

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS A. HOFFMAN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II \* KOREAN WAR \* VIETNAM WAR \* COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Thomas A. Hoffman on October 26, 2007, in Jackson, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and ...

Christopher Bartoloti: ... Chris Bartoloti.

SI: Thank you very much for having us here today.

Thomas A. Hoffman: You're welcome.

SI: Please, begin. [Editor's Note: The interview began with Mr. Hoffman showing the interviewers a scrapbook of photographs and other memorabilia from his service in the US Army.]

TH: I volunteered to go into the service. I was at St. Bonaventure University. I was there for two years, and, for financial reasons, some other reasons, college wasn't for me, at that time. So, I said I was going to leave and join the military. I joined the Army. ... I was in Military Intelligence and I was in for two years at the time when I reenlisted for another six years. So, I would have a total of eight years in. I was in Cincinnati, Ohio, as I said, and I got orders to go to Korea, ... even though the war was going on in Vietnam, and I knew Korea was a dumpy place, a hellhole; I can say that, right?

SI: Sure.

TH: So, I said, "I'm going to go to Korea for a year. Then, they're going to come back. I'll be here for six months, probably, [then], they're going to send me to 'Nam, another hellhole." ... I found out that if you volunteered to go to Vietnam, that they'd give you your choice of assignment afterwards. So, I said, "I'll skip Korea and go right to Vietnam." So, I volunteered to go to Vietnam, and everybody thought I was crazy, but I said, "I think this is a smart move." So, anyway, I went there April '68 to April '69, exactly 365 days. ... I was in Military Intelligence, assigned to the 101st Airborne. When I first got there, I went to Bien Hoa, and that's all the pictures on this page, are from Bien Hoa, and what was kind of funny here, see this open field here? ... These bunkers is where we were, these, like, tent things. We were only here for, like, two weeks or maybe a week. ... This was a bunker here and, every once in awhile, the sirens would go off and you'd go run into the bunker and you'd go in there and nothing big happened. Nothing happened, but this one day, I'm running to the bunker, because the alarm went off, and I look out to this field and a rocket landed and this huge explosion goes up. ... It was the first time that I had actually seen something live go off, and I said, "Holy mackerel, you could really get hurt here." So, that was my first indication of getting hurt, anyway, but that was at Bien Hoa. Then, from Bien Hoa, I went to Camp Eagle. Camp Eagle was fifty-one miles south of the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone]. You're familiar with Vietnam? ...

SI: Yes.

TH: Fifty-one miles south of the DMZ and it was a couple of miles west of the town of Hue and there was a town of Phu Bai. We were just a little bit north of that and it was a place only for the 101st Airborne. It was a campsite for the division, and that's where I really spent the majority of

the time. This was my tent, this was my bunk and the helmet underneath it and all that, and the bunker in front of it. The plastic was put there because of the rain, so [that] the rain didn't go down there. When they attacked us, we could go in there. Out in the background here, this is the view from my tent, looking out, this is the A Shau Valley. ... You probably may have heard of the A Shau Valley, but that's where it was, and so, that's what that is. That was my tent mate, Tom Barry. He was there for most of the year with me. That was me, when I was a few pounds lighter, just sitting on top of the bunker, but you can see this, on top of my bunker, looking out, the A Shau Valley is out there. There's a gulley here and, actually, ... when we were attacked, there was a big attack in May, when I first got there, they came charging up here and everywhere. In fact, they took over about fifty percent or so of the camp that day, but they actually came up that valley and that was [there].

SI: This was all part of the Tet Offensive.

TH: No, it was right after Tet. Tet, officially, I think, ended February 1st, or something like that. [Editor's Note: Vietcong and North Vietnamese forces launched the Tet Offensive on January 31, 1968, against several key cities in South Vietnam, including Hue. The Battle of Hue lasted until March 3, 1968.] I got there in April of '68. So, I was there right after Tet, but they owned the A Shau Valley. The Vietcong, the North Vietnamese owned the [valley]. The Marines went in there and got their asses kicked, we went in there, got our asses kicked. It was not a good place. So, they were always there and they used to crawl, at night; that's why this was all Agent Orange-ed, this stuff. [Editor's Note: "Agent Orange" was a herbicide used by the US military to kill any sort of natural cover that could be exploited by the Vietcong.] That's why it was clear, but they would actually crawl during the day, and then, at night, they'd, you know, come up and attack us. ... Probably, on average, we were attacked, in some form, six out of seven days of the week, and some attacks were two or three mortar rounds or, you know, a B-40 rocket [a rocket-propelled grenade] coming in or something, when, sometimes, it was a platoon coming and, sometimes, it was an all-out attack of a battalion of them coming at us, or something. ... Like I said, that one time, they took over the majority of the camp. We had to drive them off. ...

SI: Were they usually regular NVA troops?

TH: ... It was a mixture. Sometimes, it was Vietcong and, sometimes, it was North Vietnamese, North regulars. My job, in intelligence, by the way, was ... source recruitment. I would go out into the villages, trying to recruit sources, and anyone who *chu hoi*-ed, it was called, if you *chu hoi*-ed, that was a North Vietnamese person that gave up, I would interrogate them. ... Anyone captured by our division, that was an officer, I would interrogate. Also, I would go out on patrols with the 101st, with my interpreter, and, right then and there, if they captured somebody or they suspected anybody, we would just interrogate them right then and there. So, that's what I did. So, that was that, but this [photo], this was sort of interesting. The one night of a larger attack, it wasn't that night [the photo was taken], but, over here, in front of my tent, you can see, they kept these trucks there. I don't know what it was, some kind of an outfit over there, but a rocket came and direct hit one of those trucks and I was looking out. ... I actually saw that truck lift up off the air and just about disintegrate, but it was pretty eye-opening when you see that. Again, this is just pictures of the tent and me firing a round. This is three cargo planes; is that

what it says? Three cargo planes and a jet flying underneath, protecting them. ... Then, you can see, a jet would come in and we would spot the Vietcong crawling towards us, during the daytime, and we would sit on top of our bunk, having a beer. We'd just sit there or something, ... because we called for the air strike and they would come in and they would drop the bomb, but you could see, they got pretty close to us. [Editor's Note: The photographs, of bombs hitting near the camp perimeter, indicated that the air strikes were very close.] You'll see that through here a lot, and then, this is four helicopters just flying by, taking troops, probably, into the A Shau Valley, or near it, or to some other village for an operation. Sometimes, I'd go with them and sometimes not. You can see the jets flying over, and these were the guys in my outfit. This guy at the end is Mike. He got shot when I was there. He didn't die, but he was in an observation helicopter and he actually saw some bad guys and he told the pilot to go down, because he had his M-16 with him. ... He was going to be a hotdog and, you know, fire at them, and they shot back and he got an AK round through his arm, through his chest, through the other arm and into the pilot's arm. ... They got back and [I] went down to see him at Phu Bai, which was that town near us, they had a hospital there, and to see if he was all right. ... He had all these, you know, tubes going in him and all that kind of stuff. ... He whispered for one of the guys to come over and he [said], "What do you need, Mike? What do you need?" and he said, [laughter] "Take my picture." He wanted a picture of himself laying there on the bed, so [that] he could send it to his girlfriend. I thought that was weird. Anyway, you could see here, here's another attack. There's a jet, making the rocket run. ... That's an AK-47 that we had captured. We had this big CONEX box filled with captured [weapons]. Because we were intelligence, we had all these captured weapons and stuff like that, that we used to use. This is [a water truck]; that bladder there is water, and they went around with this truck and they would fill up this thing here and, you know, of course, for water; another explosion, as you can see, in the background there. ... "Office to the left;" oh, after the May attack, as you see, that thing there, I told you, they came down here, after that big attack, they built a bunker, this big bunker out there. You could see it, and it was actually empty all the time, but, if we were attacked, because we were intelligence guys and not the best fighters in the world, that wasn't our MOS [military occupational specialty], they would send, you know, a couple of squads of infantry guys, with machine guns and better equipment than we had, in there to help fight them off. This would be a big night. We'd have, you know, something cooking. This was just macaroni and tomato sauce, but it was a big, big event when we did something like that. Otherwise, it was all ... C rations. Near the end of my tour, we built a tent. You'll see a picture of it later on. I was the highest non-commissioned officer in our unit. So, I was called the NCOIC, non-commissioned officer-in-charge, and I had that tent built and it was just for a break. ... It was like a break tent. So, the guys, when we were not doing anything, we could go down there and play cards or something. You see the refrigerator back there; it didn't work. We didn't have electricity. So, we just, you know, stored stuff in it, but there was no electricity in this place, but that was our break tent, and then, this outhouse, that was also a big day. Whew, it was delivered. We didn't have that prior. So, when we wanted to go to the bathroom or something, we just took an entrenching tool, dug a hole, did our business, covered it back up. ... We had things called piss tubes and you just do that and that was for urine, but, then, the outhouse came. One day, this truck came and delivered this outhouse thing. It had three, like, stalls in it. I mean, it didn't have doors, but it was three holes and you put that [underneath], the fifty-five-gallon drum. You'd cut that thing, put it under there and you'd put gasoline on it and you burn it, but, when that came, we actually called it a holiday. ... We, like, quit work at, you know, three o'clock that day and all sat around with a

beer, because this was like great now, that we were all going to re-up to stay another year over there, because it was now really plush, you know, [laughter] but that was pretty cool. This was our church. It was just a tent. Here they're just setting up for a barbecue. Jet attacking, jets; that's an observation helicopter. That's when they were shot at, but you see, again, you see the bombs going off. This is, I just did this, this is my tent in Vietnam and this is my tent in Teaneck, New Jersey, where I was, ... [laughter] me and my brother, but, then, that was, again, my thing. [Editor's Note: Mr. Hoffman juxtaposed two photographs, one from his childhood and one from his tour in Vietnam.] You always had your flak jacket and your helmet and your boots handy. The ground, as you can see, was real rough, and my biggest fear was being barefoot. So, when we were attacked, everybody would grab different things first. I always grabbed my boots first, because they said, "You can't go on those stones when you're, you know, going, hopping around like [that]," you know. So, I grabbed my boots, ... I'd be in my underwear, I'd grab my flak jacket and my rifle and head to the bunker. This is that break tent that I said that we built right out there, and where I have that X is about where a rocket [landed]. On my last night, all the guys came in here to say good-bye to me, you know. It was my last night, ... at the 101st, and we're all in there, having a little party, and the rocket came in and hit right there, and I just remember being so [angry]. I said I was very mad. I was so angry. I thought they were trying to get me on my last night, you know. ... I took it very personal, you know, and I had my rifle and I was firing that. There was nobody there. It was just a reaction. ... This is our office. You know, we had sandbags all around, you know, to protect us, so [that] when an attack came, a rocket would land, or something, ... the shrapnel wouldn't go through. So, you guys probably know about that, and there's just another attack. ...

SI: There were a lot of air strikes.

TH: It was all the time, yes. ... Here's another air strike, here, coming in; [laughter] this was actually a stupid thing that I did. I was out with my interpreter and this farmer told me that he saw some VC, Vietcong, burying something, and he didn't know what it was. So, I went with my interpreter and dug it up and it was this ammunition. There was more to it than that, too, but I found that and brought it back. ... I remember the Colonel going crazy, said, "You don't do that. It could have been booby-trapped," ... because that wasn't our expertise, you know. ... These are the guys just looking down at it. This guy here, his name is Tim Le Clair and he didn't make it. He was shot and he died. This is the guy, Mike (Dirk?), that got wounded, that I told you about. So, here's another explosion. You can see that; a lot of explosions, sorry. When I was there, I ran into, down in Phu Bai, this guy Bob Perry who was my roommate when I was Military Intelligence in Cincinnati, Ohio. So, I just took a picture of that. I had to go on this mission. This is, "Vietnam From the Air," I call it, because ... they sent me, probably for about ten days, maybe it was two weeks, with this same helicopter, every day, I had to go to different fire support bases and do an inspection, an intelligence kind of inspection. ... So, I took these pictures from the air, but that was me actually flying the ... helicopter, because the guy was showing me what to do, and I said, "Would you let me do it?" ... You know, he let me fly it, but you can see, ... I don't know if you've ever seen it like that, but that's Vietnam. It's a lot nicer country than you see, but these were all fire support bases, and what they did, our 101st was here, they have fire support bases all around, so that, again, if the enemy is coming, they can fire this way at them and that way at them. So, it's like ...

SI: Those were all around the valley.

TH: They were all outside of the valley, but, yes, they're not actually in the valley. Then, they had this place to send me to called Phu Vang District Headquarters. I think that was ... even a little bit further northwest, but it was a very dangerous place. The bad guys owned it at nighttime, just about. When I was there; you see this bunker here? You'll see another picture of it where it's destroyed, but, when we were attacked there, it was very scary, because it was a very small, confined space. ... When I was there, three Marines were taken prisoner and one of my sources that I had came and said, "They took these three Marines," who were at a home of ill repute, having some fun, "and they grabbed them," and so, I immediately called the 101st and we sent some helicopters up. ... We started trying to follow them, to get these guys back, and we went to village-to-village and we were always, like, missing them, you know. They were having these mock trials with these guys and, like, we'd be an hour or two behind them. ... When we got to the last village, they had buried them alive and all three of them died, of course. ...

SI: How long did the chase last?

TH: That chase was one day. We found out about the capture first thing in the morning, I guess they were there [at the brothel] ... at the evening, the first thing in the morning, and we probably got them at some time in the late afternoon, ... because we didn't know exactly where they were going, you know. ... We took a guess and we hit one village, but, then, we had to go try to find the other village, you know, or the next village, and we're just too late. That was not good, and then, Phu Vang, the reason why I was taken out of Phu Vang [is], I was really there, my main mission there was, to get information about POWs ... that were already taken up north. ... So, I was trying to get sources here to go up there to this camp that we knew that they were keeping them at. So, that's what I was doing there. So, when I was there, I probably was there for about three weeks or so, and I was supposed to be there longer and I was basically by myself. ... Nobody else knew I was in intelligence. ... They had me down as a first lieutenant in the infantry, [had] on the bars [lieutenant's insignia] there, ... because they didn't want anybody to know I was a sergeant in Military Intelligence. ... What happened is, I would go back to the main base, Camp Eagle, to give my report, my debriefing report on what I found out, and I would do it when I had information, about once a week. ... This one time, I went down and the Colonel said to me, he said, "Listen, I don't want you to go back tonight." He said, "You know, one of the guys is getting promoted and, you know, you're the highest-ranking NCO. You should, you know, be there," and, you know, all that, and I said, "Okay, fine, I'll stay here overnight and the helicopter'll take me tomorrow." So, I told the helicopter, "Go back without me," and they shot the helicopter down, ... when it was landing back. So, they did not know if that was a fluke thing or that they ... found out who I was and they were trying to get me. So, they didn't let me go back anymore. So, I never went back to Phu Vang District Headquarters. ...

SI: What were they going to do to the camp with the information you were gathering? Were they going to conduct a raid?

TH: Yes. You know, it was the camp that they ended up raiding years later. [Editor's Note: Mr. Hoffman may be referring to Son Tay, the target of a US Special Forces raid on November 21,

1970. All POWs had been removed from Son Tay prior to the raid.] When I was in Hawaii, remember, I told you, I had my choice of assignment if I went to 'Nam, so, I picked Hawaii. You know, I'm not stupid. So, I went to Hawaii for three years and, when I was there, in Hawaii, I was there for three years, but, during my first or second year there, I hear about this attack, it was all over the news, on a camp in North Vietnam. ... They went in there and ... nobody was there, no prisoners were there, and they were blaming it on bad intelligence. Well, I said, "The intelligence I had was, like, two years before that attack." ...

CB: You were able to find out information while you were at Phu Vang.

TH: Oh, yes. When I was at Phu Vang, I knew how many guards there were, I knew how many prisoners were there. We couldn't identify their names, but I had access to a book of pictures and we would show it to prisoners and, sometimes, they'd say they think that [someone was there], but, to a lot of the Vietnamese, we all looked alike, you know. So, it was hard, really, to pick somebody out, unless they had red hair or a beard or something like that. ... So, it was really hard to identify who was there, but we knew that there were about, you know, thirty-three guys being kept there. ... Unbeknownst to me, back in the [United] States, they built a mock-up of this camp, and then, when they finally raided it, it was empty, which was very unfortunate. Remember that bunker I told you to remember? Well ...

SI: Wow, it is rubble now.

TH: Yes, just about rubble. Well, there it is again; see? [laughter] ...

CB: It was hit by a shell.

TH: Yes, they attacked us. Like I said, ... it was a district headquarters and it was, like, a town hall/center kind of place. I don't know, it was like the size of this little development. So, when they threw a couple rounds in there, I mean, you know, you're really in danger. It's not like hitting Jackson. It's so specific, yes. ... You could see, ... this is, like, the town hall. ...

SI: It is all sandbagged.

TH: So, it's all sandbagged, you know. So, it was a bad place. Yes, see, this is the one [helicopter] that would ferry me back and forth and it was shot down, [my] commander took me off the mission. Like I said, I was telling the story with this thing here. So, that was Phu Vang, and then, this was Hue, the City of Hue. I told you, we were near there. ... This was after Tet, just right after Tet, because we really ended up getting them all out. By March, they were all out and I got there in April. I like to tell everybody they got out because they knew I was coming, but that's not the case, but this is the Citadel, [a fortress in the north of the city, a key point in the Battle of Hue]. I don't know, you've probably heard of the Citadel, and they actually had the North Vietnamese flag flying from that, top of that Citadel. ... This is a Catholic church and this is a ferry going across the Perfume River. I don't know if you ever heard of the Perfume River in Hue, but that's pretty famous, and that's a ferry. You can see, it was loaded with people, very scary, I thought, in front of a monument and sampans on the river. That's, again, the Perfume River. They did everything in that Perfume River. They washed their clothes, they went to the

bathroom in it, they drank it, they did everything in it. ... That's a Baptist church. That's the post office. This was the French government headquarters, when they were there. Then, it became a refugees/homeless place, but you can see them doing laundry and bathing in the Perfume River.

SI: Did you see a lot of evidence of the battle?

TH: Oh, yes, yes. If you look at these pictures here, you can see, there's a hole in the church, but I think you can, in some of these pictures, you can see that there's, you know ...

SI: Some damage.

TH: Damage done, but, yes, we saw a lot of that. ... What I tried to do, ... I didn't go in there for source recruitment, or, really, any real business, I would go to the little villages and I would try to determine if they were on our side or not. ... They would give us information, and then, I would have to try to decide whether it was good information or bad information and whatever, but this would be a village chief and village chief's home. There's a village chief. ... Oh, this village chief, after I had that picture taken, he wrote on the back of this. So, I don't know if the village chief wrote on the back of it or my interpreter wrote on the back of it, but there's a note on the back of it, written in Vietnamese. It might say, "Go home, American." I don't know what it says, but I think it was a good luck thing, or something like that, but this is that same village, and these, too, delivering supplies to the village. When I went in there, I would go to the village chief, didn't tell him I was in intelligence, but I would ask to [see him and] tell him, "We're Americans. We're here to help," that kind of thing, "and what do you need?" and most of them were asking for medical help. So, we would drop off stuff and maybe build a little medical place for them and give them medical supplies, and then, as those people were doing that, I would be talking to people, trying to get information and find out if they were coming at night. The VC would usually come back to the village at night, and what time they would come, where, what hooches were they in, and stuff like that. ... Then, we would give that information and we would conduct a raid, you know, attack that village at night and stuff like that. ... We would tell the village chief we were coming, and then, we could tell, if the place was empty, you know, they were either BS-ing us or he wasn't telling us the truth, but, a lot of times, [we got] good information.

SI: Did you find that a lot of them were sympathetic to the VC or not?

