Neal Stanley '64
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Karen Navarro

BLIEK: Good afternoon. This is Bryan Bliek ('18), and I'm on campus at Dartmouth College in the Ticknor Room of Rauner Special Collections Library located in Hanover, New Hampshire. The narrator I am speaking to today is Mr. Neal Stanley, Class of 1964, who is with me in person. The date today is Monday, October 23rd, 2017. Good afternoon, Neal. Welcome back to campus.

STANLEY: Thanks, Bryan. Nice to be here.

BLIEK: So, Neal, let's take it back to the beginning. Can you tell me where you're from and when you were born?

STANLEY: I was born October 1st, 1942, in Morristown, New Jersey.

BLIEK: And can you tell me a little bit about your parents? How did they meet and who are your parents?

STANLEY: My mother's name was Mary Kelly Metler, and my father was Furman Nealon Stanley ('37). They met pretty much on a blind date while my father was going to Dartmouth. And it was right during the Depression, and it was a good romance. And they got married a couple years after that. They didn't have any children until I was born, and I was probably conceived around Pearl Harbor day, right after Pearl Harbor, and then my father went into the Army pretty much right after that. So I didn't know him or see him—well, I saw him, but I really didn't know him until I was probably three-and-a-half or four years old when he finally came back from the war.

BLIEK: And did your mother work during the war?

STANLEY: Yes, but not that much. She took care of me. She lived with her mother and her sister, because her sister's husband was also in the war. Most able bodied guys were in the war during the Second World War at that time. And they both worked part-time, but they took care of us. And they lived with, as I said, with her mother, both their mothers, in Hempstead, New York.

BLIEK: So, during the war you were raised by your mother and who else?

STANLEY: My grandmother; my aunt; my grandfather, my father's father; and a little bit by my father's mother. And my uncle was around, too. He was in the Army, as well, but he wasn't stationed overseas.

BLIEK: And you grew up in Morristown?

STANLEY: No, actually I grew up in Hempstead until I was three-and-a-half years old. Then my father came home and we moved, they moved to Madison, New Jersey, for a short period of time, and then bought a home in Glen Rock, New Jersey. That's in Bergen County outside of New York City. And stayed there for 61 years. So, I really was raised in Glen Rock, New Jersey.

BLIEK: In what capacity did your father serve in the war? Which branch of the Armed Forces?

STANLEY: He was in the Army. He was in the Signal Corps. He was an officer. And it was in Germany, so he went over to England, then went to Germany, and—excuse me, I've got to turn that off—and then went on to, stayed on through the VE Day [Victory in Europe], and then was going to be assigned to go to Japan when VJ Day [Victory over Japan] occurred.

BLIEK: So, did you meet your father before he left for the war or did you meet him kind of for the first time once he came back?

STANLEY: I was a baby. I have no recollection. The only recollection I have of my father early on was, I would always get up in the morning and go try to climb in bed with my mother. And one day, I was about three-and-a-half years old, and I climbed in bed and there was some guy in there, and he told me to get the (expletive implied) out of the room. [laughter] And it was my father. That was my first memory of my father. I don't blame him for kicking me out of the room, but he had just come back from the war.

BLIEK: And what year was that?

STANLEY: 1945.

BLIEK: Okay. So, you grew up in Glen Rock, then? Or in Hempstead?

STANLEY: No, I grew up—up until I was about three-and-a-half years old, I grew up in Hempstead. Then, for a short period they moved to Madison with me, and then they bought the home in Glen Rock, and that's where I grew up. So, I was in Glen Rock from four years old basically until I went away to Dartmouth.

BLIEK: How did you like Glen Rock?

STANLEY: Oh, it was a great little town. It was, you know, a middle-class town. Everyone was basically the same, you know, one car, the men went to work, the women stayed home. It was a town that you commuted into New York or you worked in New Jersey, commuting on the train. So, the men would either drive their car, their one car, or take the train to work. My mother for the most part didn't have a car while I was younger, and they never got two cars. They only had one car. But we lived in the same house. Everybody in the town pretty much had the—they were the same socioeconomic structure in place, and they lived very well. So it was a good place to grow up.

A lot of young children around, a lot my age. So, we played together, went to school together, made great friendships, the kind of—it's a very different way to raising children today, or even the way I raised my daughter. We were told—I was the oldest in the family. I had three siblings. So, I was told basically when I wasn't going to school to leave the house at 8:00 in the morning, and I was expected to be back for dinner at 5:30 at night. What I did between 8:00 in the morning and 5:30 at night was my own business. And we did that very well. But there wasn't a concern, you know, parental concern about the children at all. And we made our own—we did our own things, made our own games and structures and, you know, it worked out very, very well for us.

BLIEK: So, you mentioned you had three siblings. So, could you talk about them a little bit?

STANLEY: Sure. I have a brother who's four years younger than I am. My father describes his children this way: I'm pre-war, my brother is post-war, my sister who is 10 years younger than I

am is afterthought, and my youngest sister who is 16 years younger than I is "oh my God." And, so I'm relatively close with my siblings, most close with my two sisters. It just happens that way. My brother went to Dartmouth, as well. He also was in the Army, but fortunately didn't have to go to Vietnam. My two sisters are brighter than the two of us and they've done well. And one now lives in Massachusetts, and unfortunately she's lost her hearing. My other sister, my youngest sister, is in Houston, Texas, and has home schooled four children and does all sorts of things. She's really supermom. Yeah.

BLIEK: What kind of values did your parents raise you and your sisters with?

STANLEY: Tell the truth. Make sure that you participate and serve. My father wasn't the kind of guy that would come out in the afternoon and throw the football around with us or play baseball with us. He came home, we had dinner together, and after dinner he normally went to some civic meeting that he was—you know, he was on the school board, or the town council, those kinds of things. It was all local things that he was involved in. He also stayed in the Reserves, so once a month he was at a Reserve meeting for a weekend, and he went to Reserve meetings on a regular basis. So he was very, very active in community affairs.

My mother was pretty much 24/7 taking care of children, because they were one right after another. They also served on the PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] and the school board of my—I said my father served on the school board. The library, they were very active in the library, as well. They were somewhat active politically, but not that much. I mean, that was a pretty conservative time, so they were Republicans. And, but we didn't discuss politics a lot. Nor did we discuss a lot of social issues. There were times when I was getting older that social issues became more important for me that I started talking about them, and I was surprised at some of the reaction that I got from, especially from my father.

But, it was the values that we got were the basic things: take care, make sure that you give back, that what you have and what you've been given is a blessing, and you deserve to give to others, you also are expected to perform well and succeed in what you do. My mother was a very caring, loving

person. My father, on the other hand, was, you know, I won't say gruff, but he wasn't the kind of guy that would come up and give you a big hug and kiss you on the cheek. He did that later in his life, but not when I was growing up. So, and I was expected to respond to authority and do what I was told.

I mean, in those days, when you went to school, the schoolteacher was the kind or queen. You were just another little pawn in the game, so, if anything happened at school and you brought that home, or it came home with you, the teacher was right regardless of what happened. So, you'd get it at home, and then you'd go back to school and have to apologize to the teacher whatever—even if you didn't feel like you were the one responsible for whatever occurred. But that's the way it was. So, I don't think my upbringing was that much different than any of the other children that were in that town at that time in that particular socioeconomic structure.

BLIEK: What did your father end up doing in terms of a job after he came back from the war?

STANLEY: Before he went to the war and after he went to the war, he worked for one company, and that was the New Jersey Bell Telephone Company. So he was in the Signal Corps, as I said. So he continued working for one company until he retired, and he retired at 62. And I think he went to work for them right out of Dartmouth. He got out of Dartmouth in '37, and he started working for them.

BLIEK: What were some of the social questions that came up and kind of led you to have some disagreements with your father?

STANLEY: Well, it was, you know, the timing of things. This was a pretty white bread society that I lived in at that particular point in time, and I was becoming more socially active and interested in what was going on, especially in the civil rights movements at that time. And this was a little bit later in my life, because things were not that—we really didn't know a lot of people. I mean, there was… I also grew up as my mother was Catholic, my father was not Catholic. He was Congregational church. And so, when I was—you weren't even supposed to go into a Jewish person's home, for example. Well, I had lots of Jewish friends. I ended up having a number of black friends, as well. So, you know, I'd bring that back home, and I'd get kind of a stonewall reaction

from it. And it wasn't—they weren't prejudiced, they weren't biased in any, you know, that they would come out and say that. In fact, my father ended up his career as the civil affairs manager for the telephone company. So, clearly it was there.

And my mother came from an Irish Catholic background, and at that particular point in time when, well, really back when she was, and she'd told me stories about the discrimination that she went through as an Irish Catholic back in the '20s and '30s. So, it was a different time. But, those were the primary social issues that I… And those were the things that were really heating up as I was getting up into my teen years and early 20s.

BLIEK: You mentioned, as well, that your parents expected you to perform well and succeed in all the things, in the things that you were doing. Did that carry over into your scholastic pursuits, as well, when you were, for example, in high school?

STANLEY: Oh, yes. Oh, sure. I was… things were easy for me, so I didn't particularly study hard. I always could do well enough on my tests, and my mother would always say, "Neal, you can do a lot better than you're doing." And I'd say, "Well, it's fine. I'm doing just fine the way I am right now." I was very active. I was also active athletically. We played lots of sports. I played for—I lettered in four different sports in high school, and I was the president of my class, and then ultimately the president of the student body. So, those particular extracurricular activities I really think helped me get to Dartmouth. Of course, it didn't hurt having my father as alumnus, but that was basically it. So yeah, my parents thought I didn't try hard enough. And they were right. I didn't. But it didn't interest me as much. So, that's where I was.

BLIEK: Were you expected to go to college, though?

STANLEY: Oh, yes, yeah. In this particular school that I went to, the high school, 98% of the students graduating went on to higher education. It was not only expected; it happened.

BLIEK: Was there any interest on your end in sort of the civic participation and the military participation that your father had kind of lived? When you were in high school, were you interested yet in that sort of thing?

STANLEY: No. No. No, and in fact, he stayed in the military as a Reserve officer, so in that period of time while he was still in the Reserves, there was the Korean War. I remember being very concerned about, and he was concerned about being called up to Korea. Then there were other incidents that occurred. You know, the Bay of Pigs or the crisis in Cuba, that was later in, yeah, I was at Dartmouth at that particular time, but he was concerned about that. I ended up in ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps], and that was principally because my father told me, you know, and this is interesting in the context of Vietnam and other things that go on, he said, "You're going to be involved. We're going to be involved in a war, and you might as well be in a position where you're an officer as opposed to on the line." And so, you know, that's really what ended up happening. It's the reason I joined ROTC when I came to Dartmouth.

BLIEK: Let me circle back for a minute and just ask you how you ended up actually coming to Dartmouth? So you mentioned your father was an alum, and then you also later had your brother went to Dartmouth, correct?

STANLEY: Right.

BLIEK: So, was Dartmouth very clearly your first choice when you were looking for a college to go to? Or were you looking elsewhere, as well?

STANLEY: Oh, yes, it was. It was my first choice. But, remember my prior statement that I was not the outstanding scholastic student in my high school, and my SAT scores were okay, not off the charts. It was a different time then. So my high school advisor said, "Neal, you'll never get into Dartmouth. So, you've got to apply to other schools." So I applied to about five or six other schools. I got accepted to every school that I applied. And second choice was Colgate [University, Hamilton, NY], and then there were a number of other schools that I applied to. But, you know, when the letter came from Dartmouth, I accepted it at that time, with a little bit of [trepidation] because it was, I recognized that I needed to step my game up quite a bit if I were going to go to school here.

BLIEK: What was Dartmouth like when you first stepped on campus as a freshman? So, this was in the fall of 1960, correct?

