

US Army Military History Institute



SENIOR OFFICER ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

COMPANY COMMAND IN VIETNAM

Lieutenant Colonel David V. Harbach, USA

Interviewed by

Lieutenant Colonel Donald L. Meek, USA

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FOREWORD

This oral history transcript has been produced from a tape-recorded interview with Lieutenant Colonel David V. Harbach, USA, conducted by Lieutenant Colonel Donald L. Meek, USA, as part of the Academic Year 1983 US Army War College/US Army Military History Institute's "Company Command in Vietnam" oral history project.

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Interview with LTC David V. Harbach, USA

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USAWC/USAMHI SENIOR OFFICER ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

PROJECT: CCIV 81-23 (Company Command in Vietnam)

INTERVIEWER: Lieutenant Colonel Donald L. Meek

INTERVIEWEE: Lieutenant Colonel David Harbach

(Begin Tape V-281, side 1)

INTERVIEWER: Dave, at this time, would you please state your full name?

LTC HARBACH: David Vincent Harbach.

INTERVIEWER: And during your tour in Vietnam, during your command tour in Vietnam, what rank were you?

LTC HARBACH: I was a Captain.

INTERVIEWER: What about your source of commission?

LTC HARBACH: I was commissioned out of ROTC, Virginia Military Institute, 1961.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Did you have any prior enlisted service?

LTC HARBACH: None.

INTERVIEWER: And what branch of service were you serving in during your command?

LTC HARBACH: Corps of Engineers.

INTERVIEWER: Have you served in any other branch in your career?

LTC HARBACH: I'm primarily an armor officer. I was detailed with the Corps of Engineers during the period of time that I was in Vietnam.

INTERVIEWER: All right. And you have stayed with the Corps of Engineers since that time?

LTC HARBACH: Just the opposite.

INTERVIEWER: Just the opposite, ~~so you were --~~

LTC HARBACH: I was taken out of armor, put into the Corps of

Engineers for 2 years or upon my return from the tour in Vietnam, whichever came first and then I reverted back to armor; however, I had the option to remain in the Corps of Engineers had I chosen to.

INTERVIEWER: How many tours did you have in Vietnam?

LTC HARBACH: Two.

INTERVIEWER: And what were the dates of the first tour?

LTC HARBACH: April, 1967 to April, 1968.

INTERVIEWER: All right, and what about your second tour?

LTC HARBACH: ~~That was the fall --~~ I believe it was August of '71 to August of '72.

INTERVIEWER: What rank were you during the second tour?

LTC HARBACH: I was a Major.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So during your first tour is when you actually commanded the unit, is that correct?

LTC HARBACH: That's correct.

INTERVIEWER: All right. Dave, let's talk a little bit about the missions of your particular unit. First of all, I'd like for you to give me the unit designation.

LTC HARBACH: I was in the 589th Engineer Battalion (construction) and it was a unit that was formed in the United States, in _____ Texas, primarily from scratch. Colors brought out of mothballs and the unit was part of ~~I could be remiss in this --~~ 8 additional construction type engineer battalions which the Army deemed necessary to build to increase the engineer effort which was being planned in Vietnam. Primarily, the upgrading of the lines of communication and essentially we're talking about roads and airfields. By virtue of the massive effort that was planned, they discovered there wasn't enough engineer construction type battalions in the Army and therefore they had to go ahead and build new ones. That also ties in with my being detailed. When they embarked on creating these new construction engineer battalions, they discovered that they didn't have enough company-grade engineers in the Army and I believe the requirement was somewhere between 65 and 75 company-grade officers who had not served in Vietnam and were not in the Corps of Engineers but had some background in engineering, anywhere from a degree in engineering or indicated on their paperwork on file with the government that something as insignificant as working on a construction crew during summer employment. Those 65 of us were went a letter by Harold

K. Johnson, Chief of Staff at the time, that said welcome to the Corps of Engineers. Our initial impulse I remember at the time, was to pick up the phone _____ and say this is Captain David Harbach and before I could get anything else out of my mouth their answer was, sorry, we can't change it. You're gonna be in the Corps of Engineers. We trained at Fort Hood, Texas for approximately 9 months and then the entire battalion shipped over. I went with the advance party 2 weeks prior in a C-130 which took about 56 hours from Fort Hood, Texas until we landed at Quin Yon. About a week prior to that, the battalion loaded out of Houston, I believe it was or _____ Texas by ship and arrived in-country approximately 3 weeks after that. Our purpose in going over by air was to prepare the base camp and create the liaison with other units to help receive the battalion when it arrived by ship, both equipment and people. Maybe I missed the thrust of your initial question.

INTERVIEWER: No, no, as a matter of fact, that's exactly what I wanted to know and so your company headquarters was located where?

LTC HARBACH: When we got to Vietnam, we moved into a base camp called Coulom Nom which was about midway between the port city of Quin Yon and ^N ~~Onkei~~ ^{An Khe}, along QL19 ~~and as we approached this spot on the road, and I'll never forget the -- I think he was~~

~~the S-3 officer from the 45th Engineer Group under whom the~~
~~589th served ultimately the 18th Engineer Brigade -- let me~~
~~get that straight.~~ Our chain of command, going backward, was
589th Engineer Battalion, in the 45th Engineer Group, under
the 18th Engineer Brigade. The 18th was at Cameron Bay, the
45th was at Quin Yon, and our battalion headquarters at Coulom
Nom. For about the first month or 2, all the companies were
in the battalion base camp. From then on, with the exception
of the headquarters company and a portion of the A Company
which was essentially maintenance and quarry, with the excep-
tion of those, we were scattered throughout the countryside
on various and sundry projects. My first company headquarters
was in a little village called Tien Yen right outside the
Special Forces camp just east of the mountains from ^{Ankhe} ~~Onkei~~.
In fact, it was about 10 miles or 10 kilometers, rather, north
of QL19 just east of the ^{Ankhe} ~~Onkei~~ Pass.

INTERVIEWER: Could you spell that location?

LTC HARBACH: Thien Ngon. I'm not positive if that's how you
spell it anymore. It also went by the name of Happy Valley
which was a name given to it ~~by the -- I believe,~~ by the French
when they had a similar Special Forces camp on that site. The
Americans that occupied it prior to the Special Forces moving
in sometime in 1966, it was a 150-man Vietnamese ranger company
which occupied that Special Forces compound and the advisors,

of course, were the 10 or 11 Americans. We formed our camp right outside the Special Forces compound and our mission was to build a 2,500' double bituminous surface-treated runway to provide another staging area for operations and resupply units that were in that particular area. We spent about 65 days from the time we arrived until we left _____.

INTERVIEWER: Dave, what size unit did you have? Was it broken down into platoons or detachments and could you give me a general idea of how it was made up?

LTC HARBACH: My company TO&E was, I believe, 185 which started about 225 in the United States and we ultimately whittled it down to the TO&E. It was broken into platoons. Essentially, earth-moving platoons, construction platoons and another platoon that did such things as plumbing and concrete work, electricity and this type of function.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. ~~What~~ how many months did you actually command this unit?

LTC HARBACH: I commanded it for 9 months in the United States and just about 7 months in Vietnam.

INTERVIEWER: So generally speaking, you were with a number of your troops for some 15, 16 months?

LTC HARBACH: That's correct.

INTERVIEWER: Let's talk about the personnel within your unit just a little bit, Dave. We've had mention a number of significant people problems in the units that were in Vietnam during that time and let me touch on a few of these topics and ask you if you encountered any problems along this way. Did you have any problems with drug abuse among your troops while you were there?