TH: It was; you know, ... what I found there, very quickly, was that the average Vietnamese did not care if there was a Democrat in office, a Republican in office or a Communist in office. All they cared about was that it was raining during the rainy season, so [that] their rice would grow. The average Vietnamese, when I was there, made two hundred dollars a year. So, they could care less about politics and who was in government and all that kind of stuff. They were angry at the Americans when we came through their rice paddy field and destroyed it, you know. They were angry at the Vietcong when they took over their village and took their rice and stuff. So, you know, it was depending on who did what to them. You know, if an American went in there and killed one of their water buffalo, forget it, you know. I mean, they hated you forever. ... So, it was really what happened to them, and that's why we tried to protect these villages from them,



so that they would be sympathetic with us. The *chu hoi* program, that's when they gave up. I remember this one guy I was interrogating and he said he was very angry because of a water buffalo incident. We came with a helicopter and they came in a helicopter and they mowed down, like, three of his water buffalo and that was his whole livelihood. So, he went to the North Vietnamese and they said, "Go up the Ho Chi Minh Trail." You know, so, he went up the Ho Chi Minh Trail and they gave him this knapsack full of mortar shells and [it] took him two-and-a-half months to go up the Ho Chi Minh Trail and two-and-a-half months coming down. He says, "Coming down," he says, "there's B-52 strikes." He didn't [specify that], you know, whatever. They're getting attacked by this and that, going up and down this trail, ... made one trip and he came down and he hands ... the knapsack [over]. He's staying there that night, and, that night, they take the mortar rounds, fire them off at our camp, the mortar rounds, the six or eight or whatever he had in his knapsack, and then, tell him to go back up and get some more. Well, he went up about an hour early, "Psst," [to inform the Americans?]. "Do it over," and he said, "This is crazy," you know. So, two-and-a-half months up, getting shot at, coming back, get shot at, and then, "Boom, boom, boom," it's over. So, that's why he *chu hoi*-ed, was the word. So, this is us in a village. That's me in a village, with a guy named Frank (Feliz?), but, you see, as people were doing their things, delivering their supplies, we'd be talking to the people and the kids and, you know, giving them candy. ... You found out a whole bunch of stuff. ... Have you heard about the Phoenix Program?

SI: Yes.

TH: Yes. Well, I would work with the CIA on the Phoenix Program, and that was identifying the Vietcong infrastructure. ... So, when we thought that there was a village chief, or something, somebody like that, and not thought, but when we knew it, then, we would turn it over to the Phoenix Program, which, a lot of times, just went right back to us, and then, we would have to go, you know, that night. We would go that night and go in and neutralize them.

CB: When you would go on raids like that, it must have been hard to tell who was VC and who were the regular Vietnamese.

TH: Well, we knew. When it was a specific [raid], that was a specific target. That wasn't going in there with guns blazing. That was going in there to get that guy. So, that was an easier thing, but I was on operations, I think it might be further down, but, in the month of October, which I said was one of my worst operations that I was on. They usually called for me when they had the village. They'd take a village, and then, they would call for me. I'd come in a helicopter with my interpreter, and then, they would have these guys lined up and we would try to find out who were the good guys and the bad guys and deal with it from there. This time, I get there, I get out of the helicopter, helicopter takes off. It was an awful day. It was like this; it wasn't pouring rain, but it was misty and gray and not a pretty day. ... The captain there, it was a company, so, the captain's in charge, I said, "Captain, where's the village?" He says, "About, you know, four more miles." I go, "Oh, man, you know, you guys are supposed to take the village before you call me." So, I'm the hotshot, you know. So, he says, "Well, we'll get this over in no time." So, we're heading towards the thing, with a company of guys, so, I feel pretty good, and we're going over bridges, throwing hand grenades. ... I kept thinking, "Throw another hand grenade, just in case," because they'd hide underneath the bridge and stuff, but, anyway, we get to the rice paddy

fields and they're flooded, and, I remember, you know, they have, like, dikes, like this. They're high mounds of dirt, and then, it goes flat, and then, a high mound of dirt and it goes flat. That's how the rice paddies are. Well, when we got to the high part of it, the water would be about here.

SI: To your waist.

TH: And my interpreter could stand, but, when we got to the low part, my interpreter could just about make it. It was very flooded. So, he was holding on to my shoulders and holding a rifle overhead. We're walking through this mess and, all of a sudden, we're being attacked. I mean, so, you're standing there like this, we're in water, you know, firing like this.

SI: Firing over your head.

TH: It was awful, and I got leeches all over me that day, because ... we took our clothes off and noticed that these leeches were all there. ... In fact, I still have a mark on my foot from one of them that buried its head into me and I couldn't get the whole thing out. ... I always said that was my war injury, but I digress, but we got ... into the place and it was all VC. There wasn't a friendly soul in sight, ... but we were sitting in one of the hooches, or looking around in it, and I noticed that the cement color was different. ... We popped through the cement on the floor and there was a whole cache of weapons and rice and all that stuff. So, it was a whole village. I don't know how I went from your question to there. ...

SI: How often were you under direct fire like that?

TH: Well ...

SI: Of course, the base camp was attacked.

TH: In the base camp, we were attacked six to seven days a week, yes, and that was indirect fire. Direct, not that often; the whole time, you want to know? ...

SI: I mean, was it a frequent thing for you?

TH: No, no, no. It wasn't. I mean, we heard fire and, when I was on the operations, like, sometimes, we'd hear [fire]. I was ... actually on this operation; this was with the 17th Cav. This was one of my first ones. It was in May and they rounded up all these guys, but, on our way there, the cavalry, meaning they were in jeeps and they have machine-guns on them, well, this guy starts firing. Guys start firing at us. The Captain calls everything to a halt. Everybody gets under cover and he calls for an air strike, and I said to him, I said, "Why don't we just shoot the guy?" You know, ... we could see they're up in the trees there, just [shoot them]. He says, "I'm not going to risk one life." He says, "Watch this," and calls, in comes the air strike, "Boom," all the trees [are] gone and they're all gone. ... We all hop in the jeeps and off we go, you know, but he said, "Why risk it?" ... So, I don't know if that's direct fire, too, but, if that is, I mean, where I could have been shot, I don't know, twelve, once a month, twelve times, something like that, maybe. I don't know. ...

SI: I am just curious about how you reacted. It sounds like, not that you did not react to it, but that you took it in stride.

TH: Oh, well, you did kind of take the whole thing in stride. You know, you got scared. When I was at Bien Hoa and I saw that first explosion, you get scared. You go, "Holy crap. You know, you can get hurt here," you know, and then, you calm [down]. You start doing your job and things are going off and people are firing and you just come to a realization, that, either, A., you're not going to make it, or, B., you're invincible, and I don't know what I thought I was. ... Then, the other time you get scared is at the end, and that happened to almost all of us. It's like, ... usually, your last two weeks. They didn't ask me to go out anymore, and I probably wouldn't have went anymore, but you just got to a point [where] you said, "Holy mackerel, I'm going to make it," you know, but, up to that point, you just can't be scared twenty-four/seven. ... You'll drive yourself nuts, and some guys were really scared twenty-four/seven and they didn't handle it very well, that couldn't do their job, couldn't function real well and had problems, but, then, we'd try to cover for those guys. You know, we wouldn't let them go out and stuff like that, but you just get to a point where you just go on. I mean, I don't think it's bravery or anything. I think it's just, I don't know, you get used to it, you know.

SI: You develop a fatalistic attitude.

TH: Yes, I think so, yes. ... There were points when you say, "I know I'm going to die, so, I might as well go down fighting," or something, or you just get so mad or, like I said, sometimes, I'd just think I was invincible and, "They can't get me, you know. I lived through all this; they're not going to get me now." So, I said I think it was a combination of all those, all those things that took place. Again, talking with the kids, kids give you a lot of information, and you'd go into these dumpy looking towns and villages, but, then, you'd see this Buddhist church and [the] inside of it, immaculate, you know, like that. I was always impressed with that. ... This is all a village of (Thay Tong?). It says, "I went there ... so often that the village chief gave me some very good and valuable information. One day, I asked him what he wanted. He said, 'A stocked medical area for his village.' So, we got it for him. We had a ceremony." He wanted this ceremony. He had all these monks come and this was it. This is what we built, and see how they spelled, "Welcome?" W-E-L-L, "Well-Come Visitors," but they had this big ceremony and this was the village before the ceremony, and then, the day of the ceremony, you could see how they tried to clean it up. See how much nicer it looks?

SI: Yes.

TH: You know they cleaned it up. ... They had these, like I said, monks there and he had some South Vietnamese soldiers there and it was this big event, you know, but I had that built. ... We got a lot of information from this guy, got a lot of good information. This was my interpreter. Actually, he was the last one and the best one I had, and I had him the longest. ... This guy, (Fei?), was number two. The first one I had, the first two, ended up to be North Vietnamese.

SI: Really?

CB: Wow.

TH: And so, he was a bad guy, and they were both sent on their way and we were told that they were shot. They were killed. They had a jury and all this stuff. I wasn't there for it. ...

CB: How did they find out?

TH: The first one, he was my interpreter for, like, my first week there or something, and he went on to see his family, down in wherever his family was, whatever village, and they caught him there. I don't know what he was doing, but they said they caught him and they came back and, like I said, I hardly even knew the guy. ... Then, this guy, they came to us and they said they had done a check on him and everything didn't pan out and they started questioning him and that was that. ...

SI: I see he is wearing the ...

TH: 101st.

SI: 101st patch. Were they part of the US Army?

TH: They were part of the South Vietnamese Army, but they liked being part of the, you know, United States thing. So, they would like wearing our patch and stuff like that, ... and we would let them do it. Like, this one was my last guy, see, he's got a pistol on? That's my pistol. A pistol, in Vietnam, or in most places, means that you're somebody, you know, if you're carrying a pistol. So, when I asked if I could take his picture, he said, "Can I wear the pistol?" So, yes, I let him wear the pistol. So, that's what I did. This was actually taken at Dong Ha. Dong Ha is, like, three or six miles south of the DMZ. It was our furthest area north, that the 101st Airborne had. It was a camp there and I just went up there a couple times, ... again, just trying to get sources or ... gain sources across the border, further up, to get us the information we wanted on the prisoners or whatever.

SI: The two interpreters who were NVA, do you know if they were trying to sabotage your efforts or if they were just reporting back?

TH: Now, we don't know, we don't know. I said, ... we never saw them again. We were just told that they were taken care of, but it was after that that we started putting some more checks and balances into the interrogation, because we didn't know if they were interpreting everything correctly to us. That was what we thought they were really trying to do. We didn't think they were trying to sabotage us or something like that, because ... it would have been more valuable for them to sabotage the interrogations than it would be to kill five guys.

SI: Were you surprised that this kind of security breach could happen?

TH: Oh, well, yes, but, then, I knew we were, you know, dealing with Vietnamese. They didn't do background checks like we did and it wasn't ... quite as easy, because everybody had family from the North or relatives from the North. ... You know, it was not that divided. It's not like

they can look at you and know you're not working for the Japanese, you know. It just doesn't work like that. So, yes, ... the second time shook us up. The first time didn't shake me up. Like I said, it was so very quick. I wish I could tell you how long, but it was very quick, like the first week or two, and he was gone. I hardly even knew his name. I think it started with a "C," but this guy's name was (Fei?). He was with me for a little while then. ...

SI: Did you get close, become friends, with your interpreters?

TH: Well, then, afterwards, with him, I did, much friendlier. I said, again, I hope he made it, but, ... yes, you became close, really, also, to kind of find out if I could find out whether or not he was really on our side or not, you know. ... We would set certain things up to test him and he would pass them. Like, we would tell the village chief to tell us something, you know, and then, I would go in to the village chief and he would ask and he [the chief] would know it was a test and stuff like that, and he didn't, the interpreter didn't, but, you know, we did a whole bunch of those and it really worked. ... When I was under fire, maybe it was a couple more times than twelve, but [I] never kept track of that, never [been] asked that before, but, you know, I knew he was with us.

SI: Was he the one that was on your back when you were going through the rice paddy?

TH: Yes, he was, yes, he was. ... The other one, the other thing, and I always say it was the best thing I ever did over there, Tim Le Clair, the guy that died, the guy I showed you the picture of was involved but I wasn't with him at the start. It was just me and my interpreter. We were out and we're talking to this farmer, and you never knew where you're going to get information from. So, I'm talking to this farmer and he said, he says, "I know where an American is." Now, that, "Whoosh," top priority, you know, especially on my mission, you know, trying to find POWs. I said, "Is he alive?" He says, "No, he's dead." He said, "They buried him." He said, "I buried him." I said, "You buried him?" He said, "Yes, he was shot and he was there for, like, a day or two and nobody came, so, I buried him." So, [I] learned my lesson from the first time, I'm not going to dig up anything by myself, because I got, you know, in trouble for that. Colonel said, "Don't do that. You'll get killed." So, I radioed back and I said, "I think I have a dead American," and, whoa, all hell broke loose, like I said. ... So, they come out and Tim Le Clair was there and we're digging and we knew it was safe, because that farmer had said he dug him [his grave]. We trusted him and he stayed right with us. You know, if he started backing away, then, we knew that it was booby-trapped or something, but, anyway, we're digging and, sure enough, there's a body there. ... I remember, so vividly, I remember he had red hair. I saw the hair and, I remember, there's dirt all over the face and stuff, and Tim Le Clair, the guy who ended up dying, he took his knife and he says, "Here's the dog tags." He says, "Tom," he says, "you want his name?" and I said, "No," which, today, I regret. I wish I had known the name, but I just remember, at the time, thinking, "I don't want to know this guy's name," because, if I ever knew his family or ran into his family, I wouldn't want to say, "Hey, you know, this is how I saw your son," or something. ... Whatever the reason, I said, "Don't, don't tell me, don't tell me." So, they wrote it in the report and he kept it from me, because, you know, I was kind of (drying my eyes?), "I don't want to know it." ... Now, I wish I did, because I could see it on the Wall with my other friends, but I always thought that was one of the better things I had done there, is find this guy, who went off the missing-in-action to the dead-in-action [list]. So, his parents

could, or family, whatever, feel better about that. Here's destruction in Hue. That's a bridge, yes.  
...

SI: Wow, yes. I thought that was a bunker for a second.

TH: Yes, no, it's a bridge, yes. The water buffalo, these water buffalo were very big and they were the workhorses. They're for plowing and all that kind of stuff, and kids are going to grammar school here. This is a Marine helicopter shot down, passing by. You know, it's funny, when I went on to some of these villages; the grass is low here, because this is near our camp. I can tell, because that's the A Shau Valley back there, but, so, this was Agent Orange-ed, probably, to keep the foliage down, but, when you're going through and you see, see, this is a rice paddy here? That's all rice paddy, right? but, when you're going through the town, you can see the growth is very high and very thick and very close. You're going in your jeep, and so, I wouldn't take an M-16, I took a shotgun with me, ... because I always felt, if somebody jumped up to shoot me, you're not going to [aim]. I could just pull this, I had a double-barreled shotgun, and just pull that thing and, you know, take care of stuff, but I remember, I went to this one village and [I was] talking to the village chief and he keeps looking down at the shotgun, you know. I have the shotgun in my hand. I guess he'd never seen one before. So, he goes, through my interpreter, you know, "What's that?" So, ... they had M-1 carbines; have you seen them? They ... look like toy guns, an M-1 carbine. So, that's what the South Vietnamese used. So, I said, "What do you have?" and he shows me his M-1. So, we set up some cans. There's like four cans there. So, we set them up and I said, "Shoot the cans." So, he takes [the carbine], "Boom, boom, boom, boom," gets the four cans. So, I said, "Good, good chief." I said, "Put the four cans up again." I take the gun, "Boom," one shot, "Boom." [laughter] ... The village chief's eyes about bugged out of his head. He wanted that gun so bad, I can't tell you. [laughter] I think he thought he would win the war with that thing. I think, in the long run, I ended up giving it to him, but ... I just remember his eyes bugging out of his head. "Holy mackerel, that's a cannon." So, you see a little girl there, carrying the water, everybody working hard, and then, this is, like, just a local store. They sold beer, soda, candy. It's just a little store in the village.

SI: That was a native store.

TH: Yes, just right, but we went in there. ...

CB: Did they accept American currency?

TH: No, no dollars. It was ...

SI: Scrip?

TH: Yes, scrip, MPC [Military Payment Certificate]. ... In fact, the Vietnamese used to go, "MPC? MPC?" and, to stop the black market, the MPC would change. Like, all of a sudden, they would say, "After eight o'clock this morning, at eight o'clock this morning, that MPC is no good." So, you had to go to somebody and turn in your MPC and they would change it, for the orange one to the green one. So, then, [if] any of the black market people had the orange ones, it was worthless. So, they would change the MPC; you probably know about that. That's a girl's

high school. That's a rice paddy field, when it's a dry. I think I have a shot when it's wet. This is local food markets, kids on the water buffaloes, Vietnamese houses. This is a road going into Saigon. We went to Saigon and they sent us down there, myself and this other gentleman, his name was Charles (Ayers?), and he used to tell everybody ... his name's Charlie (Ayers?) of the Virginia (Ayers?), and that was funny. Anyway, ... when we were going in there, they stopped us. We had weapons with us. We had our weapons with us, and they said, "No one from the 101st," and they saw the 101st patch on there, "no one from the 101st is allowed to have any weapons in here." I said, "We're in a war zone, dude," you know, and they said, "Yes, and no one from the 101st is allowed to be in here." So, I said, "Says who?" So, they said, "You have to have a written thing," or something. So, I went to the nearest base that was there, flashed my credentials, which we had, "Military Intelligence here." I said, "I want you to type a letter, says that, 'Thomas A. Hoffman and [Charles (Ayers?)], Special Agent, Military Intelligence,'" that was our titles, "'are authorized to go anywhere in Saigon they want,' and sign it," and he says, "Sign it who?" I said, "Sign it by you." So, this kid signs it, "Private." Private, you know, Schwartz signs the thing and I take it and we hand it to the MP [military police] and they let us in. They wouldn't let us take our guns. So, we had these AWOL bags with us and we'd put our guns in there, because we weren't going to go [unarmed]. ... We were shot at all the time. I said we just couldn't fathom being in a place without a gun, but we took our guns into Saigon. ... Then, this is just some more stuff, local stores, local stuff, nothing, the villages. You could see, he had the; it goes up and down, you know, where they get flooded, the rice paddy fields. This, we had General [Olinto Mark] Barsanti, ... we asked him, this was part of a goodwill thing, again, trying to get sources, but we had the General come to this orphanage and he brought with him the 101st Airborne Band. So, [that was] to entertain the kids, but, while they're doing that, we're gathering information and stuff like that. So, that worked out pretty well, and these are some locals. These are higher-class people. Ones that wore all the white like that, they were richer, and then, this is the end. This was Saigon. This is actually the embassy before they took it over at the end, you know, where the helicopter landed on top, taking everybody away. The taxicabs in Saigon, and then, this said, this sign says, "We'll see you again. Thanks, we'll see you again." I said, "Over my dead body." ...

SI: Was that the only time you were in Saigon?

TH: Yes. That was the only time I went. I was there for a week. Me and Charlie were there for a week, yes. ... Actually, what happened there, I don't know how interesting it is, but what happened there, we had a friend of ours that lost some money in the black market. It was a scam. He told us how he was scammed and he told us where he was scammed. So, Charlie, who was a very tough guy, he said, "Let's go get his money." So, we went down to this [area], down this alley, and, sure enough, this guy comes, "Psst, you guys, you want to swap MPC for," what was the name of their money? ... "*piastres*, and I'll give you ten-for-one." Now, usually, the rate was two-to-one or whatever the rate [was], I can't remember, but the rate was, "I'm going to give you twenty-to-one for it." So, it was a scam. I'll show you how it works in a second. So, we said, Charlie goes, "Yes, okay, yes, twenty-to-one." Well, what they had done was, a five-cent piece is the same thing, same size, as a ten-dollar bill. A five-cent piece is the same thing, ... same size. So, what they did was, they'd put, like, the five-dollar bills, or whatever they were, ten-dollar bills, on top, and then, they'd put all these nickels underneath it. ... First, they'd showed you the real stuff, and he said, "Okay, here's our money. Now, show us yours." While

they're doing that, they swap that thing for a stack that had nickels inside of it. So, then, you said, "Okay." Then, he counted out your two hundred dollars and here's our, you know, eight thousand dollars worth of his stuff, and then, somebody would yell, "MPs are coming, MPs are coming," and the guy, "MPs, MPs," and, quick, grabbed your money, ... give you their money and everybody took off. ... Then, when you go back, you're counting your money, you find out that you have, you know, eight dollars there, or whatever. So, Charlie and I go down in the alley. We were so stupid, but we were young and invincible, and he goes, "Show us your money first." So, he [says], "How much you have?" So, he said, "I'll show you mine. We have four hundred dollars, American," you know, and he says, "Oh, we're going to give you two thousand;" I can't remember what the amount was, two thousand, their money, counted out the real stuff. Charlie [Mr. Hoffman slams his hand down] puts his hand out, I take that AWOL bag I told you about, I take the .45 out, and Charlie goes, "MPs coming, MPs coming," takes the money and off we go. [laughter] ... So, we went to our friend and he had lost two hundred dollars, or whatever, I can't remember. We gave him his two hundred dollars, and then, we each made a hundred, or something like that, you know, and had a good time, but that was that. ... That was the only time I was in Saigon, and then, we tried to go into another place and they wouldn't let us in, because we were wearing battle fatigues. ... I remember Charlie had a fit about that and he said to the maitre d', who had a tie on and all this stuff, he says, "You see my friend there?" He's pointing to me. He says, "He's crazy. You see that bag he's got? He's got a .45 in there." He says, "You feed us," [laughter] and they did. They let us go in and eat. ... This was just some other stuff. Actually, this, I haven't completed yet, but these are friends and my family, pictures of them when they were in the military, and I was going to do a thing for my family, but this, when I won the Bronze Star, they had a little ceremony and that was that. ...

