

CAO: Right.

FELTNER: So—and I would talk about it with military types, and you'd have the old stories and, you know, "How come nobody cares?" and stuff like that, but it was—it was—ironically, Karen, it wasn't till the second—it wasn't until the Iraq—Kuwait/Iraq War that people started to realize: Hey, we—these veterans have actually done—and the times had changed. Veterans weren't bad guys; they were now people that you could—particularly—particularly the Iraq [War] veterans and right now the—the Iraq/Afghanistan people, that they kind of go out of their way or at least they make all the moves to get out of their way, and suddenly somebody that had come back from Vietnam was rediscovered.

So that was sort of—helped me get out of my shell. Maybe too much, but, you know, all this stuff. But—but—but by the same token, it was a belief that they didn't—either they didn't

count or they were—they were part of a venture that didn't go very well, and it wasn't something to be proud of, and *they* weren't somebody to be proud of. And they had problems. And it's—I don't want to overdo it. You know, this—it wasn't—it's not like being—the struggles that blacks have had and other immigrants have had, homosexuals or—it really didn't [take its form? 2:39:05]. It was more like, *I just don't wanna have anything to do with ya.* So—so it was—

CAO: [cross-talk; unintelligible; 2:39;10] difficult?

FELTNER: Well, it—it—you know, it's just part of your life that, *okay, you've been there, done that. Don't want to have—not necessarily any great pride in it except amongst yourselves*. And I think that's really changed in the last 20 years.

CAO: Yeah. What do you think about how our world is changing has—obviously, there's a lot more discourse now on Vietnam and remembering—

FELTNER: Right.

CAO: —Vietnam. Like, would you think there is a particular—like, a particular thing or something that happened that changed our mentality?

FELTNER: Yeah, I think it was the fact that we now have veterans, and we now remember what veterans did 50 years ago, and there's still a lot of us around.

CAO: Right.

FELTNER: And—and—you know, I gave a presentation to the students at the basic school. I was a guest speaker one night. And I swear, these guys think—I think they thought I landed in a flying saucer. You know, like, here's a guy all the way back from the '60s and '70s!

CAO: [Laughs.]

FELTNER: So, you know, it was—it was kind of—kind of entertaining, and they were—they were so enthusiastic and—you know. Because I remember in my day, we would have been that way about a World War II veteran. But, I mean, at least they

cared to listen. They were excited to listen. They were excited to hear, as opposed to, you know, “Don’t darken my door.” So I think it was—it was just a—it was sort of interesting that another war kind of spurred this renewal, but, I think we get a lot more respect now—certainly a lot more respect than when we came back.

CAO: Yeah. What was the transition like, coming back? Especially in ’75?

FELTNER: Terrible. I mean, I can remember people just—I remember going to my grandmother’s house and just kind of went [unintelligible; 2:41:01], just being angry. *I did this. I got shot. Nobody cares.* And it was—it was an internalized kind of anger for some time, and then it got to be, *Okay, let’s not talk about it at all.* So, I mean, I don’t want to make it sound like I’m overly psychotic about it, but it was there, and it was a just kind of anger with society, of how could we do this? How could we make these sacrifices? How could nobody care?

CAO: And do you think it was just time that has allowed you to—

FELTNER: Yes. I think it’s time. I think it’s the change—well, you know, I’m in the wave of, *Okay, now—now it’s okay to talk to me again.*

And I think the other thing, though, that—that was helpful to me was that being in the Marine Corps, being in these circumstances really gave you confidence that you could do things, that you could be a decent lawyer, that you—

You know, I think one of the—one of the examples that I use is that a lot of my troops came back from Vietnam and got trouble, got in trouble in their next duty station because they—they—they couldn't adjust to the—and I remember one guy saying, “Hey, you know, I was in Vietnam, and I was responsible for ten Marines from dawn to dusk and everything else, and you—you treated me with all of the concern and respect, and I knew I had tremendous personal pride in what I was doing, and I come back here now, and I’m cleaning the barracks.” You know, it’s sort of like, “I had a point in time when I meant something. Now I don’t. In fact,

now nobody wants to talk to me." It was a real kind of an ego thing.

And I—and I think that was—and coupled with—I don't know—this shift of doing something—and whether politically it's the right thing for somebody, it's war. You're doing things to keep people alive. I was responsible for—I mean, early on, 40 but, you know, then bigger amounts and whatever. You were doing something that meant something. You were their person. At least in the Marine Corps, you're responsible for your men. You're responsible if things don't work out. You can't walk away from it and say, "It's somebody else's fault." Usually because if you screw up, you're going to get hurt, too.

