

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RAYMOND TAYLOR

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Raymond Taylor in Iselin, New Jersey, on July 30, 2013, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for having me here today.

Raymond Taylor: Thank you.

SI: Can you tell me where and when you were born?

RT: Newark, New Jersey, 25 September, 1945.

SI: What were your parents' names?

RT: George H. Taylor, Jr., and my mother's maiden name was Joy Lent.

SI: Starting with your father's side of the family, what do you know about the family background?

RT: We used the *Ancestry.com* and we were able to trace it back to 1822 that they left Ireland.

SI: Had the family always been in the New Jersey area?

RT: I think my grandfather, whom I hardly knew--I think I met him once--had four other siblings, a couple of which, I think, lived in Florida. I don't know, really, much about them, except that one of them became a brakeman and, eventually, a conductor on the Central New Jersey Railroad. That's it; I don't know what the rest did.

SI: Your father's father lived in Newark as well.

RT: Yes. He was a mechanic.

SI: What about your mother's side of the family?

RT: Beyond my mother?

SI: Yes.

RT: I only know that--I believe, let me rephrase that--I believe that she was adopted, born in Brooklyn, raised in Bloomfield, New Jersey, by her adopted mother and [her] sister. The sister was some kind of medical professional. I don't think she was an MD, but she might've been, like, an OD or chiropractor, something, but they had a big house on Beach Street in Bloomfield. As far as I know, they adopted at least five other children, maybe six, one of which passed away as a teenager. I think another one passed away by the age of thirty-three--she was an alcoholic. I guess the oldest of the bunch married a guy by the name of Leo (Mulligan?), who had a moving company in North Newark, on the corner of May Street and Summer Avenue. I spent part of my early years growing up there and the rest of them living in the neighborhood. So, some of the others, I have vague recollections of and, a couple of them, nothing at all.

SI: Do you know how your parents met?

RT: No.

SI: Your father was in Newark and your mother was in Bloomfield.

RT: Correct.

SI: Okay.

RT: They're pretty close.

SI: Bordering.

RT: Yes.

SI: What did your father do for a living?

RT: Mechanic.

SI: Okay.

RT: Well, before and during World War II, he was a cross-country bus driver for Greyhound and, because it was a critical occupation, he was exempted from military service. At some point after the war, I'm going into, like, [the] 1950s, he was in the National Guard and I think it was, like, an appointment. He was at the West Orange Armory, where he used to take care of the tanks. So, as a child, I got to run across the tanks and in and out. For me, it was fun; for him, it was work. [laughter]

SI: Where else did he work as a mechanic?

RT: Worked for an oil company, worked for a Ford-Mercury dealer in Morristown for a long time. When I was about six or seven, my parents divorced. So, on Saturdays, he'd pick me up. He'd work half a day, I'd bum, hang out, in the showroom, walk in the parts room--I was all over the place--and then, we'd spend the rest of the day together. I don't know how long he was there. Eventually, he went to work for an oil delivery company in Irvington. From there, he retired at sixty-two. He had been diagnosed with coronary artery disease. Unfortunately, within a matter of a couple months after he retired, he passed away.

SI: Your mother was a nurse.

RT: Yes.

SI: Was she working before she started a family or did she continue to work after that?

RT: My mother worked for Overlook Hospital. I don't know from when to when, I just remember her going there. She also worked for a doctor in Nutley for quite a while. I guess, at some point, she started going back to school. She has three master's degrees. Then, she taught at Rutgers-Newark, in the nursing program, for twelve years.

SI: Do you know when, approximately, she taught at Rutgers-Newark?

RT: Well, she was there when I went, so, for me, it was free tuition. I would say she probably started sometime in the '60s and ended in the late '70s. I think she also took a position with the Head Start program in Newark, but, beyond that, I don't have any recollections.

SI: In her family, did you say it was her sister or her mother's sister that was in the medical profession?

RT: Yes.

SI: Okay, the mother's sister.

RT: Right.

SI: Okay.

RT: Well, I think the two of them together adopted the children.

SI: Okay.

RT: Because I talked to my brother a few years ago and he had to get some kind of documentation and he ended up having to obtain it from somewhere in Brooklyn. That's why we know she was born in Brooklyn.

SI: It sounds like, on that side, education was valued. Did any of her other siblings enter the medical profession?

RT: No.

SI: Tell me a little bit about your earliest memories of growing up.

RT: I remember, the earliest probably recollections, we lived on Montclair Avenue in North Newark. I don't know how long we lived there, but my mother's sister, Carol, lived upstairs from us in the apartment building. Eventually, we left there and went to Nutley for about six months. Then, my parents separated. So, at that point, we moved to the big house with the moving company.

SI: That was in Bloomfield.

RT: That was in North Newark.

SI: North Newark.

RT: May Street and Summer Avenue. We lived there for, probably, six or eight months, and then, an apartment up the street became available and my mother took it. By that time, she was seeing somebody else. I guess, at some point, my brother was born in 1957. So, they needed more room. So, we moved to the second floor of a house on Broadway in North Newark. We were there for several years. I didn't particularly like the situation that I was in there and, eventually, I left, went to live with my father, who was living in Irvington at the time. So, that was working out pretty well, until, one day--the language requirement that I took was French in high school, couldn't understand a damn thing about it--but, somehow, one day, I got a passing grade on a test and the teacher accused me of cheating. So, I tried to explain to her, "How could I cheat when I didn't understand the subject in the first place?" but she got me so mad, I told her where to go. She sent me down to the guidance office, where I was suspended. So, at that point, literally, I dropped out of high school. It was the guidance counselor that sent word, through a friend of mine, to meet him at a certain place and time over on Bergen Avenue and Lyons Avenue, in the Weequahic section, which wasn't too far from where I was living. He said, "No questions asked, I'll pick you up here every day. I'll take you to school. I'll drop you back here." That's what they did. This guy's name was either Mel or Marvin (Shrofmitz?), I think a really involved, great guy and I owe it to him for getting through high school.

SI: This was at Barringer.

RT: Yes.

SI: He would pick you up and take you to Barringer, even though you were officially suspended.

RT: Well, he got me reinstated.

SI: Okay.

RT: But, I wasn't living in Newark.

SI: Okay.

RT: So, everything was on the [down low]. He was only interested in getting me through high school.

SI: You grew up in these different areas of North Newark. Does anything stand out about the neighborhoods? Can you characterize them? Were they working-class, middle-class? Was there an ethnic group that dominated the area?

RT: There were three--the Irish, Polish and Italian. It was a working-class neighborhood. Let's see, Broadway ran north and south. East of Broadway was where the black people lived. You hardly ever found a black family on the west side of Broadway. As you went further west, then, you get up Forest Hill, that's where the money was, started with Prospect Avenue, worked its

way over to Branch Brook Park. It was primarily a working-class neighborhood. My uncle's house, the mover with the big house, was really like the Irish political center of North Newark. You could find a couple of cops in there at any time. [laughter] He had a big bar in the basement. He had a couple of trucks and he had drivers and crews. I just came and went; it's the way I grew up.

SI: When you were a young teenager, maybe even earlier, did you start getting part-time jobs?

RT: Yes. I think my first job was with, right on the corner of Chester Avenue and Summer Avenue, a couple of little shelf stores, one of which was a candy store. I got hooked up with the owner of the store. People wanted the Sunday papers delivered, so, he would take orders and I would deliver them with my wagon. Quite often, they would leave me change for a tip or, in those days, soda came in deposit bottles, so, they would put out the bottles and I would return them to the store and he would give me the cash for the return of the bottles. It was fairly profitable. I probably made a couple of bucks each Sunday. In those days, a couple of bucks went a long way. Then, I got a job with a grocery store on Broadway, by the cemetery, just stocking shelves and running errands. He had the same kind of deal with a delivery service, so, people could call him up and [he would tell me], "Here, go take this steak to so-and-so." Eventually, I just got away from that. I don't think I was doing anything after that. I liked to play tennis in those days. I'd played on the courts in North Newark, in Branch Brook Park. So, anybody who had money for court time and needed somebody to play against, I was there, which, eventually, led to me joining the Marines, because, after I graduated, I wasn't doing anything. So, the money that my father had been sending to my mother through the court system for child support, once I was living with him, he gave me the money. So, I was fat after that. I mean, it was a whole fifteen dollars a week, but fifteen bucks was a lot of money back then. In, I guess, the beginning of October of '63, the courts were probably going to close for the winter. They were clay courts. One day, this guy comes by, that I hadn't seen him in a while, but we grew up next to each other on Montclair Avenue and we were friends. He starts, he said, "What are you going to do?" By that point, I had put in applications with all the utilities, the gas company, Public Service, water company--I'll tell you, wherever I could get an application in. In those days, they didn't even have to give you an application, but I guess some of them did it as a courtesy. Really, what they were saying was, the question always came up, "Do you have your service time behind you?" and I said, "No." They said, "Well, when you do, come and see us." So, my buddy that I said [I met] said, "I just was down at the recruiter and I'm thinking strongly of joining the Marines and they've got a buddy system. If you're not doing anything, the two of us could join on the buddy system and they would at least guarantee us the same platoon through boot camp and infantry training." We even got so far as to be in the same battalion at Camp Lejeune. So, that's kind of it, as far as my early employment history.