LTC HARBACH: That depends on how you wanna define problem. I can think of 1 case that sticks out in my mind that would probably best describe how I viewed the situation. Drugs were not a problem in my unit, let me say that first off. Secondly, 1967 and better yet 1966 back in the States, things hadn't reached the proportions that they had say 5 to 8 to 10 years later. It was still in the experimentation stage. Those who did use it I discovered were those who would take advantage of the situation of that sort as an opportunity to rebel against authority. Numbers-wise, from what I can recollect, I don't think I had more than 4 or 5, ultimately, when I got down to my 185 man strength that I would consider a problem. I guess the best way to say it was I knew by name and by face who I had my problems with. What I chose to do when I suspected it was gonna get worse, which occurred in the Special Forces camp in the form of Vietnamese who use it all the time, had no

idea it was against our laws and of course, with my people using the machinery that they did, I couldn't afford to have anybody out there running a D-9 or D-8 dozer or a 10-ton whatever being high on marijuana. So one day I happened to come upon one of these old fellows that kind of hangs around camps selling marijuana to my soldiers. In fact, one of the soldiers reported it and thought maybe I ought to know about it. I reported the old gentleman to the ranger company Commander who was a Vietnamese, which I later discovered was a mistake because their method of correction is decidedly more brutal than what we would do and essentially what he did was he grabbed the old man by the arm and put him in a hammerlock and lifted it up to the top of his head and consequently broke his arm. Looked at me and said we now understand and so does he and we won't have any more problems with our people selling your soldiers marijuana. Well, that absolutely dissolved me on the spot and it happened so fast there wasn't anything I could do about it. So that just shows the 1 side of how easy it was to get it. It was a matter of education. The other half of the educating coin was I found ~~one of my soldiers in my unit --~~ one of my more reliable soldiers ~~and that was because it was a function of age,~~ he was older than the average soldier at that time. I guess he was about 27 or 28, PFC, drove a 5-ton dumptruck. He came to me and he said I think maybe now I ought to talk to the soldiers. I know you're concerned about the use of drugs with this old

man selling marijuana and some of the guys are talking about experimenting with it and he came to me, offering his services in the form of talking to the soldiers so I sent him to the ~~company one day -- in the~~ company area -- and explained what we were gonna do and introduced this young man. His name escapes me. I could probably remember if I thought about it a minute. He stood in front of the soldiers ~~now, understand,~~ I never knew this fellow had used it or was involved with it, and proceeded to tell everybody that ~~he was a --~~ he had used drugs, hard drugs, for something like 4 or 5 years and had been off them for 3, had gone completely cold turkey, and in 5 minutes told them what I could've told them in an hour and in the vernacular of the day, scared the bejesus out of those soldiers and from then on, at least during my command tenure, I was never approached with any problem with drugs.

INTERVIEWER: And any encounter that you had with drugs during that particular period of time was primarily with marijuana, is that correct?

LTC HARBACH: That's correct.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Dave, another problem that has cropped up and maybe not in that particular era but later on was some racial strife problems. Did you have any problems along the lines of racial strife?

LTC HARBACH: I would say no and the reason I'm hesitating and pausing is to say that I didn't have any would be putting my head in the sand. Again, what problems I had were confined to 2 or 3 agitators who were trying to seize upon that as an excuse to do something to stir the ship and were either that way from the start or even before they got in the Army. It certainly wasn't something that they cultivated or grew on them while they were in the unit. Another reason that I say my problems in that area were insignificant were I had a black First Sergeant and I would probably say, if anything, he was more harsh ~~or --~~ ^{and} in fact, some of the black soldiers accused him of being prejudicial against his own race. In fact, if I had any problem at all, it was keeping my First Sergeant in his seat and holding him down when a potential racial problem arose. This was also the era of the term soul brother. When it first started in 1966 at Fort Hood, none of us really knew what the hell it was and what it meant. In fact, there was talk spread like wildfire that it was some secret organization when in fact, as we all know, it wasn't the case at all. So it's kind of a round about answer. Specifically, no, I did not have a racial problem.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Now, Dave, ~~you also --~~ you deployed with this particular unit and you were in it for a period of say about 9 months. During that time, I would imagine that most of the troops that deployed with you were still in the unit. Some of

the Company Commanders of course had tremendous personnel turbulence problems as the war progressed and things like that. Did you encounter any personnel replacement or turbulence problems?

LTC HARBACH: Let's define turbulence. I look at turbulence as movement of people internally within an organization. Like from platoon to platoon because of personnel turnover which is the departure of people from a unit. Again, no, we didn't have that problem because we all kind of arrived in the unit at about the same time. Were not eligible for shipment overseas unless we had the designated period of time and I believe you had to have 9 months or more so they could get 3/4 of the 1-year tour. Any problems in turbulence or turnover was created by the higher level organization in an attempt to keep an entire unit from having to leave at the same time and another one coming in so it was forced replacements. In other words, 3 months into country I would lose maybe 10 or 15 people. Not out of Vietnam but to another engineer battalion to bring down this very thing you're talking about. So I was being the first unit there, I was probably in fat city because I got to use my entire company for all intents and purposes for 6 months in a combat zone after having them together in training with them for 9 months in the United States. The guy that came after me I suspect that may have had the problem.

INTERVIEWER: Dave, I suspect I already know the answer to this

but for the record let me ask you this. Did you have any female soldiers assigned to your unit?

LTC HARBACH: No.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Did you have any ~~indiginous personnel~~ civilian indiginous personnel hired to assist you in your mission?

LTC HARBACH: Yes, we did.

INTERVIEWER: In what capacity would these people be hired?

LTC HARBACH: The most menial tasks. Pushing brooms, using shovels, that type of work.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. How did your soldiers adapt to the environment in Vietnam, Dave, and I'm really thinking about the heat, the monsoon type of weather that we would encounter over there? How greatly did they adapt to that type of environment?

LTC HARBACH: It took about a month till we acclimated ourselves to the heat. The heat was the biggest problem. When we got there, in that month, we had temperatures as high as 115 and many of my soldiers, including those who were ~~--- which was the~~ majority, physically in good shape by virtue of the nature of

the job, found that after 30 minutes they just had to sit down and rest. And it was a dry type of heat where evaporation is taking place and they were complaining they weren't sweating but they felt weak. Well, the dry heat, at that particular time with the rapid evaporation, no sweating visible, really had to pursue and push the intake of liquids and of course the salt pill as well. Once we got acclimated to that, I think ~~that -- that was only the real --~~ that was the hardest problem to acclimate to, was the heat.

INTERVIEWER: Dave, since you were in Vietnam and in command fairly early on during the conflict there, I'd be curious as to whether your troops were issued or whether they had access to jungle fatigues during that time.

LTC HARBACH: We left country with a minimal amount. ~~I say minimal --~~ I think we left with 2 sets of jungle fatigues. Once we got in-country, we received our full complement and never had any trouble replacing those that wore out or being issued new ones to include jungle boots.

INTERVIEWER: Could you, just in your own opinion, could you give me an idea of how the soldiers felt about the jungle fatigues and about the jungle boots that we wore in Vietnam?

LTC HARBACH: Here again with the heat we were experiencing

over there, knowing engineers as you may or may not, when you're sitting on top of a bulldozer or riding a scraper, the last thing they wanna have is an encumbrance to their moving levers and what have you so my soldiers either wore T-shirts or no shirt at all and I might add that occurred later on into the tour as their skin became tan and they became acclimated to it. When they wore the uniform, it was to prevent themselves from being burned. A lot of them wore turbans on their heads, for example, ~~in addition~~ over and above the floppy jungle hat which we were issued. There were no complaints. The boots were extremely practical. If you got them soaking wet, within 30 minutes they'd be dry. They'd dry right on your feet. I had no problems of immersion foot that I can remember. I don't think the uniform was really an issue.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. ~~Now, I've asked you what~~ Maybe now you'll see it's kind of a leading question, if you had the opportunity ~~if we can call it an opportunity~~, to go back into that environment, which would you think that the troops would prefer? Jungle fatigues and jungle boots that we had during that era, or the battle dress uniform and leather boots we had in this era?