SI: It was in November of 1968.

TH: Where did you get that from?

SI: It said it on the back.

TH: Oh, November. ... Yes, I never noticed that. That's my father's handwriting. I wonder how he knew that. Yes, November 19th, I guess, is when I got the Bronze [Star].

SI: Is the citation in there?

TH: Yes, the citation is here, and that's it, and then, this, oh, I always wanted to keep this. This was really a cool badge. I used it, I used this in; I want to make sure this is the one. Yes, this ... one here authorized me to go into any accident or incident, and I remember, I only used it once, in Hawaii, during the tsunami. They wouldn't let anybody down and I used it, but, like, [in] a Katrina or something, I'd just be able to flash this and I could go anywhere, yes.

SI: Did you have that the whole time you were in the military?

TH: Yes. Well, from '69 to '72, I had it, and then, ... I had another badge, which my girls took my medals and they put it in a frame and they put this other badge [in] that gave me access to all DoD [Department of Defense] buildings in the world, and that was a pretty cool badge, too. I



would just flash that, I can go anywhere. This was just a letter my wife wrote to the; you know, in New Jersey, they have that monument for the Vietnam ...

SI: In Holmdel? [Editor's Note: The New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial and Vietnam Era Educational Center is located in Holmdel, New Jersey.]

TH: In Holmdel. My brother and I have a brick there. We both have a brick there, and then, they wanted a write-up, or something, for their archive and they asked that somebody else write it, or something. So, my wife wrote it and that's what she wrote.

SI: That is great. I am actually going there on Monday.

TH: Oh, are you?

SI: Yes, we are having a meeting there.

TH: ... Yes. I have a brick there and my brother has a brick there. They gave it to us as a gift, my family. My brother was in the Air Force. ... He didn't come back too well, ... but he was a navigator/bombardier on a B-52, and so, that was that. ... Then, my niece did a report on Vietnam and interviewed me. ... She said, "We got an A+," and this was her report, ... and that was it. This is just my uncle and stuff like that. ...

SI: Is that World War II stuff?

CB: That was Eisenhower, right?

TH: Yes, that was World War II. ... No, my uncle ...

CB: That is the day before D-Day, right?

TH: That's right. That was the night before, right when they were going, Eisenhower talking to the 101st Airborne. So, that's why I kept that in there, because of that relationship. [Editor's Note: Mr. Hoffman included a copy of the famous photo of General Dwight D. Eisenhower speaking with paratroopers from the 101st Airborne prior to the Normandy invasion in his scrapbook.]

SI: Your uncle is not in that picture.

TH: No, no. ... My uncle passed away. ... You would have loved to have interviewed him. He was a Navy [underwater demolitions team member]. He was, like, one of the first SEALs. He was a frogman during World War II and he was on Omaha Beach. He received the Silver Star and the highest medal of France, also, he got, [the Légion d'Honneur], and the Purple Heart, but he was quite a hero. His first name was Abben which is my middle name, because I was born during that war and many named [children] after heroes. So, I was named after my uncle, my middle name, but he just passed away a couple years ago, but a brave, brave man, through his whole life. He was on that ceremony with [President William] Clinton on the fiftieth

anniversary, or something like that, yes. [Editor's Note: Mr. Hoffman is referring to the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Normandy landings in June of 1994.] ...

SI: He was a Hoffman.

TH: No, his name was Maguire. ... His wife was my father's sister, yes. That was me in a lot younger day. Actually, that was at Phu Vang District Headquarters. That was taken then, that bad place, I call it. It was not a good place. So, that was the story. ...

SI: That is great. Did you take most of these pictures?

TH: Yes. Most of them were taken by me, except the ones that I'm in, obviously, but, yes, I took them, and then, actually, I took another [film]. I have a movie, which is not very interesting. I took a movie. ... I used to have to go down to Da Nang, once in awhile, and talk to the CIA, stuff like that. In fact, once, I got money from them. We were short for operational monies and the Colonel said, "Why don't you ask your friends at the CIA?" because I was the liaison with them. ... I went down there and I said, "Hey, you know, ... I'm short some funds and I've got to pay these sources and stuff. Do you think you can [loan me some money]?" He says, "How much you need?" and [Mr. Hoffman imitates him taking out a lot of money], [laughter] anyway, but it was down in Da Nang. ... I used to go by helicopter and there was ... a road that goes down there, which is a dangerous road. It was Route 1, going down to Da Nang, and I told the Colonel, I said, "Let me go down there by truck." I said, "I want to take pictures." He says, "Go ahead. You want to do it, go ahead. Don't die," and so, I went with my movie camera. So, the whole movie is like this.

SI: Jumping up and down.

TH: So, that's why I said it's not very good, because it's kind of bouncy, you know; not kind of, but it is. It is bouncy, but I have a home movie of Vietnam, and that's the only home movie I took, and then, I sent the camera home.

SI: Now, we have gone through the book.

TH: Right.

SI: Thank you for showing it to us. It is excellent.

TH: I hope so.

SI: We would like to start at the beginning, when you first got into the military, and then, move through.

TH: Oh, okay.

SI: Had you been in ROTC at St. Bonaventure?

TH: Yes, yes. At St. Bonaventure, I was in the ROTC and that's why, when I got to basic, they made me, you know, acting platoon sergeant, or whatever, you know; no real rank or anything, but I was in charge of the platoon, from my standpoint. You know, I reported to the sergeant, the drill sergeant, but they put me in charge because I had two years ROTC. ... So, yes, I did my basic training at Fort Dix and, if I can just back up a second, I was going to join the Navy, actually. The Navy had a program that, if you had two years of college, they were desperate, if you had two years of college, you could go to their flight school, and I wanted to fly. ... Thank God I didn't do it, because I don't think I ... would have been able to do all that studying and stuff, but, anyway, my dad said to me, he said, "Listen, you can go in the service, but, before you join the Navy and do this, why don't you talk to all the services?" He said, "Just promise me you'll talk to all of them." I said, "Okay, fine." So, I said, "For my dad's sake, I'll go to the Marines and the Army," and I'm talking to the Army recruiter and he said, "I want you to take this test," down some place, maybe it was in Newark, "a special test we want you to take." I don't know why they picked me out, but they did, and I took this test and this guy, in civilian clothes, comes out and, very apparent, he comes out and he says he's Special Agent So-and-So, Military Intelligence. ... You know, they take me into this room and [ask], "How would you like to work with Military Intelligence as a special agent?" and I'm thinking James Bond and you know [what], and then, he leans back and I can see he's carrying a .38, you know. I said, "You know, this might be for me." So, I decided to go into Military Intelligence. So, after basic training, which everybody has to do, they sent me to Fort Holabird, Maryland. Today, the intelligence school is in Fort Huachuca, Arizona, but, then, it was in Fort Holabird, Maryland. I went to Fort Holabird, Maryland, six months of intelligence training. That's how I got so smart. ... That was funny, [laughter] and six months of intelligence training, and then, almost everyone from my class got sent to 'Nam. Like, four guys didn't, and I was one of the four. ... I went to Cincinnati, Ohio, to flush out all the Communists that are in Cincinnati, Ohio. So, there I was.

...

SI: What did that training consist of, in Maryland?

TH: Well, a lot of stuff, a big focus on interrogation, surveillance, learning about the intelligence agencies of that point. It was East Germany and Russia and things like that. Identification, I remember the one class we had. The classes were very long, like eight in the morning to three in the afternoon, and [the] military's pretty dry, you know. It's not exciting stuff. So, this one class, ... I remember, it was in the morning and we're all a little groggy and it was supposed to be on image interpreting, or something like that. ... He's talking and it's very dry and, all of a sudden, a door opens to the side and in comes this guy. He looks at the class, and then, takes out a gun and fires a blank at the instructor, looks back at the class and walks out, and then, "Everybody, drop what you're doing and tell us what you saw," and it was really amazing, you know. We're describing the guy, "Did he have a beard, a mustache? How tall? How short?" and it was all over the place. It was really amazing, and then, they, at that point, taught us how you're supposed to identify people and stuff like that, but a big part of it was interrogation, and how they did that [was], they had professional actors play roles. They had these actors from, not Broadway plays, but, like, from [the] Baltimore area, from the theater, and they would give them a role to play and we would have to try to break them down, and it was very good, but that's what that was.

SI: Was it like a regular military camp or was it more like a college?

TH: Oh, no, this was more like college. ... No, we weren't supposed to tell anybody what we were doing at the time, you know. It was all hush-hush, everything top secret and all that. The graduating class picture was stamped, you know, "Secret," or something, too, and, you know, that kind of thing.

SI: When you were sent to Cincinnati, was it to a base?

TH: No, no. We were never [on a base]. We were typically not allowed. We actually got an extra allowance for not going to [a base], because we couldn't go to the PX [post exchange] or anything like that. They didn't want us to be associated. We had civilian cars, ... we lived in an apartment. As I showed you, my roommate, there were three of us that lived there and it was very, very normal. We worked a lot on, at that time, different day and age, was what was called then the "race riots," and, in fact, they took place in Cincinnati, and war protests and stuff like that. There's a picture of Dr. Spock. I don't know if you know Dr. Spock.

SI: Benjamin Spock.

TH: Benjamin Spock, yes. Well, there's a famous picture of him. ... It was on the front page of the *New York Times*, where he's marching, in Washington, down the avenue, on the protest, and he's arm-in-arm with thirty people in line. ... I knew about four of them as intelligence agents, [laughter] ... but we did that, and we infiltrated the Ku Klux Klan and went in there. ... This was in the days of Lyndon Johnson wanting information and didn't care how you got it, and, after it was all found out, after Watergate, really, we weren't involved in that, but, when all that came out, about that kind of stuff, they said, "What the heck is the military doing surveilling [these people]?" I surveilled Stokely Carmichael, I don't know if you know who Stokely Carmichael [was], H. Rap Brown, I surveiled, and so, "What are you [doing]? You know, the military shouldn't be doing that," and they were right, but I was following orders. [Editor's Note: Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown were both chairmen of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee who later became leaders of the Black Panther Party.]

SI: This was all in Cincinnati.

TH: Yes, yes. Well, the Ku Klux Klan part, I would go across the border into Kentucky. That's where they're [at].

SI: These things were not happening all at once, right? You would get different jobs.

TH: Oh, no, yes, yes, different. It came out as something came up.

SI: You were not in uniform, living in apartments.

TH: No, never in uniform, yes, civilian clothes, wear whatever you [want], yes.

SI: What did you think of that at the time? Did you think it was odd that the military was spying on Americans?

TH: No, I didn't, and, you know, it'd be very noble of me to say it was. The only time I thought it was odd; ... I remember the incident and I don't even remember where the heck I was. I think I was in Hawaii when it happened, but there was a group that they thought were protestors, kind of, but ... they were black. It was a black group and they were militant, a militant black group. What they were militant about, I can't remember. ... We were sitting around the table and discussing that they were having their meetings in the basement of a church. You know how some churches have the basement? ... They were having their meetings down there, and they were talking about how we were going to do this and do that and bug the place and stuff, and I remember saying; ... I was in Maryland, I'm sorry, when this happened. I said, "Do you know what we're talking about here?" I said, "We're talking about bugging a church," and I think that was the only time I thought we were doing something over the top, and I said, "I don't think we should be doing that. You know," I said, "if it ever got out that we were bugging a church..." [laughter]

SI: Was that when you were in training?

TH: Oh, no, no, I was in then; no, not during training.

SI: When were you in Maryland?

TH: Oh, right when I was getting out, yes. That was my last assignment. I was assigned to Maryland. I was in Laurel, Maryland, right after the Governor of Alabama got shot there.

SI: George Wallace. [Editor's Note: Alabama Governor and Presidential Candidate George Wallace was shot in Laurel, Maryland, on May 15, 1972, an attack that left him permanently paralyzed.]

TH: George Wallace got shot there. I was there, like, a month after he got shot, or two months after he got shot. ... I worked a lot at the Pentagon and that kind of stuff, and in Maryland and stuff like that. ...

CB: You were doing intelligence investigations like these from when you enlisted in 1965 until 1968.

TH: Oh, the whole time; oh, not '68, until, ... when did I get out? '73.

CB: I meant that you were doing these domestic missions until you went overseas.

TH: Domestic, yes, domestic, except, well, when I was in Hawaii, they sent me to Kwajalein, in the Marshall Islands. I went there twice, other than that.

CB: While you were doing this, the war in Vietnam was obviously escalating. Can you tell us about the mood in the country and what your feelings were about the war?

TH: Well, sure. My feelings were, I was *gung ho* for the war. I believed, hook-line-and-sinker, the "Domino Theory." You know, I was young and, you know, I wish I could tell you it was different, but, you know, I bought it, hook-line-and-sinker. Our President talked, we listened, you know. That was what I thought, and that, "My country, right or wrong," you know, that kind of thing. ... Really, my view of the war didn't change until I was in the war, because I always felt my job was a good one, this trying to find the Americans and stuff like that, POWs, and getting good information to save our soldiers and stuff like that, but it was very quickly when I realized the war was wrong. One of the first things that happened when I was there was, the Vice-President, [Nguyen Cao] Ky, at the time, Vice-President of Vietnam, Ky, ... we were just going to the peace tables and he said something like, "Well, if the United States doesn't want to do what we want them to do, they could all leave," and I said, "They want us all to leave? Let's go. I mean, what are we doing here?" and then, when I realized about that [it] doesn't matter who's in office, a Democrat, a Republican or a Communist, they just care about their rice, ... I realized that there was a very small, elite, rich people of Vietnam. You know, "rich;" you'd be one of them now. You know, they weren't that well [off], but there were certain people that that's who you're really fighting for, and they were probably crooked, and so, I just started realizing that. ... I said that, "This is not going to go anywhere," and when I also realized that, if they had held an election for President of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh would have won. ... If they just ran that election only in the South, Ho Chi Minh would have won that election, and I don't really believe in [the Communist aspect], afterwards, this is, thinking Ho Chi Minh wasn't that much of a Communist as much as he was a nationalist. He really wanted his country to be one and all that kind of stuff, and, to be honest, he went to FDR, at one point, and cited Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, saying, you know, "Help us free [ourselves] from the French," and we turned him down. Otherwise, he'd probably be an American today, an American hero. ... So, I thought, before I went to 'Nam, I thought the war protestors were wrong, I thought they were un-American, I thought all those things. ... Afterwards, I just changed my whole view of the whole thing.

CB: You arrived in Vietnam a few months after the Tet Offensive ended.

TH: Right.

CB: Did you talk to any of the men who had been there during the Tet Offensive? They always say that that was a US military victory, but, in terms of morale, it really affected the troops.

TH: You know, there was a saying, and it's a true saying, that the Americans never lost a battle in Vietnam. ... One of our generals said that to a Vietnamese guy and he said, "Yes, that might be true, but it's irrelevant, you know. We won the war." Yes, tactically, we brought them out into the open, killed a whole bunch of them and took back all the territory that they had taken, but it showed, just like the night when they took over half of our camp, that they're a heck of a lot stronger than [we thought]. I mean, they kept giving us these body count things, you know, ... about, you know, "We killed twenty thousand here and five thousand here." ... You said, you know, "There's not that many people in China," you know what I mean? You start to realize, "This is nuts." I got intelligence reports and I remember, one time, it was written that, "The helicopter went in for a strike. Saw Vietnamese carrying, with beasts of burden, supplies down

the Ho Chi Minh. Killed three North Vietnamese," or whatever, "and one Communist elephant." [laughter] I said, "Jeez, I never knew an elephant could be a Communist, you know. I didn't know that," that's what the thinking was. I don't know, ... but how did the people, the guys, think afterwards was, they knew we were in for a whole new thing and we knew, at that point, that the war ... really needed to be changed, that [it] wasn't going to be "won."

CB: You were in-country when Nixon was elected, correct?

TH: Yes.

CB: Since he had the Vietnamization Plan, did that ...

TH: Yes, we thought that was [okay], you know, peace was going to be at hand, and we thought it was going to be over and, you know, maybe we wouldn't be home any earlier, because it had to have some down thing, but I felt for sure it was never going to last ...

CB: Another five years.

TH: Another five years. Nobody believed that, I don't think, but I do know, ... like, my sister was protesting the war when I was going over. ... I told her not to do that, and, out of respect for me, she didn't, and then, I told her it was okay. [laughter] ... I told her that, "Yes, you can do whatever you want," ... because, you know, that whole "supporting the troops" thing, that's not supporting the troops; it's sending them in to die for something that's stupid.

SI: You joined the 101st as a replacement.

TH: I was assigned to them. You see, the 101st Airborne, they're there to fight, to, you know, jump out of planes, raise hell and fight. Well, they don't have an intelligence unit, so, they get intelligence guys and assign them to different units. So, I could have gone to the 17th Cav. or something, any unit. ... After graduation, after being an intelligence agent, in my case, I had some experience in the States, but, then, you're assigned to a unit, especially in the war zone.

SI: How many men were in your unit?

TH: Well, it was called a detachment. The 101st Detachment, 101st MI Detachment, 101st Military Intelligence Detachment was the name of our thing. ... We had a colonel, we had, probably, two captains, two lieutenants. I was the highest-ranking NCO, and then, there was probably, under me, twelve guys.

SI: A fairly small operation.

TH: Oh, yes, yes.

SI: Were you the only one doing counterintelligence work?

TH: Well, we were all supposed to be doing it, but they felt that I found my niche. They thought I was pretty good at it. So, they had them doing other stuff. The 101st didn't even know what to do with us, sometimes. You know, like I said, they're trained to fight and do all that crazy stuff. One time, we got called up; I remember, I went up there with them. The Colonel goes up, "The General wants to see you," not the top general, but the second one down, "G-2 wants to see you," and they said, "Somebody wrote in pencil;" the General, top general, has his own helicopter, with the 101st ... Screaming Eagle on the front of it, and somebody wrote on it, in pencil, "Crash Ass." [laughter] I'll never forget it, wrote, "Crash Ass," in pencil, and the General says, "We want you to find out who did that." [laughter] You know, I said, "This isn't what we do," you know. ... We did counter sabotage. You know what a LRRP is, long-range reconnaissance patrol?

SI: Yes.

TH: Oh, you guys are pretty up on it. They were assigned [also]. There was a group of them with the 101st Airborne, and this one time, they were assigned a mission. They were crazy guys, I've got to tell you. I don't know if you were one or going to be one, but they were crazy. I mean, they do some crazy stuff, those guys, but, when they're given an assignment that they think is suicide, they just [refuse]. You know, ... they have a line. I don't know where that line is, but they have it, okay. ... They said they're not going to do this and this captain or lieutenant, or somebody, told them they had to go on this assignment. Well, what they did was, they took a hand grenade, they straightened out the pin and ... just kept it in, but straightened it out, and put a string on it and attached it to the chair of this guy's desk. ... He came in in the morning, pulled out the chair, the grenade goes off and he lost a leg. So, they sent us up there to find out who did it, you know, that kind of thing, and that's really not us. That's, like, MP work and CID, Criminal Investigation [Command], but they didn't have that there. So, Military Intelligence, they were just given all kinds of stupid assignments. ... Sometimes, they would just say, "We want your guys to patrol this area and find the enemy," and we'd say, "Well, we're not even supposed to be in that kind of a [situation]. We're not supposed to be captured." ... They couldn't understand that either, you know. "Well, we're 101st Airborne," you know, and they'd say, "Go out and find the enemy. You're intelligence; go find them," you know, "Go on patrol and find them," kind of thing. So, they didn't always know what to do with us.

SI: I was curious; one of the major battles while you were there was Hamburger Hill. [Editor's Note: The Battle of Hamburger Hill was fought from May 10 to May 20, 1969.]

TH: No. Hamburger Hill happened a month after me.

SI: That happened a month after you left.

TH: Thank God, yes, a month after I left. That was ... May 1969. I helped plan that, unfortunately, and the recommendations were, "Don't go in," because we knew the Marines went in, ... they got their clock cleaned, but, see, again, it was a macho thing. The 101st said, "But, we're the 101st," but we knew, intelligence-wise, we said, "They own that place, and we can't even estimate how many battalions they could have in there, because they're underground." ... So, they were saying, "Give us best estimates," and, you know, it was just all guesswork, and we



told them, "We wouldn't go in there," and what we recommended, which they did many times, was, "Send B-52s over and you just keep hammering them. That's the [safe way]. You know, don't send Americans in there," but they did.