SI: Did any members of your family influence you in terms of joining the military? Did you have any uncles who served or anything like that?

RT: Well, I had uncles that had served in World War II. One was a photographer in the Pacific, in the glass nose of the planes. They would fly over the islands, him taking pictures, in the island campaigns of World War II. I know my Uncle George served in the military, but I'm not sure, I don't know what he did. Then, in my Uncle Leo's big house, there was a lot of war souvenirs on

the walls in the bar, Nazi flags and helmets and a pitchfork and all kinds of crap. I don't think any of them had an influence on me joining the military. The person who did was a social studies teacher that I had in eighth or ninth grade. His name was Jack (Soroka?) and he'd been a Marine and he'd been through several of the island campaigns. So, the class as a whole was probably the most disciplined class in the whole school, because we had a deal with him. We'd cover the material that we had to learn for social studies in about twenty minutes and the rest of it was war stories. That was fabulous, I really liked the guy, but he made the lasting impression on me.

SI: In high school, what was your favorite subject? Which did you like the most?

RT: I liked history. I was pretty good at math. I can't say that I really liked going to school. I mean, I went to college afterwards and I can't say that I enjoyed going to college. To me, it was a means to an end. I often reflect back on, if I'd been able to learn a trade, I might've been a happier person in life. [laughter]

SI: What other activities did you get involved in, if you had any time for entertainment or recreation, organizations, like the Boy Scouts, or sports, besides tennis?

RT: I played Little League baseball. The first year I tried out for the team, I didn't make the team and I practiced all of the ensuing months until the next tryouts came. That time, I did make the team. The unfortunate part was that I think my mother was overwhelmed with her job and driving to and from. I have a memory of the first game that I was going to start. It was at third base. It was at Newark Academy. She made me so mad, because she made me wait while she ate a salad. It didn't matter that this was something important. My wife predominantly raised the kids, because I worked afternoon and evenings, but they got everything and it didn't matter--they just came first. I don't know, I know that kind of lack of caring was something that, as I got older, I said, "If I ever have kids, it's not going to be that way," and it wasn't. My son'll tell you that high school was great. He lacked for nothing. I can remember days when he was growing up and he would outgrow a pair of shoes before they even got scuffed up. I mean, at this point, he's about six-three-and-a-half and 270 pounds. He's a detective sergeant on the police force that he works for. So, he's a big boy.

SI: When you joined the Marines, were you aware of what was happening in the world? Did you follow the news about the Soviet/American struggle, that sort of thing?

RT: Yes, I got involved in it.

SI: Okay.

RT: Not at the time, but, so, the Missile Crisis was in '62. [Editor's Note: In October 1962, the United States demanded that the Soviet Union remove its nuclear missiles from Cuba. The United States placed a naval blockade around the island nation, creating a tense standoff between the superpowers that many feared would lead to nuclear war. The crisis was averted when the Soviet Union agreed to remove their nuclear missiles from Cuba in exchange for the United States removing its nuclear missiles from Turkey.] I joined the Marine Corps on--I was inducted

23 October of '63. Promptly, this buddy of mine, Richie, and I got on a bus with everybody else, went to Newark Airport and flew to Columbia, South Carolina, and then, by bus to Parris Island. About a month later, Kennedy was assassinated. It was really disheartening for someone who, like myself, had really no concept of politics, except that, growing up, at all the schools, all the guys that were running for something were handing out buttons. That's my idea of politics. [laughter] The platoon itself was all about Kennedy. They'd taken a big sheet with magic markers, in big letters, "Ask not what you can do;" what is it? [Editor's Note: President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on Friday, November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas.]

SI: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

RT: Yes, right, exactly. I couldn't grasp it for [a moment], yes, and it had a picture of Kennedy on it and that was before he was assassinated.

SI: Really?

RT: Yes.

SI: Wow.

RT: But, I got out of boot camp, finally, went to infantry training for a while, was assigned to my company, Third Battalion, Second Marines. That was early '64. Then, we got word we were going to Guantánamo. It was supposed to be a Caribbean cruise for three or four months. We were going to go there for half of the cruise, pull duty on the fence line and, a couple months later, another company from the battalion would come and switch and we'd get to go to a couple of liberty ports. That never happened. We spent the whole four-and-a-half months on the fence line. They had just finished the desalinization plant, so, they severed the pipeline, because Cuba had supplied the water for the base. So, they severed that and tensions were high and I always thought it was stupid, because all they gave us for guard duty was eleven rounds. So, the standing joke was, "What, shoot ten Cubans and save the last round for myself?" The fence line was thirteen miles long on Leeward Point and with a guard post every mile. So, even if you had a reaction force that could bring ammunition and what have you, grenades, it would take you quite a while to get to all the different posts. It'd be over by then, but there was no show of force from the other side. In fact, at Post #3, they used to have a female come out with a black bra and panties and sunbathe there, just to make you go nuts, staring at her through the binoculars. [laughter]

SI: I want to go back and talk about your training, but, first, what were the conditions like at Guantánamo at that time?

RT: They still had about a couple thousand Cuban employees that came on the base every day. They almost all were on the other side of the bay, because the base is, you have Windward, which is main side, where most of the buildings are, then, you had Leeward side, which had a jet strip. They usually always had a line of [Vought F8U] Crusaders there that were ready to go in a heartbeat, the Seabees [US Navy combat engineers] were there and that's about it. If you wanted anything, you had to go down to the ferry slip, take the ferry across the bay and go to the other

side. So, everything, the PX and all that stuff, was over there, but I didn't think the conditions were bad. I think in terms of--what is it?--DEFCON, that they have the different [levels], it was low. [Editor's Note: The Defense Readiness Condition (DEFCON) ranges from DEFCON 5, the lowest, to DEFCON 1, the highest.]

SI: When you flew down to Columbia, South Carolina, and went to Parris Island, that was really your first time leaving the Newark area.

RT: Yes.

SI: What was going through your head as you were going into this new kind of life?

RT: I guess, I don't know if I really fully understood what I let myself in for, but it was something to do. We were signed up for four years. I don't think it really hit me until we got off the bus at Parris Island. They have these yellow footprints and this black staff sergeant got on the bus and he was absolutely huge. It was all done for intimidation. Then, he goes through his whole spiel, and then, he says, "You people have ten seconds to get off my bus and don't miss a single one of those footsteps outside." Then, when I was outside and we went into this building, they sent us up to the second floor. On the way up, here's a kid in utilities that didn't fit, they were obviously too big for him, cleaning the stairs with a toothbrush; come to find out later on, that's one of their favorite punishments for screw-ups. Upstairs, there were these bare bunks, double bunks, with just bare mattresses and a pillow on them and they said, "Take everything that you own out of your pockets and put it on your bunk." So, I did that. I had a knife, little, small length of chain. So, they took all of that stuff and had us put it in our bag, but I guess, the next day, they started with the haircut--you lose all your hair. In those days, your hair was important. Everybody walked around with a comb, brushing their hair. It was the '60s. After we left recruit receiving and we were put together as a platoon, was Platoon 186 of the First Battalion, we got clothes, we got equipment and got issued a rifle. Then, they issued me a bayonet, about this long.

SI: Over a foot, yes.

RT: Yes. I have it; not the one from back then, but I brought mine home from Vietnam. I thought to myself, "I don't understand this place already. They took my small knife and my piece of chain and they give me a knife this long." [laughter] I just found it comical, but that's one of my recollections. Other than that, they made life as miserable for you as possible. I guess the first six weeks or so was designed to tear you down. Then, once they figured they had you torn down, they would build you back up the way they wanted it. So, that was that. There were a couple of events. (Smalls?), this kid from South Carolina, got caught smoking, unauthorized smoking, in a Dempster-Dumpster outside. They beat the kid until he stopped breathing. I don't think they intended to do that, but, then, they had to take him to the hospital. They revived him, took him to the hospital. Of course, that generated an Inspectors General's crew and I'd never saw so much brass in one place at the same time, [laughter] but every guy in the platoon told them, "Tripped over a footlocker." That was the end of that. Then, eventually, finally, we left there. [Editor's Note: The Marine Corps Inspector General's office investigates complaints and cases of possible abuse.]