LTC HARBACH: The jungle boots for sure. I'm not familiar with the battle dress other than it looks like the same cut of the jungle fatigues but with the camouflage color. Having

not worn it or experienced it, I couldn't compare. I suspect if it was the same lightweight fiber as the jungle fatigues with the camouflage, it would probably be preferable.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Generally speaking, Dave, how was the health of your command and I'm not talking about casualties or anything like this as far as a hostile impact. We'll cover that in a few moments but just generally speaking, the overall health of your command?

LTC HARBACH: Excellent. No problems.

INTERVIEWER: ~~Am~~

LTC HARBACH: The only problem we had and it again this might be germane, when we were at the special forces camp, the water we drank consisted of backing the water buffalo or water trailer into the river at a fiord and let the water from the river just run into the top of the water trailer, pull the water trailer up onto the bank, the medics would add a certain amount of hyperchloride and by the time it got up to our camp it had mixed itself and that was our drinking water. We did that for 2 months until a doctor came up, finally, after we had cleared the roads of mines and made it trafficable and we had all kinds of visitors then, decided that we were on the road to doom, discentary and death. Up until that time, of course, we had

no problems at all drinking this water coming out of the mountains. And he decided that it was necessary that we all have ~~the -- hold up on this one --~~ it was a shot that you got in the rump and it was given based upon weight of the individual and it was akin to injecting molten lead into your bod. ~~I can't~~ remember --

INTERVIEWER: ~~That was gamma --~~

LTC HARBACH: -- gammaglobulin. There it is. That's the only problem we had health-wise, a bunch of sore butts. No dinghy fever. No malaria that I can recollect. No heat stroke. It was a healthy bunch of boys and I might mention a point here. We trained at Fort Hood, Texas and if you've ever been to Fort Hood, even in April the climate is awfully hot and the work that we did was much like the work that they went into when we got to Vietnam so they were fairly well acclimated.

INTERVIEWER: ~~--okay~~, Dave, let me just touch on one other thing for the record. You were not involved in constructing bridges or anything like that?

LTC HARBACH: Yes, we were.

INTERVIEWER: Is that right?

LTC HARBACH: You bet.

INTERVIEWER: And were you organized for that type of effort as far as equipment and materials?

LTC HARBACH: Yes, we were.

INTERVIEWER: All right. We'll talk about that just a little bit later on, too. Can you recall looking back, how many officers you might've had assigned to your company?

LTC HARBACH: ~~Counting my Executive Officer --~~ Let's go down the line. Executive Officer, 4 platoon leaders, and I believe at 1 time I had 2 warrant officers so we're talking about 7 officers ~~8 including me.~~

INTERVIEWER: How did you utilize these officers?

LTC HARBACH: By virtue of the types of projects and jobs that I had going on, the jobs were assigned on a platoon basis so there were occasions where I might have 3 of my 4 platoon leaders out on projects spread as far as 30 to 50 ~~k~~ kilometers away. In fact, I had 1 platoon leader, my earth-moving platoon leader, who was sent on a 30-day mission to ^{Hue}~~way~~, stabilize the beaches which was nothing more than mixing concrete with the sand and spraying it with water until it solidified which was to accept the units that were coming off the ocean into ^{Hue}~~way~~ prior to ^{Tet}~~that occurred about 3 or 4 months prior to that~~ so here's

a case where ~~the platoon leader~~ ^{the platoon ldr.} I didn't see ^{for} a little over a month.

INTERVIEWER: Most of these platoon leaders were Second and First Lieutenants?

LTC HARBACH: That's correct.

INTERVIEWER: What about your senior NCO's, Dave, and looking back did you feel like you had a good qualified bunch of professional NCO's or could you recall how you might rank them looking back from today's point of view?

LTC HARBACH: Generally speaking, the entire company, from private to first sergeant, was the most capable, loyal, hard-working bunch of guys I have ever been associated with since I've been in the Army. So you can apply that to any rank, any grade, any position. There were variations on this theme. Some were not as good as others but I was awfully proud of the caliber of person I had. I might add, now that I'm thinking about it, ~~my~~ I had a sergeant, SFC I believe he was, who was pushing 60 years of age. He was recalled to active duty by virtue of his expertise which was in terribly short supply and that was in the business of plumbing. He was a master plumber on the outside. The Army offered him an additional grade and brought him back and they called him Pops. He wore

_____ the whole time in Vietnam and the soldiers just absolutely loved him to death by virtue of the fact that he represented that father image which they suddenly didn't have around anymore, plus he knew his stuff and was a real pro. I had another one just like him in the motorpool who was ~~at~~ that time, you might remember, the E-6's, ^{was} ~~you got~~ as far as E-6 ~~as a motor sergeant and forget it~~, that was the end of the line. And ~~we~~ lost a lot of E-6's ~~we lost a lot of extremely competent maintenance NCO's~~ during that '65, '66 time frame, ~~'64 even before that~~. Someone in the Army decided hey, we needed these guys back in, offer them another grade, they took the cap off promotions and let them rise to the level of their competence and he was the other one which was extremely competent and capable and just did a terrific job and would go 18, 20 hours a day and an older gentleman probably in his late 40's.

INTERVIEWER: Dave, you mentioned you had a pretty effective first sergeant there, at least I got that implication. How did you employ your first sergeant during your tour there?

LTC HARBACH: Here again first of all I subscribe to the policy of the first sergeant being — not a co-company commander but I used him in that sense. By virtue of the way we were spread out, I had to rely on my senior leaders, whether they were Lieutenants or whether they were senior NCO's to supervise and

assist me and be extensions of me in the various places that we had to orchestrate. What I'm saying is I didn't have my first sergeant running around in back of the jeep, running radios for me. In fact, just the opposite. I don't believe he ever rode in my jeep with me. He was the type of first sergeant that would anticipate the radio call before I even pick it up to call him and tell him of a problem, he'd already be on top of it. So when you have a subordinate like that, you tend to use him a lot more effectively than you would otherwise.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Dave, let me ask you this. Did you have -- did you wear engineer brass or armor brass during your --

LTC HARBACH: Engineer brass.

INTERVIEWER: ~~--engineer brass. Did --~~ Were most of your officers and senior NCO's aware of the fact that you were a combat arms officer prior to your arrival there?

LTC HARBACH: Never let me forget it.

INTERVIEWER: I think you can understand where I'm coming from, Dave. Did they feel like perhaps that they knew a heck of a lot more about construction and everything than the old man did?

LTC HARBACH: Well, I think initially they did until I got out

on the job and showed them that I knew how to read blueprints and that I made it my business to know how to operate all the machinery that was in my company and that I didn't mind helping changing a tire or picking up a shovel, smoothing concrete or doing any of the other jobs that they did themselves.

INTERVIEWER: What, generally, was your training and background and where did you go to school and to college?

LTC HARBACH: I had a Bachelor of Science Degree in Civil Engineering from Virginia Military Institute.

INTERVIEWER: So in reality, a lot of this was not new to you at all?

LTC HARBACH: No.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

LTC HARBACH: I might add I went to a 3-week course at Fort Belvar which was the equivalent of their basic course which usually lasts, I think at that time, lasted ^{2 weeks}

(End Tape V-281, side 1)

(Begin Tape V-281, side 2)

INTERVIEWER: Okay, Dave, let's continue. We were talking about a 3-week course that you had attended.

LTC HARBACH: -- The 3-week course was taken by all of us who were detailed to the Corps of Engineers and we started about 7:00 in the morning and generally ran until 9:00, 10:00 at night with a half hour for lunch and an hour for supper. So they jammed an awful lot of engineering on us in a short period of time. I found it not easy but I could keep up with it because of my background whereas a lot of these other fellows had a rough row to hoe because they either didn't have any technical experience or background in engineering or none at all.