STANLEY: ’60, right. It was certainly different than it was right now. First of all, there were no women here. Second, there were two other of my classmates that—I came from a small high school on a relative basis, but two of my classmates also came here. So, there were three of us that I knew. I ended up in a good dormitory. I was in Woodward Hall. And there were a lot of upperclassmen in that that did not join fraternities. So it was almost like you had your own fraternity inside of that. I met a lot of people very, very quickly. I could go on and on about the stories of the people I met, but they really were… You know, it made my initial stage of moving into a situation away from home. I was happy to be away from home, not that I was unhappy at home, but it was my time to move on, so that’s what we did.

And things were relatively conservative here at that time. There wasn’t a whole lot going on in the country. Yes, there were social issues. Yes, there were things that people were concerned about. But not the—we didn’t have the level of communication at that particular point in time. You read the newspaper, you watched a little bit of television; that was about all you did. There weren’t a lot of televisions around. So you read the newspaper, listened to the radio, and that was your exposure to the outside world. And then you’re up here at Dartmouth, you’re further—you know, there weren’t airplanes—well, there were airplanes, but you didn’t really fly up here. You took the car and you were pretty much… So, freshman year you’re pretty much stranded on campus, no place to go, lots of study. That’s basically what you did. And you couldn’t join a fraternity, so that’s where you were.

BLIEK: In your first year?

STANLEY: My first year.

BLIEK: So when you came to Dartmouth, did you have a plan for what you wanted to study?

STANLEY: Absolutely not. I had no idea what I wanted to study. I was sort of interested because of the work that I did in high school as class president and others, I was kind of interested in the government and I was kind of getting socially interested, so I decided to become a government major.

BLIEK: And, so you became a government major, and then did you have a plan for after graduation what you wanted to do with that?

STANLEY: No. I had no plans. So that's where the Army came in. There were lots of companies that came on campus. I interviewed with a few, and then made the decision *if I'm going to go in the Army, I might as well as get it over with and get on with it*. I didn't want to go to graduate school at that time, and I was sort of at the—I was born in October, so I was only 20 when I graduated, so I was a little bit younger than the rest of the class. And I really felt that was the time. So I'd go into the service and I'd figure out what I wanted to do once I got out of the service, most likely going back at some type of graduate school at that point. That's how I felt.

BLIEK: Let's… beyond ROTC, and I'll come back to that in a bit, were you involved in any other sorts of organizations on campus?

STANLEY: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes. I was pretty involved. I was on The Judicial Council. I served on the Interfraternity Council. I was active in my fraternity. I was a member of Sphinx. I was on the track team. And I skied. I partied. I had a good time.

BLIEK: Yeah. So, let's come back to ROTC. So you mentioned, you kind of briefly touched on it earlier that your father had kind of influenced you to join up with ROTC, correct?

STANLEY: Yes, correct.

BLIEK: So, could you tell me a little bit more about why you joined ROTC?

STANLEY: Again, it goes back to my father basically saying, "If you're gonna go in, you might as well be an officer." And, of course, at that time there was still the draft, too. So, it was pretty clear that if you were able, 1-A or close thereto, you were going to go into the service in some capacity, for anywhere from six months to two years. So, he said, "You know, it's not a lot of your time. Just why don't you go ahead and do that?" And it didn't take—it was different, the ROTC at Dartmouth at that particular point in time was not that onerous. You go to a class a week and do a few other things.

And I was the—you probably will ask me a little bit more about this—I was not the role model for an ROTC cadet while I was there. I rarely shined my shoes. I didn't polish my brass. My hair was long. My uniform was clean, but not pressed. And, you know, I just went through the routine until I went to—and this pretty much gives you an idea of what I am—then I went to summer camp. And I went to summer camp in my junior year, right after my junior year, and I said, *Well, what the heck? I'm here at summer camp. I might as well do as well as I can*. So I ended up number 2 in the whole summer camp.

And then I came back here, and because of my position—they had to give me rank—and [laughter] they were quite upset that they had to give this slovenly soldier or potential soldier a position of… I started shining my shoes a little bit more and I did get my hair cut a little bit, and I shined my brass, and got through my final year. But it was—my whole life has been, when you get into a situation where things need to get done, I'm going to get them done. You know, as I indicated earlier, things were never, you know, it was never very hard for me to get things done that needed to get done, and in some ways I don't like to talk about this because I should work a little bit harder on that, and I did, ultimately did. But it took me a while to grow up and really mature. And I really don't think I fully matured as an adult until I was in the Army. That really changed everything for me.

BLIEK: Let me come back to sort of the induction process and to the ROTC before you move on a little bit. Did you have any hesitations, despite your father's assurances that you might as well get it over with, did you have any hesitations joining up with ROTC?

STANLEY: No. No, I didn't. I mean, you know, after when we had, and as I said, I was in school when we had the Bay of Pigs and we had the problems in Cuba, yeah, that concerned me a little bit more. And then as time went on, Vietnam started to heat up. Yeah, I was concerned about that. And I'll go into more about that when I finally went away to the Army. But I knew that I was probably going to have to serve in one capacity or another. So, I felt that my decision to stay in ROTC was the proper one at that time, for me. And I wasn't going to be—I wasn't socially against what was going on. I mean, I knew about Vietnam. Vietnam was still, in the mid-'60s, it was still not something to be terribly concerned

about. It wasn't until right after I graduated that things started to build up and get a lot hotter.

BLIEK: Were the other ROTC students similar to you in terms of why they had joined up? Or were your motivations unique?

STANLEY: No, I don't think mine were unique. I think most of the people within ROTC were similarly situated.

BLIEK: And, so can you describe the program on campus? Like, how big was the program? And what was the everyday routine of being an ROTC at Dartmouth at that time?

STANLEY: Significantly different than it is today. I mean, I met with some ROTC candidates today. They had fatigues on, they had backpacks on. I don't ever remember doing that. I went to, you know, we would have our drills and other things, and it took perhaps of my time maybe one or two hours a week involved in that. There were some outdoor activities that I got involved in, you know, outdoor… I learned how to ski, for example, through ROTC. I did a lot of outdoor camping, especially in winter. That was fun. You know, digging yourself into ice, or snow, and sleeping that way. So a lot of that. And I got to know the commanders of the ROTC units fairly well, and some of the sergeants that were working in that. Most of them were World War II vets, and they were interesting men to be around. So, from that standpoint it was interesting for me.

BLIEK: So it sounds like there was a classroom aspect to it.

STANLEY: Oh, yes.

BLIEK: On top of the sort of survival skills and that sort of thing that you've described.

STANLEY: Correct.

BLIEK: So, what did the classroom instruction entail?

STANLEY: It was mostly, it had to do with military warfare and that type of thing. That was my best recollection of it. I didn't really follow the curriculum that closely.

BLIEK: So you mentioned that you were not the ROTC role model.

STANLEY: No.

BLIEK: So, did that ever get you in trouble with the ROTC leadership?

STANLEY: Yeah. They wanted me to cut my hair. And I would. They wanted me to shine my shoes. And I would. But, you know, it was not… ROTC was not the thing that concerned me more than anything else. I mean, I was basically a student like most of my friends were. There was one other of my fraternity brothers that was in ROTC and he was in Naval ROTC. But the rest of the guys were not. And I looked about the same but, you know, it wasn't long hair with a ponytail. That wasn't the issue. It was just, you know, the hair was down over my ears a little bit, and that was about it. But that was the way it was. I basically didn't change my appearance and my appearance stayed the way it was with the rest of the students at Dartmouth at that time. I wasn't going to go into, you know, there were people in ROTC that had the whitewalls and all the rest of the things. I wasn't going to do that. And I just wasn't.

BLIEK: How was the ROTC program received on campus? So, what kind of reputation did ROTC have at Dartmouth at that time?

STANLEY: It was just another organization on campus. It did not have the—there wasn't a stigma involved in it. That evolved later. My brother was in ROTC, as well. It was a little bit different. He was four years behind me. He basically matriculated, the year that I graduated he matriculated. It was different for him and it was significantly different, you know, 10 years later. Certainly there was a stigma at that particular point in time, and there were points when it went off campus, and came back on. So, it was clearly a considerable difference. But at that particular time, no. You were in it or you weren't in it, and no one really bothered you one way or another about it.

BLIEK: Let's talk a little bit more about this summer camp that you mentioned that you did when you were in your junior summer. So, what was this summer camp?

STANLEY: Summer camp, that was mostly… All ROTC cadets go to summer camp. So, this particular summer camp was in Fort Devens, Massachusetts. It's now been decommissioned as a fort. And it's like basic training, in some respects. I mean, they don't treat you exactly the same way they treat a basic

cadet. You're there for, I believe 10 weeks. I could be wrong. Maybe it was eight. You live in a barracks. You march. You do all of the things. I did KP [kitchen patrol] many, many times when I was in there. No one does KP today, but we did KP. You did pushups. You did map reading. You did rifle practice. You did all of those basic things. So you learned what it—the intent was for you to learn what it was like to be able to go to basic training inside of that. You took classes, and you were graded on your exams that you took in those classes. You were graded on the physical aspects of what you went through. You were graded on the military functions that you did: your map reading, not so much on, I wasn't a particularly good shot, so didn't get graded on that. But, it was more your leadership ability. You were put into situations where you needed to lead a group of other cadets going through various exercises. We did marches, we did reviews, we did all of those things.

BLIEK: Was there any part of the programming that you particularly liked or disliked?

STANLEY: You know, as I said before, once I got into it, I made the decision that I was going to get through it and I was going to do a good job. And I did a good job. So, you know, you weren't really given any time off. You might have had one leave, but I was in Massachusetts and my parents were in New Jersey. I didn't have any girlfriends at the time. So, there was no place for me to go. You know, the hours were long. It was a time. I went through it.

BLIEK: Let's talk a little bit now about what your life in the Army after Dartmouth. So, did ROTC transition you from a Dartmouth student into someone who was enlisted in the Army?

STANLEY: No. What it does is, you go in as a 2nd lieutenant. So, I graduated from Dartmouth in June. I was off about a month, and then in July I was in the Army. And at that time I had a choice to make. Because I did so well in summer camp, I had the right to become a regular officer in the Army. A regular officer. There's a reserve officer and a regular officer. The reserve officer goes for two years, and then has I believe a six year commitment after that, either for active reserve or inactive reserve. There's a part that's active and a part inactive. A regular officer was an officer that your initial term was three years. It was intended for people who were going to make a career out of the Army.

I had no intention of making a career out of the Army, but my family was, you know, my father had three other children to put through school. There wasn't a lot of money at the end of the month every month. We didn't have any place—you know, I didn't travel at all. And I wanted to go to Europe. So, they gave me the right to choose whatever assignment I wanted, if I would become a regular officer. And my other opportunity was to go to Korea, and I didn't want to go to Korea at the time. So, I chose to go to Germany. And you had to accept a combat arm position, so you either went into the Signal Corps, engineers, armor, infantry, or artillery. And I chose armor. Why, I don't know, but it's what I did. I figured it was easier to ride in a tank than it was to walk around all the time. I soon learned that that was not what I really wanted to do.

But anyway, I went in armor and got assigned to Fort Knox [KY], which was at that time the basic training for armor, and you went through an officer basic training school, and that lasted for three months. Then, as a regular officer, I either had to go to ranger school or airborne school. Airborne school is you learn to jump out of airplanes. And I didn't like snakes, so I went to airborne. I went to Fort Benning, Georgia, and got my jump wings there. And then I was assigned to be into the non-signal Signal. I'm not sure what the terminology was at the time. Anyway, I went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and learned basic communications: radios and other types of equipment. And that took me right straight through until December of '64. So I basically was six months in school.

BLIEK: So, what did these different programs entail? Let's start with the officer basic training school. So, what was going on there?

STANLEY: Well, you're taught how to train and lead. You're taught basic operations, tactics for tanks. You're taught other—you know, nuclear weapons had started to come in, so you had training in that, extensive training in map reading, extensive training in leadership abilities and other kinds of things. So, if you think about the basic training that I went through after my junior year, this was basic training for all officers. So, all officers in that would basically go through that school. So, I was there with other ROTC officers, as well as 2nd lieutenants from the military academy and other military

institutions. So, we all went through that. At the end of that, then you went off into various specialties. Mine happened to be communications for that time.