SI: Okay, you did lend that kind of direct support to operations.

TH: Yes. I did intelligence work leading up to that, for that battle, you know, trying to do stuff for it, you know, intelligence estimates, you know, that kind of stuff, trying to find out from *chui*-es, people that have given up, or sending sources in and stuff like that.

CB: You referred to the top general before; were you referring to General William Westmoreland?

TH: No, I'm sorry; he was *the top* general. I meant of the 101st Airborne. First, it was General Barsanti, and nobody liked him. ... They always said, "When his helicopter left, everybody went [Mr. Hoffman sighs]," didn't like him. Then, General [Melvin] Zais came in, and he was a pretty good general. He did a survey and asked the soldiers, "What, more than anything, would you want?" He said, "I'm going to try to give it to you. I don't know if I can, but I'll try," and they said, "Ice cream," and he built the 101st Screaming Eagle Ice Cream Factory, and that's what it was called, the 101st Screaming Eagle Ice Cream Factory. ... Here we were, in this sweltering heat and stuff, and he had lots of ice and stuff. ... Every once in awhile, we'd have ice cream, very melty, but it was [good]. He was a nice guy and didn't do too many crazy things.

CB: I had read that, in the 1950s, General Westmoreland actually commanded 101st Airborne.

SI: I think I have read that he was in it in World War II, and then, later on, commanded it. He had left Vietnam by the time you got there, right? He was not in charge anymore, or was he?

TH: No, he was there.

SI: I think he was; maybe he left in 1969 or 1970. [Editor's Note: General William Westmoreland served as an artillery officer, at one time attached to the 82nd Airborne Division, in World War II and commanded the 101st in 1958. He commanded MACV from June 1964 to July 1968, when he became Chief of Staff of the US Army.]

TH: Yes, yes.

SI: I was wondering if you thought perhaps he kept picking the 101st to do things because that was "his unit."

TH: I didn't know that. I didn't know that. If he was ever assigned to the 101st, I didn't know that, but I do know that the 101st, I think even to this day, is always picked on, and they like to be picked on, I think. You know, it's a status thing.

SI: Did they have that kind of *esprit de corps* that they are known for in Vietnam?

TH: Yes, yes. It was a very close-knit, very powerful unit, and the *esprit de corps* there was very high, even afterwards. ... You know, everybody had their personal feelings about the war, but everybody felt that they were really fighting for their buddies. You know, you hear guys today even saying that, that they're really not fighting for their country anymore, you're really fighting for your buddies.

SI: Did you have that same kind of feeling in the intelligence detachment?

TH: Well, different thing, wasn't saving, because that was my job, but mine was trying to get the information so that I could save guys, you know, from going on into an ambush or into a whatever, or getting information on POWs, or, you know, that kind of thing. I thought that was a valuable thing and I felt very good about my assignment.

SI: Do you know if any of the intelligence you gathered on POWs, aside from that raid that happened years later, resulted in you finding any POWs?

TH: ... Well, no, I do know that; yes, what I do know is that there were some that were identified, that had been taken off the missing list and put on the captured list, so that we were able to do that, but we wouldn't do it, usually, on [the word of] one person. It would take, you know, a couple of sources, ... but that did happen, where I would be able to get a couple of sources to verify that So-and-So was a captured guy.

SI: At that time, were the Communists using the POWs as a bargaining chip or propaganda device?

TH: I wasn't at that level, but they didn't do it ... at any kind of local level. I mean, they never said, you know, locally, "Hey, you know, give us..." you know.

SI: Did you ever hear of them putting out any broadcasts by the POWs, reading something pro-Communist, perhaps?

TH: We never heard it. We wouldn't have heard it. We heard one radio station and that was ours, you know. That was the only radio station we heard and they just played, you know, rock-and-roll.

SI: Like Armed Forces Radio?

TH: Yes, Armed Forces Radio, that was it. I mean, so, I ... didn't know about that, anything like that, at the time. We all hated Jane Fonda, you know.

SI: Did you get news about what was happening in the States then?

TH: To this day, I hate her. Yes, I think what she did was wrong. I mean, as I said, you can be against things, you can do that, but you don't go up to the enemy, sit on their things, fire at a plane and call our troops the bad guys, you know. [Editor's Note: Actress and antiwar activist Jane Fonda visited North Vietnam in July 1972. There, she was photographed at the sights of a

North Vietnamese anti-aircraft weapon and she made a number of broadcast denouncing the American war effort.] I just think that was out of hand. ...

SI: Did that happen while you were over there or afterwards?

TH: I can't remember. I can't remember. I think it was afterwards. I can't remember. I do know, the big incident that happened when I was there was, I was there right after Martin Luther King was shot, and that had an effect. ... The black soldiers were very upset about that, and I know the white soldiers had a hard time trying to understand why, you know. "Who is he?" You know, he was not [as well known]. You know, he certainly has risen to a higher level than, I think, a lot of people think he would have had. I'm not saying he doesn't deserve it. I think he does, but I'm saying, at the time, it's like most heroes, you know; it's only when you think, when you go back. ...

SI: At that time, he was not as legendary a figure as he is now.

TH: That's right. He wasn't. I mean, that's what it is. We knew he's a peace activist guy. He wanted this, that. ... You know, "What's the big deal?" and, "It was too bad a white guy did it, shot him, you know. It shouldn't have happened, you know." That was our feeling, but they hero-worshipped him, and rightly so, but [the white soldiers] didn't understand that. ... I think there was a little resentment there between the black and white, in Vietnam, not much, but a little bit, and I think it was around because of that. We didn't really understand how connected they were to Martin Luther King.

CB: Was there also a lot of ...

TH: And Bobby Kennedy.

CB: I was going to ask if there was a lot of feeling when he was shot.

TH: ... Because we knew, I mean, ... I knew, at that point, I knew he was the right guy, at the right time, in the right job, and so, we just knew he was going to win that election. I think everybody there wanted him and that was just devastating, just devastating. ... Then, you think, you know, "We're over here fighting and back home is going to hell-in-a-hand-basket. I mean, there's riots going on and Martin Luther King shot, Bobby Kennedy shot, you know. The place is going crazy," and we never thought it would come back to the thing. ... During the race riot in Cincinnati, there was one in Cincinnati, I was there and I got an order. I should have saved it. It was probably top secret at the time, but it said, [Mr. Hoffman imitates a TWIX coming in] the TWIX comes in, "Special Agent Hoffman [is] assigned to go infiltrate the hierarchy of the riot." I'm white, you know. [laughter] You know, wake up back there, you know, "And infiltrate the thing and identify the leadership of the [riot]." I said, "Number one, it's a riot. There's no leadership here. [laughter] ... You know, this isn't battle," but it's just [that], you know, this is somebody back in Washington, sends out a TWIX. So, I remember calling my colonel, who was in ... Columbus, Ohio, who's black, and I said to him, I said, "Jesus, you see this order I got?" He says, "Yes, I got copied." I said, "What do you think I should do?" [laughter] He said, "I think you're going to get your ass killed. This is what I think is going to happen." [laughter] So,

his name was Montgomery. I have his picture someplace, nice guy. So, he said, "This is what I want you to do." He says, "You have to follow orders." He said, "I want you to go out into the street, look up and down that street, and see if you can identify any leadership. ... If you can't, you come back in the door and report to me," and that's what I did. [laughter] ...

SI: How long did that riot go on?

TH: Oh, it was close to forty hours, because I never slept and I remember saying I was up for, like, thirty-nine hours or forty. So, it was some number around thirty-six to forty-two hours, that I was wide awake. I remember, I was awake for the whole thing. We had to, you know, report on everything. We're reporting that, you know, "A car was on fire at so-and-so and Cincinnati Police are responding and ... the State Police are doing this," and, you know, that kind of stuff.

SI: Was there any kind of National Guard or military response there?

TH: No, they didn't. ... No, they didn't, and that was part of my job. I was supposed to evaluate whether or not we were supposed to be doing that, and we didn't, but we did in Dayton. ... I was up there for a short time, but I wasn't in charge up there. I was, like, a gopher kind of thing. I also did protection duty for [Vice-President] Hubert Humphrey. ... When he was in Cincinnati, he was going to speak at the University of Cincinnati and Secret Service needed some extra help, so, they pulled on us to do it. ... We swept. When Nixon came to Hawaii, we [swept]; I didn't do it, but a guy in our detachment. They had [what] they called the (days?) expert, sound expert, and he went around checking for bugs and stuff like that, when Nixon was there, but I didn't get to see him or nothing.

CB: You said you worked a lot with the South Vietnamese Army when you were in Vietnam. What was your impression of them? What kind of soldiers were they? Did you feel that they were really fighting for the cause as much as you were?

TH: No, no, the regular soldier was not. There was another group, and I wanted to tell you about them, but they were ruthless. They were really committed. If they had more of them, they would have beat anybody, but I forget what they called them. There was a name for them, and probably initials, you know. I can't remember, but, to be in this unit, you had to have a mother, father, brother or sister killed, verified killed, by the North Vietnamese, execution, and then, you could be in the outfit. That's the only way you could get in, and so, these were very committed people. ... I was out, actually, on a patrol with them and we were interrogating a guy and we knew he knew that there was a bomb in the road, there was a booby trap in the road, and we knew he knew. He was the only young guy. I mean, I knew he knew it. So, I'm interviewing him, interrogating him with my interpreter, and these guys were listening, ... two of their guys, and they said, "Why don't you take a break? Let us talk to him for a minute." I said, "Sure, go ahead." I went out and had a cigarette and, when I'm out there, I hear this blood-scream scream out and I go running in there and ...

SI: They cut off his thumb.

TH: Yes, and, sure enough, they had the information in no time. ... If they had them, like I said, they could beat us, you know, [laughter] but their regular soldier, typically; you know, most general statements, you know, "All people were this or that," most of those statements don't hold water, but, by and large, I would say that they [did not]. They were low paid. They weren't very well equipped. They had these, you know, M-1 carbines. I think, like I said there, I think if there was an election, Ho Chi Minh would have won it. I mean, you know, what are they fighting for, you know? They're fighting to keep, you know, this guy in power who they could care less about.

SI: When you were in Vietnam, you also worked with the CIA quite a bit.

TH: Well, a little bit, yes. We gave them [information]. We shared information with them. [We] usually saw them in Da Nang and I probably went down to their safe house, you know, four times, three, four times, something like that, but we would speak. I mean, I would speak to them.

SI: You mentioned the Phoenix Program. Had you been aware of that sort of thing happening before?

TH: No, never knew. There was never a name for it. ... I don't remember. I don't recall, now, us calling it "Phoenix" at the time. We could have, because they had codenames for everything. I mean, there were so many codenames, it'd drive you nuts. ... So, it could have been mentioned, but all I knew was that they were interested in the neutralization of the infrastructure.

SI: Were you ever there when they carried out this neutralization?

TH: I was there, ... I know, at one raid, but just there, and the reason why I was there, I think, is because it was probably at [the village of] one of those village chiefs I knew and I wanted to make sure he was protected, but, other than that, I never went with them or anything like that. In fact, they didn't usually go. It was, you know, [that they] would send somebody, you know, a small squad of guys, you know, to take care of it.

SI: Did they use mercenaries?

TH: No, oh, no. They were all [US military]. They might have been Special Forces or something like that, you know, because we worked with them, too.

SI: Did you definitely know that they were killing these guys?

TH: Oh, yes.

SI: It was not just a euphemism.

TH: No, no. I mean, everybody, "neutralization," we all knew what neutralization meant.

SI: This could be a sensitive question. You do not have to answer it if you do not want to.

TH: I'm a big boy. I would not answer anything I don't want to answer, right. [laughter]

SI: In all of these interrogations, did you just ask questions or was there anything else?

TH: Yes. We did scare the piss out of some of them, and there were no rules. We never tortured anybody, and I'm not just saying that, just never did. The only torture I knew about was that one finger, and they were going to do the next one if he didn't answer. ... You know, when I walked in there, the guy was blabbering all over the place, so, I didn't have to stop it, but that was the only torture I ever saw, but we threatened them, that kind of thing, you know, ... or [we would] say, "I'm going to turn you over to Freddie," you know, or whoever, "and he's going take care of it," a South Vietnamese guy, or something, or, you know, "We're going to find out about your family," ... you know, stuff like that. ... I know that there were incidents, they said that there were incidents, of people being thrown out of helicopters or something. We did have a guy, ... we took him up in a helicopter, scared the crap out of him. That alone scared the crap out of him, that it went up, and he was never in an [aircraft], up five feet off the ground before in his life. Now, you're up in a helicopter flying around with a lunatic. I mean, those guys, too, ... those pilots, they were, saved me many a time, but they're crazy and God love them. ... Anyway, you know, you'd get them talking that way, too. We took one guy up in a helicopter voluntarily, because he couldn't show us on the map. He wanted to tell us where, you know, was going to show us where, but he couldn't read a map. So, we couldn't go up too high in the helicopter, because you can't [tell what you are looking at]; you know, you've been up high. You can't pick out your hometown when you're ... up a thousand feet or something. So, we got a LRRP helicopter pilot, ... because we knew he'd fly real low, and he went roaring right along the ground and, you know, could take us, and [the informant would] say, "Right in there, right in there," and, sure enough, I remember that. Then, we radioed back and we called for artillery fire, and they sent in a couple rounds and [they set off] secondary explosions all over the place, and then, we called for the air strikes and, "Boom," all hell broke loose. So, you know, it was good intel, but that wasn't a bad thing. That guy wanted to go, but, when you put them in the helicopter, and most of the time we did, because we took them from where we captured them back to the camp or something, and they'd be in the helicopter pissing in their pants, you know, because of that alone.

CB: As an intelligence officer, did you hear stories about how American prisoners were treated by the North Vietnamese?

TH: Oh, yes. Well, those stories were going around. Whether they were true or not, I had no idea, but that was all; ... there's a word for that. That was all word of mouth, kind of thing, hearsay kind of thing, ... and the same thing about intelligence, if they knew. You know, "They captured two intelligence guys last year," and what they did to them; whether that was true or not, we don't know, or if they were people just trying to scare us, to make sure we didn't get captured, because it was a big thing that we're not supposed to get captured.

SI: Did the enemy use any propaganda against the US soldiers where you were?

TH: Well, the only thing that they did was if they mutilated a body or did something like that, you know. I know, a lot of times, ... some guy would kill a Vietnamese and put an ace of spades in there, or something like that, and they [the enemy] would take it and put the card on an American soldier or something, but, never, nothing handwritten or verbalized.

SI: No leaflets or anything.

TH: No, no, not where we were.

SI: Before you went to Vietnam, did you have any training in Vietnamese culture or language, anything like that?

TH: No. ... What language I learned, I picked up there, unfortunately. It would have been great, but, no, that was a real sorry point. We learned that as we went, too, and, usually, I learned that mostly from that last interpreter, you know. He would say, "The best way to do this is this," you know, that kind of thing, and, you know, learned etiquette. I ate with them, unfortunately, and I say unfortunately because I had dysentery almost ever[where]. Whenever I had to go to a village chief's place for dinner, or something like that, the ... next day, I was on bed rest. ... I had dysentery all the time, and I would tell my interpreter, "Whatever they're saying, tell me. What I'm eating, don't tell me," you know. [laughter]

SI: That is interesting, because I thought that would be a big part of your work, to know the culture, who was important, who was not.

TH: Yes, it would have been great.

SI: You had to pick it up as you went along.

TH: ... That was learn-as-you-go, yes, and, you know, we quickly [did]; I mean, it wasn't a hard thing to figure out about who was [who]. The village chief was the village chief and, if he was good, usually, the village was good, and, if he was bad, usually, the village was bad. That's how it seemed to have worked out. So, we tried to find the good village chiefs. [laughter]

CB: Did you see many aspects of French culture there?

TH: Oh, yes, oh, God.

CB: I know you said the first time you landed was in Bien Hoa.

TH: Oh, my God. In fact, I went to my first Vietnamese restaurant last week, and I always said I wouldn't go because there wasn't anything there I ever ate that I would want to eat again, but it was a whole different experience. It's like eating at Benihana, [a chain of Japanese restaurants]. That's not Japanese food, is it? You know, they've got New York strip steak, ... but, anyway, it was a great restaurant, but I was saying, at the dinner, the Vietnamese language, the culture and the language, is so integrated with French, it's unbelievable. One of the greatest things about Vietnam was, they had the best French bread, and we have to thank the French for that. I mean,

that bread was unbelievable. The only thing, the sanitary [issues], they'd cook it; you saw those little, like, shops there, right? They'd have this dirty, little shop, all by itself, and as they cooked the bread, out of the oven, they have no place to store it, because those places are tiny, they just put it out on the ground. ... They'd stack up these French bread [loaves] five feet high. They'd be stacked up in a pile, flies all over them, and we would go there whenever we'd pass by. We would go and I'd get two loaves, one for my interpreter, one for me, and we would eat that. ... It would have black specks in it from the flies baked right in it, but best bread you ever had, [laughter] but the language, ... some of their customs, ... half of the words were, you started out in Vietnamese and ended it in French. I mean, you know, yes, very intertwined with the French; yes, you knew the French were there, and the French-Vietnamese children, beautiful. I mean, it was a nice combination. Most of them were very attractive, the women and the men. ... You can tell right away, you know, who [was French-Vietnamese].

SI: Did you do any work with the other groups in Vietnam, like the Montagnards, [people indigenous to the Central Highlands of Vietnam]?

TH: No, not with Montagnards. That was more Central Highlands, and so, it wasn't by me, so, no.

SI: Most of the people you worked with were native Vietnamese.

TH: Yes, yes.

SI: Did you do any work with any other intelligence agencies, besides the CIA, Naval Intelligence, perhaps?

TH: No. The only time the Navy was ever involved, and to answer your question, ... one night, we were really getting pounded, real bad, and it was a storm, pouring, monsoon, pouring down. Helicopter, no flights, that's what it means, and nothing could get up in the air. We could fire artillery, but we were getting pounded. ... All of a sudden, I heard these "locomotives" coming through the air. I swear to God, it just sounded like a train coming through the air, and we found [out] it was the Battleship *New Jersey* firing. ... I remember picturing it. I said, "Oh, my God, we're in this storm here." I mean, this was a monsoon. I'm picturing this ship, battleship, out there, you know, rocking and rolling, firing these sixteen-inch "locomotives" through the air, and they're hitting out right out there. I just couldn't believe how they could be that accurate, but I didn't call for them. Somebody else did, ... but we think they were there that night. ... No, we didn't deal with the Navy. They weren't up by us, because, again, the Navy, mostly, was down south, by the Delta.

CB: Did it rain there often?

TH: During the rainy season, when it rained, it rained. I told my wife, I think it was the only time I cried in Vietnam, was this one night. We were some place and we had a tent. It wasn't my regular tent, but it was in a tent. The winds came, knocked the tent down and I was there. I had my helmet and my rifle and I'm sitting in the mud. It's just pouring down, because the rain just comes. You can't see this far. You've never seen anything like it, pouring down, and I just



remember sitting there and just tears just coming down my face, like this, like, "What the hell am I doing?" Yes, but, that was it. ... Yes, during the rainy season, when it rained, it rained, and, other than that, it was hot. I know, the troops now talk about the heat in Iraq. We didn't complain about the heat as much as the humidity. ... I remember being up at seven in the morning, you would be up earlier, but, by seven o'clock in the morning, all your shirts [were] soaking wet from here, here and there and there in the back, and just soaking wet, you know, and the arm [pit marks] this big around. It was almost all sweat and that's why you see pictures of everybody with their shirts off. It was just so humid, you just couldn't do it. Our cot, that cot I slept on, they gave us air mattresses and they were terrible, because they were rubber. ... You'd lay on those and, you know, the air mattress has grooves and they were just filled with water, sweat running down them. So, that didn't work too well. You know, if we had sheets, [it would have been better], but we didn't have any sheets, so, there was nothing to put over that thing. So, you were better off just being on the cot.

SI: It does not sound like your living conditions were very cozy.

TH: Oh, no, it was terrible. The mosquito net was great. That was great. I'll tell you, one day, I was in my tent and, usually, I had the flap open this way and I looked out to the A Shau Valley. Well, this one morning, six o'clock, whatever time, I remember opening my eyes and I saw this C-130 going to land in my tent, you know. The thing's at treetop level, or whatever, and I just remember, opened my eyes and I go, "Holy crap, he's going to land right on my tent." ... Behind it was this fog and everybody, we started screaming, "Gas, gas." So, we're putting gas masks on us. They don't have C-130s, so, I knew it wasn't gas, and then, somebody said, "They're spraying." It's ours, because we saw the stars, ours, and they're spraying the mosquitoes. I said, "The Army is not going to be out here killing mosquitoes for us." So, then, [we] later found out it was Agent Orange. ... We actually got covered that day, yes, and it was reported. I'm part of that lawsuit, in that I didn't want to get anything, but I just wanted my name in there, in case anything ever happened, you know, when they first did that thing. So, I put my name in.