INTERVIEWER: Had you attended the armor officer basic course prior to going over?

LTC HARBACH: Yes and the advanced course.

INTERVIEWER: And the advanced course, also. So had you been a Captain for at least a year or over a year when you took command?

LTC HARBACH: I was promoted to Captain in the career course which was in the spring of 1965, was sent to Fort Hood specifically to command a tank company which I did for 9 months prior to moving over to the Corps of Engineers. So I had had 9 months

of company command in the United States at Fort Hood in the 2nd Armor Division before I moved over and took the 17 months of command of the 589th.

INTERVIEWER: In reflecting back a little bit, Dave, how would rate the morale in your unit during your tour as Commander?

LTC HARBACH: Outstanding.

INTERVIEWER: The soldiers were mission-oriented? Would you say they enjoyed the type of work that they were doing in that environment?

LTC HARBACH: Absolutely. Let me expand on that, if I may. Comparing say an engineering unit with an infantry or armor unit, the things that the engineers were doing over there were things that improved the country and to assist in many respects and very subtle ways, the indigenous population as well, compared to a combat unit which is out there destroying things and killing people. We were seeing positive products although there's positive products as well out of the combat side but we don't need to get into that philosophical discussion. But I think it points up the attitude that the engineers had. For example, we had a medic in our company and the villagers were initially very suspicious of us because the villages around our base camp where we were building the airfield were infil-

trated and totally controlled by the Communists and they were reluctant to be seen with the Americans. By the time we left, there was such agonizing despair and sadness over the fact that we were leaving when we came in there was a path that would accomodate feet when we left there was practically a 2-lane road. We let them take crushed rock from our quarry any time they wanted it. We showed them how to make cement blocks. Our medic, as I mentioned earlier, would hold sick call which originally started with 2 or 3 and it ended he'd have 100 to 150 a day so these kinds of things the soldiers saw and became involved with the population and there's nothing more sensitive than a young soldier toward the plight of a country that was being brutalized so they saw what they were doing as a really worthwhile venture. Not only in the engineering aspect, but from the human contact aspect.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that the rapport that you were able to develop and build over that period of time enhanced your ability to get the mission accomplished?

LTC HARBACH: Very much so.

INTERVIEWER: Let me ask you a few other things about morale of the troops in the unit. How do you think that the troops viewed the 12-month tour and the fact that they would be able to go home in X amount of days? Was this a positive approach

to that?

LTC HARBACH: Comparing my 2 tours, ~~I think my first tour --~~ That it wasn't really talked about that much. I might infer an answer by saying there were a considerable number that were talking about and opting for an extension because they liked what they were doing and couldn't see going back to the United States and doing nothing for 3 months. They'd just as soon extend it for 6 and then if they were to get out, get out with that up feeling. Compared with their fear of not going home, that did seem to enter into it. The threat was there all the time and I think there was a lot of self-resignation and if it was their turn and their time it was gonna happen.

INTERVIEWER: Generally speaking, we subscribed to a 6-month command tour for Company Commanders and in many cases for Battalion Commanders, too, during the Vietnam conflict. Could you comment on how you felt about a 6-month command tour as it applied to the morale of the unit?

LTC HARBACH: I feel it had a detrimental affect if for no other reason than any group of people will become attached to their commander. If you look at it as a function of time, in 6 months of combat, it's probably equivalent to maybe a year or 18 months in peace time and that's about the time you're really rolling with the unit and you have things just the way you want them

and ~~you're finally~~ you finally have learned your job to the level of expertise that's desired initially and now you have to leave to punch that proverbial ticket. I'd have been much happier to complete my entire tour over there as a company commander and then move to battalion headquarters where I became a civil engineer for the last 5 months. I'm a soldier person and I don't enjoy desk type or staff type work so you're talking to a guy who's gonna tell you the longer I can command the better. I think it goes beyond that. I think it goes to the national level where this business of the 1-year tour in Vietnam was probably one of the reason why we were over there as long as we were. Whereas in World War II, we were sent over there to get the job done, and get the hell home. When you say you're going over for a year, you have what happened in Vietnam.

INTERVIEWER: Dave, did you experience any casualties of any members of your unit due to hostile enemy actions during your command tour?

LTC HARBACH: Yes, we did.

INTERVIEWER: And primarily what type of actions would that be?

LTC HARBACH: Mines and mortars.

INTERVIEWER: So rather than direct fire, it was being mortared

say at night or at other times and then having troops step on land mines or--

LTC HARBACH: Trucks running over them.

INTERVIEWER: -- trucks running over them. Okay.

LTC HARBACH: We were sniped at occasionally while we were working in closed in terrain such as in the passes, the _____ Pass, which is the one between ^{Ankhe}~~Onkei~~ and Pleiku, and the ^{Ankhe}~~Onkei~~ Pass which is the one just before ^{Ankhe}~~Onkei~~. Although we never lost anybody from that, we had our first loss, unfortunately was precipitated by a Korean guard killing one of our soldiers who mistakenly thought he was the enemy. We were working on a bridge site and ~~the guard~~ the Korean guard had changed.-- ~~this~~ this was during the hours of darkness and was not briefed properly that the Americans were working on putting in a _____ bridge next to a bridge that had been blown and through a quirk of fate, one of my soldiers was coming up to meet a truck that was coming in and guide him down to the site and the Korean guard heard the noise behind him, whirled around and killed him.

INTERVIEWER: Were you able to obtain promotions and awards for your personnel in your unit during your tour there?

LTC HARBACH: Yes. In fact, let me comment on the award policy.

I got a call one day from the Adjutant and he said that General Duke, who was the 18th Engineer Brigade Commander, was coming up to visit our site and that I would have 3 soldiers nominated to receive the Bronze Star. I went off my nut and said, what do you mean 3? I might have 1 but we've only been here 3 months and this is quite a heady award as far as we were concerned, one not to be taken lightly, and I was informed at that time that lots of folks in certainly less serious positions and less strenuous work were receiving them in a lot greater profusion. This is airing dirty laundry, I know, but it gives you an idea of how we were separated from the world up there looking at things in their proper perspective and reacting to things that way when, in fact, they were wanting us to jump on the bandwagon only because everybody else was doing it. That's an ~~ass~~ backwards way of saying I didn't have any problems because I probably could've awarded 15 if I wanted to compared to those who were getting them for other reasons. That aside, my only feeling was that if a man got an award, he'd be damn proud of it when he got home, whether he got 1 or 5, he knew that in this outfit he'd earned it. I think promotions were probably more important to the soldier than the award was initially because it meant more money and prestige, especially in an engineer outfit.

INTERVIEWER: Dave, you touched on a fact of life there and that was that engineering units many times were somewhat autonomous in that they had missions, you might be in one area

for some time. You might move to another area. I'm a little curious as to ~~what~~ what did you do to relieve some of the burden in the off-duty time that you might have for your troops? In other words, what types of entertainment or recreation was available?

LTC HARBACH: First of all, for the most part, we worked 24 hours around the clock, 3 8-hour shifts. So most of the soldiers got a break. Those that got this break at night, we had movies. We had beer and soda flown in by _____ and I think that was probably the 2 biggies that they looked forward to. And believe it or not, we drank twice as much soda as we did beer. Drinking beer in the heat, you know what happens. It makes you sleepy and it really doesn't ~~quench~~ your thirst. The other, of course, was the R&R program which I adamantly enforced and they were able to go to any of the places that they chose.

INTERVIEWER: Did you suffer any casualties from injuries during the operation of heavy equipment or anything like that, you know, that would not be attributed to hostile enemy actions?