BLIEK: What were your impressions of officer training, and then airborne school?

STANLEY: Okay. This is where the social aspects of what occurred. Remember I said I kind of grew up in this white bread environment. You know, I knew what was going on. One of the things that the Army quickly teaches one is, you really begin to appreciate the diversity of our country and what is in that. So, I had… and also when I was at Dartmouth, there weren't a whole lot of black students at Dartmouth. There weren't a lot of students of color at Dartmouth at that particular point in time. It was mostly guys like me. That wasn't the case in the Army. So, I got to meet more people that were considerably different than I was and had a different upbringing than I did. And I happened to have a very bigoted person from Greenville, Mississippi, who was my roommate. And after listening to his spiel for about a day, I went to the commanding officer and told him I wasn't going to spend any more time with that person. And he asked me why, and I said—I told him why. He was from Mississippi also. [laughter] But, fortunately, he put him with somebody else and I got another person.

But, at that time I realized that there was, finally the light bulb goes off and you realize *things are a lot different in the real world. And if I'm going to be a good leader, I'd better understand the kinds of things that are going on in our country, and how things are really happening in the military and what is going on in the military*. So it helped me considerably. So the things that I learned… Yeah, I learned how to drive a tank and I learned how to do other things from a military perspective. But I think I got more out of the recognizing our society when I went into the Army and really got into it and involved in it, and that went on through my entire career in the Army. I'm going to need some water.

BLIEK: Sure. Let's take a break. [Pause in recording.] So, after your officer training schools, you ended up being deployed to Germany, correct?

STANLEY: Right. But, there's something in the midst of this that I think is interesting. So, we're going through… And then I told you I

was at Fort Sill. And at that point in time, it was 1964, I was going to turn 21 in October, and I was going to be able to vote for the first time in November. So you had to be 21 to vote at that time. And it was a big deal for us, because at that time, the end of '64, Vietnam was getting pretty hot, and there was a Presidential election at that particular time, and the candidates were [Lyndon B.] Johnson and Barry Goldwater. So, there were a whole group of us that had gone through each one of these, and we were sitting in the PX, and these are five or six 2nd lieutenants, and we were discussing, you know, "Who are you gonna vote for?" And to the man, we all decided that we were going to vote for Johnson because he'd keep us out of Vietnam. And I remember that discussion. I can remember the Formica table that we were sitting around and the plastic chairs that were there, and we all went off and voted for Johnson and all of us ended up in Vietnam.

So then I went back, I finished up that particular assignment, and then I went off, I got assigned to Germany. Go ahead.

BLIEK: Yeah. I just wanted to ask you more about why you thought that Johnson would keep you all out of the war?

STANLEY: Because Barry Goldwater was portrayed as a hawk that, you know, he espoused bombing North Vietnam early and getting us involved. And it was generally felt politically that he was a warmonger and we would not do that. And he lost the election by a significant margin.

BLIEK: So, around the 1964 elections, what sort of coverage were you getting about what was going on in Vietnam at the time?

STANLEY: Very little. Very little. I mean, you'd get it. I mean, we knew more about, we knew what was going on because we would get that from our internal sources in the Army. But, you know, there was some play in the newspaper. You've seen what was going on in the press at that particular point in time, so we saw the same things. It was not really until '65, '66 that things really started to change significantly in there. So that's where we were.

BLIEK: Okay.

STANLEY: So I went home, had my leave, and then got on a ship, because we were still sending troops over to Germany on ships, and I got on there right after New Year's in 1966.

BLIEK: And what were your impressions of Germany? Actually, let me backtrack. To which part of Germany were you assigned?

STANLEY: Nuremberg, Germany. I was assigned as the communications platoon officer for the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment. Now, the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment was stationed in, was headquartered in Nuremberg, Germany. And you're familiar with Nuremberg and what happened in the Second World War there?

BLIEK: Yeah.

STANLEY: And then, we had Italians out on the border between West Germany, Czechoslovakia and East Germany. So we actually had a mission to do. My communication—as the communications officer, I ran a top secret communications center, and we intercepted messages, mostly CW Morse Code, that would come in from East Germany and Czechoslovakia and Russia. I also ran—we were responsible for all of the communications throughout the regiment itself, so all the radios and telephonic communications, we were responsible for those. So that was my first job when I was there. And it was a good job. I learned a lot. I learned a lot about being an officer and a leader, and I learned a lot about the military, and I learned a lot about people.

BLIEK: What was the kind of day to day experience?

STANLEY: Well, it would be in context with a lot of different things that went on at that particular point in time. First of all, let's talk about the—I had all types of people in my unit. I had very young people, older people, I had good sergeants, I had black NCOs [non-commissioned officers], I had black commanding officers, I had people of color that were in the unit and in part of my life. And, you know, I quickly learned that everybody was the same in the sense that you were either good and did your job well or you were not good and you didn't do your job particularly well. But I really understood the cultural aspects of what I was involved in. I was dealing culturally with different people, and I had to

respect their cultures and the way they were and how they grew up if I was going to lead them properly. That's a big deal. It's good that I learned it. I'm 21 years old. I've learned it at that particular point in time.

I would conduct, you know, I was responsible for conducting field exercises. So we would go out in the field and I'm basically living with my men at that particular point in time. I'm the only officer involved in what I'm doing. And I learned pretty quickly that, and my father had told me this, he said, "Listen to your sergeants." And that helped me, it kept me alive many times, because they really had a lot more of experience than I did about what was going on internally, because they'd lived it before. So, I spent a lot of time with my men. When we were out on field exercises, I ate with my men. I didn't eat with the officers. My men ate first, I ate second, or I ate last. A lot of my fellow officers didn't agree with me, but that didn't really bother me because I knew when push came to shove, they'd protect me.

And there was a good example of that. We had an IG [Inspector General] inspection, and that's a major inspection, so you're the general from the, in our particular case, Corps comes down. And we had been out in the field constantly. Our equipment was—and you had to do a full display of all your equipment. And we'd been out in the field and I knew things were lost. I knew that things looked like crap. And I went to my sergeant, I said, "You know, Tuck, what are we gonna do?" He says, "Don't worry, sir. We've got you covered." "What do you mean you've got me covered?" "Well," he said, "don't worry and don't ask me any more questions. We have you covered." I said, "Okay."

I came out the morning of the inspection, and it was called TO&E, table of equipment. There was all of the equipment laid out on the ground. It looked beautiful. Even the serial numbers were right, and I knew they were wrong. I knew that this wasn't what it was. So we go through the inspection and the colonel that was inspecting us came in, "Lieutenant, I'm very, very impressed with what you were able to do." [laughter] You know, "Tell your men how much I am impressed." I could feel that the sergeants, I was standing out in front of the sergeants and they were behind me and I could feel them smiling at me.

So, after this is all over, I said, “Okay, what did you guys do?” He said, “Well, we’ve got an entire unit,” and this was the barracks that we were in had four or five stories up and had multiple stories down, because that’s where the Germans built it that way. They went down and hid all the stuff down there, the good stuff. We were out there running a second whole TO&E of garbage equipment and things like that that they’d scrounged up. But I learned the whole system, how the NCOs do that and how the sergeants protect what’s going on. But if I hadn’t been, you know, hadn’t taken care of them, they wouldn’t have taken care of me. And, you know, that’s a valuable lesson to learn.

And another lesson was, you know, listen to what they have to say. I became very close with a number of them. A couple of them died while I was there, for other reasons, and one of them died in my arms, had a hemorrhage and died right there. I had another one of my sergeants drown. He was black. I had to go through all of his mail, read every single piece of mail that he had. I learned a lot in reading that about him and the culture that he was inside of. Gave me another aspect of perspective. And the reason for that is they didn’t want something, at that time they didn’t want something going back to the family that would change their view or attitude towards the soldier that was there, and also the fact that they didn’t want any secrets that he might have to go back home. And that wasn’t really the case. But I learned a lot in that perspective.

I had people that were not very educated. I had people with IQs, you know, maybe 65, 70. You had to help them through. I had people—my driver was… I have many, many funny stories about my driver, but the one aspect of my driver was he wasn’t very bright, he almost killed me three times, literally, by I think just doing things he was told not to do, but he did them anyway. And I forgave him for it because he didn’t know. He tried. That’s all I wanted. But, anyway, he decided he was going to—they didn’t make any money. They had very little money. And he was a southern Baptist, and from the mountains of, I think West Virginia. And one day some guy shows up in my office, showed up and said, “Private so-and-so owes me $200.” I said, “For what?” “Well, he bought a Bible from me.” I said, “Okay. You come back tomorrow. I’ll go talk to him, because I want to talk to him.” I said, “What did you do?” He said, “I bought my mother a Bible.” I said, “Well, show me the Bible.” And here’s this

Bible, and it's got fake gold leaf on it. It was worth at that time probably $10. He paid $200 for it. Then, of course, it was one of these things where you pay a little bit down and then the guys, everyone was paid in cash at that particular point in time, and they'd wait in line until they came through the pay line, and then they'd get them for more money. Well, he had other buddies that pushed the guy out of the way. So I brought the guy in, I said, "You're not getting any more money." "What do you mean? I'm owed the money." I said, "You sold him a piece of crap. It's a Bible, for goodness sake, and he's going to send it to his mother. And you're not collecting another dime from him. And if I see you on this post again, I'll have you run in." And he left. [laughter] But that was the way you had to be. You had to take care of your men.

I had another young man, he was 18 years old. He had no teeth in his mouth. Well, he had teeth, but they were all rotten, because he didn't know how to take care of his teeth. So I had to arrange to have all of his teeth pulled, and then have new teeth put in, or basically bridges put in to take care of him. But that's the kind of thing that you all of a sudden realized you were stuck in a situation that everyone else didn't get raised the same way you did, everyone else didn't have all the advantages that you have.

And there was the reality of discrimination, there was some of that still going on in the Army at that particular point in time. Yes, we're making some headway, but clearly that was still there. And there were some difficulties with some of the black officers and some of the black enlisted people that were really feeling some power at that particular point in time and wanted more of that, so you had to deal with that and deal with it effectively. So, you know, I learned a lot in the three years that I was there.

I ended up– I got married, came back, and I had been promoted just before I left, and I was then a 1st lieutenant. And I came back and I was made the regimental operations officer, and I was responsible for all of the operations for the regiment at that time. I wasn't the S-3. I reported to the S-3, but he was worthless, so I did all the work. I ran a top secret center. I was also the nuclear weapons officer for the operation, for the regiment, so I was responsible for all of that material. It was kind of rough on my wife because I basically came back and immediately went off to a place

called Grafenwöhr [Germany] to conduct a whole bunch of exercises. And I really didn't see her for the next year-and-a-half. So that was a tough way to start a marriage.

But that particular assignment, it was a major—I became a captain, but I learned a lot and got a lot of experience as a result of that, learned how to brief senior officers. It was really interesting in the perspective of really the mission of our particular unit was, there was a major invasion route into the western part of Europe through the Hof Gap. There were a couple of these, and these were the mountains, and our job was to, if the Russians came, and the Cold War was pretty hot at that time. Our job was to hold them off for three weeks until we could bring more troops over. We would have been lucky to hold them off for 30 minutes. And I knew that, but we'd go through all of the briefings and then we would do operations that basically mimicked the kinds of things that we would have to do to support that, plus do all the nuclear weapons things and the things that got on through that. I learned a lot.

BLIEK: What did the nuclear—handling the nuclear weapons…

STANLEY: Well, I didn't really handle, because you would have to—I didn't handle them, thank God, because a couple of my friends that did handle them, they have not had a happy life since then. But anyway, no, it was mostly how you processed all of the paperwork and other kinds of things, and how things were protected, how the weapons were protected and secured in the sense that no one could accidentally or on purpose detonate a nuclear weapon. And there were specific procedures that you needed to go through to be able to do that.