SI: These were guys from all over the country.

RT: Primarily New York and Chicago.

SI: How did everybody get along in the unit?

RT: Not too poorly. As it turns out, my buddy Richie and I, and then, two other guys that I went to high school with were in the same platoon. We didn't even know that they had joined up. We even had a guy who was a Yale graduate, who didn't want to be an officer, but he wanted to be a Marine. So, they made him the guidon. He got to carry the flag around. You get kind of a special little privilege here and a little privilege there for that, so, it's kind of an honor thing.

SI: What was a typical day of training like at Parris Island?

RT: A lot of physical training, push-ups, push-ups, running. There were obstacle courses. Oh, we also had a guy who flipped out on the DI [drill instructor]. So, this is how sick they are--they put him in the lock-up. So, then, for the whole time that he was locked up there, our DI would run us by him and had a little chant with his name in it, "Are you enjoying yourself?" and stuff like that. [laughter] It was a little perverse, but I think we ran three miles before breakfast every day. We also had to stand fire watch in the barracks and, looking back, you really needed it, because they were ancient. They were from, like, World War I or something. They were made out of wood, and then, they had guard duty. Guard duty was always an experience, because there was this DI from another platoon who used to sneak up in the trees at the back of the barracks and, as the guy's, kid's, walking around, he'd jump out of the tree with his NCO sword, until, one day, he got clocked by somebody. That ended that, but, I guess, of the twelve weeks that we spent there, three of them were out at the rifle range. I just remember, when it rained, we couldn't go outside. They used to show movies from the island campaigns in World War II. So, you got a form of indoctrination as to what was going on. Once we got out of there, we went to infantry training at Camp Geiger, outside of Camp Lejeune. The barracks were really horrible, concrete, cold. I had come down with viral pneumonia and I missed part of the training, because, in those days, they just made you sweat it out, but one rule of thumb was etched in stone and that was the day you had to go to the gas chamber. Whether you were sick or not, you were going. So, that day came and I was still sick. A half an hour after the gas chamber, I was cured. [laughter] Boy, that stuff, that was terrible, but, then, that's when you start really getting an idea of what you might have to go through, because, along with that, they give you these little tubes with a needle on the end. Then, if you were gassed in the war, you'd have to just break it and stab yourself with the antidote, if it worked. So, I think these were filled with sugar water or something. Then, after you got out of the gas chamber, you had to stab yourself with this thing. Finally, one day, they have this course where you've got to crawl underneath the barbed wire and you've got to crawl for quite a ways, a good fifty yards. They have these couple of old thirty-caliber water-cooled machine-guns. Fortunately, I had heard that if you are going to do this course, you don't want to be at the far end, because the guns are old and the barrels tend to heat up, but they're firing live fire over the barbed wire. They have these little bunker/foxhole type things with sandbags with a couple pounds of explosives in them. Every time somebody got close, they'd set one of the charges off, so that you got the whole effect, but I made sure that I

was up close to the guns. The other one that was interesting, the other one I liked, was the "John Wayne course," where you walked through this trail and the targets pop out all over the place in front of you. It's a live fire exercise. So, that was cool.

SI: Those were both at Camp Geiger.

RT: Yes. We also got to do [training] with the old bazookas--they called them rockets. It's a rocket, but you take it to this field, set you up with a round with a dummy head in it, and there's a tank out there. I'm guessing the tank's probably nine hundred yards away, but I hit the tank. I never thought twice about it after that, until I got to my company, Third Battalion, Second Marines, which was going to be my outfit for a while. They had a weapons platoon and they had rockets. Somebody must've made a notation somewhere along the line that I could fire this bazooka, because that's where I ended up. Without any seniority--I was a private--you get to be an ammo carrier. So, they have this vest that holds a couple of rockets in the front and a couple in the back. Now, you're expected to run with this thing in a combat situation, with your gear and a rifle and all this crap. I'm thinking to myself, "This is not a good idea." I got an opportunity to transfer to machine-guns and that made more sense to me than rockets. The LAW eventually got rid of the rockets, because it became a disposable, and I think, today, they've restructured the platoons. [Editor's Note: The M72 LAW (light anti-armor weapon), a one-shot, disposable, anti-tank weapon, replaced the bazooka in 1963.] In those days, each company had three infantry platoons and a weapons platoon. The weapons platoon was half rockets and half machine-guns. So, every time there were exercises or an operation or something, you'd get farmed out to one of the infantry platoons. There's a guy that I met there that we're still friends. He lives in Pennsylvania. We talk more on the phone than we do actually get together in person, but, a couple years ago, my wife's cousin is a retired lieutenant commander, naval aviator, who's an A-7--that's [the LTV A-7] Corsair II--pilot off the *America* over North Vietnam, then, eventually, an instructor and he retired as an instructor at Annapolis. So, he lives down there and we told him, "I'll take you and Tommy to the Marine Corps Museum, you give us a tour of Annapolis." So, that's what we did for a weekend. It was a good time and he's been up here a few times, stayed over a couple of the holidays. Anyway, I was supposed to be the best man in my buddy Tom's upcoming wedding, but he broke his wrist just before we were going to the Mediterranean. He couldn't ship out. So, he ended up at Earle, down here, at the weapons depot, [Naval Weapons Stations Earle at Sandy Hook Bay, New Jersey], decided he would extend for two years and he got married while I was in Vietnam. So, I never got to fool around with him, getting married and all of that, but he's still married to her.

SI: You formed lasting friendships out of these training units.

RT: Yes. Well, in 1986, the guy who was my assistant platoon leader sent my mother--I've got to go back, this is earlier, this is like in the '70s--sent a postcard, a Christmas card, to my mother. My mother gave it to me and I didn't know that he lived down here in Bayville. So, I called him and went down. He'd become a Port Authority cop, was disabled, wrecked his back, but he's walking around with his gun, two huge German shepherds, and he really put me off a little bit. We were close over there, during the war, but he had PTSD bad, really bad. Eventually, he committed suicide. We've had three guys from my platoon in Vietnam that have gone that route. We were small, so, the percentage of that is unusual, but that's later on.

SI: Were you at Guantánamo when the Gulf of Tonkin Incident happened?

RT: That was in '65?

SI: It was in 1964, early to mid-August. [Editor's Note: On August 2, 1964, the USS *Maddox* (DD -731) reported being fired at by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. On August 4, 1964, it was mistakenly reported that the *Maddox* and its reinforcement, the USS *Turner Joy* (DD-951), were again attacked. Congress passed the "Tonkin Gulf Resolution," officially the "Asia Resolution," on August 7, 1964, authorizing the President to take retaliatory action against North Vietnam.]

RT: I got to Guantánamo in September of '64.

SI: Okay, it was probably before.

RT: So, that already occurred.

SI: Now, we look back and see it as a pivotal point in the war, but, at that time, were you aware of it?

RT: No. We didn't have television down there; for the most part, we didn't have radios, either. The guard duty is a twelve-hour shift every third day. So, you were one day on, one day off, one day on standby. On my standby days and my days off, I got to meet, at the club, a couple of Seabees and we became friends. The one guy was a bulldozer driver and they were constantly working on the roads inside the fence line. So, he'd come over to the barracks and say, "Look, I'm going to be on the fence line tomorrow. Do you want to go?" and I'd say, "Yes." So, I would volunteer to ride shotgun for him. In turn, when we had mutual days off, he brought the scuba tanks and he taught me, rudimentary, how to scuba dive. We didn't go out very far in the ocean. There were barracuda and sharks and, in fact, they had built us a swimming hole and they'd taken rocks and kind of come around this way, the shoreline being here. So, they made this big oval and, with a natural water filter, they're just piling rocks on top of rocks on top of rocks, until they were somewhat above the level of the water, but some of the storms down there were absolutely horrendous and the seas would kick up. So, the following day, whenever it cleared, guys that wanted to go swimming, they had to send some divers down to see if there was anything undesirable that had been washed over the rocks. A couple of times, we found some small barracuda, which they either shot them or netted them and got rid of them.

SI: Wow. When you were on standby, did you have other duties?

RT: Every now and then, they'd have a drill, but standby simply meant you've got to hang around the barracks. Nobody goes to main side who's on standby. That's all it really was, to my recollection. Yes, we had a lot of free time.

SI: You were there for four-and-a-half months.

RT: Yes.

SI: What was your next duty assignment?