LTC HARBACH: No, none that I can recollect.

INTERVIEWER: Dave, the organizations that you commanded there in reflecting back, do you think that TO&E or modified TO&E

organization was adequate for the mission that you were given?

LTC HARBACH: It's hard to remember whether we were working on the full or the modified. Let me put it this way. I never wanted for any equipment. In fact, we were told that the United States, based upon the anticipated missions that we would have, to come up with a list of things that we would like over and above even the modified once we got to the _____ it was a matter of weeks until we got the things we needed. For example, we did a lot of drilling in a rock-out cropping where we put in the airfield which had a hardness factor of somewhere around 7 or 8 and the jackhammers and the bits that ~~we had were~~ — did nothing more than put a dent in the rock. So we needed a track drill which is a drill on tracks which has a long shaft to which we would attach tungsten allied carbide steel tipped bits which were needed to get through this kind of rock. That was the biggest problem and it took, dropping the desire in one of the General's ears on one of his visits and within 1 day 3 ^{CH-47's} ~~schoonks~~ arrived with the track drills on it. And up until then, the system didn't know they were in-country. In fact, they were sitting at the port at Cameron Bay. Water tremors, because of the heat and the type of business that we were in, you had a lot of compaction that we had to do _____ and we had 5,000-gallon tankers that were turned into water trucks and a lot of this was done by the engineers jury-rigging these old coded out fuel tankers. So I guess in general we had no problem

coming up with any equipment that we deemed necessary to do our job.

INTERVIEWER: Dave, how did you accomodate your troops as far as _____ and things like that go?

LTC HARBACH: We lived quite prehistorically the whole time I was there. Of course, being the first unit and moving into an area where there were no base camps as you can imagine. We slept in tents and on cots ~~and between~~ -- in fact, ~~When we had our base camp at the~~ when we were doing the airfield, we brought the dozers in and dug long ditches that were about 4' deep and we put our tents in the ditches and then between each tent we built bunkers where they could go from either tent into the bunker in case we were mortared. Extremely rudimentary.

INTERVIEWER: How did you feed your troops? Did you set up a company mess ~~or something like this or --~~

LTC HARBACH: We had basic company mess ~~at our~~ at the base camp that would provided _____ chow to the outlying areas or in cases where I had a platoon out doing a job in excess of 3 or 4 days, then we'd chop a small section of the mess team with a portion of all things they need to sustain themselves and all we had to do was make sure they were resupplied with the staples that they needed.

INTERVIEWER: Did you find it necessary to conduct any on-the-job or any training programs after you arrived in Vietnam to bring your people up to speed?

LTC HARBACH: Any on-the-job training that they got as far as instruction was actually doing the work that they were engaged in. To give you a cross section, I keep talking about the airfield. ~~We also did --~~ We built a major portion of the Korean Rock Army Hospital in Anyon Valley which was south of Quin Yon near the coast and that consisted of concrete work, plumbing work, electrical work. One of the quansets that we put up had to have lead shields throughout in installation of X-ray equipment. So that type of sophisticated work to include all the running water, sewage _____ and toilets and this kind of thing as well as the earth-moving work which we were doing on the airfield, and the bridge work which consisted of driving piles, putting in -- 1 bridge we put in we used 36" wide flange 290 steel g¹ir^ters which are -- 36 means the g¹ir^ters are about 3' high with a _____ on top and bottom about a foot and a half and then having to go through the procedure of hauling them there, taking them off the trucks, placing them, all the welding that goes into that type of thing, the lumber-work and so on.

INTERVIEWER: Dave, did you receive frequent visits from ~~---I~~ would imagine you had a Battalion Chaplain there. Was he able

to get to your unit on a frequent basis?

LTC HARBACH: Infrequent.

INTERVIEWER: And were you able to get out to visit the troops or the platoons on a frequent basis?

LTC HARBACH: I was on the road almost continuously.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. How did you get from place to place?

LTC HARBACH: Jeep.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any air support whatsoever as far as helicopters at your call?

LTC HARBACH: We could have that type of support; however, it had to be arranged way ahead of time. Any helicopter support I had was handled through Battalion 4 in the form of bringing in supplies I needed quickly that I couldn't get routinely through being delivered by truck.

INTERVIEWER: How did you communicate with them, internally, within your company?

LTC HARBACH: FM radio.

INTERVIEWER: Were you able to maintain communications with those detachments or platoons that you had out on construction sites?

LTC HARBACH: For example, the one at Anyon Valley, no, until we got well within range for FM communication. Now, most of these places were in a position ~~to have~~ -- to be tied into some sort of switchboard or if you got to a place that had a telephone and had enough time to sit there and try to patch a line through you were able to talk to them.

INTERVIEWER: How did you get tasked, Dave, on your various missions? Who tasked you and could you explain to us how you might receive your missions?

LTC HARBACH: The missions came to us from the 45th Engineer Group down to battalion and battalion ran a mission chart and it was based upon those commitments already out and scheduled to occur as one job finished and another one would come up. For example, the earth-moving work that we were doing on the airfield was a continuous effort for I think 63 days. At the end of those 63 days, we'd have to practically shut down our earth-moving operation for a week and almost rebuild our equipment. I think we went through 2 or 3 sets of tires on our big Clark 290 tractor/scrapers and the conditions of weather and sand and this type of thing that get into seals just wears

out. I don't mean to say the equipment is inferior. The equipment was used to it's maximum and we had to stop and so a _____ but my point is that particular unit would not be tasked until that period of maintenance was over and/or they had their R&R so it's conceivable a ~~unit could standdown~~ a platoon would standdown within a company for 2 to 3 weeks to take care of those things that needed to be done, ~~the care~~ take care of soldiers, take care of equipment and this was all handled by a master chart at battalion and then battalion would have meetings periodically where we'd review the bidding, update completion dates. Sometimes completion dates didn't come when they were scheduled so in answer to your original question, our missions came from battalion.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, Dave, did you ever find it necessary to standdown because of weather conditions such as monsoons, rain, things like this?

LTC HARBACH: Never the whole company. Maybe a portion. ~~If a~~ If we were putting in a bailey bridge which would be next to a -- ~~excuse me~~, commercially constructed bridge that had been blown or dropped into the water and we were rushing to get the bailey in before the monsoons hit and didn't for whatever reason, the rain came early and what have you, we'd just have to stop putting in a causeway or what have you. Normally, when the bridge was blown in Vietnam, immediately the engineers

would put a bailey bridge across the broken span while they built a causeway and an auxiliary bridge to put into effect while we repaired the major bridge, and I can remember one instance where we had hauled fill material for almost a week to build up the embankment to launch our 1 auxiliary bailey bridge and in 1 night the monsoons hit, the river went up something like 5' and just completely washed that whole week's worth of effort away. So, yes, there was a standdown.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, Dave, were you required to provide your own perimeter security and if so, how did you go about this?

LTC HARBACH: At the battalion base camp we were and those units who were in the battalion base camp shared the responsibility of manning the various guard towers and walking posts that were established. When I was out in a company operation, again, I had to provide that security myself. Because we couldn't fit inside the Special Forces compound at Tenyon, we had our own set of barbed wire fences and what have you and surrounded our little encampment just outside the perimeter. We were tied in with the Special Forces. In fact, one night when we were receiving small arms fire and mortar fire, one of my sergeants acted as a forward observer on our perimeter and communicated with the mortar pits in the Special Forces compound so it was either a singular effort or a combination.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Dave, for the record there, one of my

topics of interest was any types of civic action or medical programs that you conducted for the local population and you covered that quite well. ~~I just want to remind --~~ For the record there, that we have covered that. In the area of supply and maintenance, you mentioned some of the unique problems that you had in the area of maintenance with the weather conditions, dust, heat and things like that and the equipment. Let me ask you. Did you have any special problems in the area of supply and especially supply of parts, replacement parts, and things like this?