SI: You showed us the pictures of where they cleared out the perimeter.

TH: No, ... yes, and, if they'd told us then that, someday, this could cause cancer, we would say, "Spray it." I mean, the choice was, you know, having the jungle come up to your tent or you could have this wide-open killing field, you know, ... to protect you. So, I mean, even if we knew it was bad, we would have said, "Do it," ... but, yes, they sprayed Agent Orange.

SI: In the Military Intelligence detachment, did you have to take turns on guard duty at the perimeter?

TH: No. ... Yes, we only had to do it once or twice, until somebody got the word to somebody that ... there is a secret [document], there was, a secret document that said how we were to be handled, and one of them was, "No guard duty," because we were not supposed to be in any place we were supposed to be captured. In fact, a lot of those missions I went on, I wasn't supposed to really go on, but I just felt it was, like, my duty to do it, so, I would do it, ... or it would be good for me to do it, but it says in there, "No guard duty." So, somebody would get a bug up, "How come these candy-asses aren't pulling guard duty?" So, they'd say, "We want you

out there tonight." So, we'd have to go out there, because you have to follow orders, and then, the word would have gotten to somebody in, you know, whatever, but, then, that guy gets rotated back and a new guy comes in and whatever. So, I think it ... probably happened to us three times, or something, where we were out on the front lines, scared to death, you know, because we weren't trained to do that. You know, we were just afraid of screwing up more than anything, but, from where I was, we could, with a night scope, and we had night scopes, with a night scope, I could see the enemy out there, at nighttime. You could actually see them out there.

SI: At night, was there constant harassment and interdiction fire? What was that scene like?

TH: Well, it was always great when it was a full moon, something like that, but, if there was activity going on, we would call for flares and, ... at will, they'd just, "Whoosh. Boom, boom," you know, like, one now and one [later], you know. ... We didn't fire live rounds just out there for no reason. That didn't happen, but it was flares. ... The flares went off and you could see everything. ... If there was somebody way out there, you know, five hundred yards, you'd see them, you know, ducking down.

SI: What do you remember about the night that half the base was overrun?

TH: Yes, that was bad. Actually, ... in this article, ... they alluded to that, somehow, ... in this thing here; they alluded [to it].

SI: This is a magazine put out by the 101st.

TH: This was a magazine. Yes, the 101st put this out, and I don't know if they put this out ...

SI: It is called *Rendezvous with Destiny*.

TH: *Destiny*, yes. See, this is Barsanti, but there was something in here. ... You see, 17th Cav., see, I worked with those guys, the 17th Cav., on that. That was that first thing, but it was May 21st or May 22nd. I remember, it was my sister's birthday and the only reason why I don't have the date; see, here's Camp Eagle, here's Hue, Highway 1, Phu Bai was here, A Shau Valley, but, yes, May 22nd. "May 21st, at twelve-thirty AM, NVA battalion, augmented by personnel from sappers," and the sappers were bad. ... In those bunkers we were in, they were throwing stuff in there, "launched a daring ground attack against Camp Eagle, following more than four hundred rounds of 122-[millimeter] rockets, eighty-two-[millimeter] mortars, B-40s, B-41s, into the division headquarters area. We staged southwest perimeter, beaten back by the First Brigade. Fast thinking, the artillery, real good." This was without sighting devices. ... So, when you have to take your artillery and lower it, without sighting [it], to ground level and fire it, you know you're in trouble. So, that's what these guys did, and, "First dawn, fifty-four enemy bodies, sixteen injured, were captured," there was more than that, "sixteen satchel charges, thirty Bangalore tubes, fifty RPGs, and then, 255;" I think, in that little gulley, right in front of my place, I think there were, like, six, eight dead guys there.

CB: You had only been there for a month when that happened.

TH: Yes, that was [it], but I was already [acclimated]. At that point, I was okay, yes.

SI: You did not have that bunker you showed us in the picture at that point.

TH: Yes.

SI: Okay, you had that.

TH: Yes, I had that bunker.

SI: Did they pull you back to that?

TH: No. I was in that bunker and, in fact, the only thing I [recall is], the Colonel came up and said, "We're running low on ammo." That's all he said to me. Again, I was the ranking NCO. So, myself and my bunkmate, Tom (Barry?), we said, "We'll get it," and we went down there. It was down in front of us and I remember going down there and thinking how stupid this was set up. It was dug into the ground, with the doors opening out towards the bad guys, and I said, "Now, this is kind of stupid, because, now, it's opening out towards the bad guys. Somebody fires one bullet in here, this thing's going up," ... but they ended up moving that and they built that other thing there, that big bunker there for the infantry guys to come after that, but we went down there and we got ammunition and stuff like that and brought it up for the boys.

SI: Did you fire a weapon that night?

TH: Oh, yes, oh, yes.

SI: You did.

TH: Oh, yes, all hell was breaking loose that night, and we didn't even know, sometimes, what we were firing at, but, there, you know, it was just all hell breaking loose. It's not like in the movies, and I'm sure you've heard that already. You know, you hear a shot and you go like that and you fire back. You hear a shot, you don't know where it's coming from, you know, left, right, up, down, wherever, you know, you just [react], but you had the thing, you, "Boom." You're just firing out there.

CB: Was that one of your first experiences with combat?

TH: Yes, ... the first experience, ... probably, that I fired. ...

CB: Before you arrived in Vietnam, did you have expectations of what combat would be like?

TH: Yes. I thought somebody's going to fire, I was going to go like that and he was going to be dead. [laughter] That's what I thought. I mean, you know, I thought, when ... somebody fired, you heard the shot and you fired back, but, you know, all you'd hear, [Mr. Hoffman imitates the sounds of a battle], you know, and you don't know if it's yours, theirs, where it's coming from,

very confusing. ... That was probably my biggest thing, was how confusing battle was. It was very confusing, not as organized as it is in the movies.

SI: This kind of fighting, perhaps not as big as this battle, would happen six or seven days a week.

TH: ... Yes, something that would happen, and, sometimes, it was real light. It could be one mortar round coming in, you know, and, you know, twelve-thirty [at night], it doesn't matter, you've got to get up, you've got to put your stuff on, get in the bunker, you know, ... because you don't know how big it's going to be, or little. It was just harassment, sometimes.

SI: Did anybody you knew have trouble coping with this?

TH: Oh, yes, yes, some people became very petrified and wouldn't go out. Some people had a hard time going down to the chow hall, you know, to eat, because it was out, you know, ... just had a tough time coping, you know, and we tried to cover for them as best ... [we] can, until they could get around, but, yes, some people had a tough time.

SI: Were the guys in your detachment relatively new to the Army or were they like yourself, having had a couple of years' experience?

TH: Yes, well, I had a couple; I was a little bit older. What was I, twenty-two? but, you know, I was older. I was a higher rank, was a staff sergeant at that point, and most of the others were not. Most of them were either right out of intelligence school or something like that. ...

SI: Do you think that being a little older helped you?

TH: Oh, yes, yes, I think so.

CB: At twenty-two, you were one of the oldest.

TH: Yes, I think so, yes.

CB: There have been a lot of complaints by American Vietnam vets about the M-16. They said it would jam and it was an inferior weapon to the AK-47. Did you ever have any issues with it?

TH: No, no. We liked it, and everybody I knew liked it. We never had, really, any problems with it, and I was out with the infantry guys, too. They didn't seem to complain. Like, I've heard the same thing and I just didn't hear it quite as bad as that. The other thing there, too, I would really like to say on the record is about drugs, that it seems to be, I think, from the movies, a lot of perception that, like, everybody was high all the time and/or drunk all the time, or something all the time, and they were shooting up all [the time]. Just think about it for a second; if you were going to be on a patrol with somebody, do you want them high? You know what I mean? and the same thing with drugs. If we knew somebody was high, I mean, we would've killed them. So, I'm not saying it didn't go on. It did, but it was in the rear. Whenever I saw it, it was in the rear and it was not as prevalent as they made it to be. There were not drug dealers all over

Vietnam. I don't know. You know, ... you could see, we're out in the boondocks there, you know. Where's the corner, you know, candy man? He's not there, you know. ... So, it just was not as prevalent as they make it out to be, and nobody wanted [a high soldier in combat]. As I said, if you were going out on guard duty, they wanted to make sure that you were clean and straight, or, you know, out on patrol. I was with, like I said, those 17th Cav. guys and many, many other troops, with them, and they wouldn't have tolerated [drug use]. They would have killed them.

SI: When you did see drug abuse, was it just marijuana or were there other things?

TH: Yes. That's what I saw, [marijuana]. Now, maybe there was this whole other culture going on, ... but, again, I would assume it was in the rear area, because where do you even get all that, you know? Maybe in Saigon, you know, maybe in the larger places, but not out in the boondocks; these little villages didn't have anything.

SI: How did you feel about the guys who were not in areas of danger like you were, such as the guys in Saigon or the guys in the rear areas?

TH: Oh, I thought they were lucky. No, I wasn't; I mean, you go where you're assigned. I mean, you know, I always said, you know, "I would ... never want to go back there again, but, boy, I'm thankful for the experience." I'm glad I was with the 101st. ... I think, you know, I learned a lot, I grew up a lot, I think a lot of things happened. I was not a great student then but now, I have a master's degree. So, you know, so, things change, and I think the Army [helped me]. ...

SI: After the first two years, did you have the option to leave? You said earlier you re-upped for six more years.

TH: Oh, I was in for three. So, at the end of two, you could re-up for six and get ten grand. Now, 1966 this was, ten thousand dollars, your daddy didn't make in a year, you know what I mean? and it was just a huge sum of money. It's like what they're throwing at the guys now, to try to keep them. Now, I hear, they're throwing a hundred thousand at SEALs to keep them there. That's what I heard, but, anyway, ... they offered me ten thousand dollars. So, it would be six years from [then]. They would drop my third year and I would start the six. So, it was a total of eight, eight years for ten grand, and I did it and it was probably a mistake, in the long run. It should have been less, but, if you did four years, you got, like, a thousand dollars, you know. So, I wanted the money, but it didn't slow me down. I did pretty well, when I came out. I went into business. I realized the military wasn't a way to make your money, you know, and I retired at fifty-eight. So, I did pretty good.

SI: When you went into the Army, it was before the major buildup in Vietnam.

TH: Yes, yes.

SI: Did you think that you might be going there when you signed up?

TH: No, ... I guess, when I went in, there were still some war protests, but it was so minor, but it wasn't a thought that I would end up going there. It was after I was in. Then, it just kept getting bigger and bigger, and it was so fast. It was really taking a life on its own. I joined in, what, '65, I think it was? and so, then, it was [small], but '66, it became much more on the radar screen. '67, forget about it, it was huge, and I went in '68, '69. Have you run into any phonies?

SI: Not that I know of. Everyone I have run into, I think their stories check out pretty much. Of course, you cannot check every detail.

TH: Yes, yes. ... Interesting thing, my daughter's best friend ... ended up being a lawyer, but, ... before she was going through law school, she was going to undergraduate school, she had to interview three people that went to war. So, she ... asked me to be one and I'm talking to her and she said, "What unit were you with?" She had these questions, and [asked], "What unit?" "101st." She goes, "Oh, it's so great," she goes, "That's the same as my boss. He was with the 101st." I said, "Oh, no kidding?" and, you know, maybe I knew him, you know, a big division, but who knows? So, I said, "When was he there?" She says, "Well, he was only there for two months," some number like that," and I said, "Oh, what happened? He get shot or something?" She goes, "No, he made his three combat jumps."

SI: Oh.

TH: I said, "What?" "He said he made his three combat jumps." I says, "There was one jump in Vietnam and it was a publicity shot. They cleared the ground, they had the news there and they jumped, and it was the only time they ever jumped," and the whole story, and so, she was [tricked]. I said, "You've got the best story ever." I said, "You've got a made-up guy." I said, "This is better than having a real guy," [laughter] I thought, you know, but three combat jumps. ... So, I thought it was interesting. I said, "Now, when I ... came back from 'Nam, you didn't want to admit you were there. Now, everybody wants to have been there, you know." It's funny, huh?

CB: What was it like when you came back? Did you get any of the sentiment that people were against us being over there?

TH: No, no. Nobody ever said anything to me, but, again, the main reason for that is, even when I came back, I'm in Hawaii, I'm in civilian clothes, you know. So, I wasn't at a military base or anything like that. So, I never saw any of that. I heard it, ... you know, heard it was in the news and stuff like that, but nothing ever affected me. I'm also a big guy, [laughter] but civilian clothes, I think, was the [thing].

SI: Did you come back to the mainland between your tours in Vietnam and Hawaii?

TH: Yes. Funny, yes, I haven't told this story in a long time. Actually, when I came back, ... my assignment was, I told you, Hawaii. So, I flew; if I can just tell you about my last day there, ... it was my last day. They send you to; it started with an "R," like relocation center or something, but it wasn't called that. It was something military like that, but you go to this place to get ready to go out and you spent one night there. I remember, there was one thing there, and

then, they'd send us down to this terminal, and the terminal is a building with a tent over it, you know. So, it's really a big tent, with solid kind of walls, plywood or something, and I remember sitting in that tent and they're saying that you're going there. So, they said, "Sit down and we'll call your name," or whatever, and I remember sitting there and I said, "I can see a rocket. It's going to come right through there and hit right here." So, I pick up my duffle bag and I went down and I sat down there, and then, I could just ... see the rocket coming right at me then. I kept moving, ... because I was going crazy. So, [I] went up to the desk and there's a sergeant, the Air Force sergeant, and I said, "Hey, Sergeant, I've got to get out of here," and he said, "We have a Braniff," that was Braniff Airlines, that was [operating] at the time, said, "We have a Braniff Airline [flight] coming in here. It's going to be here in two hours and it's got 'round-eye' stewardesses." You know, "round-eye," you know, that was a big thing. "We have 'round-eye' stewardesses on it," he says, "or I've got a body ship going back now." He says, "A C-141 and it's going to Seattle ... with dead American bodies on the back of it. You can go on that now." I said, "Put me on it." So, I got on that plane. I always said I was going to pee on the country before I left, but I didn't. I just spit, and then, got on the plane and there was, like, mesh [seating]. It was like a weave kind of thing you sat in. I sat in that thing and it was freezing cold, because they're keeping the temperature down, because the bodies were all in [the hold]. ... I couldn't see them, ... but the plane was filled and it had a lot of bodies, and that's how I came home, landed in Japan, and then, went to Seattle. So, from Seattle, I, on my own expense, took a plane to New Jersey, okay. I get a bill in the mail, from the government, for the distance between Hawaii and Seattle. This was, like, when I was in Hawaii, like, I was there a year, and I get this bill for 158 dollars, or something, because I should have only ... gone to Hawaii, but this [C-141], I mean, it didn't stop in Hawaii, you know. It went to Japan, and then, it went to [Seattle]. ... So, I wrote back and I said, "You're going to charge a soldier for coming home?" I said, "I can't believe this." I said, "I refuse to pay this," and they sent me another bill, said, "You have to send this thing [in]." I said, "This is now going to go to the newspapers. I'm going to take this to the newspapers, tell them you're charging a veteran to come home from the war," [laughter] and then, I never heard from them again. So, I think I owe the government 151 dollars. Did that answer whatever that question was? I forget what it was. ...

SI: Yes. We were just asking if you came back home before going to Hawaii.

TH: Oh, yes. So, then, I came back home, and that was an adjustment. Loud noises, hit the floor, you know, stuff like that, and, you know, I'm very nervous, and then, what's also funny, my mother's the greatest cook in the world and I had some of her food and got dysentery, I guess from not being used to it. Now, that food was the bad stuff, but I remember being sick as a dog for a couple of days, but great to be home.

CB: During your year in Vietnam, did you ever take a leave?

TH: Yes, yes. I did two, actually. The one was, the Colonel, because me and Charlie had done such a good job, said, "Why don't you go down to Saigon?" So, we went down to Saigon for a week and we had a good time down there. At that time, I was married to a different woman. ... I married her right before I went and I divorced her when I came back, just shouldn't have happened, and I met my present wife of thirty years, thirty-one years now, but no kids or

anything like that with the first wife, but I met her in Hawaii for a week. So, I had R&R there for a week.

CB: Can you describe what it was like to be in Vietnam during holidays, including your birthday?

TH: My birthday, that was great, because that was getting near the end. My birthday is in March and I was leaving in April. So, that was a real good one, and one of my favorite cakes is angel food cake. So, my mom made an angel food cake, and I loved popcorn. So, she filled the box with popcorn, you know, to, like, hold the cake in the box, ... so [that] it would make it over there. Well, when the cake got there, it was, like, inundated with popcorn. So, it was pretty funny, but what we did was, we had a rule, in our detachment, and, [as] I said, [it is] a small group, that everyone, if there was any boxes that came, which we knew what it was going to be, a CARE package from home, had to be opened in front of everybody at five o'clock, or something like that, you know, cocktail hour, you know, or something. ... So, at five o'clock, or whatever time it was, we would open up the box, and then, we would share, you know, whatever we had, and, usually, I'd get Slim Jims in there and, you know, my angel food cake, but my birthday, ... that was great, getting the angel food cake. Christmas was just, I guess, another day, and Thanksgiving, they, the Army, did its best, you know, trying to give a turkey thing or something, but it was a rainy day. It was monsoon season, so, it sure was not a nice day. It was probably like today, you know, ... but I'll tell you about New Year's. I said to the Colonel, I said, "We ought to do something for New Year's." Now, we had some groups around us. You saw that truck detachment across the way, but we had some other groups around us that we became friendly with, when they were in, and I said, "Let me see if I can get some entertainment in here." The Colonel says, "Go ahead." I always liked to scrounge for things. I got him a jeep, too, by the way. I'll tell you that story, ... if you care, but, anyway, I'll tell you the jeep story first; it's funnier. The Colonel's jeep got blown up during one night. A rocket comes in, blows up his jeep. He says, ... "I don't have a jeep." He said, "I put in [for] the replacement. It's going to take, you know, eight months to get it. I'll be out of country by then." I said, "I'll get you a jeep." So, he says, "You'll get me [one]?" I said, "I'll see what I can do." So, I was going down to Da Nang, to see somebody, probably CIA, and I go into ... that CONEX box I told you I had, with the weapons. Well, I take a Chicom .38. It's a Chinese Communist pistol, with the hammer and sickle on it. Well, that's hot stuff. So, I take that with me and I go down there and I see this jeep. It's a beauty. It's waxed and it's got the cover over the back tire, you know, with their unit name on it and everything. So, I said to the guy, "Whose jeep is that?" and he said, you know, "That's Colonel So-and-So," a "full bird" colonel. My colonel was a lieutenant colonel. So, this guy's a "full bird" colonel. So, I go in there; could go anywhere, Military Intelligence, you know. So, you go in, "Military Intelligence, I need to see your colonel." So, he said, "What can I do for you?" So, I take the gun out, this is in the rear, Da Nang's rear, you know, put the gun down there. I said, "What do you think of that?" He says, "That's pretty cool." So, I know he's got [to] thinking, you know, he can go back [and tell the story], "Here I am, surrounded by thirty NVA, you know, and I shoot them all, take the pistol." So, he's got his war story going. ... He said, "What do you want for it?" I said, "I don't know. What have you got?" He says, ... "How about a refrigerator?" I said, "I don't have electricity where I am now." He says, "How about an air conditioner?" I says, "No electricity," you know. He says, "I don't think I have a [thing you want]." ... He says, "What do you want? ... I don't have anything." I said, "How about a jeep?"