And to give you an example of how severe this was… There was one of our battalion commanders who I liked, he was a lieutenant colonel and I liked him a lot. Unfortunately, his unit violated some of these procedures and I needed to write him up on it. It was my job. I had to do it. And I remember going up and talking to him about it and telling him what had happened, and I remember him standing at—I was in a small helicopter at the time and I remember he saluted me as I was—or I saluted him and he saluted me back as I was taking off. And I realized that was the end of his career. And he was a young man. But that's the end of his career. Tough stuff. You learn it.

BLIEK: Were you predominantly in the company of Americans when you were stationed in Germany or was there also a NATO presence when you were out there?

STANLEY: I worked with the Bundesgrenzschutz, so it was German. Not a lot of NATO, but the Germans. Bundesgrenzschutz were the border guards. Basically, that's what it means. I'm pretty sure that's what it means in German. I also had a lot of German friends, and I was able to be with my German friends a lot when I was—I didn't live on base either. I lived off base. I had a very good friend, he and I lived off base, until I got married, and then I lived back on base again. But, once I assumed the role of the operations officer at that particular point in time, I really couldn't communicate a lot with my German friends. But I learned a lot from my friends who were Germans about their views, and most of them disliked their parents significantly because they'd been Nazis. And they were quite politically involved. I knew of a few Communists inside of that. And it was a good time to really learn and absorb the changing culture that was going on in Germany at that particular point in time. And financially there were four marks to a dollar. The dollar was worth a tremendous amount, so while we didn't get paid a lot, we enjoyed living well on very little money. So it was a good time to be in Germany from that standpoint, as well. But I learned a lot from them, my German friends, and I've kept some of those relationships.

BLIEK: What level of readiness were you expected to be at in the Germany post, and what kind of equipment had been provided to you accordingly? So, were you stationed with tactical nuclear weapons or were some of them strategic nuclear weapons?

STANLEY: Tactical. And, you know, strategic ones were basically the Air Force took care of most of those. But ours were tactical. They were, basically some of them could be sent or delivered with artillery, some of them could be delivered in other means through some of the equipment that we had, the tanks and others, and rockets that we had. But they were stored away from where I was stationed, and they'd really be brought to you if you needed them. So, they weren't part of the exercises that we would do. They were never part of that.

BLIEK: From what I understand from your biography, at some point you tried to resign your commission, correct?

STANLEY: Correct.

BLIEK: And so, was this while you were posted in Germany?

STANLEY: All right, well, let's go through the timeline.

BLIEK: Sure.

STANLEY: So, I was stationed in Germany, and I had—let's see, did I do that? No, I hadn't done it then... I finally got some leave, and my wife and I were on leave in Italy, and at that time the radio that you listened to was the Army radio, AFN, Armed Forces Network, and there were people being pulled out to go to Vietnam. Well, I just turned the radio off. You were supposed to keep it on. I turned it off when I was on leave. And apparently, they'd been calling me, and I got back to post and they said, "You've been contacted," you know, "they were on AFM, they were trying to contact you." And I said, "Well, I never heard it. I was in the mountains," whatever. And I was supposed to be stationed at the 101st Airborne Division, and I was supposed to be a company commander in the 101st Airborne Division. Well, that position got filled, and before I got back.

And then I realized, you know, *It's time. If that's gonna happen, you should resign your commission and get out of the Army*, because I had no desire to be—there were people that wanted me to be a career officer, but I didn't want to be a career officer. So I submitted a letter to resign, and then that was refused, right about the time that I was supposed to be deployed back to the US. And, so it was that I came back. I made an attempt—I went down to Washington and met with my Congressman to see if anything could be done there. It couldn't. I didn't expect that would happen at that time.

Interestingly, my father, who was, by that time he'd retired, and he was always pretty patriotic, came to me and said, "If you want to go to Canada, it's okay with me." And I said, "Dad, I can't do that. I mean, I leave, I'm basically deserting at that point. I'll go to jail at best, or get shot at worst. So I'm not, you know, I can't do that. So I'm just gonna have to suck it up and go." My mother was upset, my wife was upset, my

father was upset, and I was upset, but, you know, that was—I tried to resign. Subsequently, maybe two or three years later there were enough regular officers that were resigning that it was determined that Congress basically said if someone wants to resign, you'll have to allow them to resign. If they've served their tour of duty that they originally committed for, you have to let them resign. But that wasn't the case in 1968 at that time.

BLIEK: So, when did you end up in Vietnam itself?

STANLEY: February of 1968.

BLIEK: Okay. So, what was the process of getting there? So, when did you get your orders that you were being deployed to Vietnam?

STANLEY: Oh, I got the orders prior to that. So the orders were I was going to be an advisor. And before I went, I was sent to language school to learn Vietnamese, which was, I'm tone deaf. Do you know Vietnamese at all?

BLIEK: I was there this summer, so but yeah, it's tricky.

STANLEY: So, it's a tonal language, and I have a lot of funny stories of my attempts at speaking Vietnamese. And I learned it. My instructor, who was a Vietnamese woman, finally came to me and she said, "Captain, you'll never learn how to speak my language." [laughter] But anyway, I went through language school, and then got on a plane and flew to Vietnam. I didn't have an assignment. And that was normal. So, you came. And I arrived in the middle of the 1968 Tet Offensive. So, the plane had trouble landing, finally got permission to land, landed, and I went to what was called MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] headquarters in Saigon, which was a large hotel, I'm pretty sure. Anyway, and there was a lot of small arms fire going off, and then you could see smoke and other things on the horizon. So, we were in the middle of that.

Originally, when I first got there, I was told I was going to be going as an advisor to a tank battalion, and I thought, *Oh, my God.* A Vietnamese tank battalion was a whole bunch of armored personnel carriers, and maybe some assault vehicles. They couldn't go off the road. They had to stay… Well, you've been to Vietnam. You know what it's like.

Couldn't go off the road. So, what are you gonna get? You're gonna get mined, and you're gonna get hit by RPGs [rocket propelled grenades]. And there was very little protection in these things. And I said, "This is nuts."

When I got to Vietnam… I didn't believe in the war at all. I had come to the point of not understanding why we were there, what we were doing, why? To this day, I can understand why we were there, to a certain degree. But, I remember sitting in a briefing, and there's an officer up there saying, "Well, here's the reason we're in Vietnam." And he went through the whole, you know, the dagger that faced, it went right down into Australia, and the Great Chinese Horde was going to come down and overrun all of Vietnam, and Communism was going to invade the entire Southeast Asia, etc., etc., etc. And I'm sitting there going, *This is nonsense. This is just bullshit*. And anyway…

At that point, right before, it was a couple of days of this, and then I got my orders to go as the operations officer for a newly formed brigade level, which was called the 44th Special Tactical Zone, which was down in the [Mekong] Delta, which was located in a town called Coa Lanh. I was going to replace a man who had just been killed, a captain who had just been killed in the first stages of the Tet Offensive. And I got on a helicopter and got transported out there. While I was flying out, and I can still remember flying out and there you see the B-52 strikes. It's interesting. Here's a river, obviously that's where the B-52s were supposed to hit, they were supposed to hit along that river and whatever targets they were going after. And there out in the rice paddies are all the craters. So, they missed. But there were a considerable number of this.

So I'm flying out, and of course there was still fighting going on, so there was still a lot going on on the ground. I landed, or I didn't land. The helicopter came into the town, hovered above the ground, the crew chief threw my duffel bag out, and said, "You're out of here, sir." I said, "Put it on the ground." "You're out of here, sir. Either you jump out or I'm gonna throw you out." I said, "I'll jump." So I jumped. So here I am standing on the ground, and the helicopter took off right away. So here I am standing on the ground with my duffel bag and that's it, and a sidearm. I think I'd been assigned a .45 which, you know, I can throw it, a .45, at somebody and have a better chance of hitting them than shooting them.

[laughter] So anyway, I'm standing there and all of a sudden I hear, "Pst, pst." And over in the bushes is a Jeep, and there's a sergeant in the Jeep, "Come here, sir. Get in the Jeep. The road is only going to be clear for another hour, and I've gotta get you out of here." So, I throw my stuff in the Jeep and off we go. So that was Vietnam. That's how I ended up where I was.

BLIEK: So you must have landed in Tan Son Nhat Air Base in Saigon?

STANLEY: Tan Son Nhat. Yeah.

BLIEK: What were your impressions of the South Vietnamese soldiers that you were advising?

STANLEY: Oh, you jumped ahead. [laughter]

BLIEK: Oh, okay.

STANLEY: You jumped ahead. I didn't meet any Vietnamese soldiers at all until I got to Coa Lanh.

BLIEK: Okay, let me backtrack, then. So you were supposed to replace an officer who had been killed in action during the Tet Offensive.

STANLEY: I did.

BLIEK: So, given that that you knew what you were getting into, what were your expectations for what you would see on the ground?

STANLEY: Well, I mean, you looked outside and you expected that you were going to get… I didn't know what to expect, quite frankly. I wasn't sure of the—I knew it was mostly Viet Cong down in the area that I was going into that were not North Vietnamese troops, so it was militia level training. I knew that from the aspect of what had happened during the Tet Offensive, which was going on at that time, that there was a lot of mortar and other types of attacks, some ground attacks, mostly being held at night and other kinds of situations. So I knew that. Other than that, I didn't know anything. I didn't know a whole lot about the unit that I was going into. I didn't know how many Americans were involved

in it. I didn't know the kinds of situation that I'd be confronted with when I got on the ground. And that's not at all unusual.

BLIEK: So, what happened then after you got out of the helicopter and got in the Jeep?

STANLEY: Met my commanding officer, whose name was, he was a lieutenant colonel, his last name was Jurasi, and his name that everyone called him was Mal Hombre. So, he'd received a battlefield commission in the Second World War, and subsequently when I was there, General [William C.] Westmoreland came down and pinned the bird on him, so he became—that was Jurasi. So he was all blood-and-guts. And here he is commanding a what was called a MACV unit, which was in a little out of the way place in the Delta. So, I learned very quickly.

So, what had happened was the man who [I] replaced, they had been mortared and he got killed by a mortar in the first days of the—the first day really of the first night of the Tet Offensive. The unit at that particular time, we were—I could have showed you a picture of what we lived in, but it was an old French police area, and there were just concrete buildings with tin roofs on top of them. The primary facility was a lot larger than that. But that's where we were supposed to sleep. Well, no one slept there, because if a mortar round hit the top of the roof, it would pretty much wipe out everybody else that was inside. So everyone was sleeping in bunkers, with flak jackets and helmets. Subsequently, I found that that was exceedingly uncomfortable and we didn't do that anymore.

But we were basically surrounded by the VC [Viet Cong]. We had Vietnamese troops. They weren't really fighting very much at that particular point in time. Our intelligence was poor. This was a new unit that I was involved with. And Colonel Jurasi was hell bent to make sure that we pushed, or the Vietnamese troops pushed and got a larger perimeter for us, so that we could begin our operations. And my job was the operations officer, so I would work with the Vietnamese, plan the operations, and go out on the operations with them. That's what I did.

BLIEK: So, did the perimeter get expanded?

STANLEY: Oh, yes. Yeah, it took a few weeks or a month or so. And this was a fairly small team at the time. This was, you know, yes, we had a couple of majors in there. One was, the guy that I reported to was a major, and then there was one that was an S-1 and S-2 and S-3, and then the colonel. And I think there was an XO [executive officer] involved, but he was an XO that came in later. And then there were non-commissioned officers, as well, a number of NCOs. A few privates. But I think the whole detachment was probably 15 people at that particular point in time.