LTC HARBACH: Categorically, no. I will say that a lot of the repair parts and things that we needed that we got were received and secured based upon internal company initiative as opposed to relying and waiting for the Battalion S-4 to come across and that's no reflection on the 4, ~~more so that he didn't~~ ~~ac~~ He didn't have the TO&E to support the demands of the far-flung locations of the entire battalion. He would get the paperwork taken care of. He would make the phone calls and grease the way and then all we'd have to do would be to execute the movement of the equipment or the part from the depot.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever find it necessary to send someone from your unit to the depot?

LTC HARBACH: Yes, quite often.

INTERVIEWER: And generally speaking you were successful in locating the items that you needed?

LTC HARBACH: No problem. In fact, in many cases there was so much equipment and parts coming in in such great profusion that it was difficult for the people that ran the depots at least at this point in time, to know even what they had or where it was. Consequently, if an engineer was there and he could spot it better, they were given carte blanche to go out into the yards and look under tarps and be able to spot it and say, this is what this means and it would save all kinds of time.

INTERVIEWER: From an operational point of view, Dave, would you say that your rapport with the Special Forces unit that was in your area was a good working rapport?

LTC HARBACH: Excellent.

INTERVIEWER: Were you able to support the Special Forces unit in any types of construction projects or anything like that?

LTC HARBACH: They lived in an underground compound. They had 2 or 3 standoff type roofs and probably could stand a direct hit of 250 pound bomb so they were pretty well squared away. There were occasions where we would provide crushed rock or whatever, if they wanted to upgrade a particular facility and

periodically during mortar attack maybe one of the mortar pits walls would cave in and we would provide either expertise or materials to repair that type of thing.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, Dave, let's talk a little bit about some general leadership aspects here. In reflecting back, what would you consider to be one or more of the more difficult aspects of your duties as a commander in that environment?

LTC HARBACH: From a leadership standpoint?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

LTC HARBACH: I guess my pause is more indicative of not having any problems as it is to try and think of 1 that might come off the top of my head.

INTERVIEWER: Let's expand it just a little bit then and say leadership and management of resources and things like this to make it an all-incorporate type of term.

LTC HARBACH: I guess I have to answer it this way. The things that we did were real live missions with a product. The mickey mouse didn't exist and I think when you have problems in leadership and management it's because they're tied up and wrapped around the axle and things that ultimately don't have much

meaning or show much of a product. So because everybody down to that lowliest PFC had an integral mission in what we were doing, if there was a management problem or a leadership problem it was I didn't have more of this. ~~The Lieutenants that I had -- let me shift gears.~~ If I had problems with leadership and management it was back in the States and suddenly when we hit Vietnam, I saw people shine that I would've never guessed would produce or come across in the way in which they did. Now, was this a function of my leadership? ~~Hell no.~~ It was a function of the fact that they really got caught up in what they were doing. At Fort Hood, if we'd put in a bridge, we'd have to tear the son of a ^{guy} ~~bitch~~ down because the union wouldn't allow it to remain up. In Vietnam, the bridge went in and every time they drove up and down that road, they can see that it was theirs and took pride in the fact that it was theirs and they had a big or small part but an integral part in doing it. So there were a lot of intangibles that go into unit pride and esprit which affect the ability of the unit to lead itself, guided by company commanders and platoon leaders who know how to channel these energetic resources into a product. I don't know what that means and maybe when I read the tape ~~I'll be able to -- I don't know, Don.~~ I didn't have any leadership problems. I didn't have any management problems. I don't know how else to say it.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I think that sums it up pretty well, Dave,

and for transcription purposes we're just about running out of tape here and I do have a few more questions for you. I'm not gonna keep you a long time but if you will, let me pause long enough to change --

(End Tape V-281, side 2)

(Begin Tape V-282, side 1)

INTERVIEWER: We have a few more questions I'd like to touch on here. I thought I'd combine the questions just to get your general comments on them. The questions I have here on the paper that I'd like to hear your reflections on -- what was a typical day like for you as a commander? And what did you expend most of your time and effort on during that particular day or any day of the week?

LTC HARBACH: I guess a typical day, as I mentioned in one of the earlier sides, consisted of sharing my time among the platoon projects and if a particular project was going well and there was ~~no~~ and they had no problems and I was satisfied with the progress being made, maybe I'd spend no more than a half hour. Whereas another site, it might be a critical point where several things needed to be coordinated and things that would potentially require somebody to come off the job to solve, I could be that link, either through the use of my radio or

by sending ~~my driver~~ my jeep, off to tie together a problem and sometimes I'd spend 4, 5 hours at a particular site. As I said earlier, most of our projects were 24-hour, around the clock. Sometimes I would do all my running, maybe for 3 or 4 days I'd do nothing but check the sites at night and my XO and my first sergeant would pick up the slack for the other 2 shifts. I and the platoon leaders and the first sergeant and the other senior NCO's found it very hard to restrict ourselves to 8-hour shifts. If we could get 4 hours of sleep every 24 hours, that would be sufficient in most cases. There were a lot of opportunities going from site¹ to site to sleep in the jeep and maybe a 30-minute snooze in a jeep while you're going from place to place was sufficient to keep you going. The drivers, on the other hand, they were told to seize the opportunity whenever they had a chance to sleep so it was kind of catch as catch can. Generally speaking, 16 to 18-hour day from my standpoint as company commander. I had enough provisions that I carried with me anytime I went anywhere so that if I would be hung up for 3 or 4 days I would have the necessary equipment, munitions and foodstuffs and clean underwear and what have you, that you can kind of live like a nomad. There was no place that we really called our home. We went from site to site for the most part.

INTERVIEWER: Were you able to get mail to your troops on a regular basis?

LTC HARBACH: Yes, ~~and the way that was handled --~~ it was a rule

of the company — anybody that went to the base camp, where the mail was delivered had a mail card or would have authority to go pick up the mail and run it to any of these far-flung sites. In fact, the people that were in the battalion area, such as the Battalion Commander, the S-3, you never went anywhere but _____ distribution of mail and would take the stuff out. In fact, 1 day I had a general officer at battalion that was receiving a briefing and decided to drop into one of our sites and he delivered our mail that day.

INTERVIEWER: That kind of leads us into the next point that I'd like to ask you about. That's the chain of command above you and the company there. Dave, could you comment on how your senior commanders' leadership affected you and your unit? In other words, did you receive the proper amount of guidance or the proper amount of support during your tour over there?

LTC HARBACH: Let me answer generally. Yes, we did. Specifically during my tenure, I worked with 2 Battalion Commanders. The first Battalion Commander was extremely involved in every aspect of the battalion. Involved to the point of terrorizing everybody that worked under him. I guess a better way to say it is I like a mission-type order and he didn't believe in it. He had to get down to the nitty gritty and intricacies of every mission. After a while you get used to that and you know how to work around it and work with it, you understand the personality.

