

DAVID HUGEL -- USMC PHOTOG: EARLY MACV '63-'64

David Hugel:

My name is Dave Hugel. Actually, it's David but my [inaudible 00:00:04] calls me Dave. That's H-U-G-E-L and I was with the First Marine Aircraft Wing, specifically a group called MAB-16, Marine Air Base Squadron 16 sub-unit 2. We were assigned to the air base in Da Nang Republic, Vietnam. I got there in April of 1963 and I left around the middle of January 1964.

I was born in Baltimore City. My family moved to Baltimore county when my sister and I were in elementary school so we really finished most of our education in Baltimore county. Graduated from high school in 1960 at Parkville which has relatively new high schools, post war construction as population grew in Baltimore county. I did OK in high school but I was never on what we call the academic track that I would go to college.

Your choices were fairly limited. You have to remember the draft was still in existence in those years and you could have been drafted into the army. Military was always an option for us. Very few went to college. Some did, very few did but the other option was to go out and get a job. I didn't see anything that really interested me that much so I said I will give military a try.

You got to remember, this is only 15 years after World War 2 ended. There was still a lot of veterans around in the area. There were popular movies that were still being played about World War 2 as well as even comic books had features on World War 2 so I said if I'm going to join the military, I'm going to join the best. I guess it was some other propaganda in the recruiting material. I decide to join the marines.

Now, once you get in, there are no promises. I went through boot camp and I passed all the hurdles and then was delighted to find that I had been selected because of testing we had done in boot camp to go to one of the advanced naval technical schools in aviation. The marine corps has many schools of its own but almost all of the people that they have to go into aviation division are trained by the navy. It's a joint school, jointly run by the navy and there's a lot of marines on staff.

That led to another series of tests at the naval air station at Memphis Tennessee and I was selected to go to photo school which pleased me a lot because I've done photography as a hobby in [inaudible 00:02:48]

enjoyed it and I'd done fairly well with some projects I've worked with over the years. I went to this photo school which was very extensive. I think it was 16 weeks. It was very long and we get in a lot of the technical aspects of photography, mostly still, black and white in those days although we did extended sessions on aerial photography.

Having finished this school, I was classified as an aviation photographic technician with the term MOS but all people in the service, no matter what they do, there's a number and a title for what that is. Mine was 4611 and of course that then determines where you'll be stationed and having that training, it meant I would be stationed at some kind of marine corps air facility, air station.

It's not unusual, people when they graduate, they get to make a request for duty station and truthfully, it's seldom honored. I happened to be fortunate to request and be stationed at the Marine corps. Air Station Quantico, Virginia. When you come out of Baltimore City, I looked at the map and it was only about an hour and a half away so that's a great place to be so that once I finish my week of duty, I normally would get the weekend off and come home.

It was also an exciting place to be because a lot of the projects that were going on down there. Quantico was where most people know who trains all the marine corps officers but there also is some experimental units down there dealing with aviation and they developed certain techniques. They were developing something called a SATS strip. Small Airfield for Tactical Support where the concept was, you go in, clear a piece of land and lay a runway and have an operation within very short period of time.

It was all done with pre-fabricated matting, not the World War 2 matting. This is high-tech matting and then they installed a resting gear and they installed a catapult system to help assist these air-crafts, they were all jets, off the runway. As a photographer, one of my assignments was to go out and film that. They had tests. Once again, it established daily. I do it, quite a few tests and we were out there in warm, hot weather, cold weather, filming it. The engineers would evaluate the film we took to see what is any adjustments needed to be made.

That air strip was later deployed to Vietnam. I never saw it because it came after my time but it was later deployed to Vietnam. I'm told it's very effective and again, creating an air strip out of a piece of land out of nothing rather than extended time that we take to build a normal airfield. If anyone is interested to have an exhibit on that, then at the Marine

Museum at Quantico, including the deck flooring you walk on is actual SATS strip matting.

There are a lot of interesting things there. The public affairs photography got to meet the Vice President of the United States. Lyndon Johnson had come to the base for an event and I'm taking pictures of him and next thing I know he was charging at me just to shake my hand. I said, "My goodness." "How you doing marine?" The vice president to meet me, that was quite a thrill.

As happens in the military and even in the corporate world, sooner or later your time comes to be transferred, to get orders. I got orders for the First Marine Aircraft Wing. [inaudible 00:06:36] which is headquartered in Iwakuni in Japan. I said OK, that's where I'm going to go and had little leave. I took the leave and got to the west coast. It was a 3-week boat trip. Later veterans were flown over and back again. I had the inconvenience of being on a ship both ways, going over and coming home.