I showed up as a kind of a—I'd spent time in Germany, I was probably 225 pounds at the time. Had too much beer and black bread in Germany, had a good time. Anyway, within three months I weighed 160 pounds. I ate one meal a day, and that was… there was a Special Forces camp down the road, so if our facility was here, [points at table] this was the same road where I landed and the helicopter was here. We'd drive down the road about a mile and eat at the Special Forces camp, and then come back. And we ended up working with Special Forces a lot.

I could tell you stories for the next four hours, five hours, on what happened during that year that I was there. Some of them… unpleasant, some of them frightening, a lot of them very amusing. But what I ended up, you know, you read what I wrote and which was very short, but I spent a lot of time with the Vietnamese people. I got to know them. I got to appreciate, you know, what they were going through. The longer I was there, the more I disliked the political structure of South Vietnam. The province chief was… completely dishonest and only concerned about himself. He took his best troops, surrounded his compound with those troops. All of the supplies that we would send in to be given to the peasants he would stockpile in his yard, and then sell them to the peasants at exorbitant rates. And that was really distressing, and it just turned the—you know, you're trying to fight under those particular circumstances and the people hate you because they're looking at hands like this that that is what's printed on the crates and things like that. And we're being represented as supporting this basically little warlord that's in charge of the province.

Most of the officers, senior officers had other jobs. They all spoke English well, they usually spoke French, and of course Vietnamese. I was directly advising a major who

turned into a lieutenant colonel. He ran the local ice plant. That was a big deal, because we needed ice for all sorts of things, so his family was well off. So, most of the officers came out of a class of Vietnamese that were significantly above the rest of them. The line officers, the captains, lieutenants, would live with their families, and most of the non-commissioned officers also had their families with them. So if you went—and I spent time with these young officers. So you'd have a room about this size, and there'd be four families living in this room, and there'd be blankets. There'd be a blanket here and blankets there. So those were the four families. Everything went on, a family would do inside of that very non-private space.

And I think, you know, you talk to these young officers and they would say, "You know, Captain, we appreciate what you're doing for us, but you're going home. This is our home. And we're here till the end." So the commitment, the level of commitment, they pretty much realized that—and this was well before it was all over, but they pretty much realized what was going on. And I didn't feel that they were telling me, "Great, we're going to win this war and everything's going to be fine," because it wasn't going to be fine. Regardless of who won, it was not going to be fine for them, because their station in life was not going to change at all as a result of this.

And I learned a lot about the culture, the Vietnamese culture. You know, most of my time in the field was with the Vietnamese. I ate with them, slept with them, fought with them, understood completely why they didn't want to fight at times. You know, they were, well, not ill-equipped, but pretty much unprepared and they didn't have the deep commitment for what they were doing, as opposed to the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese that had a passion for what they were doing in doing that.

There was a significant amount of terror involved in what went on. You know, you spent… Everyone knows, of course, heard about some of the things that the Americans have done. Well, there was a tremendous amount of terror from the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese back against their own people. To give you a specific example, we were called—there'd been an attack on a village one day, and we got on a river—we spent a lot of time on river boats, as well. So if you saw *Apocalypse Now*, for example, aside from the

"[Ride] of the Valkyries," you know, [Richard] Wagner's piece and the American flag flying off the back, a lot of the stuff that happened in that movie actually did happen.

Anyway, we got on the river boats and we went down, and got to this village. And what the people had done in that area to protect themselves, they all came into the village at night, and then they all slept in a metal building about the size of that open area out there. And the Viet Cong had lobbed a satchel charge, and satchel charges were, they were about that big and that big and that big of all explosives, and then they had wire fuses back in against that, and then actually put a berm between the other charge, and then detonate the charge behind it. That would send the satchel charge in. Well, the satchel charge came in and hit the top of the roof, came through the roof and exploded inside, killing many, many people. And I walked in. I remember I walked into the village and was met by two dogs coming down, and they had human bones, parts, in their mouths as they were coming out of this village. And we were pulling people out of that building, and every single bone in their body was broken. That particular village basically catapulted over to the other side right after that. They just didn't want any more of that. They wanted to live their life in peace, and whatever peace they could find. But there clearly was terrorism on both sides, and you'd see it all the time.

You know, there was torture. The culture was different in the sense that if you were in control, you basically did what you needed to do. So there was one day I was going past and I heard these screams coming from this area and I walked in and there were a couple of the—well, more than a couple of the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] soldiers and they were torturing a peasant in there who they claimed was Viet Cong. And I told them to stop. And I went to get an officer. I wasn't 20 feet down from that area and then they started it all over again. And it wasn't really for any other reason than just something to do. I got the officer, the officer did virtually nothing about it.

You know, so that was the first wave. We finally got things pushed back and we started more aggressive operations. And then things changed. Then the big influx of—this was in the latter part of 1968, we had an engineer platoon that came in and started building facilities for the advisory team and for others. So we had been living inside of this little

compound. I'm leaving out a lot of very amusing stories, too. You know, you're living like this… I'll tell you a couple. So you're living with everybody else and you're doing a couple of things different. So, for showers we constructed– it was like an outhouse but it was bigger than an outhouse, and to heat the water, basically you had an outhouse, so you defecated in the outhouse. And then we would pull that out and pour JP-4 gasoline on it and light it, and we had copper tubes that ran around and that would heat the water to give us a halfway decent warm shower. [laughter] I remember these stories as I think about it.

Finally, the engineer platoon came in and they built us a shower facility. The Vietnamese are very sweet people, and they're shy until they know you, and they're modest. You wouldn't expect that, and if I told you other stories about how they were. I mean, the men, for example—this was another aspect of things that I learned very, very quickly. So, the person I advised, and we're going and he said, "Well, I need to show you Coa Lanh." I said "okay." So, I'm walking with him. All of a sudden I feel his hand on my hand. He wanted to hold hands with me. You know, I'm not homophobic, but I was going, *What's going on here?* And I remember the feeling and I'm going, *Should I pull my hand? No. No, you just got to observe what's going on here*. So I just left my hand there, and we walked along, and there were other men walking along hand in hand as well, so I figured, *Well, that's the way they are, so that's the way I'll be*.

And then, I would go in—and there's another part of the story which I'll tell you, but it was another part of my job, at night I would call in all of the damage and reports, etc., and that's a big part of what I did. But the Vietnamese troops were there, and some of the Vietnamese, even the young lieutenants and some of the sergeants, etc. were there, as well. And they'd roll out their rice mats, and they'd all sleep together, not sleep together, just next to each other, just in a great big ball sometimes just to keep warm, so they'd just kind of all sleep together like you would with your brother or your sister when you were a little kid. That's the way they were. You know, you can culturally say *well, that's not right*. But, it was right for them, and there wasn't anything else going on, and that was the way things were. And I found they were…

But they were curious, too. So, when we finally got a shower facility built, these were all men, so they didn't really care, so they built the shower facility so there was a wall that came up to about the height of that cabinet, and then there was screens above that. No, there weren't any screens. It was open. And then a roof over the top because it rained a lot there. And then the showers come out. We still, by the way, we still use the same facilities to keep the… Well, the women that would come in to do work at the camp wanted to find out—often you'd look up and there's a whole group of women looking in at you, [laughter] and you're naked standing there taking a shower. They just wanted to check you out to see whether you were the same as their boyfriends and husbands. So, you know, and they'd be laughing and then they'd just walk off. But that was typical stuff. You know, they were such wonderful people to be with, and I learned so much from them in the sense of, you know, you learn from the perspective of you're in a different culture. The way you were brought up and what you learned was right or wrong. And that's necessarily the way it is in reality, and you've got to be perceptive enough to understand that. And it helped me considerably.

My Vietnamese also would love to take me out on an exercise, and we would be out in the field and they'd always cook. And they'd go, [speaks in Vietnamese] "You eat first." And I said, "What are we going to eat?" "We tell you after you eaten." "Okay." And so I would eat whatever they prepared, and then they would eat it, too. But I ate everything. So, you name the animal or insect or rodent, ate 'em all. The only thing that got me, and they thought this was really funny… so one day they come and they said, "We make good soup for you." I said, "The soup is red." "Yes, it's very good. It's very good for you that way." "Okay." And I take it and it had these lumps in it. It was blood.

BLIEK: Yeah, pig's blood.

STANLEY: Pig's blood. Yep. It was pig's blood, and they'd scraped the fat off and dumped the fat in. That did it for me. You know, I went over and vomited it, and they just thought that was the funniest thing in the world. [laughter] So, you've had that?

BLIEK: I wasn't that adventurous, but I was pressured into trying the fertilized duck egg. So, I had that. I had durian, which was distinctly unpleasant. Didn't enjoy that very much.

STANLEY: No. It's tough. But, you know, subsequently a lot of my career was spent in other cultures with other people and, you know, it helps to… You learn how to do those things. Anyway.

BLIEK: Why don't we wrap it up here for today, because I think it's getting close to 5:00 and I mentioned that you had to go. So, let me just push pause for now.

[Pause in recording]

Good afternoon. This is Bryan Bliek back with Mr. Neal Stanley, in the Rauner Special Collections Library for part two of our interview. So, Neal, yesterday we had a bit of a chance to talk about some of your frustrations in your capacity as an ARVN advisor while the recorder was off. So I was hoping we could pick up our conversation on those fronts. Two things you had mentioned to me were your frustrations with some top down regulations on the kinds of armament you were allowed to have on your riverine boats, and another frustration you had mentioned to me was this one instance of a staged parachute drop for the press. So I was hoping we could pick up our conversation from there.

STANLEY: Okay. I can't recall exactly what we talked about yesterday for the recording, but specifically the parachute drop was a battalion sized ARVN unit that were dropped. And this was all staged for the press. So, the drop occurred. The planes flew in and everyone jumped, got on the ground, and then immediately marched, after they were on the ground, and they did a few things to assume positions and things of that nature. But there was really no, there was no critical tactical reason why that had occurred, because at that point, they all got on two-and-a-half ton trucks and got moved to the area where they were going to start their operation. So, there was no necessity to do this. They could have easily gotten put on the deuce-and-a-half's four and five miles back, and then taken to wherever they needed to go. But it was the drama of this big parachute drop that really was the propaganda portions of what we were doing.

Now I recognize that there's propaganda all over the place and in every war and every side does it. It's just frustrating when you see that kind of money being wasted and time being wasted under the circumstances that were completely

unnecessary. And people got injured in the drop. And there's no reason for things like that. So that's frustrating when you go through that. And it was difficult enough to get the ARVN forces to fight at times, and if they feel they're doing something that is quite frankly unnecessary, it's one more reason for them not to participate.

You know, there were lots of other things that would come up. Basically, when you're in a combat situation, there are going to be things that are going to be done, or in a situation where you're in a war, so if you, I think we mentioned yesterday or maybe I mentioned last night, you know, if you've read *Catch-22* or you've watched *M*A*S*H* on television, a lot of the *M*A*S*H* incidents, you think, *well, those things really didn't happen*. But yes, they did really happen. Things of that nature happened all the time. The frustrations that you see Hawkeye and others going through and try to understand what this war was all about, the Korean War in that particular case, very similar circumstances happened in the Vietnam War.

And, you know, the *Catch-22* things where you're just in a mad cap arena of death all around you, and you're trying to deal with that, and it becomes, you know, things happen that you really, you just can't believe that things are going on the way they're going on and the people are getting maimed and killed around you, and you seem to be whole. You're whole in body, but your brain is soaking in all of this stuff, and it affects you over a period of time. Fortunately I didn't have any significant post-traumatic effect of the war, but I know a lot of people had, and a lot of my classmates had it who served in Vietnam, and often in circumstances where they were engaged in a lot more significant combat than I was.

BLIEK: I think the specific word you used yesterday was "demoralizing," that the sort of experience of looking at these unnecessary photo ops and certain other decisions from the top down was demoralizing. Were there other incidences that were demoralizing to you?