RT: After the four-and-a-half months, we flew home to North Carolina and the next one was, about six months later, we hooked a Med [Mediterranean] cruise. So, we left from Morehead City, North Carolina. I was on the USS *Telfair* [(APA-210)] and there were five ships in the squadron, two APAs [attack transports], an AKA [attack cargo ship], an LST [landing ship tank] and an LSD [landing ship dock]. That was not too bad. I mean, crossing the Atlantic Ocean was horrible. I hooked fantail watch one night and it poured, an outrageous rainstorm. I mean, the seas were so rough that the prop was, like, coming up out of the water and the guys, the Navy guys from after steering, were coming up, losing their lunch and going back down again. [laughter] I'm tied to a pole on the back of the ship with a mouth[piece], old-time, like, a half a telephone that you can talk into. Basically, I had to tell [them], shout into the thing, if any of the other ships in the squadron were coming too close to us. So, eventually, well, obviously, we arrived there safely, but I thought that I would really be seasick, because I had gotten seasick going down to Guantánamo. It's the first time I was ever on a big ship, but we were up in the bow. Fortunately, going to Europe, our company was in the back, in the (golf?) compartment in the back of this ship. So, it's not as bad, but it's very eerie to lay there in a bunk against the side of the ship and hear the water rushing by. It's kind of weird, a little unnerving.

SI: How long was the voyage over to Europe?

RT: Ten days.

SI: Was that because of the LST?

RT: Yes, the ships are just not that fast. I'm guessing at ten days. It's probably in my record book somewhere. Then, we went through the Straits of Gibraltar, like, three o'clock in the morning. So, they made an announcement, "Anybody who wanted to take a look?" I don't think anybody went, not at three o'clock in the morning.

SI: Yes.

SI: But, I think our first liberty port was Marseilles. We did Marseilles, Toulon, went to Italy, we went to Naples, Genoa, La Spezia, we went to Malta. I loved Malta, the history there of the Crusades. There's a basilica there, St. John's Basilica, built in the year 1000. The monks still chant and swing incense and it was really cool. Then, we did operations with other NATO forces on Sardinia and Corsica. We went to Spain. We were in Barcelona, then, Palma in the Majorca Islands and I guess the most--you asked [about] the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, was not related to that--but a B-52 collided with a refueling tanker over the southern tip of Spain. They dropped three unarmed atomic bombs and everybody went. There were, like, thirty ships that converged on this part of Spain. They got two of the bombs back right away and the other one took weeks to find. It was in the ocean, in, like, fifteen feet of water and ten feet of mud. In the movie, *Men of Honor*, with Cuba Gooding, toward the end of the movie, he's recovering the bomb. That's the story and, of course, being Hollywood, they send a Soviet submarine. There

was no submarine there, not with thirty warships covering the area, but, eventually, they found the third one and, of course, Franco lost his mind. [Editor's Note: Francisco Franco was the Fascist dictator of Spain from 1939 to 1975.] So, in addition, too, we had to pay this farmer, because the tanks went ashore in the wrong place and destroyed his crops, but that was about the only thing. [Editor's Note: On January 17, 1966, a B-52G bomber carrying four hydrogen bombs collided with a KC-135 refueling plane near Palomares, Spain. *Men of Honor* is a 2000 film about Carl Brashear, the first African-American to become a master diver in the Navy. During the Palomares Recovery, he was hit in the leg by a pipe on the USS *Hoist*, which resulted in a leg amputation.] Well, years later, I met a guy. His name is Dick Esau. He's a retired Marine colonel. He became National Commander of the Military Order Purple Heart and, in those days, we used to have it at the Pines Manor in Edison, they had a big dinner every year. The magazine came, after he was elected, and it had his picture on the front cover, which is traditional. I said, "I know this guy." So, I went and got one of my cruise books and, yes, he was the S-3 officer for Third Battalion, Second Marines. He's the operations officer. So, he also played on the battalion softball team and so did I. He was the first baseman, I played center field. Eventually, he came to the state dinner that we were having and I was introduced to him. We were talking and, eventually, he asked me what outfit was I with in Vietnam and I told him. Then, he's dead quiet for a while and he says, "Coal Mine?" The coal mine at Nong Son got attacked on the 3rd of July '67 and I was part of the triangle that managed to get a volley of eight-inchers right on top of the hill and break off the enemy attack. He had been introduced to me because he wanted to know--we took his picture from the cruise book and we put it in the ad book that we run to raise funds--he wanted to know who put the picture there and how did he get it, how was it obtained? because he was a captain back then. So, that's how I met the guy, was introduced to him. Then, it was a small world, because he started to recall playing softball. Softball was big at Lejeune. We won our division that year before Vietnam, and then, lost the double round-robin playoffs, 4-3, 4-3, and, in both games, we walked in the winning run in the last inning, but those were the good times. Dick and I, in subsequent Purple Heart conventions and stuff, we'll hang out together. We did Portland in 2002, when I was the state commander that year. So, we went to a Portland Seadogs game and everybody wanted to sit with him. He didn't want to sit with them, he wanted to sit with me. So, we got a couple of beers and sausage sandwiches and we sat away from everybody else and just shot the shit for--excuse my language--for hours. I mean, we were watching the baseball game but--and there's a whole story, and I'll get to it later, of the coal mine and the actions of different groups of people that we've pieced together, but unknown to each other at the time, that made a fairly successful conclusion to that battle.

SI: When the ship was searching for the bombs, did your daily duties change? Were you part of that search or were you just on the ship?

RT: No, our ship was the reserve ship. So, if anything happened anywhere, we would be the reaction force. So, no, we weren't there, but what was happening at the same time was, and this I found out from this colonel, years later, one of our many conversations, after it was said and done and the ships were going back to their stations, they offered us--they told us there was a big storm. This is March. They told us there was a big storm off the coast of North Carolina and the geniuses that we all were just assumed that to be true, because we probably figured it was hurricane season. It wasn't, but what they were doing was running all of our service records, to see if they could take the squadron and send it through the Suez Canal, across the Indian Ocean

and come up off Vietnam as a battalion landing team. In the interim, they offered us the first liberty port of the battalion that was supposed to relieve us, was going to be Trieste, and I wanted to go to Trieste. Everybody else voted to go back to Palma for another week. Palma was nice, but I prefer to go places I haven't been before, but I found this out from this colonel, that that really was a smokescreen. There was no storm. We just got told that and, of course, you couldn't pull something off today like that, not with Internet on the ships and satellite phones and all kinds of other stuff. We didn't have any of those goodies back then. In fact, I don't even think we had GPS back then. What they found out was that it wasn't feasible, so, we shipped back to the States and waited until we got orders to go to Camp Pendleton, to run us through the mountains for a few weeks, to acclimate us to the heat, and then, ship out for Vietnam.

SI: They did not have any jungle training at that point.

RT: No. The only thing I knew was that I was not a big fan of infantry tactics, especially being a machine-gunner. They target you first, [laughter] you and any officers they can identify. When I got to--let me just back this up a minute--after Pendleton, some of us were sent down to El Toro, which was a Marine Air Station. We got on this old Navy freight plane. There were thirteen sling seats in it and the rest of it were crates and it was a whole bunch nurses and officers. They all got the sling seats. I spent the next thirty-eight hours on a crate. That's how I got to Vietnam.

SI: Wow.

RT: Yes. We landed at Barbers Point, Hawaii, just outside of Pearl [Harbor], and we got refueled and we're about to take off and one of the engines fouled. So, they kept us right on the runway while they repaired the plane, took off again and we were headed for Wake Island. That was uneventful. We got to Wake Island. We landed, we ate in the mess hall, got back on the plane and we were headed to Okinawa. We got to Okinawa on two engines. Two of the engines were fouled by the time it got there. The nurses and officers all got off in Hawaii. So, I got used to my crate, I didn't even bother to try and find a sling seat--three days in Okinawa, stowing my gear, and then, we flew into Da Nang. That's Pan-American.

SI: Either at Pendleton or Okinawa, did they give you any specific indoctrination on what to expect in Vietnam, enemy tactics, anything?