We landed in Yokohama which is the port in Japan not far from where I was to be in Iwakuni but before even getting off the ship I was told my orders had been changed. I wouldn't be going to Iwakuni. I would be going to Okinawa. I've heard about Okinawa as a place the marines fought with the army and helped win from the Japanese during World War 2 but I knew nothing else about it. It's a piece of coral above the sea and I think it's 50 miles long, 10 miles water at the water's point.

I got to Okinawa in the spring, April. I can't tell the exact date but April 1963 but it was a short stay. Again, they bussed all the marines in the aviation area going to this air station in Futenma, up to a parking lot and then they started assigning marines to different units. It was a couple hundred marines. At the end of this process, there was 6 of us who had not yet been assigned and I happen to know the corporal who was reading the roster. His name was Bobby D. Oakley from Quantico, previous duty station. I said, "What about us Bobby? Where are we going?"

He looked at me and he's from Kentucky and had this twang and he said, "Go on and pack your sea bags, you're going south!" I said, "Where is south?" He said, "Vietnam." 3 syllables. He was true to his word because 2 days later, I was on an aircraft this time, not ship, but headed for Vietnam. That again was late April 1963.

Producer:

Did most people even know where the hell this country was or ...

David Hugel:

No. Even marines were not familiar with it, let alone the outside world. We knew about, of course the war between the French and Indochina which later was divided up and allows Cambodia and North and South Vietnam were split but we didn't know much about it at all. Let alone where it was. When I first got there, it was limited information you could send home. My mother, she couldn't even find, not Vietnam, but the city where I was on the map because the Vietnamese had changed the city.

It originally was called Tourane. The French called it Tourane. The geo-map said Tourane. I said Da Nang. It was the same location but the Vietnamese had changed the name but it was not well-known at all nor was the mission that the marines were performing in those days. Although again, the marines first went into Vietnam in 1962, in April 62 and I got there in April 63, a year later. Literally, I didn't know that we were there or what we were doing.

I'm getting ahead of myself but our primary mission there, those 3 marines and the photo lab, was to process aerial reconnaissance film, shot by what we call aero-observers who were officers who had terrained fine locations and marked the coordinates and all that and take some pictures. We were to process the film, make prints and they use those for a couple of purposes, primarily, for intelligence reasons.

They'd seen an area of suspected activity and they take a number of pictures and we develop and we say, "Well that's Viet Cong base camp" or "That's this" we wouldn't do it, the photo intelligence people would or once they locate an area that they thought would be in the vicinity where they can have a landing zone, they would photograph that so that we would make a number of prints for a briefing.

They do this in relatively short order. They fly a mission one afternoon, we'd process the film, print the film, they'd have the briefing at zero dark thirty and those helicopters would take off. They try to catch them by surprise and often did, often they did not. Someone had spread the word that we were coming and the Viet Cong were noted to disappear into the jungles and the hillside.

Often, they'd come back having to seek ground fire. We're talking about light planes. It was a single engine observation plane called the Bird Dog OE-1. I estimate, I didn't fly those missions, but they flew 5,000 feet perhaps and sometimes lower when they wanted to get a real good look at something. Although they had telephoto lenses on the camera, often, they were detected.

That in itself, sometimes led them having to cancel the mission because they'd come back the next day, and I have some slides or pictures if you can show, would spike it. They'd cut off long poles of bamboo and spike them in the ground so that air craft couldn't land on those [inaudible 00:11:54] but often they were successful. They'd come back and it hadn't been spiked and they could come in with the troops.

That was a basic mission. Diem government was in charge. They'd come in 54 after the division of the two, North and South. It was a communist insurgent because the North Vietnamese under Ho Chi Minh, although they had agreed to go North of the parallel, DMZ, they had a cadre of troops they kept in the south and every now and then they'd send in others but it was pretty quiet, pretty steady. We did not feel.

We knew that there were Viet Cong and Viet Cong sympathizers nearby. We were surrounded by them but they weren't hostile to us almost all the time. There were rumours of this is going to happen. I got there just before May Day which is a big communist rally and there were rumours that we'd attack May Day. It never happened.

We were doing our job, we were getting shot at from time to time but it wasn't the imminent threat of an invasion. I'll tell you about some other situations. It got a lot more hairy than that. Let me lead into the expansion of our mission. We'd been doing that pretty successfully then we had a new person show up, was a Marine corps correspondent, now they call them combat correspondent, who had come to the base and he immediately hit the ground running. He wanted to go out and cover these missions that the marines were flying.

What were those missions? The missions were bringing the South Vietnamese, we call them ARVN army Republic of Vietnam troops into a landing zone that we've identified. This is a landing zone. It's likely there will be Viet Cong nearby to pursue them. Later, after that mission, hopefully was successful, pulling them out and taking them back to their home base. One occasion we had to run some medical evacuations where they were injured or killed and then thirdly, primarily supplying. It was a long term mission and they didn't have supplies. Resupplying them or more likely, supplying outposts. They had a number of outposts established throughout the region.