He said, "A jeep?" I said, "No, not a jeep; your jeep." [laughter] So, he says, "How can I give you that?" So, I said, ... "The next time that any round hits in Da Nang, like tomorrow, somebody's going to fire something into Da Nang, you write that down off as a combat loss." [He] didn't even know, and I said, "I'll tell you how you do it. ... You write down, 'Combat loss,' and you're taken care of." He says, "Honest to God?" I said, "Honest to God." So, then, I said, "Before I leave here, I want all the paint off," because it had, you know, whatever his unit there [was], "and I want '101st Airborne' on it," because I was afraid that I was going to leave and he was going to call the MPs and have me turned in. So, I said, "I want '101st Airborne' painted on the thing." He did it and I drove back, gave it to the Colonel, and he said, "I won't even ask." ... True story, but New Year's, I said, "Let me see what I can do." ... We get a ... Chinook. The Chinook is the longer one, you know, carries troops in the thing, loud. If you've ever been in one, deafening, deafening noise; you don't ever want to be in one, but you filled it with soldiers and they're all sound asleep. Anyway, American soldiers can sleep anywhere. We go down to Da Nang, and I didn't go with the helicopter. I went with the regular helicopter first, go down there, and I find this guy who's booking entertainment down in Da Nang for the troops, because it's a rear area. ... There's this group of Australian girls, like four girls, that have go-go boots on, and go-go, it was go-go, at the time, you know, and they have the white short skirts, and no nudity or anything like that. They wouldn't do that. ... This is a different day, ... but, like, a bikini top thing, you know, and they have, like, a three-piece band and they're going to do it for X amount of money, which we could do. So, we give them that. So, I have to go back. Now, I have to transport them. So, I need that Chinook helicopter, and I remember, we traded a generator for ... the helicopter for the night. We flew the band in and he couldn't land at the 101st, because the chopper was; actually, I don't know why, but it had to land at Phu Bai. Oh, because that's where his home base was, ... the Chinook's home base. It would fly us to Phu Bai, and then, we had to take these girls and their manager and the little band, three-piece band, by jeeps and truck ... ten miles to Camp Eagle. This is dusk time, very dangerous, and so, we have machine-guns up on top of the things and the girls are petrified. We had them wearing helmets and they were having a fit, because they didn't think they were going to a forward area, ... but we got there and they put on a show, for an hour or something. ... It was great and the troops loved it, but there was probably only a hundred of us there, but it was great. It was a great night, but that was New Year's.

CB: Did you see any USO shows?

TH: No. ... We're too far north, ... way too dangerous for Bob Hope or anybody else that was coming. The only person I saw walking around camp was Joey Bishop, who just died, ... but I remember seeing him like it was yesterday, and I was telling [people recently about] it, because, you know, he just died. He had a flak jacket on and his helmet on, and he's with this little entourage of people, you know, I guess, military people and non-military, but I could see him. ... I'm looking, I'm saying, "This has got to be somebody," you know, and he's going, "Hi-ya, soldier," and I go, "Hey, how you doing?" and then, it hits me, "It's Joey Bishop." I said, "Joey Bishop." See, he was scared to death, I've got to tell you. [laughter] He was [shaking], like this, but that's all I remember, and he was the only guy I saw.

SI: Did he put on a show?

TH: No, no. ... He was just walking and he said hi to me and that was it, and he was just walking around and no show, no, not there.

SI: Did they have any enlisted men or officers' clubs, that kind of entertainment?

TH: No, not where we were. That's why I built, I had that, what I called the rest tent, you know. ... We actually stole the tables and chairs and stuff like that, and that's it. We built, like, that bar thing there and we had beer. It was always warm. You know, we'd put it in the refrigerator, but there was no electricity. ... You could play cards or just sit there with, you know, your friends, listen to USO radio, or something like that.

SI: Did they have movies?

TH: No, no movies. See, it was pretty forward, a pretty forward area, ... no movies. I don't know why.

CB: Do you remember where you were and how you felt in 1975 when the North Vietnamese finally took over Saigon?

TH: Oh, yes, I felt very bad. I knew we let a lot of people down. I could just see, I just knew, we left behind a lot of people. ... My wife always says, "Do you want to go back?" and I have a very mixed feeling about ever going back. I said, "If I went back, I'd probably like to only go to Hue and I'd probably like to go to some of those villages that I went to," I said, "but, probably, those village chiefs were probably all executed," you know, and so, I don't know. ... I think I worried about who was good to us that probably [were executed], and that's what I thought about that day. I said, "I know we left people behind there," and I think it was embarrassing and all those other things, of how we left.

SI: I wanted to ask you ...

TH: Does that answer that?

CB: Yes.

SI: I wanted to ask you a little more about what you were doing in Cincinnati, before going to Vietnam.

TH: Okay.

SI: When you infiltrated the Ku Klux Klan, what was that like?

TH: Oh, well, ... the humorous part of that was, [to] go to a meeting, you find out there's a meeting, you go to the meeting. ... I remember this one time, I go to a meeting and they're really trying to collect money, more than anything, at these meetings, and [there were] a couple of, you know, racist things they're saying and plans, "Don't forget, the big march is coming and Fred from so-and-so is going to be coming here from Texas to give us all a good pep talk," or

something, you know, crap like that, just real meeting stuff. They weren't going to [plan an attack], you know, "We're not going to get anybody tonight," or anything like that, but, after this one day, I'm back at my field office, that's what we had, ... a field office, and a state police intelligence guy comes in and says to one of the guys, "Hey, do you know who this guy is that was at the meeting last night?" It was me. [laughter] He says, "It's him. He's in there," ... and, you know, we always said you could always tell who the intelligence agents were, because they were the only ones that paid their dues. [laughter] So, if they paid their dues, they're probably [an intelligence agent], because it was not our money, you know. ...

SI: Was it just, "Let us gather intelligence on the group?"

TH: That's what it was, yes, "Let's gather intelligence on them and see what we can find out." We didn't do much of it. It wasn't a big, prevalent thing, but ... when we heard of something. It was usually in Kentucky, which was right [there], Cincinnati's right over the border, and that was part of our area of operations. So, we did that. ... What else I did there; we did what we called "penetration inspections." ... At that time, Nike [antiaircraft rocket] bases and that kind of thing were all over the country and we would try to penetrate them, because ... no one was allowed to be on them. So, we would design plans to try to get into those places, but that was a lot of fun. That was the fun part of the job. We did background investigations on people. We did interrogations of people.

SI: Who would you interrogate and what would you do?

TH: People trying to get into the military or [who] were drafted into the military. Remember, it was [when] the draft was going on there, and, if they were suspected of being either Communist sympathizers, different day, remember, gay, antiwar, you know, any of those things, we would talk to them about it; drug use, you know.

SI: Would you ...

TH: Interrogate might be [too strong a word], you know. That's what it was called. ...

SI: Were you going in there identifying yourself as Military Intelligence?

TH: Oh, yes, yes. We would call you in and say, "This is your application. It says on here that, you know, you've never taken any illegal drugs. Now, we have reason to believe that you have, and the reason why we have is because we've spoken to your college roommates," or friends in college or from your neighborhood, or whatever, which we did, "and, you know, we found out that you did. Now, we want to talk about it. What was it? How much? How often? Did you inhale?" [laughter] It wasn't a big thing. The marijuana was so prevalent, it wasn't a big thing, but ... we're really trying to find out if it went deeper than that. That was it, because ... it was [that] you were either a non-user, a marijuana occasional user ... or a hardcore drug addict. You know, it was [that] there wasn't, you know, like, anything in-between.

SI: If you found out someone was in the antiwar movement, would you reject them?

TH: ... No. We wouldn't reject them from the military. What we would do is make sure they didn't get a clearance.

SI: When you were either conducting surveillance or trying to infiltrate the antiwar movement, what would you be doing there?

TH: Yes, same thing. I was supposed to go to Washington on that march. I was scheduled to go on the bus and go with the University of Cincinnati on the bus. ... I was taking courses at the University of Cincinnati and they found out that one of my instructors was going to be on the bus and they pulled me off of it; on one of the busses, not my bus, but one of the busses. ... They were afraid that, if he had looked in the file and saw that the GI Bill was paying for my college, that the government was paying for my college, that they would have known that I wasn't a regular student.

SI: You were actually taking these classes. It was not part of a cover.

TH: ... No, I just took a class to take a class, you know, because it was free. The government paid for it. So, I took courses whenever I could and I got a lot of credits done that way, through a lot of schools. ... My transcripts were forever, but Chaminade [University in Honolulu] and University of Hawaii and Cincinnati and etc.

SI: Did you have to assume a cover?

TH: Yes, oh, yes, and we did that, yes.

SI: What was that like?

TH: ... Nobody questioned you and, you know, if you're just a student, you're a student, you know. I was still the student age and, you know, talked the same stuff and wore the same clothes and, you know, talked about girls and cars and whatever, you know. I mean, we didn't have to go through a big thing of, you know, our background, where we were [from].

SI: You did not have to live it.

TH: No, because it was never that [involved]. Nobody would ask you anything that deep, you know, would ever go that far.

SI: What about Communist organizations? Did you ever infiltrate them?

TH: ... No, I didn't. I don't think so. The only thing that happened was, when I was in Hawaii, we were told to surveil a guy that was coming back from Vietnam. In fact, he was a high-ranking ... non-commissioned officer, high-ranking, you know, like a platoon sergeant, something like that rank, E-7, he was, maybe an E-8. ... He was, supposedly, coming back and he was going to come to Hawaii and, from Hawaii, he's going to take his R&R. ... We were supposed to surveil him and it was no big thing, but they thought that he was trying to sell secrets to the Russians. How, I didn't have; we didn't have all that. Our job was just to surveil him

while he was there for seven days. "When he goes back, let us know," you know, [that] kind of deal. Well, he gets off the plane, and I'll get to the end of the story; he gets off the plane and, the next morning, he grabs a taxi cab, goes to the airport and hops on a plane to go to Mexico, and we nailed him there. We arrested him there, because ... he tried to leave the country, which was illegal. You couldn't go to Mexico on R&R, ... and then, when we took him, we took his baggage and we found a film, and we did not develop the film. We were asked not to, although we had a lab. They asked us not to develop the film, just to send it to Washington with him, which we did, but the thing was that, while we're on this surveillance, we all had to go and, it's called, "make the rabbit." You know, you have to see him, so [that] you know what he looks like. Looking at pictures and all that doesn't do much. When you see the person, then, you can really recognize him again. So, we were all at the airport and there was a two-way mirror there, that the customs used. So, we were doing that and they had a guy who we had identified and he had a certain hat on and stuff. He was an intelligence guy. He would be behind him, so [that] we would know the guy in front of him was the guy we were supposed to surveil, and we had pictures, so [that] we could verify it and all that. So, we're all there to make him and he walks by. We all know what he looks like. I hop in the car, because I have shift two, whatever, and all hell breaks loose. He gets in a taxicab and, in five minutes, they lose him, and the next thing is, they find out that he goes to Fort Shafter. This sergeant goes into Shafter, and Fort Shafter has these places where people lived, they're like a barracks, almost, families lived, and it's A, B, C, D, E section of this one building, like condo A, B, C, D and E. ... They said that he's in C, something like that. So, I said, "Let's look up." We have a book that we look up, and I said, "The guy that's in D, right next-door, I know, not well, but I know. I've interviewed this guy, you know. He's a sergeant. I know him. He's right next-door." So, they said, "Why don't you go there, see him, and, you know, we can get some listening stuff up against it. You can surveil him from there. It'll be great. You'll know if he leaves the place," and all that. I'm going up to the door and, as I'm walking up there, I said, "Boy, I hope these guys didn't screw up and he's in D and not C," you know. ... It just was a passing thought, I remember, and then, I looked down. You know, people took their shoes off in Hawaii when they walked into a house, or that Asian culture, and I see men's shoes sitting there and I said, "I hope this isn't my rabbit," you know, the target, the guy. Guy opens the door; I called him, ahead of time, and I said, "This is Tom Hoffman, Military Intelligence. I need to talk to you about a matter," and he said, "Sure, come on over." Opens the door and I said, "Hey, how you doing, Sergeant?" and, as I'm shaking his hand, I look over his shoulder and there's the guy, sitting there at the dining room table. I said, "Oh, crap." [laughter] I said, "Sarge," I said, "I was here to talk to you. You know, I live here on base;" I don't. I said, "I live here on base." I said, "What I had to talk to you about," I said, "ended up to be nothing." I says, "I'll tell you all about it tomorrow at the office. I'll stop by, but it was nothing. ... I was passing on my way home. I just wanted to say thanks for inviting me over, because I know it's late." It was like eight-thirty at night. [He] said, "Okay, great." I got back, ... I was screaming. Again, I was NCOIC. So, I was screaming, livid mad, that they had got the wrong thing, but, anyway, that was that story.

SI: Wow. There is a lot of cat-and-mouse stuff in Military Intelligence.

TH: Yes. ...

SI: In either Hawaii or Cincinnati, did you work with the FBI or any other agencies?

TH: Oh, yes, yes, mainly golf, but, yes. We had to; by law, it's an agreement that all the intelligence agencies have to meet, once a month, or something like that, and even at the local levels. So, we would meet on a golf course and we would do that, but, yes, I was very friendly [with the FBI]. I went to the FBI Christmas parties and, you know, stuff like that. Yes, we were all friendly and we shared information, if we thought it was important to them, or, you know, to us, or something. They would tell us something.

SI: In Hawaii, you were doing the same thing as in Cincinnati.

TH: Oh, yes, but Hawaii, I was a much higher rank there and there was no more race riots there or anything like that. So, it was different in Hawaii. I mean, now, I had a bigger job there and all that. I did all of the interrogations, what they called hostile investigations, hostile interrogations, they were called, because of my experience in 'Nam and all that stuff. So, if [it was] somebody that was trying to come get their clearance and ... [they were] hostile, because there could be something in his background, the guy wasn't getting it out, it was turned over to me.

SI: Was it a larger office in Hawaii, a larger unit?

TH: Oh, yes. ... Hawaii was, I guess, a little bit bigger, because we covered everything in the Pacific, ... although we didn't have to go anywhere, but, yes, it ... seemed to be a lot of work there. We had, again, it was a colonel in charge and there was probably thirty, forty people there, something like that.

SI: Is that why you went to Kwajalein, because you covered the whole Pacific?

TH: Yes, yes. I went there, went to Kwajalein, twice, neat place. A plane came in once a week. I got off the plane and the guy that I was supposed to interrogate had already given up ... and flew back, and my plane took off already. So, I had to wait the week for the next plane to go back. So, I went fishing and swimming. It was great. [laughter]

SI: In 1972, why did you decide to leave the military then?

TH: Because I wanted to make money. ... It was okay, but I knew, you know, I could do better than this. You know, the pay wasn't that good and I said, "I want to get on with my life and do something," and my mother always said, "You know, you should run a restaurant," and I had no background in it. ... When I was in Maryland, this guy I knew said he knew the district manager of a steak house, a chain outfit. It was called Emerson's and they're out of business now, like Steak and Ale, and I worked for them, too. ... I said, "Have a cocktail party," I said, "I'll pay for the booze, and invite him," and he came and I talked to him. He said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm getting out of the service," and [he said], "What are you going to do?" "I don't know. I'm thinking of going in the restaurant business." "Really? You want a job?" gave me a job, and then, I became vice-president of Sodexo, years later. [laughter]

SI: You wrote on your resume that you joined Sodexo in 1988. You were managing restaurants between 1972 and 1988.

TH: Yes. Then, I managed restaurants. I did Emerson's, then, Steak and Ale, Hanover Trail Steak House. I don't know if you knew them, but they were owned by Campbell's Soup, and then, ... I decided to go into the hotel business, because I ran their Publick House up in Chester, [New Jersey], and it had fourteen rooms. So, I got a little room experience, and so, I said, "I think I'm going to do hotels." So, I went and worked for Prime Management, who owned Hiltons and Sheratons and stuff like that, and I worked for them, liked it, and then, I went into corporate dining, which was great. That was Monday through Friday, and I started as a district manager with them and, a couple of years [later], they made me a vice-president and had seventy million dollars under me and nine district managers, and I did quite well.

SI: Do you think your experience in the military helped you in business?

TH: Oh, God, yes.

SI: How?

TH: Yes, yes. I mean, I used to tell people; first of all, they would get so excited. You know, we're bidding on business or getting business or losing business, and everybody's paranoid. I said, "You know, it's not life and death, guys." You know, ... I made decisions that, in other places, ... would kill somebody, and I said, "Now, we're talking about money. How important [is that]?" I mean, you know, it just didn't seem so important, but I think it gave me leadership qualities and all those other things, yes. ... Even today, I mean, you join the military and you're eighteen years old and, you know, they put you in a tank, or whatever they put you in, you're just in charge of whatever it is and they just give so much responsibility to young people that you have to either grow into it or you do a lousy job, I guess.

SI: Were you allowed to talk about what you had done?

TH: No, for a long time. Yes, they had me sign. I had signed something, and, unfortunately, I never got a copy of it, but there was something that I signed, when I was leaving, that I wasn't allowed to go within twenty miles of a Communist border for, you know, twenty-five years and I was never allowed to go into a Communist country, in the rest of my life. Now, I'm hoping, I think that's all gone now, ... you know, because I'd like to go to Russia, ... but, you know, yes, they had you sign all this stuff and, you know, "Penalty of death," you know.

CB: Was that out of fear that you could be captured and the enemy would get information out of you?

TH: Yes, and a lot of times, they said, like they used to always say, "Even if you don't know anything, they're going to think you know something," you know. So, you don't want to be captured or go into a Communist country. That was their [rationale], you know.

SI: Were you allowed to tell people that you were in Military Intelligence or did you have a cover story?

TH: Yes, some people. ... It depended, you know. Family and all that could know; what we were doing, no. I mean, we were never allowed to talk about, you know, surveilling Stokely Carmichael or anything like that, or, you know, what we're specifically doing, you know. ... We were never supposed to talk about that stuff, ... but, then, it all came out in the newspapers. [laughter] So, that blew that.

SI: From your position, did you ever know what they were doing with all the information you were gathering on Stokely Carmichael and others?

TH: No. ... You know, we used to compile so much paper on this stuff, and I used to say, to me, "I wonder if anybody reads this," you know, or, "Where does it go?" but, eventually, apparently, it does go into a file, because they have files on everybody. So, I'm sure Thomas Hoffman's got a report on somebody in some place, you know, and it's in there. What did they do with it? You know, that you had dinner at so-and-so and ate so-and-so and left this much of a tip, what they're going to do with that, I had no idea, but I did it.

SI: Did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life after you got out of the military?

TH: No, I don't think so. No, I really don't think so. I think I came back from 'Nam okay. [As] I said, my brother didn't, but, yes, I think [so]. [Calling to his sister-in-law] Hey, Sue, I came back okay, huh?

Sue Hoffman: What?

TH: [Did] I come back from 'Nam okay?

SH: No.

TH: [laughter] Not only there, but even from the military, yes, I think I did fine.

SH: You had headaches.

TH: Yes, that's true, yes, and that, I always thought, was Agent Orange, too, but I had very bad headaches, and it really started, it was very bad, in Hawaii. In fact, they took one of the interrogation rooms and put a cot in there for me, so that when I got them, [I could rest]. The interrogation room was soundproof, you know, and they had a microphone, hidden microphone, ... but I was allowed to just close the door and lay down on that thing, because I'd get these migraine headaches, and I was getting them about once every ten days. ... They sent me to the doctors all the time and they gave me prescriptions and all that, and there was never a cause for [it]. Over the years, it went from every ten days to once a month, and it probably stayed at once a month until I retired, and, now, ... it's probably two, three times a year, but, yes, I forgot about that. She's got a memory like an elephant, my sister-in-law. She remembers everything.



SI: Were you ever offered the opportunity to go to Officer Candidate School?

TH: Yes, actually; no [and] yes. [laughter] What I was offered in Hawaii was a direct commission and it was, they said, [as] a warrant officer, and they said that they wanted to give me a warrant officer [rank]. All I had to do was sign up for three more years, or something like that, and I just wasn't interested. ... They said, "What would interest you?" and I said, ... "I'd take nothing less than a first lieutenant." ... I didn't think they would do it, and then, they started talking about it, and then, I said, "Listen, before you go any further, I don't think I'd take that, either." So, I turned it down.

CB: Did you keep in contact with any of the men from your unit?

TH: Not one. My wife asked me that as recently as two days ago, and I said, "Probably, the only guy that I would really like to see;" I've looked up most of their names on the Wall. I have the book of all the names on the Wall, and I don't look them up at once. I still haven't looked up everyone, but I open it, once in awhile, and look at one name, and it's always scary, because, usually, the name's there, and then, you find out it's not that person. Like, I looked up Charlie (Ayers?). Charles (Ayers?) is there, but he was Charles (Ayers?) "of the Virginia (Ayers?)," because that's what he introduced himself [as], "I'm Charlie (Ayers?) of the Virginia (Ayers?)," like he was a big shot, and this guy was from Texas or something, and so, I knew it wasn't him, ... because they list the hometown, or what unit or branch of service he was in. See, I think there's a Thomas Hoffman in there, US Air Force. See, so, you know, they know it's not me. So, I do look up names, but what was the question?

SI: If you kept in contact.

TH: Oh, contact. The only one is Tom (Barry?), who ... was my bunkmate, you know; not bunkmate, you know. He was in the same tent as me for most of the time there. ... He and I were very similar, similar interests and all that kind of stuff, ... but I never have.