RT: No. In fact, when we first heard that the Ninth Marines had landed in '65, we were in the Mediterranean, "Vietnam, what's Vietnam?" What became Vietnam I knew as French Indochina from geography, but I probably learned a lot about Vietnam after I came home. The guy, I had to take his course at Rutgers, King C. Chen, on Ho Chi Minh and his relationships with Vietnam and China, I have his book somewhere--he autographed it for me--even though it wasn't required reading for the course. He was very interesting, because there are a lot of fallacies out there, he said. I think he interviewed Ho Chi Minh and Ho said that the only weapons that he ever formally received from anybody was a presentation [Walther P]-38 and six rounds of ammunition. The rest of them, they fought and they captured it. [Editor's Note: Dr. King C. Chen, a Professor of Political Science who specialized in Asian politics, taught at Rutgers for twenty-four years.] I found it interesting, years later, that Kennedy, it was said he would've

never gotten involved in Vietnam, that, "It was a civil war. Let them fight it out amongst themselves," which is true. My idea about Ho Chi Minh was that he was a nationalist first and a Communist second, that because it was primarily an agrarian society, you didn't need any great, big formal, structured government, you know what I mean? You just make sure the people got taken care of. So, anyway, I got to Vietnam.

SI: Where did you land?

RT: Da Nang. So, they said, "Every other guy, take one step forward," which we did. So, one line of guys went to the Third Division, which was in Da Nang, and the rest of us were going to the First Division. So, we got back on the plane and flew fifty miles south to Chu Lai. So, while I'm waiting for transportation--I think I was going to Seventh Marines--this officer comes in and said--we were waiting, milling around in this tent--he says, "I want six volunteers for recon." You could've heard a pin drop. I thought to myself, "This could be what I'm looking for." It just happened to coincide that the flap on the tent was open on one side and this sentry was walking around with a dog and I recognized him from back in the States. So, the next time he came around, I said to him, "Hey," we greeted each other and I said, "Where's recon?" He said, "They're down there on the beach," and it was quiet and it was scattered, small spurts of firefights on the other side of the airstrip. It was kind of mind-boggling--the [Douglas A-4] Skyhawks would come in on the steel planking the Seabees had put down, roll to the end of the runway, refuel, rearm and go right back out again. It was totally different than Guantánamo, where they just sat on the line. Occasionally, you'd see pilots, planes and pilots, doing maneuvers, but not all that much. So, there were six of us from the old company. So, I said, "Look, I don't know where you guys are going, but I'm going there and you can take your chances a day at a time." So, the six of us volunteered. As far as I know, we all made it back. So, I got to recon that night. They found me a bunk, and then, the next morning, I started getting gear, because I didn't have any jungle utilities, I needed a rifle. Of course, I didn't open my mouth up about being a machine-gunner, until somebody read my service record, and then, I lost my rifle, got a pistol and a machine-gun again. They just happened to have one in the ammo bunker, because of the added firepower. There's a couple of different philosophies. There's two recons in the Marine Corps, or there was at that time. You had battalion, each division had a battalion of recon, and they had--I want to say loosely connected, but I'm sure that there were ropes and not strings--called force troops and in there was force recon. It was like a huge recon company. That's, like, six platoons. I mean, the average recon in battalion got three platoons. They preferred to work in small teams and they got their training before they hit the outfit. They go to jump school and scuba school and survivor school and stuff like that. They have a separate MOS for them, too. Their, I think, recon, force recon, was 0321. I was 0331, which is machine-gunner, and then, eventually, I got a secondary MOS in recon after being in the outfit for six months, 8651. Anyway, eventually, the two units were merged, and then, split in half. That was when the Third Division went north, further north than Da Nang. They went up to Dong Ha, pushing up against the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone]. The First Division--this is the Fall of '66--the First Division leaves Chu Lai and goes up to the Da Nang TAO, tactical area of responsibility, but the Army unit coming into Chu Lai was, I believe it's called Americal. They didn't have any reconnaissance assets, so, we left two companies, plus H&S [headquarters and service] and three platoons of force, to support that division. We had two companies and three platoons up at Da Nang. That's when life really began to change. The time in-between patrols had escalated. We

used to get three and four days in-between patrols. It was down to two--and it's simply the logistics of not having enough people to generate enough patrols. Force would prefer to work with their six-man teams. We'd prefer to work with thirteen to eighteen-man teams, even though a standard platoon was twenty-two men. Most of them were undermanned, because, if you get into a firefight, you want all those gunslingers with their extra firepower, because to do what we had to do recon-wise, you could do it with three or four guys. All the rest of the guys were for security. [Editor's Note: The Americal Division was headquartered in Chu Lai from 1967 to 1970.]

SI: You got there in June.

RT: Yes.

SI: When did you start going out on patrols?

RT: Two days later.

SI: Two days later.

RT: I think I got there on the 14th of June. Two days later was this "Howard's Stand" on Hill 488. There's Charlie Company, First Recon, First Platoon, Charlie Company. They were attacked by an NVA battalion in Hiep Duc Valley. So, the battle went on all night. It was eighteen guys against hundreds and they brought in Crusaders off a carrier, fired directly onto the team's position. The spread on the guns would be like a "V." So, they were just shooting straight at them--the "V" was keeping an invisible fence, if you want to put it that way, from any further encroachment by the enemy. I was up there after the battle and there were unexploded bombs up there, there were pieces of packs of clothing, all kinds of crap from the enemy. Howard's Stand became the most decorated small unit [action] in US military history, all branches of the service. Of the eighteen guys, Howard got the Medal of Honor, there were three Navy Crosses, everybody else got a Silver Star. Six guys died and I think everybody but one guy was wounded and, yet, a lot of guys didn't want to go home that were left, once their wounds had healed. So, they were given jobs in the battalion area, like handing out towels and working at the club. They were never allowed out again. [Editor's Note: The Battle of Hill 488, or Howard's Hill, occurred on June 15, 1966. Gunnery Sergeant Jimmie E. Howard received the Medal of Honor for his actions there.] Immediately after that, so, let's say that was two days, the next day, I had barely gotten my gear and figured out how to fill a rucksack as opposed to an infantry pack and we shipped out on a helicopter and went to the Tien Phuoc Special Forces Camp, which is six miles down the road from Howard's Hill. They were afraid that the enemy was going to attack the camp and the camp would be overrun. So, we were sent in to provide security and what they did have was, a half a click from the main camp were two 105s and they did come under attack, all night long. Because I was a machine-gunner, they put me on this fifty-caliber in a pit. There was no protection whatsoever. I mean, anybody could fire one round and knock you right out, but it was next to the first aid station. Since the camp didn't come under attack, I spent some time with this Special Forces E-8 [a master or first sergeant] tending to the wounded. Some guy--he'd seen a lot, you could tell, by this one guy got shot, he was a PFC, got shot right in the thigh, but it severed the main artery. He was dead by the time they got him to the first aid

station. So, he said, "I'll show you this." He showed me, said, "He's been shot by a Mauser," and he points to a hole here, but the whole back of his leg was blown out. I got an education-and-a-half that night. The next day, since the camp didn't come under attack, we went down the road. Howard had been the kickoff of Operation KANSAS. We started combing the hill, trying to figure out--they had six or seven recon teams on 488--trying to figure out, "Why?" It made no sense to just throw a battalion against eighteen guys sitting on a hill. What are they [doing]? You're better off hiding and not letting them know you were there. There was a subsequent operation, a month-and-a-half later, maybe. They put a whole company up there. Although we put out thumpers [M79 grenade launchers], they weren't very good. So, every time you heard something, you threw a grenade, but there really wasn't anything there. Then, it kind of died after that. In the Fall of '66, when all the leapfrogging took place, Third Division went north, First Division went north and Americal came in. One of our first patrols was in Antenna Valley. If my memory serves me, it was in the southeast ridgeline. The first night out, we set in along a trail. We had an enemy column walk right into us. By the time they came right at where I was with this fellow, Ray (Triana?), whatever losses they took, they fled, because I opened up with the machine-gun, Ray was on an automatic rifle. The next morning--oh, during the night, there were two machine-guns, enemy machine-guns, that kept firing at our position. They didn't have the angle on us and they were breaking the branches over our heads. So, you couldn't get much off of your [belly] and you're on your stomach most of the night. Finally, around two o'clock in the morning, they got to playing with the Vulcan guns and, as soon as the machine-guns opened up, they knocked out both of them. [Editor's Note: The M61 Vulcan Gun has six barrels and shoots twenty-millimeter rounds.] So, the next morning, I go down the trail and there's a couple of blood trails and I walked out to a clearing, didn't see anything. I come back in and there's a gook standing there at port arms. On the way out, I had walked right past him, but he must've been the point man. When I hit him, and Ray hit him at the same time, [I] spun him off the trail into the fork of a small sapling and that's where he spent the night, in rigor mortis. I was so focused on looking to my left that I didn't see him on the right, because I was sure if there was anybody hanging around, they were going to be on my left side. So, he had a brand-new SKS, still had cosmoline between the barrel and the stock. He only had nine rounds. [Editor's Note: The SKS is a Soviet manufactured carbine. Cosmoline is a rust preventive substance.] He'd joined the North Vietnamese Army on November 10th, which is the Marine Corps' birthday, 1961. We found out from documents later translated that he'd been an assistant squad leader with the outfit that hit Howard and that they had taken ninety percent casualties and what was left of them went back to North Vietnam to rebuild and re-outfit. They were coming south. They were going to pass the Marines, pass up the Marines, and go against the Koreans at the Bassac River. So, that finally solved the problem of why Howard was hit, because, well, the part that I left out was that in amongst all the maps and documents and stuff was a map of 488. Howard was sitting on top of a munitions factory built into the side of the mountain.