But the poi- —the—the—the point of all that was that—that you really have a feeling of internal pride in what you do and can't understand why nobody else does, doesn't. And—and—and—but you get toughened inside. You get comfortable with, you know, circumstances that happen and things that people [get wigged out? 2:43:45] because something awful is happening. "We've seen worse." [Laughter.]

And—and—and so you—so you—you have a confidence that you can handle bad situations, at least in my case. I mean, I don't have a mental problem that causes me to completely go ballistic but just the reverse, just to say, *Okay, you know, you've proven something to yourself, if nobody else, and—and—and you—you can handle these circumstances. You can help other people handle them. You can be the person that is the rock for them to lean on, because you've done that.*

So, I mean, I would say in the long run—and—and—and the Marine Corps discipline, the demand for doing it right, the demand for professionalism, the demand for honesty and integrity, because what good does it you to be a yes man and say, "Well, that's a great plan, Mr. Commander, but we're all gonna get killed if you do it," instead of saying, "We're gonna get killed if we do it." [Both chuckle.] So there is a sort of a—there is sort of a mental, moral code that if you see something wrong, you do something about it, because your people rely on you. Your ethic is that you're

supposed to be—set the example, and the failings of your group of the success of your group is directly attributable to you. And you can't walk away from it. You can't say, "Oh, you know, it's too hard" or "it's too hot" or—you know, the Marine Corps is always—the great line is we were always—you know, we're a million-dollar organization on a dime budget. That's probably true. But, you know, the thing that went with that is, "That's true and we're gonna overcome it. We're gonna do it anyway. And, in fact, if we have a problem, it's probably that we think we can overcome anything"—you know, until reality sets in.

But—but it's an amazing, I feel, probably one of the—well, a lot of things, but it has to be one of the leading influences on—on my life, of how I've led it since, and the ultimate benefit to me to be part of it. I mean, this stuff is interesting to talk about, fun to do, and I will tell you that nobody in their right mind should do it as their first course. President [Donald J.] Trump shouldn't drop nuclear bombs on top of—on top of—

CAO: I was going to ask what your—

FELTNER: —on top of North Korea, even if he thoroughly deserves it, until—because that's a great macho response until you think, *Well, they can take out I don't know how many South Koreans, 30,000 American troops, destabilize whole reg—a whole region for your ego? I hope not.*

And I really do think that—and one of the interesting things that's happened is that the military has—I don't know if it's gone all the way there, but they were a leader in integration. They were a leader in a lot of these—I think their record on women is mixed. I love women getting involved in the military. They are—I'd just as soon have a woman next to me who can shoot straight as opposed to somebody who can't. But just generally, they—they—they have a perspective. They have a level of—that men may not have, of compassion. They have a level of—a level of—of—when I went to—when I taught—I taught ten years of being an instructor, the first year writing at BU. Every year, the women were the best. Every year!

And there was a reason for that. A couple—a couple—not silly ones, but, you know, they were clearly more mature. I don't know whether the male brain ever catches up or something. But they were more mature. They were there to go to law school. The men were there to go, *Well, let's see if I'll like law.* So—but it was more than that. They were conscientious in what they did. They were conscientious in the things they turned in. They were more interested in getting feedback. And—and I think all those attributes are—are making those—the percentage of them that are in the military—a really good group to have in there. I know women that are pilots—I'm not trying to list these things: "Isn't it wonderful that we're all"—but they're good ones. And they add a lot. And they—they aren't wimps, and they aren't all the things that people think they would be: the concerns of why you don't want to have women because this and that. I—I—I don't believe that.

And, of course, with three daughters I *have* not to believe it. But—and a mother who would—who was a wonderful, wonderful mother but would never let me forget that women were pretty important, too.