CB: Have you been to the Wall?

TH: Yes. I was there again this year. I took my grandson, and we were down in Virginia. They live down there and they said, "Let's go. He wants to see the Lincoln thing," and [the Wall is] very emotional for me. ... I thought, "This time," I said, "this time, I'm not going to cry. This time, I think I'm going to be okay," because I was walking towards it, and I said, "I think I'm really going to be okay," and I turned around at that wall and it just comes racing back real fast. This was the first time I got through the book [his service scrapbook] without crying, but I didn't tell you all the stories, either. ...

SI: How integrated were the Military Intelligence units in Cincinnati, Vietnam or Hawaii?

TH: Well, in Cincinnati and Hawaii, we're not integrated at all. We were totally separate, not on any base.

SI: I meant, were you racially integrated?

TH: Oh, I'm sorry, I thought you meant into the service. ... Was it Military Intelligence you were asking [about]?

SI: Yes. You mentioned that your colonel in Cincinnati ...

TH: The colonel in Cincinnati; he was actually in Columbus, because the headquarters was in Columbus. ... That's the headquarters for the intelligence [operation], was in Columbus, and the regional office, that was what it was called, I think; maybe we were regional. ... Yes, we were regional offices. That was whatever that office was called, and then, they had regional [offices]. There was one in Toledo and one, you know, probably someplace else in Ohio, whatever, another big town, and then, there's one in Cincinnati. So, the guy in charge of the whole ball of wax, he was black. His name was Colonel Montgomery, great guy.

SI: I was curious ...

TH: But, to go further than that, we had, in Hawaii, ... there were black agents, and not in; in Maryland, I was in a field office. I was in; not a field office. I was in my home. It was my home. I forgot, there was a term for it. I can't believe I forgot that, but it was just my house, ... but really by myself, and I reported in to Fort Meade once in awhile, and that had a whole bunch of people, but I was on my way out of the service then, so, I didn't go there that often. So, I didn't see too many other people. In Hawaii, there was forty people; three were probably black. There were, probably, ... three were black, probably seven or eight were Asian, you know, but, again, that was probably because [of] the Hawaii thing.

SI: What would they think of surveilling ...

TH: There were no women, because they knew they couldn't intelligently, you know ...  
[laughter]

SH: I'm telling my sister.

TH: [laughter] I'm more afraid of you than your sister. You'd hit me; your sister wouldn't, my wife. I'm sorry.

SI: What would they think of surveilling these black militant groups? Did they think it was odd?

TH: I have no idea. ...

SI: Did you ever discuss it?

TH: No. ... As I said, we thought the whole thing was odd. I mean, we knew, I mean, when we were surveilling these people, ... like, "What are they going to do with this information when they have it? That Stokely went to 102, you know, Beatrice Lane and was there for four hours, left with three people in a car, with license plate number so-and-so, and went in to this..." You

know, ... we used to question all the time, "What the hell are we doing?" but, you know, we were getting paid. It was something [to do], to drive around in a car, you know, and Stokely Carmichael, I surveilled him some, he knew me. [laughter] You know, [Mr. Hoffman imitates Stokely Carmichael waving to him], you know, it's just [like that]. ...

SI: Do you think he knew you were Military Intelligence or just something?

TH: Sure. He knew I was something, yes, I mean, after awhile, yes, and because it wasn't just me only. It was stupid. There were, like, four of us there, you know. The FBI is there and the state police are there, state police undercover, you know. You know, we knew it was kind of a joke; we felt it was kind of a joke. ... Bomb threats, we used to go to bomb threats, and ... only one place ever blew up and it was so funny. ... It wasn't funny, but it was a construction site and it was a union/non-union issue, but it was a bomb threat and we always went to it. ... We'd be with the FBI guy, smoke a cigarette, have a cup of coffee with the guy, you know, "Hey, how's it going? ... What time's it supposed to go off?" "Nine o'clock?" "Yes, we'll wait until ten after," and, you know, ten after came, we all got in the car. This one time, we're sitting there, ... "What time you got?" "I think nine o'clock." "Boom," [laughter] blew up, but that was the only time. That was in Cincinnati.

SI: Was it just a lone bomber?

TH: Yes. It was not a big bomb. It went off and it was, ... "Holy crap, now what do we do?" You know, we'd been to forty of these and nothing ever happened, [laughter] and, now, ... something happened, but you just write a report, you know, "Small explosion goes off. Damage to be assessed at, you know, three thousand dollars," or whatever the thing was, and do you think it was because of the union versus non-union thing, or whatever it was. Whatever happened, I have no idea, you know, but the police were really involved with that, not us. We were also involved with transport, any time, again, I don't know what we were supposed to do with it, but I was called every time a nuclear device was moved in the State of Ohio. ... They would tell me that they're moving a device from, you know, Andrews Air Force Base to Wright-[Patterson] Air Force Base in Dayton, and [I would say], "Thank you." [laughter] ... Then, the next day, I'd write the report that, "At 9:03, I got a call that ... they were moving a nuclear device and it went off and there was no incident." I didn't [know what else to say], you know. I'm not supposed to stop it or do anything, just, I don't know. A lot of the stuff in the military, you just do because they tell you to do it.

SI: How did you feel when, in the early 1970s, the extent of what the intelligence agencies were doing came to light? It was very controversial.

TH: Well, the *New York Times* wrote that up, and, actually, the biggest [reaction], ... I remember, my first initial thing was, I was so angry, because I love the *New York Times*, I was so angry that they said, "They're running around like Keystone Kops," you know, that Military Intelligence is running around like Keystone [Kops]. ... I just didn't like being called that, you know. [laughter] [Editor's Note: The Keystone Kops, a group of inept policeman, were characters in a series of silent films.] ... I remember them using that term, "Keystone Kops," and not liking that, but I laughed and I said, "You know, yep, we did it." You know, I think, in my

view, it was all harmless. Probably, the military had no business doing it, but it didn't do any [harm]. I didn't think it did any harm to anybody, you know. ...

SI: Was there a general attitude among the people in these units? Were they very conservative? Were they paranoid types? Was there a particular type of person who would do this kind of work?

TH: Most people were very dedicated, pro-American. Most of the ones in the intelligence units were pretty smart, you know; not saying we were the [smartest]. They always said we were the pick of the litter, but I don't know if we were. ... They said we were in the top five percent, but the top five percent of what? ... I think they were all pro-American, anti-Communist. ... Does that [answer your question]?

SI: When you would investigate an antiwar group, would anyone say, "We have to get these people?"

TH: ... No, I don't think that's [right], no, because we would socialize with them, I guess. [laughter] I mean, you know, we'd, like, do going up to the North Shore, and, you know, ... that's where they all were, and you'd say hi. It didn't bother us. It really didn't. We're just doing ...

SI: It was just a job.

TH: Just a job. You know, it sounds like in Nazi Germany, when they said, "We're just following orders," but we weren't killing people or anything, you know what I mean? and writing reports on them, I mean. ... I know, today, like, they'll say, you know, some comedian, or something, they'll say, you know, (Steinbrenner?) or whatever, they say, "I have a file at the FBI." I said, "Probably everybody does, and it's probably all harmless crap in there," you know, and I'm not saying they should have it, but ... I don't think it'll hurt you, if that makes any sense.

SI: Yes, it does. Do you have any other questions?

CB: From a military perspective, what lessons do you think the United States learned, or should have learned, from its experience in Vietnam?

TH: You know, it's a disaster [in Iraq], and, actually, to be honest, when they said they were first going to go into Iraq, when I heard about weapons of mass destruction, I said, "We need to go in," because I would have wanted to impeach any President that, if we thought that they had a nuclear weapon, ... and they would've used it, and they didn't do anything about it, we should impeach that guy. So, I think we should have gone in, get the weapons of mass destruction. Now that we know that they weren't there, and, probably, some of those reports were exaggerated, or even made up, it's just outrageous. ... Then, to go into any war, once you decide to do it, you have to certainly be proud of the military, how quickly they got into Baghdad and they did that job, but that there was no follow up, because you have to have a complete plan, and the military, usually, is very good at that. So, I don't know who dropped the ball on that whole thing. I have a feeling it was the Secretary of Defense. I used to always say that Robert McNamara was the worst we ever had, but, now, I think it was Rumsfeld. [Editor's Note: Robert

McNamara was Secretary of Defense from 1961 to 1968. Donald Rumsfeld was Secretary of Defense from 2001 to 2006.] ... I think that was the fault there, that there was no follow up plan, and that [if] there was no weapons of mass destruction, then, we shouldn't have been there. ... They're saying, "Well, we should have gotten rid of Saddam [Hussein]." [Editor's Note: Saddam Hussein was President of Iraq from 1979 until 2003, when he was captured by US forces, put on trial by the Iraqi interim government and sentenced to death for crimes against humanity.] Well, we should also get rid of, then, all the dictators, and we shouldn't [single one out]. I mean, I'm just saying that tongue-in-cheek, but you know what? you can't pick one out. Syria is just as bad, or Iran's just as bad, North Korea's just as bad, and why are you picking on them, you know, just that one? So, I think that was a mistake, and I think they didn't learn even in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, when they fought the Russians [from 1979 to 1989], we supplied the insurgents, we supplied the insurgents with weapons, and insurgents came to help that cause and they got the Russians out. Well, now, insurgents are coming to get the Americans out. ... I'm sure there's Al-Qaeda members in there, but that's not who we're fighting. We are not fighting the terrorists. [Editor's Note: Al-Qaeda is the international Sunni Islamic extremist movement founded by Osama bin Laden. It is responsible for numerous terrorist attacks, including the September 11, 2001, attacks.] Those American troops should all be in Afghanistan, getting rid of the Taliban and getting rid of Al-Qaeda, and finding that son of a bitch Bin Laden, ... who, after all these years, is still walking around. "But, we got Saddam," [Mr. Hoffman makes a negative noise]. You know, the guy in North Korea [Kim Jong-il] is still there. ...

CB: Some people compare Vietnam and Iraq, saying that this war in Iraq is this generation's Vietnam. Do you think that comparison is accurate?

TH: ... Yes, I think there's [a basis], because it's a regional conflict. ... You know, they always say, for policemen, the worst thing for a policeman to do is go into a domestic dispute. ... You've got a husband and wife fighting, I mean, you don't want to be in the middle of that. ... This is a civil war, just like it was in Vietnam. It was North versus South, and it really wasn't [about outside ideologies]. Ho Chi Minh would have had the whole place [if it were not for outside involvement]. It was one group trying to hang on to power, and we just picked one dictator who said he was pro-American and not a Communist. That's why we picked him, but, over here, it's the same thing. You have three groups of people that hate one another, and the only one that'll keep that whole is a dictator, just like Yugoslavia. You know, Tito kept that place tight as a drum, and then, soon as he died, it breaks up, Croatia, "No, no," ... all these groups, and same thing in Russia. Stalin and Khrushchev, those dictators, can keep those people together, because of the iron fist kind of thing, ... but, now, they all hate one another, and the Chechnyans are going [to fight], you know. So, you can't get involved, and that's domestic disputes, as far as I'm concerned.

CB: One difference in the military today is that it is an all-volunteer Army. Do you think that makes a difference and do you think that that is a good thing?

TH: I really think that it would be great if everybody could serve, I think, in some capacity and for some length of time. I don't mean for [the long term], I mean for, like, a year, or two years, or something like that, and then, the rest, you know, if you want to be in longer, you stay, but I don't think that would be such a bad thing, because, as I said, everyone I've seen, most people

I've seen go in, personally, have developed well. ... I don't think it'll do you bad, but I don't think having an all-volunteer Army is necessarily a great thing, but I also think that everybody says, "Support the troops," but, you know, most of those troops are on food stamps and most of them are on [welfare]. You know, they're just not being treated right and paid right. ... The scandal at Walter Reed Hospital ... should be an embarrassment to everybody, I mean. [Editor's Note: In February 2007, a series of reports in *The Washington Post* exposed poor conditions at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center.] ... That's supporting the troops, is, you know, when they come home with one leg that they're in a [good] hospital, that they're taken care of.

SI: Why did you decide to wait more than twenty years to go back to school after you got out of the military?

TH: ... Because I didn't feel like I needed it. There were two things. One, I didn't think I needed it, because my job progression was going rather well, and nobody asked me to get more. The other thing is, I did not do well in school, and the reason why is because I have ADD [Attention Deficit Disorder]. ... It was another good thing I passed along to my daughter, one of my daughters, who also had it, and that's how we found out. We took her to be tested and they found out she had ADD. I'm sitting there, they're asking these questions, I'm going, "Holy crap, that's me," you know. So, the guy said to me, the psychiatrist specialized in ADD, by the way, and he said to me, he says, "Were you in the war?" I said, "Yes, yes." [He] said, "How'd you do?" I said, "I did pretty good." He said, "Did you like it?" I said, "To be honest, I did." He said, "ADD thrives on it." He said, "What business you in?" I said, "Restaurant business." He says, "I could have probably guessed that one, too." He says, "It's crazy, chaotic, not the same every day," da-dah, da-dah, da-dah. So, anyway, I went through it. So, he put me on ritalin and I took ritalin. ... I decided, [at] that point, to go back to school, and I remember ... being given my first assignment. ... You don't have ADD, do you?

SI: No.

TH: It was the first time in my life that they gave me an assignment, I read what I was supposed to read and wrote what I was supposed to write, all in one sitting, and it was [great]. I said, "I can't believe this. This is un-freaking believable." ... Usually, like, I could read a paragraph, put it down, go do something else, then, come back, read the other paragraph, then, two weeks later, I write the thing, the last minute, I do that, but I could [now] steadily go along. So, I did the undergraduate, and then, my wife said, "Jeez, why don't you try the graduate [degree]?" and I was working. I was vice-president and all this. I said, "I don't know if I can do it," but I think the ritalin, ... which I don't take anymore, because I'm not studying, ... it really kept me on track. I was focused like a laser on schoolwork and I got all "As," in undergraduate and graduate, and I never had an "A" in my life, you know. ... One other, third thing [was], company paid for it, ... because they came to me and ... they're saying, "You'll be a vice-president. It'll look a lot better on your résumé if you [have a degree]," not graduate school, but the undergraduate. ... "Why don't you try to finish up?" or something like that, and I said, "Okay."

SI: Did you ever use the GI Bill?

TH: Oh, yes, got a house, you know, with the mortgage thing, you know, no money down and all that. My first house, I got that, and then, ... I used GI Bill [for] some college, yes, used it while I was in the military. Then, when I came out and got the job, no, like I said, because I kept going along. I was very happy. I was making good money and all that. I felt I didn't need it.

SI: Did you have a problem, in the training phase of your military career, focusing?

TH: Oh, yes, yes, I did, and I don't know how I got through that part, but I do know, in business, as the psychiatrist said, he said, "You find somebody that will get you through that," and I had an assistant. ... He said I was very creative and I could take a job to a Point B, but I could never take it to the end. ... That's an ADD kind of thing. You can take it this far, but never cross the finish line, and I had this assistant who did that for me. So, I would take it [to] this part, and then, she'd finish, and then, I got all the glory, you know, because it was my project and all that stuff. It's not that I was a thing, [trying to take all the credit for myself]. I always told people, "Without her, I'd never do it," but she did it, and then, my wife, also, she's a special ed. teacher, she didn't know ADD, but she knew how to handle me ... at home, and so, I had somebody at work and somebody at home who can handle me. She can tell you about it. He wanted to interview her for a book on how to handle somebody with ADD. So, if I'm jumping all over the place, that's why, but that's ... that ADD thing, but I've learned to control it over [the years]. You get better at it. ...

SI: That was going to be one of my questions; was there anything in your background that you thought made you a particularly good fit for Military Intelligence?

TH: I think the ADD probably was a good thing, you know.

SI: Do you have any other questions?

CB: I don't think so.

SI: Usually, when we do the interviews, we start out with your life before the military.

TH: Oh, yes.

SI: Do you want to give us an overview? Where and when were you born?

TH: I was born in 1945, in [the] Bronx. I was there for two years. I didn't like the social life. [laughter] So, at age two, my family moved us to... [Editor's Note: Mrs. Cheryl Hoffman enters the room.] We're just starting at Teaneck, Cheryl. We haven't been to 'Nam yet. [laughter]

Cheryl Hoffman: You tell them about your medals?

TH: No. I told them about ADD, though. I told them how you handled me and the doctor wanted to interview you for the book on how to handle people with ADD. Now, ... they said they usually start at the [beginning]. They're at the end, now, [but they want to] ask me about the beginning of my life.

SI: Yes, to help put your life in context.

TH: So, at age two, my parents moved us out of the Bronx and we went to Teaneck, New Jersey, where they bought their first home, in 1947, and [for] fifty-two hundred dollars. ... We lived there until after [I left] St. Bonaventure. Until I joined the service, they lived there, so, that was really my home hometown. [I] went to St. Joseph's Grammar School, went to St. Cecilia High School and St. Bonaventure, went to St. Bonaventure because my brother went there. That's why I picked it. He did good, [laughter] not me. I did good afterwards; he's the one that didn't do so good afterwards. My lovely wife; I was married first, which I mentioned, had to mention to them. I was married first. I hardly tell anybody, because it was such a short-lived thing, no kids, you know, married before the war, got rid of her after the war, and hired her [Cheryl Hoffman] when I was in the restaurant business. She was the first person I ever hired. ...

CH: Yes, married the boss.

TH: Yes, and [I] married her; went into the restaurant business. ... I think I told you that my mom always thought I would be good in it and, finally, you know, [I] listened to her. ... Then, I had that cocktail party with the guy from Emerson's, and then, went to Hanover Trail, Steak and Ale. I told you all the rest of that. Did I skip anything?

SI: No, I think you covered everything.

CH: I would like for him to tell you about his medals. That would be good.

SI: Yes. You had the citation in there. We skipped over that.

TH: Well, I won two Army Commendation Medals, I won, there, and the Bronze Star and the Cross of Gallantry, [Vietnam Gallantry Cross]. ...

SI: The Republic of Vietnam gave that award.

TH: Yes. ...

SI: Were any of them for specific actions?

TH: ... They were generalized, and almost everybody in intelligence [receives decorations that] are generalized, but, yes, it was a generalized citation. [To his wife] I told them about finding the guy. I think that was my best thing that I did there. They asked me if I've been back to the Wall; told them it has no effect on me. [laughter]

CH: ... Yes, very overwhelming.

SI: If you could have talked about the war afterwards, do you think you would have?

TH: Oh, I did. What do you mean?



SI: You said that you could not talk about it.

TH: Oh, about what I did.

SI: Yes.

TH: Well, I think ...

SI: Were you reticent to talk about the war?

CH: I didn't know you when you first came back, so ...

TH: Well, yes, ... but even when you knew me, I didn't talk a lot about the war.

CH: No, you did not.

TH: I was never really hung up on that whole thing. ... When I tell some of the stories, I would tell the story, and then, I'd usually go into another story, like I was doing with you guys, too. I would go into another story, and then, I would know that I was going to an area I didn't really want to go to, when we talk about interrogation or something like that, ... which I did talk to you guys about, ... or [being] under fire and stuff like that. ... I would make up an end, because I'd realize, I'm saying, I'm going, "I don't want to, you know, go there." So, then, I would have to kind of rearrange that story a little bit.

CH: One story, ... he has an Uncle Abben, who was ...

TH: Oh, that's right. My Uncle Abben, when I first came back, we were sitting at my dining room table in Teaneck and my mother was there and my aunt was there, ... his wife, and my Uncle Abben was in the living room, and I kind of forgot about him. ... I was talking to my mom and they were asking me [for] a story, "Tell me a story," and it was about that bad day in October I told you about, going through the rice paddy field and the guy [I] shot. ... I ended that story saying that I didn't shoot anybody, and that I could have, but I didn't, and my uncle ... kind of came over. ... I realized he was there, I'd forgot he was there, and he was very upset with me. ... I remember, to this day, I'm a little embarrassed about that, that he died thinking that I didn't do anything.

SI: He thought you were ...

TH: A little cowardice, I think, yes, because I'm talking to my mom, you know, and she doesn't want to hear about you [shooting at anyone], you know.

CH: ... Just a couple weeks ago, we were talking about this. He just disappointed his uncle; he knows he did.

TH: Yes, I just know I did, and I was his pride. He really liked me. ...

CH: And the reality was, he wouldn't have been disappointed, I'm sure.

TH: No, no, he wouldn't have been.

CH: But, he never knew the real story.

TH: Yes. So, I feel bad about that. ...

SI: Was contact with home important to you when you were over there?