SI: Yes.

RT: So, that was why it was attacked. Using the map, they went back, they found it. It was abandoned and they blew it out, collapsed the whole thing. That was my first group of patrols. It seems odd, but the most notable ones was the first one and the last one, the last one being the battle at the coal mine.

SI: How long was the period that we just talked about? Was it just a few weeks or a few days?

RT: Where is this?

SI: The whole story, from Howard's Stand to when you found these documents.

RT: Oh, it was months.

SI: Months, okay.

RT: Howard was June 16th, I believe, '66. A company from Fifth Marines came up the hill the following morning, lost five men to a sniper. There's a book out on it and it is published. Then, I want to say November until we got into the firefight that night. We pulled numerous patrols in-between, but, most of the time, you don't stick around. We didn't have any choice this time, because, A, it was night. We don't like to move at night. The second part is, we were pinned down by two machine-guns. [laughter] They never seemed to run out of ammunition, which told us something about the troops that were in the valley.

SI: During that time, did your recon unit take any casualties? Was anybody wounded?

RT: No, we had an exceptional platoon. I was in the Second Platoon, Bravo Company. By the time we got up to Da Nang, we got better quarters. We got wood squad huts, metal roofs. We had canvas roofs in Chu Lai and they leaked constantly. I have pictures somewhere. They're not captioned; they wouldn't do you any good. I never captioned them, but I had taken slides. I had hundreds of slides and I got my nephew, who's a graphic artist, to transfer them to CD. So, we made up numerous copies and, at one of our platoon reunions, we gave them to all the guys. A couple of guys that didn't make it, I mailed it to them. If you're interested, I can get a copy. It's packed away up at my son's house, but I'd have to caption them for you, so [that] you'd know what you were looking at.

SI: That would be great. How long was a typical patrol?

RT: Four to seven days.

SI: Okay.

RT: More daunting than anything is the weight of your pack on day one, because they usually started about eighty pounds and they go up depending on the length of the patrol and whether we're taking any extra equipment. If the machine-gun's along, everybody's got a belt of a hundred rounds of machine-gun ammo to hump, in addition to 160 rounds. We tried to keep each man with three hundred rounds of ammunition, eight magazines, a double in the rifle, one taped upside down to the other, and the balance loose in your pack, in the bottom of your pack. Then, you've got food. For up to a seven-day patrol, you'd take ten days' worth of food. The biggest problem was water. You can only carry about eight canteens, so, that's always an issue a few days into the patrol. They gave us nice patrol rations in a bag. You'd have to add a gallon of hot water to it, warm water. The problem was--not a gallon, a quart--the problem was if you

wanted to give up your canteen's worth of water for one of those and the answer was, most of the time, no. We got fruit in the cartons from the C rations, but I used to go to the PX, once I got to Da Nang, and buy cases of mixed fruit, peaches and pears. I virtually lived on it. So, you can imagine how heavy these packs were, and then, we're climbing mountains. To get a guy up, off the ground, we used to set the pack on the ground, the guy would lean back, put his arms through the straps and two guys would pull him to stand him up. I would say it's probably the most physically demanding job in the Marine Corps, but the fact that the tactics were so radically different than the infantry, I almost didn't want to come home. You were talking about this platoon, "Did we take any casualties?" We took one. A couple of guys got Purple Hearts, me amongst them. They weren't bad. I walked away. We were working out of An Hoa, the combat base at An Hoa, Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, and they were out on an operation, so, they brought us down to do perimeter duty. Some of the locals reported forty VC [Vietcong] and gave us a geographical location. So, we went out--there were thirteen of us--went out after the forty guys. The objective was, by nightfall, to get to this low hill. So, we got to this low hill; the VC were on the other side of it. They started throwing rocks, typical, because to throw rocks and you mix it in with a grenade every now and then, it really plays with your head, because you're ducking every [time]. You hear something hit over there, you hit the ground, mostly rocks, a couple of grenades. So, the Lieutenant decides to fire in, over their heads--he had marked the hill before we went out with a spotter round. So, they fired the round. It came in short. If I had been standing up at the time, it probably would've taken my head off. It hit directly behind me, killed my assistant gunner on the machine-gun. God must've spoken to the other guy that was there, because he thought somebody from headquarters group had called him, so, he went over there. He got his chimes rung. He's deaf in one ear. Finally, the VA certified him, but the other guy was--there wasn't anything left of him. What was left, I had to put in a poncho and try and drag him to a helicopter that's being shot to pieces as we were trying to get on it. It killed him and it wounded four other people on the hill, one of which was, I think his name is Rick Heilman and he became the National Legislative Director for the DAV [Disabled American Veterans]. Our corpsman was awarded the Bronze Star because, I mean, the rocks were hitting him and he tended to this guy. His leg was a disaster, but Arnie, the corpsman, Arnie Sorensen, got the Bronze Star. Heilman's career, obviously, was over. I think, eventually, somebody told me that knows him, said, after years of trying to hang on to his leg, they finally took it off. My gut feeling about the whole thing is, I would've never fired. That's a desperation shot. That's something you do last, not first, but hindsight is 20/20.

SI: In the period after November 1966, what happened?

RT: We were progressively running more and more patrols, primarily in Hiep Duc Valley. Hiep Duc Valley and Que Son Valley, which I think is the northern end--I don't know why it has two different names, but it does--produced more rice than the people who lived there could eat. So, it was a prime target for the NVA and the activity in that valley was heavy-duty. You're up against the Second NVA Division, which is the First, the Third and the 31st Red River Regiments. Eventually, there were numerous skirmishes and small battles until the UNION operations began in April. I was on both ends of the UNION I and UNION II. That's a story in itself, but the eventual outcome was that, between the infantry, which was the First and the Fifth Marines, and recon, which is--now, I'm going to tell you something that wasn't common knowledge until somebody wrote a book about it--anyway, it virtually amounted to the destruction of the entire

Second NVA Division. It was over after UNION II. They didn't have much of anything left. What had happened, coinciding with the move north back in November, was that the commanding officer of First Recon was a colonel by the name of Lieutenant Colonel Art Sullivan. Art had more, Colonel Sullivan had more, faith in experienced NCOs than he did in rookie lieutenants. So, he devised a plan that, in some ways, had some of the characteristics of the Phoenix Program run by Special Forces. [Editor's Note: The Phoenix Program, run by the CIA and Special Forces, sought to identify and kill or capture members of the Vietcong or National Liberation Front from 1965 to 1972.] We didn't build camps, we didn't really interact with the people, but we became a bunch of hunter-killer teams. In the Marine Corps Museum, when you walk in the Vietnam section down there in Quantico and walk past the big panoramic that greets you, you walk right into the recon room and there's a couple of plaques on the wall and a couple of pictures of, I think, Colonel (Lefkowitz?), who, long after I left there, was shot down and killed in a helicopter. It was a quote by, I think it's General Walt, who was Third MAF Commander, lieutenant general. [Editor's Note: General Lewis Walt commanded the III Marine Amphibious Force and the Third Marine Division in Vietnam from 1965 to 1967.] He said, "By the end of 1968, the Stingray teams had accounted for over half of all the confirmed kills by the entire First Marine Division." Nobody knew what we were doing. It kind of ticked us off that everything was considered secret, and we accepted that, until they did a documentary on our unit. Well, why did you allow that? [Editor's Note: Operation UNION I (April 21-May 16, 1967) and Operation UNION II (May 26-June 5, 1967) were search-and-destroy missions conducted by the Marines against the Second North Vietnamese Army Division.]

SI: When was the documentary made?

RT: Spring of '67.

SI: It was during the war.