So I—I think that—but the Marine ethic is the sort of warrior ethic, but with it is the whole idea of being—moral judgment about saying what's right or wrong, about, maybe most importantly, setting the example. Don't expect anybody to do anything you wouldn't do. Be cognizant of what makes them work. Be cognizant of what their good points and bad points are. Because they'll keep you alive, and—and—a great saying is: Take care of your Marines, and they'll take are of you. But that's the way it works. You have to take care of them first, and then they—they may not be Rhodes scholars, but they can give you a lot of good advice, which you can ignore if you want. They recognize you have to make the decision, but they're always—they always feel free to give the advice. So—and—but you should always listen. And I—and I think that if Congress and the president were made up of the same kind of people, we'd have a totally different country. I mean, maybe—maybe we'd *be* in Korea by now. I hope not, but I would think that they would—

I think one of the things right now that's keeping us stable, from scaring the hell out of me is General [James N.] Mattis,

who's a four-star general and is [U.S.] Secretary of Defense. And he was a well-decorated, highly-effective leader and everything else, but I also think he's a guy that is also a scholar, knows tremendous amount about the use of force and use of people and a really—really—guy who's not going to—at least I hope—not going to let [President Donald J.] Trump make the decisions on—well, Trump will make the decisions whether he wants it or not, but he will temper and be—be kind of a steady—steady person in the middle of chaos. So that's my view. That's my political view. As I said and as I've been arguing, people can agree or disagree with me, but that's my take on it, so—

CAO: Yeah. What was the general veteran response during the election? As you mentioned, you said—

FELTNER: I think the—the bad news is I think an awful lot of the veterans thought Trump was just great, and I think they thought that because they hated Hillary [Rodham Clinton], and Hillary—[the 2012] Benghazi [attack] and the sort of the idea—I think one of the problems with the election was that the Democrats forgot the great—you know, the great white male, and they believed that, you know, if you're from the South or if you're in the military or something like that—

CAO: [unintelligible; 2:51:30].

FELTNER: Yeah, these—these people aren't too smart anyway, so they can't figure out the—you know, ignore them. I mean, I don't want to go too far down, but didn't even go to Wisconsin and—and Michigan, and that's where you lose. I guess she never went to Wisconsin. I think she did go to Michigan. If you take them from [sic] granted, people for granted, and—I mean, there have been—she's sort of a lightning rod in the—in the war, and I think there were a lot of white males who—of limited educational background, tough economic circumstances, who felt that minorities and—and—and special interests were telling everybody else what to do, and, "Hey, we've been here. What about us? You don't even make the effort to come after us." They all showed up and voted.

And he shouldn't have won the election. Popular vote wise, he got crushed by three million people. But he got enough

votes in the places he needed ['em in? 2:52:35], and—and—and the Democrats forgot those people used to be Democrats. And—and if they want to win the election, they should remember them—you know, a lot of veterans and a lot of the—however you want to characterize them, whether they're hicks or whether they're, you know, the crowd of hillbillies or something—they—they can vote too, and one, two—two hillbillies still—still—still outvote one Harvard professor.

And—and—and—and—and I think that—I mean, I don't go too far down that line, because I still think the logic of why you would vote for Trump is still screwy. But that's the group, and I think there are a lot of veterans in that group.

CAO: In that group, yeah.

FELTNER: Or let's put it this way: There are a lot of people who wave the flag around and act like they're—and then there are—they include a lot of veterans. So I think that the veteran—the veteran crowd, I'm going to guess, voted for Trump pretty heavily, because they voted Hillary and Bill [President William J. "Bill" Clinton], who—you came to Hillary almost this sort of anti-veteran. But I—I think that—I hope we have an election where *everybody* is important and there is no—because you elevate one group—

And I also think that—you know, the other bad news is I think a lot of the Trump supporters and some of these people that I'm talking about—I think they're racists, too. They just got done with a black president, "so we're not going to have another liberal in there who's going to elevate minorities. I can't get a job," and whatever.

So it's—it's—it's a whole mixture of—of—of things going on. But I think importantly, you really took a huge hunk of voters who you presumed were too stupid to vote or didn't—didn't think they way you did and discounted them. And I'm afraid to say: Look what we got.

CAO: That's where we are now, though. [Chuckles.]

FELTNER: That's where we are, so we got to make the best of it.

CAO: Exactly. And have you had correspondence with other ’67 alumni, Dartmouth alumni?

FELTNER: Just had our 50th reunion a month ago.

CAO: Okay. Oh, wow! You were back up here at Dartmouth?

FELTNER: Yeah, for the 50th reunion.

CAO: I was actually here, yeah.

FELTNER: Were you here during the—

CAO: I was here. I was helping with graduation, so you guys must have been around.

FELTNER: Yeah. So we—we—we were here. W had a great time, by the way, and we had—we had—did—did—as—Professor [Edward G.] Miller—did he show you the book?