STANLEY: Well, you know, maybe I overstated it. I wasn't really demoralized in the sense of that. You're dealing with… Let me give you a specific example, and this didn't have anything to do with combat. It just had to do with the nature of leadership. And you recognize that there are good leaders and there are bad leaders. Unfortunately, in a situation

where people's lives are at stake, you can't really afford to have a bad leader. But, we had some. And I'll give you a very—it's a little off color, but I'll go through the incident. Where I was stationed, we really didn't get USO troops coming in there, so we didn't have Bob Hope show up or somebody else, regardless of that. I think after I left, Martha Raye, and you probably don't know who Martha Raye was, but she was a singer actually in the '40s. She must have been close to 70 or 75 by the time she was over there. But, she came in after I was gone.

But they brought in this, we found out they were going to bring in this group from Thailand. Well, we knew exactly—the officers knew exactly what this group was. It was basically strippers, and pretty explicit kind of stuff was going to go on. Well, we had—the colonel was gone, so we had a lieutenant colonel who, you know, he was a nice man, but I think he'd played football his entire time that he was in the Army. He was a very good quarterback. But I think he went into the line too many times with his helmet off, because he invited—[laughter] I'm thinking about this, I just can't believe it happened—he invited the people we were advising and their wives to this event, and had them installed on a big stage, and the other part of the stage were these entertainers and they were all these Thai girls and a rock 'n roll band of questionable performance capability. But anyway, they were there. And you could watch—I mean, my friend and I were standing there watching this, and we just couldn't, you know, it was to the point we just didn't even want to view it because we knew how it basically insulted these people would be. And these women were intelligent, they were cultured, most of them had gone to school in France or England and they were—you know, this was not—you know, why would you invite them to come to this? And this was one of our senior officers doing this.

Thank God it rained. It started to rain. And there was no covering over the top. And by the way, these women were beautifully dressed. And it started to rain, and their hair was all done up. [laughter] And fortunately, that gave them the opportunity to leave. The show went on with the girls in see-through raincoats, plastic raincoats. It was, you know, you're standing there shaking your heading going, *What are we doing this for?* And it's really not demoralizing. It's just saying, *This is absolutely stupid*, and it is not, you know, I can understand why it may be important to have some type

of show like that, but to invite people that are going to be embarrassed by that kind of activity is craziness. That's just a minor example.

In the field, you know, we had trouble getting our ARVN troops to fight, and I'm not sure whether we talked about this yesterday or whether I spoke about it last night. But, we had trouble getting them to fight. And I understood that. And I'll digress a little bit here by saying that I got to know the—and Bryan, stop me if I'm repeating something here—I got to know a lot of the junior officers. Did I talk about this yesterday?

BLIEK: Briefly, yes.

STANLEY: Yes, I did. I remember. I told you how they lived and things like that. And, you know, their concern was, you know, *You're gonna be gone, but we're gonna stay here*. And I talked to you about that yesterday.

BLIEK: Yeah.

STANLEY: The point was that most of these, you know, the troops knew that. The troops knew that we were going to be leaving and somebody else would come back in, and they were, quite frankly it didn't make any difference to them who. And some of them told me this. They just wanted the war over so that they could get back to their lives. And if they could avoid getting killed in the process, that was what they wanted to do. So their officers would not push them into a position where they were afraid they were going to take too many casualties or any casualties. And on the other hand, as I think I mentioned yesterday, but I can say it again, is the fact that we were pretty sure that every operations plan that we put out was given to the Viet Cong at some point in time prior to the operation going on. So, those things were clearly there. I think we went through that yesterday, though.

BLIEK: You did mention this feeling that the Vietnamese knew that they weren't going home as long as you were, but I don't think you really talked about how you felt that the Viet Cong were going to end up with your mission plan, so if you'd like to talk a bit about that…

STANLEY: We finally got to the point where we didn't share anything. If we were going to conduct an operation, a lot of the key

points that the support that we were going to receive from the US military, whether it be air support or artillery support, we did not discuss a lot of that, discussed none of it really, at least at a—we might do it at a high level, but certainly not at a detailed level of what we were going to use. Because 9 times out of 10, or 10 times out of 10, there wouldn't be anyone there at the point in time. We'd have all the intelligence done, we'd know where the force was that we were going to encounter, and they were gone. So it's pretty clear that the information was going from one place to another. And, you know, I've talked to other advisors in other areas and other people, and quite frankly the infiltration, the National Liberation Front infiltration into the ARVN battalions was pretty high, even at high levels, and we had a lot of local Vietnamese that came onto our post, and whether there's the woman that's helping clean up or the man that's cutting your hair or the person that's doing your laundry, you're exposed to the national population. And there was very little done to really screen these people significantly. So you were pretty clear—I was fairly sure that virtually everything that we did was pretty well communicated, at least at the point in time when I was there, back to the VC.

BLIEK: So, did this distrust of your ARVN partners hamper their effectiveness or damage their morale?

STANLEY: No, no, no. I mean, I think they understood that we weren't going to communicate that. But if there was a significant problem that they felt that they were being shut out in an operation where they needed to know, and remember that we were still advisors. We didn't have… Yes, we fought. Yes, we were exposed just as their troops were exposed. But, without their forces, we couldn't do anything, or we could do very little. So, if they felt we were conducting the operations on our own, yes, there'd be some—there were… and that happened a couple of times where we came in and started dictating how things were going to be done, and there were some repercussions as far as that was concerned. That was always done at the higher level. It was not done down with the junior officers at all, but it was done with the senior officers that we were advising. So they did get upset, yes.

BLIEK: In your capacity as an advisor, what did your idea of success look like, if you had one?

STANLEY: Well, when I first got there, it was pretty easy to understand what success was. Success was clearing enough so that you could sleep at night, that the town itself could operate at least as it needed to operate for the people that were there. So we did measure our success that way, so that our area of operation continued to grow and we were more secure in the environment in which we lived on a daily basis. As time went on, success was measured in KIAs and casualties, and recovery of weapons and other kinds of things. So, one of my jobs, each night we'd come back from an operation if we were on an operation, or if they weren't on an operation, just in a plan, my job was to poll all—on the radio, poll all of the units that were part of the 44th Special Tactical Zone. So I would poll all of them for all the operations that were going on, and they would come back and give me a casualty count. So it was… Viet Cong, North Vietnamese—we didn't have a lot of North Vietnamese—but, enemy, let's just put it that way, our enemy deaths and casualties; prisoners captured, always very few of those because they killed most of them; and supplies, stores, weapons captured. And then, similarly for friendly forces.

Well, after doing this for about a month, it became pretty clear that the number of casualties on the other side were significant, and the number of casualties on our side were very small, in retrospect. And the weapons that we found were starting to look very similar. So, in other words, you'd get a report of a weapons cache and you've got so many machine guns and so many AK-47s, and even so many Springfield rifles. I always used to laugh when I'd get something for a Springfield rifle. I mean, Springfield rifles were probably used in the Civil War. And it became abundantly clear that the information was falsified.

And then, there was no distinction between whether or not the casualty on the other side was a civilian or an actual combatant. And point of fact, a good portion of them were civilians that had, they were just killed, and they were supposed to be combatants. Now, civilians get killed in war. I understand that and appreciate it. It's, you know, in every war that we've had, every war that is ever conducted, almost the highest number of casualties are civilians that have nothing to do with it. You hear the term, "collateral damage," and they are collateral damage. Sometimes that collateral damage is significant. That's very concerning.

So, when you talk about measuring success, that's how the Army measured success. It measured success on being able to obtain certain tactical objectives. So, we were in a place that was the agricultural area and a lot of rice growing for all of Southeast Asia in the Mekong Delta, and then there was an enormous area of just, they called it the Plain of Reeds, and it was an area almost swampy in some respects, but not really swampy, just very high grasses. And then, inside of that there was an area called the Seven Mountains region. Well, the Seven Mountains were a tactical—they wanted to gain the high ground and capture those seven mountains. So we conducted a significant number of operations against that particular objective. Success would have been measured in being able to take that objective and maintain it and hold it. So we would conduct air strikes, we would conduct combat operations against that. The problem was that that area was so littered—not littered, but there were caves. It was an easily defended position, so a battalion sized unit could easily defend their positions in there and move from one area to another area with the caves that were inside of the mountains. So we never took them, at least during the time that I was there.

So you're constantly running out and fighting against something that you're not able to obtain really. So, whether you use the term "demoralizing" or you've seen movies or read stories or read accounts of—and it happened in Vietnam. It happened if you watched the Vietnam series and you see where we're trying to take hill after hill, and we take it and then someone takes it back, and we come in and take it again. It's this constant… And that happened in the Second World War, it happened in Korea, it happened in Vietnam, it's happening again in Afghanistan and Iraq, the same situation. So, it's very frustrating for the guy on the ground who's fighting for these particular positions and realize that you worked and lost men and lost people in combat to gain a 400 foot advantage over somebody else, and then two weeks later, you're back doing the same thing again because they took it back from you. And you really wonder, *Why are we doing this?* So the person on the ground is questioning the strategic decisions of those that are above them. So, you know, that becomes a problem.

Fortunately, I only had to spend a year there. If I were like the Vietnamese and had to spend my entire adult life fighting those kinds of situations, you'd get demoralized. You had the

chance of getting very demoralized, especially if you kept losing. And that was the case with the ARVN troops. And you're fighting a group of people that were committed. They were 100% committed to what they were doing. They weren't afraid to die. They believed in a cause, and I'm talking about the National Liberation Front or Viet Cong. Viet Cong was a word that we invented. But, they were committed to that, and they were going to do whatever it needed to be, including giving their own lives to the process that was going on. So, yeah, it was pretty clear when I was there. And it got more clear as time went on.

BLIEK: Yesterday you also mentioned that your operations also extended to the riverine system in the Delta, correct?

STANLEY: Right.

BLIEK: Can you talk a little bit more about what the nature of your operations on the river were?

STANLEY: Well, first of all, a lot of the roads were intersected, so you had difficulty moving troops and others on roads. First of all, there was the rain, so there was mud and there was difficulty, especially in the rainy season. So we used the river systems to be able to move troops. It was fast. The Swift Boats would move quickly through the water so that you could move operations quickly through. You could move, you know, with the right level of security, you could move large bodies of troops if you needed to using the rivers. And they were the primary means of transportation for all of the goods that were flowing through that region, which was primarily rice. So it was a huge rice growing area. And it really provided a lot of other things. It provided fish. It provided the commerce that was going on inside of that. So, the river systems were critically important in maintaining and keeping them open. The other part was troop movements and moving people from one place to another quickly. So, control of the rivers was important. Control of the area around those rivers was important.

Some of the clandestine operations that we would do. Sometimes we'd move by helicopter and do night drops. We talked a little bit yesterday about working in Cambodia. So, we would do night drops, and then move into Cambodia, basically to observe and understand what was going on in the movement of troops and supplies through Cambodia into

Vietnam. So, that was the basically the Ho Chi Minh Trail as it was referred to. And then there was certain other operations where we would use the Swift Boats to move us up into a position, and then be able to work our way across inside of that, work our way after we got off of those boats and into the system.

Using river boats was like anything else, it was you were exposed often to, you were coming down narrower parts of rivers with vegetation on both sides, and you could be easily ambushed under that circumstance. Fortunately, I was never in a—I came to the rescue of those that had been ambushed under those circumstances, and it was pretty horrifying, because you were basically totally exposed, and they'd normally take out the boat in front and take out the boat in the back, and then you're just sitting out there in the river, and it's very difficult to be able to see where the enemy is. And of course, if it's decent weather and it's during the day, you can bring in air strikes and that would be your only savior, or some artillery if artillery was close by. But the air strikes were difficult because… Yeah, I was responsible for coordinating air strikes, as well, if there were planes available. Our planes were primarily used for American troops. We had the ARVN Air Force, and they were questionable, and then we also had access to US airpower, but we didn't have a priority. So if you got trapped in an ambush, you know, you'd call in whatever you could get to be able to assist you. So, that was the situation.

BLIEK: Did being able to call in air support and artillery support make a difference on the ground?