But it's a difficult thing for people to work under that don't enjoy that kind of work ethic. The second Battalion Commander was completely the opposite. He believed in mission-type orders. He was perceptive enough to know those who needed a little bit more than mission-type order and would be able to handle it accordingly. I have a tendency to be stubborn on occasions and think that my way is the only way and the second one was even perceptive enough to turn this into a lesson for me. It was a mission of the likes which I can't remember the details. But I came in with my plan and was able to professionally stand in front of his desk and stomp my foot and pound my hand without feeling any fear of retribution. He kind of looked at me and smiled and said, well, Captain, you have a good mission. I wouldn't particularly do it that way but drive on. He knew when he smiled at me that day that 3 or 4 weeks later I'd come back with my tail between my legs and tell him that yes, Colonel, ~~you had it done~~ — your system of achieving the objective was the better way. So I guess what I'm saying is I was faced with the dichotomy of battalion commanders and was able to work comfortably with both ~~once we~~^{once} each other understood where we were coming from. I particularly enjoyed the time away from battalion during the first battalion commander ~~— his tour~~, because I could do things my way and know that not necessarily that they were against the way he did things but I'm sure there were some things I did that had he been there with me under his thumb, would've caused it to be done

differently. For example, he arrived 1 day at the job with the Group Commander and he liked to arrive on the scene with everybody busy doing things. Well, this day, there wasn't anything moving anywhere in the area. In fact, everybody was in the motorpool and practically 3/4 of our equipment was in a million pieces and I'd made a conscious decision to shut down for a day and a half and maintain equipment. Well, this type of a situation absolutely terrorized this commander because he wanted to put his best foot forward and show the Group Commander who's time was limited, who didn't get to see things very often and I'll never forget the Group Commander coming by and pulling me aside and saying, Captain, I understand what your Battalion Commander wanted me to see but he said I'm awful proud to know that we've got unit commanders and he said I see this everyday that are doing the job first and not trying to please the VIP's rolling in. So that had a big lesson for me and the people around me and we got a lot of mileage out of that.

INTERVIEWER: Dave, ~~we've touched on~~ -- throughout the interview here, we've touched on a lot of positive aspects of your tour there. In reality, I didn't receive many negative vibes from you. Was there any frustrations that were so great during your tour there that you can remember and reflect on this day?

LTC HARBACH: I guess my frustrations were with what I perceive

to be a lack of sense _____ on the part of the supporting side of the organization. The S-4 more so than any other aspect of the battalion and again not because he intentionally didn't have a sense of urgency. I think he was limited in what he could do by virtue of the organization he had to work with. He was not the most gregarious, outgoing type of person. He was more content with sitting in base camp and saying he couldn't get through on the phone because the phone was down and this is the type of frustration that's probably not even worth mentioning but I guess if I had to say one, that would be one. Another ~~one would be the --~~ to see a bridge built over a 3-month period of time or 2½ months and 1 week later drive up to it and see it sitting in water again because somebody else didn't do their job. Another frustration was that we weren't allowed to have anything any better than the worst of the rest of the units that weren't engineer and what that means is that if we had the capability to build a palace for our soldiers, never mind that other people were living in palaces, because we were engineers if they saw a palace erected on our site, we would be chastised because it would be easier for us to do it. That really isn't mind-boggling but that's about the extent of what I can come up with that's frustrating.

INTERVIEWER: I can understand your feelings there, ~~and~~ Now let's turn this around a little bit because I feel sure that from the positive point of view that you'll come up with a few

thoughts, too. Looking back on your command tour and your association with the troops in this particular unit here, could you say that you realized some really significant satisfactions out of this tour?

LTC HARBACH: Absolutely. I touched upon that throughout this interview, the first of which was the extremely close relationship that we developed with your men and when you're huddled in a bunker during a mortar attack together or sitting in the jump seat on a bulldozer or a tractor/scrapper with them or talking to them at night over a beer as the sun sets and you're with them practically 24 hours a day, it becomes almost a familial relationship. I didn't say familiar. I said from a family standpoint. I was extremely successful in maintaining an air of informality without ever becoming familiar and there's a fine line there, one I think that we're all conscious of and I think the ability of the people beneath me to see this work and be able to separate the work ethic with the personal ethic and still be able to maintain that rapport in that closeknit situation is probably the highlight of ~~intra-~~ and interpersonal relationships, and recognizing this glue which held everything together in spite of adversity. And I think adversity brought out the best of that situation in any of the jobs that we did. The second positive aspect, I think, was as I mentioned earlier again, the growth of the Vietnamese indigenous folks around us that without having a directed, deliberate, legislative effort

to help the Vietnamese, we did a lot of these things on our own and along with our regular mission we were able to pull both of them off without hindering the mission. Everything from the sick call or taking care of the villagers to providing materials to having supper with them or sitting down _____ inviting them up to eat with us, inviting them to see our movies that we had periodically and establishing those relationships. Those were perhaps the 2 biggest positive aspects of the tour.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Dave, as we conclude the interview then, I'd like to set up just a little scenario in order to set you up for a question and the scenario is this. That the time is in the '80's, the mid-'80's, Vietnam is now some 18 to 20 years behind us. We are finding it necessary to deploy troops into a hostile enemy environment very simliar to that of Vietnam weather-wise, just about the same, mission-wise, just about the same and you've been invited to address a class of officers who are attending an advanced and you get this question from one of these officers during the question and answer period and it goes something like this: Sir, a number of us have been slated to take command of a small unit or company and we'll be departing here and headed to this company, be probably a 12 to 18-month tour. It'll be in a hostile enemy environment and based on your experience as a commander in this type of environment, have you got any suggestions or any tips that you might pass onto us at this time to make our jobs just a little bit easier?

LTC HARBACH: Well, aside from your scenario, Don, I don't even think you need a scenario of that sort. I think what you're saying is how do I successfully command that company and I think I'd do it this way and I found it probably to be the same advice I gave as a Battalion Commander to my new officers coming in the battalion. See if I can reconstruct it. Number One, know your job. What's implied with that is the minute you try and ^{B.S.} ~~pull-~~ ~~off~~ the soldier or imply that you know how to do your job, that's the first person who's gonna prove you wrong and from that aspect you live in a glass house. He's a human being and you're a human being. The thing that separates you is what you wear on your shoulder or he wears on his sleeve, which is the establishment of the organization. That's understood. That's a given. You've got to prove yourself that you can support what's on your shoulder and that comes from knowing your job. Secondly, you're gonna command a group of people. Don't treat them as a group. Don't put a blanket over them and treat them all the same. Understand that every one of those X number of people is a different and separate personality and it's your job as his leader to understand as many of the facets about him and his personality as you can _____ into your system and the only way you do that is to work with them and work for them and support them. Correct them when they're doing something wrong. Remember to admonish them or punish. Know which ones have to be shoved and know which ones can be led and this _____ all comes together somewhere in your head, knowing

know to sort that all out when you look at that platoon or when you look at that company. As far as the scenario you painted, I suspected you were gonna talk about -- you were going into El Salvador and how could we do it any differently and I'll just use that as an abject approach to it and say the American soldier, if properly led and ~~all those~~ some of those things I said at that part of it, will prosecute himself and his job to the very best of his ability and won't be concerned with the political issues that are involved. I think the American soldier was probably led as well in Vietnam as he was in any war we ever fought. I'll get off the main thrust a little bit. I think the problem was in the political execution of the effort. How in the hell do you go over there and lay your body on the line when the son of a ^{gyn}~~gyn~~ you're fighting is sitting at a peace table ^{making}~~making~~ an ^{fool}~~fool~~ out of you and if you go back and remember _____ who said war is an extension of politics, I think what he really meant was you stop the politics and you stop the peace talking until you get that son of a ^{gun}~~gyn~~ down on his knees and see things the way you want and then you tell him, then you go back to the political table but I can't see doing both at the same time and I think this is the hardest thing for the soldier to battle. To include cross border operations into Cambodia where we were pulling up thousands of weapons and tons of supplies and were being chastised by the American public for it. I'm getting on a political bend and I wanna get back on the original topic, the

original question. I guess the reason I got off of that was I probably said all I had to say about it.

INTERVIEWER: Well, Dave, I've experienced through this project a number of hours of interviews with Commanders from various branches of service and I have to say to you and I haven't said this before. I have to say to you that this has been one of the most interesting interviews that I've conducted on behalf of the Military History Institute and myself, I certainly appreciate your time and your consideration in coming over, talking with us for a while. As I stated to your earlier, this will eventually find it's way into the archives and who knows, 100 years from now, somebody might pull back on this and benefit from your experiences as a commander in a hostile enemy environment. Again, thank you, very much, Dave, for all the help that you've given us and best wishes in your future endeavors.