CAO: Yes.

FELTNER: Yeah, that was—that was—that was part of it, and I have an article in there someplace.

CAO: Yeah.

FELTNER: But the—the—yeah, it was in—and it was a—it was a wonderful event, absolutely wonderful event. And seeing people that you will probably never, ever see again, but nevertheless—and reminded of this time. I mean, one of the reasons why I was so excited about coming here, it’s so close to that time and the memories and the lessons and the whole spirit of the time. Something—I wanted—I wanted to come up and—and tell people like yourself in the—in the future: There’s a big lesson to be learned here. Or there’s a couple of big lessons to be learned.

I mean, I think—I mean, the first—I may be parroting some of the things I said in the article—I think the military is absolutely essential, but you want it to be led by good people. It’s not—it’s not a wind-up toy that you just throw at everything that you think is annoying you at the time. You use it when you need to use it. And you recognize that when

you use it, people are going to die, and people often are going to die—who are usually going to die who are the ones that are maybe not as wealthy, not as well educated, but their service and their dedication and everything is—is what keeps us as a country together. It's why everybody wants to come here.

And I don't want to lose that. And I'm concerned about—one of the concerns I had about some of this stuff in the—in the Middle East was that we've always been the good guy, and when we start to be the aggressor, then we lose being the good guy. We—we—if our principles are we're going to go in and invade somebody else, you know, I—I—I—I can't abide that unless, you know, you can really show that if I don't—if—there's no alternative but doing that. I could be persuaded. But not to do it in the first instance, not to be the person that sets off the war.

So—and—and—and then I think the other thing—so I think that there is a tremendous lesson here about wars, that—the worst option. It may be necessary, but—and I think one of the many things that sort of got my thinking back about Vietnam was the trip I took in 2010. What a—I mean, people are spectacular. I say to people there are two reasons for it—I think there are several reasons for it. One, they like the idea of somebody paying them money. Two, a lot of the older people that were involved in the war are dead, and—

But they're a cultured people. They had—they had 2,000 years of culture. I saw that in places like Hué, where they have—they had in the—in the—in—for example, the year 1200, they had a—they'd have—they'd have a nationwide examination, and they would put the names up, and they still have them. And everybody could take this examination. There was no exclusion on the basis of whether you were from nobility or from—a guy working in the rice field. And if you were one of the top 20, regardless of what your background is, you were selected to be the equivalent of a mandarin, which is sort of like administrative people, and you would run the country.

CAO: Yeah. Wow.

FELTNER: And so—and they—they—they had literature, they had—[half? 2:59:02]. And very beautiful music. Very thoughtful people. Also [chuckles] very aggressive. With all due respect, the Chinese—they tell me the Chinese have voted—invaded them three times, and they threw them out three times.

CAO: Yeah, they—[Chuckles.]

FELTNER: So—so the—I'm very impressed with them as people and very impressed with what they put up with.

One—I was thinking of a couple of other things that I wanted to just [unintelligible; 2:59:28]. Have—has your class involved any of the literature or art that has come out of—out of the—out of the war?

CAO: I don't think so, but I think the idea—really great [unintelligible; 2:59:38].

FELTNER: I would say—I would recommend that there be at least four movies that you folks should see, that I would—that I would consider to be sort of useful and interesting, maybe not necessarily completely realistic, but *Apocalypse Now.* That's with Marlon Brando [Jr.].

CAO: [Whispers] I love Marlon Brando.

FELTNER: And Marlon Brando and the—not Charlie [Sheen], the other—the other—the other—Martin Sheen.

CAO: Oh, so this 19- —

FELTNER: *Apocalypse Now*, and these were sort of '70s, early '70s. *Born on the Fourth of July*. That's with Tom Cruise. *Full Metal Jacket*, which I love. It's the Marines in Hué. Very tough-minded movie. And *Platoon*. And there may be others. But, I mean, I'm sure there are others, but those are—those are my four favorites.

In terms of books?

CAO: Yeah, books.