STANLEY: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. I mean, we couldn't have, in many, many cases could not have survived without that, in most cases couldn't have survived without it. Air superiority was the difference, because again, when you're in an ambush in a jungle, the person that's trying to kill you could be over there by that door, which is maybe 15 meters away, and you can't see them, you hope they can't see you, but they normally can, and so, even calling in an air strike against someone that is that close to you, collateral damage—not collateral damage—well, collateral damage could happen, but the other part is friendly fire, you could easily kill your own troops or kill yourself with friendly fire.

It was interesting last night, or yesterday, I was talking with a friend of mine, and he was an artillery forward observer, and he was explaining some of the things that went on when he was there. It was before me. And you know that if you call in artillery, the deviation is 15% plus or minus. Well, 15% could mean, when you're 50 meters away from somebody, could mean that 15% of the bombs are going to hit you, as opposed to where they're intended to hit. So, there were instances in his tour of duty where he'd be calling in artillery fire and recognizing that he had to worry about his own safety plus the safety of the troops he was supporting. But, yes, airpower was critically important.

And I can give you another specific example of that. This was before Tet of 1969, but we had been hearing through our intelligence that there was another attack being built up against our headquarters in Coa Lanh, which was, I mean, trying to defend this position was virtually impossible. There was there no wall around it. There was a fence around it, but there was no wall around it, and you could easily get into it. I mean, there was a gate in the front, you know, but any large vehicle could run through the gate. And we got attacked. So, it started off with mortars, and then movement on three of our flanks with troops coming in basically through the city and through the rice paddies into our position. And we were very concerned, because we thought we were going to be overrun. I mean, first of all, we didn't have a lot of firepower inside of it. We had, at that particular point in time, our units, the ARVN units were out in the field, out on another operation, so really what we had at that particular point were the garrison troops that we had there. Interestingly, the province chief who was down the street over here, he had a lot of troops, but he wouldn't allocate any of those troops to help us.

Well, lo and behold we were able to call in air support in the form—and this was, and you probably read it, and that was what was currently called the "Puff the Magic Dragon" [AC-47 gunship], and basically that was a couple of Gatlings inside of a—I can't remember the nomenclature of the plane that was used. But it came in, and you could watch the tracers come down, it was just like rain coming down with the tracers hitting the ground, and then we were moving him back and forth over where we needed to be, and they were just circling and continuing to do that. That's what ended it. And that drove the enemy back, and it was over. So, if it

hadn't been for that instance, we never would have survived, or we would have had some real problems, let's put it that way.

BLIEK: So, in the aftermath of that, did you have to go out and make the casualty count and that sort of thing?

STANLEY: Yeah. Yes, yeah, we did. And it was significant. And that was actual. I mean, you could… And again, though, there was collateral—there were collateral damage deaths. There was no question about that. There were peasants that were out there, there were others that were killed as a result of the attack, and whether they were killed as a result of what we did or what the Viet Cong did, you couldn't tell, but most likely it was us.

BLIEK: Could you tell me more about what you observed the impact of the war to be on the civilians in Coa Lanh?

STANLEY: Well, it was not just Coa Lanh. It was all over. Some of the people were successful as a result of that. I mean, there were, you know, the entrepreneurs were able to make money and do things, so they benefitted and profited by the fact that the Americans were there and the Americans were buying things from them, buying their services, other kinds of things. So, there was that group. School went on. Just, things happened as the daily routine continued each day. The young women and young boys would go to school. It was really quite a sight to see, especially the young men were normally dressed, I believe, if I remember correctly, in black pants and white shirts, and the women had the black pants and white conical hats. This was Ao Doi. And it was white normally. And they would go to school each day, and it was kind of pleasant to watch them walking along going to school. So everything, you know, those kinds of things. So, the superficial things continued over that.

But there was the constant fear among the local populace that they were going to get drawn into some type of firefight, some type of situation. So you're living inside of a situation that could explode at any point in time. Now, it was pretty clear that they knew if something was going to happen. If there was going to be an attack by the Viet Cong, they knew about it, and they could take action to protect themselves. We didn't attack them. We didn't conduct—now, we did conduct operations out in the provinces, and there was a lot

more of what went on out there. We were conducting operations against particular village areas because that's where the Viet Cong lived and basically operated out of, so that was clearly that was going on. But in the city itself… it was, Coa Lanh was a very small city. It was a province capital, but it was still small. The people pretty much lived a usual life, with the other kinds of things that would go on as I just mentioned. You know, you'd be concerned about what was happening around you because there was always the chance that you were going to get involved in a firefight or some type of military action.

BLIEK: And as you said, people did get killed in the crossfire?

STANLEY: Yes, they did.

BLIEK: What would these operations against the provincial villages entail?

STANLEY: Normally you would go in, you would determine whether or not a village was friendly or not. If it was not friendly, you'd try to find out what was going on, where the… Let's put it this way. Did I tell you the story about my interpreter going into the Viet Cong village?

BLIEK: No, I don't think so.

STANLEY: Okay. And I'll use this as an example of what went on in these villages. So, after I'd been there for a while, we needed a place. We were at the end of the supply line, so to speak, so we would get beer delivered to us. Well, we always got Ballantine beer, because Ballantine beer came in steel cans, and steel cans rusted. So, all of the beer that we got, no one else wanted a Ballantine because you're just drinking out of a rusty can. We got that. So, there'd be pallet loads of—you know, a helicopter would come in and drop a pallet load or a truck would come in and drop a pallet load of beer off for us, or sodas or other kinds of things. And I didn't drink while I was there, but I finally decided, you know, *We need something more than just hanging out, so we'll build something. So we'll build a little hootch, and then that'll be a place that people can go and just sit and talk*.

Well, I decided you need something on the floor. It got muddy and stuff like that in the wintertime. So, we'd get some rice mats. So I went to my interpreter and I said,

"Tuan, I need some rice mats." Said, "No problem." This is in the middle of the day, and he said, "I know exactly where to go." Okay. "We'll take my Jeep. Do I need a weapon?" "Oh, no, no, no. Perfectly safe." "Okay." Get in the Jeep, drive out, drive through town, drive over a bridge, drive over another bridge, pull into a village and there's a big canopy over this village of vegetation, trees, and other things. And we pull in and look around, and no men here. There were a lot of older women and children, but no men, no young women. And he gets out of the Jeep and says, "Be right back." So I'm standing there, and I became the center of attention because there were a number of old women and children that were just standing there and staring at me. They didn't smile. They just stared, and looked at me. And I'm standing there in my fatigues. I didn't even have a helmet on. I said, *This is not good at all*. I figured this was not good, so I finally go over and I find him negotiating over to try to buy a rice mat, and he was arguing over 50 piasters, 50 P. At that time, 50 P was worth nothing. I said, "Pay the lady and we're getting out of here." "Oh, no, no, no. I have to get a good deal." I said, "We're leaving now. Pay her. We're going." And, so we go and come back.

And that night I went down, and I normally made my rounds, I went down to the Ranger battalion that was attached to us, and I went up to the advisor that was advising this battalion, and I said, "Hey, you know, I bought some rice mats today in a village," and then I described where I went. He said, "You were there?" I said, "Yeah, I was there this afternoon." He said, "We get fire from them every single night. That's a VC village." So, we knew which were villages of VC and which weren't. So, you'd go into a village and try to determine where the men were. And often that was interrogation that would go on. I didn't—if I were on one of those, I wouldn't allow anyone to torture people and try to get them… I know that that happened. There were instances also where people were captured or killed, and the village was burned. Personally, I wasn't involved in any of that, nor did it happen when I was there. But I know that it did occur.

And all that, it really cemented the hatred for, again, the government, government troops, and also the Americans who were there. So, it just hardened the attitude of the individual villages. And you gotta understand, we really didn't control a lot of that space. That space was controlled by Viet Cong. We controlled areas, specifically cities, but once you

got outside of those cities, it was pretty much, in a lot of cases it was a free fire zone, as well. So, if you saw any movement out there, then whatever the movement was must have been a—and if you were living in a free fire zone, you were told, or you were supposed to be told, that you needed to get out of that area. But, you know, how are you going to move a whole group of people off of land?

And a lot of the people that you'd, at the time I was there you'd go into these villages, and these villages had not changed a lot in 500 years. I'd been in villages where there were no metal implements at all. They used bamboo and wood, had some oxen that they would use, or they'd tend the fields themselves and till the fields themselves, pulling that. And it was all rice farming. So yes, there clearly was that kind of thing going on, and went on when I was there.

BLIEK: How did you end up in Cambodia?

STANLEY: I was told to go there. There was an ARVN Ranger unit, and I was, at that particular time I was doing some work with a Special Forces group, and the Special Forces went over there. Then again it was interdiction. It wasn't significant, other than the sense that I was there. I got brought there by, in two cases, one that we were air dropped in; the second case we went in by boat. We came to specific spots, and it was right along the [Ho Chi Minh] Trail. We were trying to determine whether or not, you know, what was actually going on. We were not carrying out any specific attack or other kind of mission, although that did occur. The ones that I was involved in was strictly observation. And then we were picked up either the following morning or day, or we were picked up a couple days after that.

But, there was clearly—I mean, I read the press. The press said, "We're not in Cambodia." *Well, where was I yesterday?* [laughter] I was in Cambodia. So it was clear that we were there. And that happens all the time and I can understand that, you know. You're not going to disclose all of your plans. But the point was, you know, you either don't have to say anything at all, or it was just another example of, you know, tell the truth, you know, here we are and what we're doing. It was difficult for us, as I indicated before. We knew where the supplies were coming. We knew where the troops were coming from. But we could do very little other than observe to be able to change that situation.

There were attacks by Special Forces, by some of the South Vietnamese forces, and also by Montagnards further north on that supply line that was running through Cambodia, but not that significant. Now, ours was basically coming out. It was the tail end of the line, so to speak, so it was coming out, then getting on the rivers and being able to move, or being able to move through the country. And that was another part. You asked about supplies for the Viet Cong were moved down the rivers, so you're intercepting other craft, disguised normally as fishermen and other types of things, to try to determine whether or not they were carrying weapons with them. So that's how I was in Cambodia.

BLIEK: And did you participate in those maritime inspections?

STANLEY: I did.

BLIEK: And were you in any situations where you did discover arms caches?

STANLEY: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah, we did. Not that often, but… And I wasn't involved in that many of them. So, you know, that happened.

BLIEK: What would happen if you did discover an arms cache?

STANLEY: Normally the Special Forces or the Navy would take over the guys that were there that were in the fishing boat, and they'd be turned over to the Vietnamese Army and they'd be interrogated at that point. They weren't killed, at least the ones that—immediately, the ones that I was with, because they were more interested in the intelligence that they were going to gain from them. But clearly, you know, you'd pick them up and try to find out as much information as you possibly could about where they came from.

BLIEK: Was it strange knowing that you were in Cambodia as part of this kind of a secret war?

STANLEY: No. It wasn't strange. I mean, it was strange in the sense—I mean, it wasn't any… Listen, you could be in Cambodia or you could be in Vietnam, you wouldn't know the difference. I mean, the terrain was exactly the same. I didn't really think about it a lot. And again, I more or less went because I was curious about what was going on, and knew that I could get somebody to take me there with them on a mission. But not

really—I didn't get into the deep political situation of why we were there and what we were doing. It was more of that kind of thing. But I knew that we… And it really wasn't our mission. See, that was the other part. It wasn't my mission to go over there. It was really, that was really handled by Special Forces, and we were attached to a Special Forces unit, so we got to know some of the people inside of it and I went with them under those circumstances. But it was really their mission to spend their time there, and they did.

BLIEK: What was your impression of the Special Forces?

STANLEY: Whose impression?

BLIEK: Yours.