RT: Yes. We also got a visit from Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. We had a sign on the First Squad tent, four-by-four piece of plywood, it said, "Dunn's Raiders--Never have so few been so foul to so many," and Lodge said, "I don't think that's in keeping with the hearts and minds." I don't know who made the comment to him, whether it was the Colonel or General Nickerson, but he said, "The sign stays." [Editor's Note: Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., served as the American Ambassador to South Vietnam from 1963 to 1967. Lieutenant General Herman Nickerson commanded the Third Marine Division in 1967.] There's this little side note about the sign, is that one of our guys used to put a little flag up there every morning and he'd take it down every evening. I used to laugh at him. He told me I was unpatriotic. I said, "No, I'm just practical," but the guy was Ron Kovic. [Editor's Note: Ron Kovic, a paralyzed Marine Vietnam Veteran, wrote the best-selling memoir *Born of the Fourth of July*.]

SI: Wow.

RT: The whole book and the movie about him stems from his second tour, but, on his first tour, he was a radio operator in my platoon and he got sent home in one piece. He was an outstanding Marine. I really was kind of sick to see him paralyzed and, I mean, there's certain people you could characterize as a Marine's Marine. He was one of them. I wrote to him when I found the

book in the library one day, never heard from him. One of our guys today is on email basis with him, but he has no desire to come. I don't know why. I mean, I can understand being bitter about being shot and paralyzed, but, when he came back, he went to the infantry. He went to Mike Company, Seventh Marines, and he got shot up at the DMZ. I've often wondered if he wasn't looking for something, and you know the old adage, "be careful what you wish for," but he wished for something more. See, recon, in the beginning, when I was there, with few exceptions, was, "Don't engage the enemy. Try and identify them, size, force, unit, if possible." That's when everything changed with Stingray, because Stingray was all about, "If you have to expose yourself to get them to come out and play, then, do it." We did it so many times and just destroyed them, because they didn't know what they were up against. We were told, and I never saw the actual document, that one of the teams captured a document from Ho Chi Minh that said not to engage any Marines with funny hats. See, we didn't wear helmets or flak jackets. So, most of us had bush hats. This one guy wore a DI's hat out to the bush. I had a cowboy hat at one point, but that's [gone], and along with it was that, "Should you engage and you should [stop them], dead or alive," there was a hundred-dollar bounty on our heads. Well, a hundred-dollar bounty, back then, when the average family income was three hundred dollars a year, was a hell of a lot of money for them, but a lot of people tried and a lot of people failed.

SI: Can you take me through a typical Stingray operation?

RT: Yes. I think, probably, the most notable for me--there were two. I don't remember, I wasn't a platoon commander yet and I had the machine-gun, so, that had to have been right after the program started, around November. We were set up in this tree line at the top of a hill. The orders came through over the radio that they wanted to snatch a local for intelligence purposes. So, we found a guy collecting wood for their fires, for cooking food and what-have-you, a woodcutter. So, we took him, tied him up, gagged him. Well, I surmise that when he didn't return to the village, the enemy surmised that we had to be on that particular hill, because that's where he went. So, they laid and they waited, because we would've had to come down off the hill into this, like, low elephant grass. We saw them. There were thirty-five or forty of them. So, we were due for extraction. So, what happens was that we engaged them in a firefight to start with. Then, that gave enough time to the air wing to get us a couple of gunships and, within a couple of minutes after the gunships arrived, there was nothing left of the forty VC, but that's Stingray, small teams with the ability to bring [in] air and artillery, on-call, and you get first priority. The second one was--in fact, that one, I think they said they counted thirty-six bodies, was on the front page of the military newspaper at one point. It's always, "Recon Team Gets Rescued." Yes, we got rescued after the fight was over. [laughter] The choppers didn't come in down below on that one. They came in up above, which shows you the physical strength that you had to have to be in this outfit. We threw our packs up into the helicopters, and then, jumped up and the crew chief would grab you by the arm and pull you in, but I've been on worse extractions. On another one, we were set in by a river and we were watching a wedding across the river. Some gooks had stumbled upon us from the back, threw a couple of grenades, nothing happened, but, by the time the firefight started, their side had been reinforced. So, they diverted two 46s [CH-46 Sea Knight helicopters], which have the ramp in the back that goes down. On one of them, I was the first man on the first bird, because I have to protect the other side of the helicopter with the machine-gun, and there was a photojournalism team from NBC. The guy did not move. I'm yelling at him as I'm running off this--this helicopter's backed up to the cliff. I'm

running off the cliff onto the ramp of the helicopter with a barrel, red-hot barrel, machine-gun barrel, and this jerk is just filming. I butt stroked him with the machine-gun. He went flying. The camera went up by the pilot somewhere and the rest of the guys, the reporter guy got strong-armed by the rest of the guys coming on to the bird. We got out of there without any casualties. That's another case of [where] we're talking about things being secret. I wrote home and I said--all my letters were the same, constantly, except for this one--I wrote home and said, "You might see me on NBC. You'll know it was me because I hit the cameraman with the butt end of my machine-gun." My letter got home, like, seven or eight days later, but, three days after the incident, my brother was watching the six o'clock news and starts jumping up and down, saying he saw me and I hit the cameraman. My mother never came out of the kitchen. She didn't believe him. So, she believed him after the letter arrived and described what he saw on the television, but, after that, things were fairly quiet. I think, in my own personal opinion, and it's not based on anything but observations, was that the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese were taking a beating. There didn't seem to be enough of them or enough of their will to fight going into the Spring of '67 and it started to slow down action-wise. Tet of '67, which was the year before the big one, I was patrolling north of Da Nang, just around the mouth of Elephant Valley. They must've had a mortar unit out there, because they tried to mortar us. They were way off target. I had to cross this graveyard. Years later, I saw this movie, *Go Tell the Spartans* [(1978)] with Burt Lancaster, about the battle in the '50s with the French in this graveyard and how it reoccurs in Vietnam. It's a pretty interesting movie, not a lot of action, like one truck and one helicopter and stuff like that, but more like the symbolism of the futility of war. I guess, I don't think anything really big happened until the coal mine, which was, as it turned out, my last patrol in Vietnam. I came back in on July 6th, three days after, and continued on and off. If I was in, once I was promoted to sergeant in March and given command of a platoon, which really pissed off the rest of the sergeants in the company, because they all had seniority, but they were squad leaders, if I was in more than two days, one of those days I would spend as a liaison officer in the war room of the First Marine Division. Basically, I had to monitor all of the activities of the teams that were out there and, every four hours, go around and update the maps of two generals and four colonels and answer any questions that they had. It was a twelve-hour shift and it was, like, I was twenty-one years old and I'm wondering, "What happened to my life? I went from being a nobody to being a somebody in the Marine Corps." So, I'm looking around me--I'm doing things that officers did. I'm running a platoon, I'm working in the war room, which was a lieutenant's job. At that point, I could've made a very lucrative career of the Marines. I had, at that point, declined a commission once. I would've had to take an infantry outfit and I was not going to do that.

SI: When was that offered to you?

RT: That was early. That was, like, February of '67, when I was still a corporal. In fact, this whole thing with me becoming a sergeant and getting a platoon evolved out of something that got blown out of proportion. We were on the finger below the top of Hill 452, on the backside of 452. The other side faces the coal mine. I was a squad leader at the time and this other guy, (McIntosh?), was the squad leader. So, we were practicing artillery missions on these two peaks to the southwest. One of my rounds came down in the river. I don't know why, but I saw a big splash. I figured that's probably where it went to. So, the Lieutenant tells me to adjust--all well and good if it's just trees and mountains, but I would've had to adjust between a couple of

friendly villages, with the possibility of killing a lot of people that were friendly and known to be friendlies to our side. So, I got on the thing and I ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We will put it back on.

RT: Okay.

SI: Go ahead.

RT: So, I got on the radio and I canceled the fire mission, at which point the Lieutenant relieves me in the field. Okay, so, for the next three or four days, I've got nothing to do. So, when I get back, he tries to court-martial me. I get called in by the company commander first and he wanted to know what happened and I told him. By that time, Colonel Sullivan had rotated out and Colonel (McKeon?) was the battalion commander. I've got to go up and explain to him what happened. The upswing of it all was that this lieutenant gets promoted to captain, but never makes another patrol, because he was the same one that fired the over the hill shot and ended up screwing up a rookie lieutenant who's making a snap-in patrol. He never got promoted higher than captain the rest of his career. In fact, after the war, he got reverted to sergeant major, but that's how I got meritoriously promoted to sergeant. Then, something else happened, was that after the promotion ceremony, when everybody had gone away, the Colonel and the Sergeant Major Black pinned my stripes on and that never happens, not to a sergeant. So, I felt like I'd been acquitted, but that same issue comes up in [1992 film] *A Few Good Men*. You've got to do the right thing, you have to have a moral compass; without one, you're lost.

SI: At that time, did you have much interaction with the Vietnamese in these areas that you were patrolling through?