FELTNER: *Street Without Joy*, Bernard Fall. *Rumor of War* by Anthony Caputo, I think. [Transcriber's note: Philip Caputo.] There's one that was just brought out that is interesting, called *The Sympathizer*. It's on—it's on the Top Ten—it's about somebody comes to California from—

And one, I just absolutely wanted to tell Professor—I wanted to bring it—I couldn't get it in time, and it's a book called *The Sorrow of War*[*: A Novel of North Vietnam*]. And it's written by a guy by the name of Bảo, B-å-o Ninh, N-i-n-h. And Bảo Ninh is a North Vietnamese, and his book is—his book is allegedly fiction, although it's supposedly his story. And what is amazing about this book is—there are probably a variety of—of predispositions you might think about when you read a book like this. I mean, there's a cynical view. There's the all-hero book. There's the cynical American. There is the, you know,—the—

This book is by a guy that's Vietna- —North Vietnamese. It's not a book that is all or—well, it's—at least in part—but it's not a communistic kind of a book describing what a wonderful deal it was. It—it's one of the saddest, most illuminating, terrific books ever wri- —he is a North Vietnamese soldier, who has real, real problems with his country. He thinks they're horrible. But he goes—and there are scenes in there where Americans are brutalizing the—the North Vietnamese. It's sad. About his—his girlfriend and all the terrible things that they went through when they were bombed and all the rest of the stuff.

I recommend this book because this guy is—he's writing it—he said that his book has been compared to *All Quiet on the Western Front*, which is quite a classic, from World War I, by a German [Erich Maria Remarque]. But this is—this is a book by a guy that went through the entire war as a member of the North Vietnamese. And it is not the slightest bit—not the slightest bit nice about the Americans and not the slightest bit nice about his own government.

And in fact, this guy—he published it under a different name, and he—he has actually tried to put out another book, but he's kind of afraid to put the book out again because the North Vietnamese government still doesn't think it's very positive about *them*, which tells me that it's a great book. But

if you want—if you wanted a book that will tell you the views of a North Vietnamese soldier, that's the book. And it's a—I just—it's a great—great book. And I think he's—he's even—I don't think he got any—he got some international awards. He certainly didn't get any awards in North Vietnam for it.

But it's not—it's not a—you know, it's not a "poor little me" book; it's just the horror of war from the North Vietnamese side that you never would ever see, and you don't get the same impression—Americans had planes and all these other things, and they could go home. He *was* home. And—and—and—and—I mean, he was in his own country.

CAO: Right, right.

FELTNER: And—and they used him. The North Vietnamese leaders used him like they used everybody else, as just kind of a—an ends to a—a means to an end. But this is a very sensitive, thought- —I just—it's a fan- —a phenomenal book. And if you want to get a different perceptive and a perspective not just on Americans and what they thought, and South Vietnamese, but somebody from—I just think it's special from that perspective—

CAO: Yeah, definitely.

FELTNER: —to be able to get that kind of a perspective. As well written as it is—and it's—you know, it's a little—it's been in a translation, so it's not—flows—doesn't flow that easily, but it's a wonderful book.

CAO: Awesome, yeah.

And so to close up, could you explain this right here?—[Both chuckle]—or if there's anything else that you've brought that you—

FELTNER: That I haven't forgotten to show? [cross-talk; unintelligible; 3:05:19]. Oh, this—this—this was given to me as I gave this presentation.

CAO: Oh, in 2009.

FELTNER: It's a—in two thousand and—no, this was in 2006. This was with the—

CAO: [unintelligible; 3:05:30].

FELTNER: [cross-talk; unintelligible; 3:05:30] students. This is what all officers carry. It was—the .45 [caliber pistol] was their sidearm. And this is the clip you put—put up the ten rounds in here and stick it in the back. It is—they don't use this pistol anymore in the service because it is a little bit unwieldy. It is far more weapon than you need. They have gone to a weapon that is easier to use, possibly more accurate. But this is—this, as a pistol, is as good as it gets for—for taking the other side down. And it's also a reflection of this was the sidearm in Vietnam. I think it's a 9 millimeter now. They've had a number of different varieties. But this is sort of the classic. And it's a .45 pistol, and I think at some point came from the old Colt '45 in the West. But that was the—that was the—that was the sidearm that all officers had in Vietnam, so I thought you might just find it—assuming your not—you know, it's not going to shoot anything. It's not going to go off. We're not going to—we're not going to—we're not going to get into any Second Amendment questions—

CAO: [Chuckles.] The antics of it, yeah. [Chuckles.]

FELTNER: —because I agree that guns should certainly be controlled and not—not the other way around. But—so—I'm sure there's stuff. I've got some junk here. I'm sure there's something I forgot to mention. But I did—I did want to mention, though, the books and the movies because I think you can—you can—you can certainly get the books. That one by Bảo Ninh—phenomenal.