TH: Oh, God, letters from home were the greatest thing ever, and better than a letter was the box, like I said. ... It always had to be opened in front of everybody and we had to share everything. ... It was always great to see what [came], because everybody got different stuff, you know, what you like and what I like, different things, you know. I liked Slim Jims and angel food cake and popcorn, and that's what I got, and somebody else would get, you know, chocolate and, you know, different stuff, which was always melted, but, you know, people didn't always think too well. They also sent; we got a package from, like, strangers, too, you know. That would come. I guess people were given addresses, just like the ...

SI: Like pen pals.

TH: Like what?

SI: Like pen pals, when they have kids write to servicemen.

TH: No, no, this was a box. I think they paid for it, and you could, like, send a box to this soldier, or something. I don't know. It came with tobacco products and it came with cigarettes, menthol and non, filtered and non-filtered, came with pipe tobacco, a couple cigars, chewing tobacco, you know. ... It was the first time I ever tried chewing tobacco, I mean, the real stuff, you know, the real [chaw]. That is the most disgusting [thing]. I don't know if you ever tired that.

SI: No.

TH: Oh, my God. So, I said, "Well, it was free," you know, so, we tried this thing. ... It was terrible, worst thing I ever had, but it was always nice [to get a package], you know. ... It came with a little note that says, "From Mr. and Mrs." you know, whatever, but it was nice, but, yes, home contact was great. I only called home once or twice. It was called the MARS [Military Affiliate Radio System] line.

SI: Yes.

TH: Yes, you know. You guys, you know all about this, too.

CB: Not the MARS line.

SI: I have interviewed other Vietnam veterans who have brought it up.

TH: Yes?

SI: I would like to pretend that I do all this research, but a lot of people have mentioned things in other oral history interviews.

TH: ... Yes, it was called the MARS line, and it was very sporadic, and not a great [form of communication]. You know, "Hello, over," you know, "This is Tom, over," you know, and then, there'd be a delay, and it was a mess and I think I called on it once or twice. The Red Cross, I always said I always hated the Red Cross. ... I came back from a mission and they said, "The Red Cross wants to see you," and, oh, you know that's not good news. So, you go up there, you know, you figure your mother and father are all dead, and your brothers. Everybody's dead, you know, and that's the worst thought, you know. So, you're running up there, "Who died? Who died?" ... One question, I said, then, "Who died?" and the guy said to me, he said, "You know Anthony (Stepkavich?)?" I said, "That's my grandfather," and he said, "He passed away." I said, "Oh, thank God," and thank God [only because] the man was eighty years old; you know, I was picturing it was my mother and father and brothers and sister in a car wreck. ... I didn't mean, "Thank God he's dead," you know, just [thank goodness the rest of my family is okay]. ... I remember, he said, "Well, obviously, you're not very close to him, so, we're not going to send you home." ...

CH: And the reality was, he was very close to him.

TH: Yes, was very close to him. In fact, we're bringing an article to my mother about it, where he was from in Velaluka in Croatia, and I'm going to go visit there someday, but I was very close to him. ... I was very hurt by that, and by the comment, and then, not being able to go home. So, I've never donated a dime to the Red Cross; fix their ass.

SI: Many veterans say they do not like the Red Cross because they were charged for donuts.

TH: Oh. There was no donuts by us. [laughter] You know, one thing you will learn, you'll see, I think, is that everyone's experience was really unique, I think. I mean, there may be some similar things, but, you know, I talk to people, it's just amazing how different the experience was, but, no, I never saw a donut girl. They said we were really in a front area.

SI: Yes, it sounds like you were very removed from everything.

TH: Yes, there was nothing like that. [To his wife] They said, "USO?" I told them about Joey Bishop, and that was that. ...

SI: When you were going in and out of Camp Eagle, was it mostly by air or by road?

TH: Jeep.

SI: A jeep, okay.

TH: I took a helicopter and jeep, never walked. It was always helicopter or jeep.

SI: Were the roads usually safe? You mentioned you were fired at a couple of times.

TH: Oh, yes, yes. We never went on the road when it got [dark]. When it got to be dusk, they owned that road. Route 1 was [the] only main road in place, and they owned that at night. So, we wouldn't; didn't [not] go out there at night, but it was a whole different thing. It was with helmets and flak jackets, and you had other people with you, with, you know, machine-guns on the back of the things and stuff like that. ... During the daytime, you know, there were incidents, you know. There'd be fire and you'd jump out of the jeep and wait a minute or two and see if there was another shot and take off.

CB: Were there landmines or booby traps on any of the roads?

TH: Yes. Not right by us, but we would go into a village and there would be booby traps, and then, there was that one where that guy was interrogated, remember, by the other guy.

SI: Where they cut his thumb off.

TH: Yes. ... So, they would put IEDs [improvised explosive device], now they're called, but, yes, they would put unexploded bombs in the road or something like that. ... Most of our roads, like Route 1, was used so much that minesweepers were out first thing in the morning and they would check the roads, go down the roads. That's what we were told, anyway.

SI: Did you have any Vietnamese on the base, working there?

TH: Yes. They came, they filled sandbags, at points. We did our own; around intelligence, we didn't want them, so, we filled our own sandbags. I think you saw some of us filling sandbags, but other units had locals, called "locals," come in and do that. Also, they would send somebody in to take a whole thing of laundry and they'd take it down to that nice Perfume River, [laughter] and they'll wash it down there, and then, come back and clean it. ... We did that once in awhile, too, but, otherwise, we'd do it. ... Otherwise, we'd pay for that. It was always real cheap, you know, like a quarter, something like that.

SI: Okay. There were no incidents with them, any VC coming in that way?

TH: No, none that [I know of]; no, just my interpreters. [laughter] No, not that I know of; I'm sure they were in. ... You can bet money on it, that, you know, some of them were and, you know, gathering [information], whatever, how many people were there, or something like that, but almost anybody could figure that stuff out. I mean, we were really out in the open, so, you know, it's like trying to get intelligence on Khe Sanh. I mean, you knew what was there.

CB: Overall, would you say most of your experience with the villagers was positive?

TH: Yes, oh, yes, I would say very much so. ... Even the ones that [we] would find out that they were the bad guys, to our face, they were always nice, I mean, because they knew we'd arrest them or kill them, or something, you know. ... You know, it was always [amiable]. Everybody was, you know, friendly and nodding. The kids were always great. The kids, you know, it's funny, when I'd be talking to an adult, the kid would come up to us and they would always be looking at your arms, because ... we had our sleeves up all the time, because it was that hot, but they'd be rubbing your arms or rubbing your legs, because they didn't have hair on them. ... So, they'd be feeling your arms and your legs all the time. ... You'd be talking and you'd feel this little hand, you know, on your calf, you know, feeling the hair on you, but the kids were always friendly there, because they were hoping that you'd have something, a candy bar or something for them, or something like that, but everybody was nice. ... Get this story from that; they drink tea out of [a plastic cup]. It would be ice cold; it would be room temperature, not ice cold, sorry. Nothing was ice cold, no ice, but they'd have a plastic glass and it would have been evaporated, from the tea, you know how you see the marks on it? for after three days, going down, and there'd be this much tea in the bottom of it. You'd go like this, throw it down, [empty it]. This is inside the house, throw it down like this, because it was dirt, down here, and then, they'd pour some [new drink], you know, and go like that, hand you that glass. [laughter] You know, so, it was a little dirty and stuff, but they were always hospitable and sharing, trying to share food and stuff like that. They never wanted our food. They wanted the candy bars or something like that, but they never wanted the C rations or anything like that. C rations sucked; I'm sure everybody told you that.

SI: Yes.

TH: And then, they came out with LRRP rations. They were then called LRRP rations. Now, I think they call them M ...

SI: MREs [meals, ready to eat].

LI: MREs; they didn't call them MREs. Did anybody call them MREs, you know?

SI: Not the Vietnam era guys, no.

TH: No. Did anybody call them LRRP rations? That's what they called them.

SI: No, I have not heard of them.

TH: No? They called them LRRP rations. I guess, it was for the LRRPs first, because ...

SI: They would be out there for awhile.

TH: Yes, but that's what they really were, were the MREs, and I remember, it was chicken and rice and beef and rice and they had the spaghetti. I think there was only, like, three or four, and you took hot water, preferably. You'd warm up the water. We used to take C-4; you know C-4?

SI: The explosive?

TH: The explosive. You take a little piece of that and it burns, and we'd put our metal cup over the thing to heat that thing. You'd get the water up. It didn't boil, but it got to, you know, a good temperature, and you'd pour it into the bag and let it sit there and shake it. ... You'd wait two minutes and eat it, and we thought we were living large with that. I mean, that was good stuff, compared to; you ever have C rations?

CB: No, I have not.

TH: See, everybody should have a C ration. I really believe that, you know, just see what it's like. I mean, it's not going to kill you. The beans, the ham, the lima beans and ham will kill you, [laughter] but the other ones won't kill you. Who would come up with lima beans and ham?

SI: I am surprised the food was so bad. I thought an elite unit like the 101st would get better food.

TH: Yes. ... They opened up, like, a mess hall, ... but it was only open once in awhile for breakfast. They'd let us know that it was open for breakfast and we'd go down there. I remember the first time going down there and it was all powdered eggs, you know. It was just mixed with water in there ... and it was terrible, you know, ... but it was different and it was the social thing, you know, until somebody threw a rocket in there and, like, eight guys died in the chow line. ... That was a bad thing, but how they could [do that], you know, they throw one rocket into an area ... and they hit a chow line, it's just incredible, you know.

SI: Could they see the chow line?

TH: No, no, it was just a lucky shot, yes, random shot, yes.

SI: Did you go to religious services when you were in Vietnam?

TH: Religious? They had it. You saw the tent. You saw the (parachute?) thing. They had it. I probably went once, maybe twice, yes; prayed a lot, promised a lot, that I was even going to become a priest, whatever I had to be, but, you know, "Get me through this." ... Some nights, I said, were worse than others and you just wait for that flare to go off and you'd feel like it was all going to be okay then, you know, because you didn't see anybody right in front of you.

CB: Did you notice anybody who became very religious while they were there?

TH: Me, [laughter] but, by being very religious, I don't mean going to church. I don't think it was very packed. Days of the week didn't matter. I mean, nobody knew what day it was, except Monday, because that's when you took the malaria pill. We all took the malaria pill on Monday; they tell you that? [laughter]

SI: Not that they took it on Monday. Was it Atabrine?

TH: Yes. Well, I don't know, but it was ours. We had to take it on Monday. Maybe that was just our guy, our colonel, making sure that we all did it, but you all had to take the malaria pill. ... It was a big, orange pill, took it every Monday.

CH: Did you speak at all about Bud?

TH: No, I just said my brother didn't do well. My brother was smarter than me. My brother, she disagrees, my brother was highly intelligent. He went to St. Bonaventure, went for his master's, didn't finish, was a biology major, star athlete, president of his class, captain of the swimming team, basketball team, just "Joe Everything." Right now, he's a dishwasher at Taco Bell. ... He got to the rank of major, and as a navigator/bombardier, and then, had a breakdown. ...

CH: After he was out.

TH: Had a breakdown after he was out, at a Reserve meeting. He was at, actually, a Reserve meeting, because he was still in the Reserves, and the military claims that it's not related. He was on fifty-two combat missions; so, now, he's a dishwasher. I mean, this guy was; it's incredible. So, that's my brother's story. ...

CH: ... He was over there at the same time you were, (no fair?).

TH: ... Yes, we were there at the same time, but he wasn't actually in 'Nam. He was in Guam or Thailand, you know, different places, ... but, when there was a B-52 strike, and we were near those B-52 strikes, ... the whole ground would just [move], like this, you know.

SI: It would shake.

TH: It would shake, and I'd say, "That's my brother." [laughter]

CB: Did you guys enlist together?

TH: No, no. He went to OCS [Officer Candidate School]. He went in before me, way before me, and he was already a captain, or something like that, a lieutenant.

CH: He's seven years older than him.

TH: He's seven years older than me, yes.

SI: You never had the opportunity to meet each other when you were overseas.

TH: No, no. I ran into him once in Hawaii, and that was ... when I got back to Hawaii. He happened to land there one time and I was able to see him, but never there, you know, not unless he was shot down. "If you get shot down, I'll come get you." [laughter]

SI: It must have been difficult for your family to have two sons overseas at the same time.

TH: Yes, I guess so. I think it was very difficult on my sister. I know it was on my mother, too, but, yes, I know my sister, because she was against the war, you know, kind of thing, too, and she's got two brothers there. So, I think she had a hard time. ... She's ten years younger than me. So, she had a tough time. So, what do you do with this?

SI: We type it up into a transcript, which you will get a chance to look at.

TH: It's not going to be like five hundred pages.

SI: No, this will probably be around sixty.

TH: ... You know, my reports, I said, "What do you do with all this stuff?" [laughter]

SI: I know people do read these.

TH: Someday, somebody's going to ask you this, "So, were you thinking you were really doing anything?" [laughter]

SI: We hope so. I think people will be very interested in this interview. Is there anything you want to add to the record, anything you think we missed?

TH: I'm thinking. How was this interview?

SI: Very good.

TH: Was it, yes?

SI: You were very open and candid about everything and you had very unique experiences, so, very good.

TH: Good.

SI: Just one more question; what was the attitude of most of the men you were with towards the Vietnamese, in terms of was there a racial attitude?

TH: ... Well, we didn't like the enemy, and, by and large, I mean, except for the village people that you got to know, we didn't like them. I mean, there was a saying, I don't know, you probably heard of it, "Kill a gook for Christ." ... To this day, I wouldn't say to this day, but ... a long time, I harbored a lot of that, like, [if] somebody, my cousin, wanted to have a Vietnamese person over at the house, ... I'd say, "I really rather you didn't," and that was nothing against them, either, but I was just afraid of what they might bring up or what their view was. I don't know; I was afraid they were going to say something ... that would piss me off, to be honest, and I just didn't want that to happen, but I went to my first Vietnamese restaurant, as I told them, last week, and I thought that was a big step. I don't think I'll go back [to Vietnam]. ... I'd really love to, but don't want to. I said, "If I see somebody with that, you know, red star on that helmet, pith helmet, and he tells me, 'Stand over there,' or, 'Don't cross the street,' I think I'd smack him or



something," you know. I don't know. ... She knows I can get very angry, but, so, I'm just afraid of what [could happen], something could happen, but I would really like to see the country again and where I was, and maybe show my family or something. I don't know. ...

CH: Take the girls and we will all go back.

TH: We'll all go back, yes. ... So, by and large, you know, we didn't really like them. We didn't trust them all, you know. We heard the stories, ... never happened to anybody that I knew, but, you know, the kid putting a hand grenade down the gas pipe of the jeep or something and, you know, the kids doing this and that, but I never saw it, never had a firsthand experience. ... You just heard of it, so, you were very distrustful of them, when you went into the shops and stuff like that. That's why the thought of going into Saigon unarmed was just not going to happen. I mean, you know, it just wasn't going to happen. So, Charlie and I took matters into our own hands, ... because you just couldn't trust anybody.

CB: Did the men in your unit look down on the tactics of the North Vietnamese, in the way they fought, how they never came out in the open?

TH: Well, we really wished that they would come out, and, you know, they're fighting a guerilla war, which we didn't even know what a guerilla war was, but, you know, "Come on out and fight," this kind of thing. Yes, we would have really liked that. [We] didn't like the holes that they were digging and living down in and, you know, stuff like that. ... You know, war isn't fair either. So, you know, I would have done the same thing if I was them, but, you know, can't say we liked it; didn't like the environment. It stunk. It was so humid, and I said the heat was one thing, that's what the Iraqi veterans were talking about, but the humidity, it was just stifling, almost unbreathable, and then, when the monsoons came, ... it was just so muddy and just not nice. The local food sucked. That's why I said, "Why [would] you go to a [Vietnamese restaurant]?" All they ate was [rice], and those workers, they'd be filling the sandbag, and then, you'd see them, they'd take out a china dish with the sticky rice, with lemon grass on it and some kind of [protein], you know, maybe pieces of fish or a piece of meat of some sort, and eat it up. ... Then, they walked around with that little pendant thing and ate it. ... So, the food wasn't [good]. I mean, there was nothing there I didn't want to eat again, that I ever had.

SI: Last question; did you think that the American war effort was wasteful in any way? For example, do you think that we were wasting materiel or that it was overkill in some sense?

TH: Well, I told you about how ... the one time we got attacked, ... everybody stopped and nobody fired a shot and we called for an air strike and blew the place up, but, I mean, I don't think that's overkill, ... and I don't think B-52 strikes were. I think anything that saves a life, one life, isn't [overkill].

SI: I think that the excess may be more in terms of materiel; you might go into a valley full of trucks that are not in use, just sitting there, rusting. We were just shipping materiel over there and never really using it.

TH: Not where we were. [laughter] We used everything, and we were out stealing stuff. I mean, you know, there was one story, I told you, I worked with Special Forces guys, and there was a report that, at Da Nang Airbase, or Saigon or Bien Hoa, I think it was, that, "Watch out, because the Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese, attacked the airstrip and stole three helicopters from the place," and we should be watching out. They always gave us the, "Watch outs," because we were the furthest unit north. So, if they had anything, they'd bring it down. I was at the Special Forces place and I see them painting three helicopters, ... starting to put their identification marks on it, and I said, "That, those were in Saigon." They said, "You didn't see those helicopters." [laughter] So, I know they needed three helicopters, so, they went down and stole them. They [the US Armed Forces] think the North Vietnamese have them, but, no, we always felt we always needed more stuff, I mean, at least where we were. ... There was one other thing, if I can just tell you, too, another thing; do you know what an image interpreter is? They're the guys that look through those funny looking glasses at maps and they tell you that, "This is a missile," like during the Cuban Missile thing, [Cuban Missile Crisis]. Well, we had an image interpreter attached to our unit. They were below us there, because that's all they did. They just looked at these maps and tried to find crap, ... a battalion headquarters or something like that. Well, we had this brand-new kid, just came off the boat, and he says to me, he said, "Sergeant," he says, "I see a tank." That was big news, if we were to see a tank. So, I look in the glass. I don't know what the heck I'm looking at, and I said, "It looks like a rock to me," but he says, "It's a tank." So, I take it up to the Colonel. He looks through the thing, he says, "Looks like a rock to me," and [the] kid says, "Sir, it's a tank." So, we took it up to G-2, G-2 level is a full-bird colonel or general. He looks through the thing, didn't know what he was looking at, either, and he says, "Looks like a rock to me," and this kid, private, says, "Sir, it's a tank." So, he said, "Okay," he says, "well, we can't do anything [today]. Tomorrow," he says, "I'll send a plane up there." He says, "We'll fire a missile at it, we'll see what happens." They go up there and we get the report back that the rock moved. [laughter] So, it was a tank, but I thought that was a funny story, sorry.

SI: No, yes. Was that big news, because that meant there was a regular Army unit?

TH: Yes. ... Again, since, if they're going to bring tanks, we're the furthest one north, so, you know, they're going to be bringing them towards us, but nothing ever happened. We never got attacked by tanks. So, it was getting ready for Saigon, five years later, or something, I don't know, eight years later.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add to the record? We can probably sit here and ask questions all day, but we do not want to take up your entire day.

TH: No, I think I took all your day, but I enjoyed it. No, it was very good, very professional. [To his wife] They did a good job.

SI: He is the one being graded.

TH: Oh, yes?

CH: Oh, you're a student at Rutgers.

CB: Yes, I am a junior.

CH: And what are you?

SI: I am a staff member. I went through the course; now, I am working there full-time.

TH: I'm now ... a Rutgers football fan. I'm jumping on the bandwagon late, just a couple years ago. I said, "I never liked college football, but," I said, "I've got to be for somebody, because everybody's for Notre Dame or Penn State," and [I] said, "I think I'm going to be for Rutgers."

CB: We have a big game tomorrow.

SI: Yes, I hope they win tomorrow.

TH: Why, what's tomorrow?

SI: West Virginia.

TH: Oh, West Virginia. Did you see *We Are Marshall* [(2006)]?

CB: No, my parents saw it, and they said it was very good.

TH: We just watched it, very powerful. Did you see that movie?

SI: No, I have not.

TH: Very powerful movie, yes, very powerful.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add?

TH: No, no, and if you have any follow up questions, feel free to call.

SI: Thank you. This concludes our interview with Thomas A. Hoffman on October 26, 2007, in Jackson, New Jersey. Thank you for having us, and thank you, officially, to your sister-in-law for hosting us.

TH: You're welcome.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Christopher Hackmann 3/5/2009

Reviewed by Mark Parkhurst 3/5/2009

Reviewed by Jessica Ondusko 4/10/2009

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 8/24/2010

Reviewed by Thomas Hoffman 9/24/2010