RT: Very little. Our corpsman used to go down to Dog Patch, where all the hookers were, and give them penicillin shots and what-have-you. [laughter] That was about the extent of our interaction. The portion of us that stayed at Chu Lai, they formed an Echo Company, which was part reaction force and part combined action platoons. So, those guys were working with South Vietnamese. We never did.

SI: This brings us up to Operation UNION I, or was there an action in-between?

RT: Yes, scattered. You could be out in the mountains and run into somebody who didn't expect to see you there, those kind of things. Even if we thought we had overpowering firepower, we'd just as soon break it off, rather than risk taking any casualties. UNION I, I don't have a whole lot of recollections of. I think I was out several times on the operation, because over a period of several months this thing [occurred]. There was something in-between, BEAVER CAGE, but recon wasn't involved in that, but, on UNION II, I want to say toward the end of the operation, the infantry's pushing them west, pushing the enemy west. [Editor's Note: Operation: BEAVER CAGE was a mission to destroy supply tunnels in Quang Nam, South Vietnam, from April 28 to May 12, 1967.] Two days before the operation started, this portion of

the operation, I was out there mapping this, like, funnel, took me two days to plot all these artillery things. So, when I needed to fire a mission, all I'd give them is two letters and it's in their fire control back at the base. In fact, at one point, fire control went down and I got a volley from the--I later found out it was the *Newport News*, USS *Newport News* [(CA-148)]. It was a cruiser. I never saw such a tight pattern in my whole life. That was unbelievable, just an entire tree line erupted at one time, God. I guess I was being effective as a blocking force, because the enemy was fleeing sporadically and many of them didn't even have weapons. They were just running away from the infantry and the more that we could hold them and keep them from escaping, then, the infantry would be able to move in for the kill. I guess I was effective enough, because at one point on the next finger was an NVA officer with three gold, I want to say it looked like oak leaves that a major would wear, but I couldn't tell, at six hundred yards, what exactly they were, on each collar and he had an aide. Guy had, like, spectacles. When they showed up, it was the wrong time, because I had a team of guys down the hill getting water from the creek. Well, we were able to get them back up the hill. We fired our traditional two shots, and then, we opened up with a machine-gun, trying to just spray the area, even though we knew the spread was going to be wide. We didn't have a sniper rifle on that patrol and I had all rookies. At that point, I had an entire platoon of rookies, except for four corporals. So, I wasn't about to trust them to try and shoot somebody down with a rifle at six hundred yards. I'm sure there's probably some of them, in retrospect, that could've done it and, probably, I should've done it that way, but I just thought I could get more bullets out and maybe chase these two guys off the finger. After that, we packed up and we moved further east, but I never had a field of fire again. I was afraid, if I stayed there, I'd outstay my welcome. [laughter] So, we moved, but we never really got a place where we could get a good view.

SI: Were the rifles that your unit used still the M-14s?

RT: Absolutely.

SI: Did you ever ...

RT: Oh, yes, they tried to give us the garbage.

SI: Yes.

RT: Yes, they came in with the AR-15. [Editor's Note: The AR-15 is the civilian version of the M-16 rifle.] They jammed constantly and we just refused to take them. So, in fact, the first patrol after, they wanted us to fire a hundred rounds through the weapons. You couldn't get a hundred rounds through the weapons, because, like, every second or third round would jam. So, you'd spend [time] trying to get the shell casing out of it. I liked the M-14. It had good power in the trees, could cut through small trees. We weren't sure about this smaller round. We had listened, at least one night, to a radio, I was just flipping frequencies and I came up on an infantry unit, that some of the guys were wrapping them around trees to keep the enemy from getting them. I said, "Screw wrapping them around trees--give them to them. They don't work anyway." I saw a thing on the Military Channel that, now, the M-16, which is the offspring of the AR-15, has got the longest length of service of any other rifle the military's ever had. I thought, "How ironic--I wonder how many guys died because their damn weapons didn't work,"

and they didn't, especially when they had the option of having a Stoner system. Stoner was phenomenal. We got a staff sergeant in, I want to say March, March or April, but he brought a Stoner with him--he came from an infantry unit--and promptly got shot in the elbow, destroyed his elbow. So, I talked him out of the Stoner. I said, "Listen, you're going home. You're done. Me, on the other hand, I'd like to have that," what an outstanding weapon, absolutely outstanding. If you go to the Marine Corps Museum, they have all six versions of it in a locked case. There's a couple of the guys have gone to various gun shows, one of them came across one--the guy wanted sixty-five thousand dollars for it, fabulous. The Army pooh-poohed this thing. You figure out, do the math, you pay for the rifle, the AR-15, it's cheaper than the Stoner made by Cadillac Gage. Then, you're going to fire all these rounds through it, at ten cents apiece. Well, at what point did the Stoner become more viable than the AR-15? and the Stoner worked from day one. Some of the SEAL units had them, some infantry units had them, some Special Forces units had them, but I don't know why the Army was given the opportunity to pooh-pooh these things, but they did--fantastic weapon. No matter what crap I got in it, weeds, vines, dirt, it still fired; so did the M-14. [Editor's Note: The Stoner 63 is a light machine-gun and rifle that was used in a limited capacity during the Vietnam War.] The M-14 was a lot heavier, about 7.4 pounds, as opposed to about five pounds, I think, for the Stoner. I mean, I only had it for a couple of months, by the time they tracked it down and I had to give it up, but all the guys, every guy in my patrol, got an opportunity to carry it at some point during the patrol, no untoward remarks. That's basically it, as far as weapons go.

SI: You said, increasingly, you got less time in-between patrols. What would you do to unwind in camp? You mentioned the liaison work, but what other types of things would you do?

RT: Yes, that was just me. Well, there was a period that the new guys, when I got the eighteen rookies, they had to go through the RIP program. The program hadn't been done in a while and it had to be put together and we made a few patrols before they ever got there, the same thing as I did. I'd made patrols before I went to the RIP program, which is the Reconnaissance Indoctrination Program. It's a crash course in everything you need to know in three weeks, from map reading, how to call artillery, how to work a radio, how to use it properly, map reading, big on map reading, survival tactics. I don't recall what's all in it, but, while they were going to the school and I had my four corporals to keep an eye on them, I worked at division headquarters, but that's how I spent my time there. In-between patrols, as soon as you come back in, you take a shower, shave, clean your weapon and, if there's time, if you come in in the morning, then, you've got time to go to the PX, which is down the road at 327, or you wait until the following day, but there really wasn't a lot of time, free time, left. When we were in Chu Lai, we used to play football in the surf. We had a couple of people who could throw a football. Colonel (McCann?) could, played football at Villanova, I believe, and my company commander, King Dixon, was an All-American halfback at South Carolina. In fact, he had a guaranteed contract to replace Frank Gifford on the New York Giants, but, today, he's got two fake knees and two fake hips, so, he said, "Thank God, I never took that deal."

SI: It sounds like your senior officers were a mixture of West Pointers and people who were from ROTC.

RT: No, many of the officers, we didn't have that many, but of the ones that were there ...

SI: I am sorry ...

RT: It's not West Point.

SI: I meant Annapolis.

RT: Yes, only occasionally you get an Annapolis graduate.

SI: Okay.

RT: All right. The rest are "mustangs" and guys who went through Quantico, yes--like, Howard was a staff sergeant, the guy we had was a gunnery sergeant when he took a commission, so was Joe Campbell in the First Platoon, yes.

SI: What was your opinion of both your immediate officers and the higher-ups that you had contact with?

RT: I had a lot of respect for both battalion commanders that I served under, think both men were very intelligent. Sullivan was a more hands-on guy than Colonel (McCann?) was and, I mean, I literally mean, hands-on. I know of one lieutenant who got punched out by him for screwing up. They did the job. I don't know how else to describe it. It's either all or nothing; either you're successful or you're not successful.

SI: Did you get leave during your year there?

RT: Yes, twice, went to Bangkok and, the other time, I went to Taipei. Bangkok was cool. I took a bus ride to see the "Bridge over the River Kwai" and some temple complex. It was nice to get away, but there's always that part of you that you're part of a crew that's [together]. We had a unit in the Second Platoon that gelled. One guy could virtually read another guy's mind and, when the firefight starts, you couldn't ask for a bunch of better guys.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: This concludes today's session with Mr. Taylor and I look forward to our second session. Thank you very much.

RT: Thank you.

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Reviewed by Jesse Braddell 6/1/2014

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 11/1/2015

Reviewed by Raymond Taylor 5/19/2016

Reviewed by Molly Graham 5/26/2016