STANLEY: Oh, they were good. They did things that many others would not want to do. I mean, they risked a lot on a constant basis. They were a little bit crazy, a little bit—not a little bit—quite a bit fatalistic about what they did and how they did it. They were very secretive in the sense that they were conducting operations. There were only Americans in the unit. There might be a few Vietnamese in the unit that would assist them, but those Vietnamese were pretty tightly controlled and vetted so that they were pretty sure that they were friendlies. But we didn't have anything to do with their operations, other than they would report to us every once in a while. So, they had a whole separate chain of command that they would report to. My chain of command was basically ARVN forces and through the MACV structure. The Special Forces operated totally on their own.

BLIEK: Did your time in Vietnam end after your posting in Cambodia, or was there something that came after that?

STANLEY: I'm not sure I understand what you mean.

BLIEK: So, when did you leave the Army? Was that right after you…

STANLEY: I left the Army. I came back to San Francisco, I was cashiered out right there in Oakland, and I was done.

BLIEK: Yeah, so was that right after your posting…

STANLEY: I got off the plane, went through that, and I was out of the Army.

BLIEK: Okay. So, when did you actually leave Vietnam?

STANLEY: Right after Tet 1969, so in February of ’69. I could get the exact date for you, but I don’t have it here.

BLIEK: Was it difficult transitioning out of military life and back into civilian life?

STANLEY: Yeah. Yes, it was. I mean, in the sense that you’re leaving a chaotic situation. And here’s the way it works, or it worked for me anyway. So, everyone had their little short timer calendar, and depending upon the calendar you had, it was—I just marked off the days. Others colored in certain things, and I won’t go into that. But, you pretty much were, you knew when you were going to leave, and you knew when your orders were up and you’d be able to go. And you’d worry. You’d worry about going out in an operation. You know, normally you wouldn’t worry. Yes, you worry, but you don’t want to die or get seriously injured two days before you’re ready to go. So, there is a lot of tension involved in that at that particular point in time.

And the way it worked for us was, we didn’t go to Saigon and go to a relocation center and then get sent home. That wasn’t the way it worked. A helicopter came in, picked you up, took you to, in my case Tan Son Nhat Air Force Base, you were dropped off, you were assigned to—you sat in a hangar for a while, got on a plane and flew home. And that was it. So, today you’re fighting. Tomorrow you’re back in the United States again. So, that whole situation is, you know, you’re *okay, it’s relief, relief that I’m home, relief that I survived it.*

And of course, at that particular time, 1969, no one liked American soldiers in the United States—well, not no one, but there was great protests against American soldiers at that particular point in time. So, the faster you could get out of your uniform and not have to endure a lot of angry people, and the anger directed at you, or it didn’t need to be directed at you but was directed at you, the better off it would be for you. So, frankly, my anxiety was expressed in just trying to get back home. And at that particular point in time, my wife was living in Washington, DC, so I got out, I immediately had an airplane take me to—and within, I don’t think I even—I can’t remember whether I stayed in a hotel that night. I think

I did, but I can't recall—and flew immediately back to Washington, DC, and then tried to get my life re-established. And it was difficult at that time.

I had been, while I was in Vietnam, I had been accepted at law school, so I knew I was going to go to law school, but that wasn't until… I got out the end of February, law school started in September, so I had all that period of time to figure out what I was going to do and what we were going to do. What ended up happening is I went and visited my family, I went and visited my wife's family, and then we drove across the country back to San Francisco, and found a place to live, and then I went to work at a job until I got into law school. My wife was a schoolteacher, so she found a job, as well. So, that was basically…

What I tried to do was basically acclimatize myself as much as I possibly could. I think it was very helpful to be back with my family again, see my family and talk with them. You know, there was some… My mother and my wife at the time didn't get along real well, so that was, you know, there was some difficulty there, but that was resolved and, well, it wasn't resolved, it was never resolved, but at least things got—it calmed down once I was home. And it took a while. It took a while for me to just… I didn't talk about Vietnam. People would know that I was there. My employers would know I was there, because, you know, I had to put it in my employment records and things like that. But, people really didn't ask me a whole lot about it, and if they did, I didn't—I'd just tell them, "I don't care to talk about it. I'm just happy to be home. I'd rather do my job." And that was that. And that went on for quite a while.

BLIEK: One of the things that you mentioned was that there was a lot of hostility in 1969 towards American soldiers returning from the war. Did you encounter any of that firsthand?

STANLEY: There were people… Well, in a sense, yes, I did. There were people jeering and screaming at us when we got off the plane, yeah. But I didn't have anyone confront me, no.

BLIEK: Another thing that you mentioned earlier today was that there had been other people that you knew had a much more difficult time readjusting, coming back to the United States after their tour.

STANLEY: Uh-huh.

BLIEK: And I was hoping you might be able to talk about that a little bit more.

STANLEY: Well, one of my fraternity brothers, you may or may not have interviewed him, his name was Lee [A.] Chilcote ['64]. Did you interview him?

BLIEK: I didn't, but I know he's been interviewed.

STANLEY: Yeah. Lee had a really tough time. He was there a little bit before I was. He was also, he was going to law school in San Francisco at the same time, different school, but we knew each other. It was hard for Lee. He was in a Marine, an artillery base up in I Corps, which was the northern area of South Vietnam, and endured a lot of very, very difficult, you know, constant, constant artillery fire from the North Vietnamese into his position, and threats of being overrun and other kinds of situations where lack of sleep, a lot of people dying around him. And he had difficulty adjusting. He was still a little bit, even though he'd been back about a year, there were still problems that he… You know, I'm not going to share what he told me, because that's his business to talk about if he wishes to. But, he did say that he was having a lot of trouble just trying to adjust and having sleeping problems and other things of that nature.

In fact, I talked with another friend of mine yesterday, and he had some pretty—he was the forward observer that I mentioned earlier. He told me some stories that were pretty—you know, he was almost killed three or four times, you know, literally bombs exploding here, and him being here, at a little lower position. But when a bomb explodes, the shrapnel goes out like this and like that, and there's a little window like this that you can, if you're lucky enough to be inside it, you don't get hit. And he didn't get hit. He had a piece go through his helmet and graze his head. The people on either side of him were killed.

You know, being caught in an L-shaped ambush, this was a battalion sized unit being struck by that. An L-shaped ambush is you've got people out here and then you've got people here, so you're marching, you're coming along this way, they're coming this way, and then they're shooting at you this way, and then there are people up in the trees

shooting down at them at the same time. You know, he almost had to call in artillery on his own position, just to try to—and you never want to do that, but that's… And then there was other instances where the North Vietnamese tried to breach a perimeter of a unit that he was supporting, and they literally fired all night long. There were five or six batteries of guns firing all night long. They got up the next morning and the North Vietnamese were piled up that high for quite a while. They just kept coming and coming and coming and dying. And you see carnage like that and you just, and that affects you significantly.

And there were a lot of guys that came back, and friends that I knew that have come back and it's taken them not just months or a couple of years, but they still suffer from those memories. A lot of it has to do with the makeup of the person that you are. You know, clearly I saw things that maybe if someone else saw them or experienced things, that they would feel differently about it. I was fortunate enough to be able to compartmentalize those things in my own head. Every once in a while… I don't get dreams anymore. I got dreams when I first came back, but I don't get those anymore. Normally it's a dream of being overrun and running out of ammunition and not having any place to go, and being completely surrounded. That was, you know, those kinds of situations I would dream about. But, that passed after a year or so.

BLIEK: I think the last thing I want to ask you, and I think it would be a good way to wrap things up, is you mentioned that you didn't talk about the war for a long time to people who asked you about it. But we're here today and you're giving an interview about your experiences during the war. So I wanted to ask you about what's changed since then?

STANLEY: Oh… Well, there are a number of things that have changed. I don't think I relate—I talk about this when I'm in the—you know I was in the panel discussion. I don't think I told you about it. Well, what changed for me, it happened about 25 years ago. And I was perfectly happy not talking about it, even though the war was over, things were done, I went through law school, I practiced law, I had run an insurance company, sold the insurance company, I was a CEO of another insurance company. I had gone through a divorce and met my current wife, and she was from Washington, DC. And one time we were back there visiting her family and her

friends, and it was an evening and they said, “Well, Neal, you were in Vietnam, weren’t you?” And I said, “Yes.” “Well, have you ever been to the Wall [Vietnam Veterans Memorial]?” “No. I don’t want to go.” “Well, why not?” “I just don’t want to go.” And that was the end of it. And the way I answered it was, “Don’t bother me with this. I’m not gonna do what you’re asking me to do.” So a couple of days later—my wife and I were joggers, and we went out jogging and went through—I think I told you this—went through Rock Creek Park. Did I tell you this?

BLIEK: Briefly, with the recorder off.

STANLEY: Okay. I went through Rock Creek Park, jogged through Rock Creek Park, and she said, “Let’s go to the Lincoln Memorial.” And I liked the Lincoln Memorial, so we went up there, and she said, “The Wall’s right down here. Why don’t you go down?” And I did. And that changed everything. I found the names of the guys that I knew that had died. It was, as I mentioned, it was a cathartic experience. It kind of released all of the pain that I pretty much masked inside myself. And from that point on, if someone asked me what I did in Vietnam, I would tell them what I did.

As time went on also, one day my wife comes down and she has this box in her hand, and she says, “What’s this?” I said, “What do you mean, ‘what’s this’?” And it’s all the medals that I had won—not won, you don’t win a medal—the medals that I had been awarded. And she said, “Well, what did you get these for?” I said, “When I was in Vietnam.” She said, “Why didn’t you tell me about these?” I said, “Well, it’s not important.” And then I explained what my feelings were and that type of thing. She took them out and did some things with them. And I’m still not—I’m uncomfortable with that still, but it’s something, it’s important to her that she recognizes those things, and so it sits up on a wall in our home.

But, you know, as time goes on, then you start talk about others. So this Vietnam panel, this experience, and others, you recognize that it helps you in talking about it, it relieves some anxiety in you, and it helps others that are trying to understand what we went through, why we went through it, so maybe circumstances like this will not happen again. That helps. I think it’s important to talk about it for the historical basis of it, because history does repeat itself, and it certainly repeats itself if you don’t pay any attention to it. So I think it’s

critically important that this kind of work go on. And it helps those of us that—I'm not the guy that's going to go into a blog and talk about it forever. I'm not, that's not what I want to do. Nor do I need to sit down with a whole group of veterans over a beer and talk about it. Don't do that either. But with those friends of mine that were there, people that I knew at that particular point in time, the people that we trust one another and can talk with each other, yeah, it's good for us. It's good for them. It's good for me.

But I really… you know, when you think about the impact that this whole experience had on my life, one year out of my life, but what a tremendous impact that it had on everything that I've done since that particular point in time, good and bad, you need to recognize it. You need to go through it. You need to analyze it. You need to say, okay, what happened to you during that period of time? Why do you feel the way you feel today, and what did you get out of that situation that you were in that made you the kind of person that you are today? How can you help somebody else that's going through the same kind of thing? How do you use that in recognizing the kinds of things that are going on today in the world, and give some perspective of that? And don't mask it all and don't be fooled by what's being told you. Your own instincts, your own– what you're experiencing, what you have experienced, gives you good reason to question, judge—not judge, but to question what's going on inside of, you know, whether we're in Afghanistan or Iraq or you name the theater that we're in, and why are those things occurring? And are we doing the same kinds of things again? So you need to raise your awareness of those things. And all of that now is coming out more and more.

So, I credit Dartmouth for doing those types of things and allowing us to get the opportunity to be able to help ourselves, and help others in the process of disclosing what we feel. So, you know, this discussion that you and I have had is more than I've talked about the war probably in total for all the times that I've ever talked about it. There is a lot more, as I told you yesterday, there's a lot more, there are many, many more stories that I could tell you about my experiences there, good and bad, but the sum total of those is a good representation of what I am today.

BLIEK: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

STANLEY: I think we pretty well did it.

BLIEK: Okay. Well, Neal, thanks so much for contributing your experiences to the project.

STANLEY: Okay.

[End of Interview.]