LTC HARBACH: Thanks, Don.

(End Tape V-282, side 1)

APPENDIX A

BIOSKETCH - LTC DAVID V. HARBACH, USA

HARBACH, David V. (Dave)
LTC. Armor

DOR: 9 Apr 77 (Yr Gp 61)

BORN:

WIFE'S NAME: Charlotte Ditto

CHILDREN: David V., II, 10; Melissa, 5



EDUCATION

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Name and Place</u>	<u>Study</u>	<u>Degree</u>
1957-61	Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, VA	Civ Engr	BS

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Position, Organization and Location</u>
Nov 61-Jul 63	Plt Ldr, C-E Off, S2, 2d Bn, 1st Cav, 3d Armd Div, Kirch-Gons, Germany
Jul 63-Aug 64	ADC to Asst Div Cdr, 3d Armd Div, Hanau, Germany
Jul 65-Jul 66	Co CO & S3, 2d Bn, 66th Armor, 2d Armd Div, Ft Hood, TX
Jul 66-Apr 67	Co CO, 589th Engr Bn (Const), Ft Hood, TX
Apr 67-Apr 68	Co CO & Civ Engr, 589th Engr Bn (Const), Vietnam
May 68-Jun 71	Asst PMS, St John's Univ, NYC, NY
Aug 71-Aug 72	Regt Sr Advr & Div G3 Advr, DCAT 99 (25th Arvn Div), Vietnam
Aug 72-Dec 73	Stf Off, MASSTER, Ft Hood, TX
Dec 73-Dec 74	XO, 2d Bn, 8th Cav, 1st Cav Div, Ft Hood, TX
Jan 75-Jun 76	Deputy G1, 1st Cav Div, Ft Hood, TX
Aug 77-Nov 78	XO, 2d Bde, 3d Inf Div, Kitzingen, Germany
Nov 78-May 81	Cdr, 1st Bn, 33d Armor, Gelnhausen, Germany
Jul 81-Jun 82	Stf Off, ODCSPER, HQ FORSCOM, Ft McPherson, GA

SERVICE SCHOOLS: Grad - USACGSC, 77

INSTRUCTOR EXPERIENCE: Mil Sci, St John's Univ, May 68-Jun 71

SPECIAL QUALIFICATIONS: OPMS- Armor (12), Pers Mgt (41); Prcht, Instr

BATTLE CAMPAIGNS: Vietnam, 7

AWARDS: BSM w 3 OLC, MSM, ARCOM, MUC, RVN Gallantry Cross w Bronze Star, CIB, Prcht-Bad

FOREIGN LANGUAGES:	<u>Read</u>	<u>Speak</u>
German	Fair	Fair

ORGANIZATIONS & SOCIETIES: Armor Assn; VA Mil Institute Alumni Assn & Keydet Club

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APPENDIX B
COMPANY COMMAND IN VIETNAM QUESTIONNAIRE

I. BASIC DATA

Full Name:	Unit Commanded and Its
Rank While in Command	Location:
Source of Commission:	Dates in Command:
Branch of Service:	Number of Tours in
Specialty in Command:	Vietnam; Tour When
	Commanding:

II. PERSONNEL

A. What did you consider to be your most significant people problem(s)? Areas to consider include:

Drug Abuse	Racial Strife
Personnel Replacements	Health

B. In what way(s) did this problem(s) affect the operation of your unit?

C. How did you utilize your officers and senior NCOs, e.g. XO, Platoon Leaders, 1SG, and section/squad NCOs?

D. Please comment on the status of morale in unit. Areas to consider include:

Impact of 12 Month Tour	R&R
Six Month Command Tour	Unit Mission
Off Duty Time	Boredom
Internal/External Factors	Turbulen
Promotion/Award Policies	Other

E. What kind of entertainment was available for your unit? How often?

III. ORGANIZATION

Was your MTOE/MTDA organization adequate? If not, how did you organize for operation?

IV. TRAINING

A. Were your replacement personnel adequately trained for immediate combat operations in the position to which they were assigned? Areas to consider include:

Weapons Qualification MOS Qualification
MOS miss-match Other

- B. Did your replacements receive any type of in country training prior to arrival in your unit?
- C. What type of training program did you conduct in your unit?
- D. Assess the effectiveness of your unit training as compared to the training that your soldiers, NCOs, and officers received prior to their arrival in RVN.
- E. Did you employ the techniques that you learned in the Army School System? Areas to consider include:

5 Paragraph Order Estimate of the
Troop Leading Steps Situation
Doctrine and Tactics Security Procedures
 Other

- F. Evaluate the state of training of the enemy. Areas to consider include:

Tactics Fighting Qualities
Discipline Effectiveness
Organization Other

V. OPERATIONS

Part I: General

- A. Did you have any problems concerning Geneva Convention Issues? If so, how did you handle them?
- B. What major operations did your unit participate in?
- C. Describe your unit's hardest fight.
- D. Comment on the operations of your unit. Areas to consider include the use of:

Armored Forces Fire Support (Air/Arty)
Allied Forces Other

- E. Did your unit suffer any casualties caused by friendly fire? If so, please explain.
- F. How much time did you usually have to plan an operation? Was it sufficient?
- G. Comment on the problem of controlling troops under fire.
- H. What problems did you have in coordinating fire support, both air and artillery? How did you solve these problems?
- I. How did you organize for 24 hour a day operations?
- J. How were enemy casualties reports? Areas to consider include:

Estimated body count	Actual body
	Count
Pressure for a high count	Other
- K. Describe your SOP for the defense of your firebase or base camp.
- L. Describe your unit's planning and execution of ambush patrols, convoy security, movement to contact, etc.
- M. What kind of Civic Action or Medical Programs did your unit conduct for the local population?

Part II: Combat Support/Combat Service Support

- A. What kind of internal communications did your battery use during fire missions?
- B. Did your unit participate in combat operations?
- C. How did your unit participate in combat operations?
- D. What impact did the Vietnam environment have on your unit's operations?

E. What problems existed in CS/CSS units that were RVN peculiar?

F. Did your unit have a security mission?

VI. SUPPLY AND MAINTENANCE

A. Did you have any special problems in the area of supply?

B. Did you have any special problems in the area of maintenance?

C. Was your unit's assigned equipment adequate to accomplish your mission?

D. Was it necessary for your unit to acquire excess or unauthorized equipment or supplies in order to accomplish its mission? If so, please explain why.

E. Comment on the living conditions of your unit. Areas to consider include:

Field environment	Base camp environment
Food	Shelter
Other	

F. What were your normal daily rates of ammunition expenditure? How were you usually resupplied?

G. How well was your unit equipment maintained? Areas to consider include:

Organizational	Direct Support
General Support	Maintenance/IG Inspections

H. Did your unit follow published Army supply and maintenance procedures? If not, please describe your "system."

VII. GENERAL

A. What was the most difficult aspect(s) of your duties as a commander?

B. What did you spend most of your time and effort on?

- C. What was a "typical day" like for you as a commander?
- D. Comment on your unit's casualty situation. Areas to consider include:
- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Number of casualties | How they were |
| Effect they had on you | evaluated |
| Effect they had on unit mission | Effect they had on unit |
- E. What were your greatest satisfactions and dissatisfactions while in command?
- F. Comment on how your senior commanders' leadership affected you and your unit.
- G. If you had the opportunity to "do it over," would you change the approach you took while in command? If so, please explain.
- H. What advice would you offer future company/battalion commanders?
- I. Do you have any other comments?

APPENDIX C
MAP - REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

MAP - Republic of Vietnam