The movies? They're all good. They're all—*Apocalypse Now* is really kind of *way* over the top, and it's sort of allegorical all over the place. *Platoon* is sort of way over the top in being just the horror of war. *Full Metal Jacket* is just [chuckles]—it's just got some great—great—it's—it's just so classic to [unintelligible; 3:07:38]. I mean, one of the great lines in the—in the movie is this guy comes in. He's a new recruit, and he going to show these grizzled Marines that have been there what a tough guy he is, and he's telling all about his exploits. And the—the old- —the older sergeant comes up to

him. He says, “Hey, we know you can talk the talk. We all want to know: Can you walk the walk?”

CAO: [Laughs.] That’s [cross-talk; unintelligible; 3:08:00]

FELTNER: Just a—just a great line. And then the—*Born in* [sic] *the Fourth of July* is just completely a—a—Jane Fonda and Tom Cruise—I think that’s who it is—but it’s the veteran who comes back and becomes a dissenter, becomes a—becomes a member of the—of the antiwar forces.

So there’s another—another excellent one I forgot, *Deer* Hunter—*The Deer Hunter*. So you—you—in you’re interested in—if you’re interested in sort of getting a—a full flavor on—on—on those things, or any of them, but I would have to say—I would say of the books, just Bảo Ninh is such a unique perspective. And if I had to pick one of the other ones for you to see—brutal but good: *Platoon*. It won the Academy Award.

CAO: Oh, wow.

FELTNER: So—so—and they help to provide a war perspective on it, too.

Is there anything else I can answer for you or do anything with respect to any aspect, whatever. Listen, I’ve had such a good time doing this because I’ve had a chance of—it’s like I’m doing a Show & Tell.

CAO: Oh, it’s great, talk about yourself, yeah!

FELTNER: But I also—yeah, and I—and I—and I—I think you—you do that, and you do it at some risk that doesn’t—“Are you full of yourself?” So—but if “full of myself” or a “little bit full of myself” is helpful to understand what—what the Vietnam War was and the ramifications for wars and it helps another generation to say that it is a war that probably didn’t need to be fought, probably left—

I mean, the reason why Vietnam is so important to me is because it’s the war that made this country stop believing that the government is all powerful and all knowledge. It’s a—it’s a war that made everybody cynical about

government, as they had every right to be. It's a war that made people stop and think about: What are you doing? Who's in charge? And I'm afraid it's also a war that we may be forgetting lessons that are to be learned by all of those things, and they're—they're valid lessons. They'll continue to be valid. And if there's one thing our generation can tell people like you is—as I think my great line is: If you're going to use—if you're going to send people to war, the people who send those people should be worthy of the people who go.

CAO: Yeah.

FELTNER: And so that's my story and I'm stickin' to it.

CAO: Yeah. Well, thank you so much for your participation and just your willingness to honestly share everything. I never expected to—

FELTNER: Get the full Show & Tell.

CAO: —see as much as I did, and it has been very, very helpful, as you said, just as—I'm a visual learner, so even being able to see—

FELTNER: Well, if you can—the only—the only request is if you can promise to get me my magazines back—

CAO: I swear.

FELTNER: —and the letters, and the rest of the stuff—

CAO: I absolutely will.

FELTNER: —you can—you can have. And if there's an- —and, by the way, you've got my e-mail address. If there's any question, if there's anything—you know, "We never talked about X" or "I've read this, and what does this mean?" and so—happy to do it. And with the letters, I think you'll—you'll (a) get a kick out of them and (b) you'll probably—you'll probably say you know, you can see the anguish in them, you can see the pride, you can see bottom of the barrel, you can see—you know, I tell people—you know, combat is a hu- —you talk

about drugs and everything. It's got to be—in some regards, it's the ultimate high.

CAO: Yeah.

FELTNER: And the ultimate low. So—so—

CAO: On both sides.

FELTNER: Yeah. And it could be, you know, just like that, and you go from one to the other. But they're kind of fun, and I'm—as I look back on some of them, some parts of them I'm probably embarrassed about, but that's okay. I mean, I think from your perspective, to find out what people were thinking at the time, they're contemporary.

CAO: Yeah. Well, thank you very much.

FELTNER: Look it's been a real pleasure.

[End of interview.]