I might say this too that we were in I Corps which is the northernmost military section of Vietnam. Just out to the DMZ down, I'm sorry, I can't remember the miles but a couple hundred miles south of there. The whole country was divided into 4 zones and we were in the northernmost

segment. They established a number of these outposts literally on mountaintops. You couldn't get there any other way but by air or foot but there were no roads, no easy access. We had to resupply those from time to time.

That was with the primary mission and of course other things that would come up. Sometimes we have some VIPs. I never met him but they tell me McNamara went through there and Westmoreland. Westmoreland was the vice chief of staff and he wasn't chief of staff [inaudible 00:15:13] but anyway, they take these VIPs out and show them the terrain, what's going on.

Those were our basic missions but then when this journalist showed up, he went out and he started making notes and doing things but he'd often take a photographer with him from the three of us. He would take one of us with him to photograph those things. That's where many of the pictures that I took originate. I would fly on these missions.

To give you an example, they had a landing zone picked out and the helicopters would come in waves of 3. They would land and I would be on one of the first. I'd immediately jump out and try to get a good position where I'm not in the field of fire as the gunner's coming in but I can get some pictures.

The Vietnamese would disperse into the bush and then another wave would come in so some of the pictures that I've taken, you will see are of that: the waves of troops coming in, sometimes the Vietnamese getting off the helicopter, sometimes pictures of the Vietnamese soldiers going into the bush. One, they were actually setting up a wire so that they could provide fire ahead of where their troops were going. Those are the kind of combat situations I covered.

I want to emphasize again, marines were not directly involved in combat. We were there to provide them logistical support for the South Vietnamese troops but just the same, a lot of firing going on during that period. Interesting question because I didn't really have, the troops that I would see, seemed enthusiastic. They seem like they were ready for their mission to do this.

I've read since that some of the results were less than satisfactory. They didn't always do what they were supposed to, especially the officers didn't pursue with vigour enough or something but from my personal observation, I didn't see much of that. Again, that wasn't my level. They appeared to be enthusiastic and like soldiers anywhere. A lot of them

never wanted to be there but they were there and they were doing what they were told to do. That was the mission statement and it had been supported beginning with Eisenhower after the partition of the country in 54.

Through and again, I want to remind that the year 1963, President Kennedy was the president. Johnson didn't come in until late November of that year and he then was president for a couple more years but during my time there until I left in January, he had begun his second term by that time. That was the general assumption and I'd say, the policy of the government.

If you read more, there was the history of the war and there's sort of a reanalysis of history of the war. The communist have been planning this for a long time. It wasn't just an instant resurrection. They had troops in place, although in sleeper cells, so to speak and I've read some very interesting material that was not known at that time. Let me talk about not just what we did but being in a foreign country was different of course.

We had very open liberty for being in a country that had a war going on. We could go to town, limited hours, you had to be back, I think by 10:00, 11 at the latest but you couldn't stay overnight for your own safety. When we went to town, we went to town in either an old school bus that's painted green. Old school bus, it was green, [inaudible 00:19:14] but all the windows have been removed, they've been replaced by wire mesh.

You got to remember, you're in a tropical country, it's hotter than the devil so it brought the air in but also kept the grenades out. We didn't get bombed but you never knew when somebody would just try to toss. The same with the bars in downtown Da Nang. They all didn't have windows. They had these heavier grade of wire mesh over to let the air in and yet not letting, like, just toss something in.

That was part of it but it was an interesting time and I mentioned earlier that President Diem was the president of the country and yet he was one of these people you read about. We didn't get a local paper per se but we got Stars and Stripes which is a military based newspaper that was distributed pretty regularly. I got the national news magazines from the States so I knew what was going on. There was a lot of unrest, the Buddhist, particularly, were unhappy with Diem because he was a Catholic and it's a predominantly Buddhist country and there was a little tension there.

One day, I'm on flight line, waiting for a mission to go out into the field. It was an interesting mission in itself but let me tell you the preliminaries first. We get over there and we have an early take-off time and get assigned to an aircraft and nothing's happening. I said to the chief, "What's the matter? We're supposed to leave." "No," he said, "We're on hold for some reason." Sometimes, it's because of the weather where you're going and the mountains is worse than it is where you are because the weather where we were was fine and no it wasn't the weather.

I'm standing there by the helicopter and that day, I brought an unusual camera. It's fairly new for us. It's called the combat graphic. It was a 70mm camera, unlike what we were using, a 4 or 5 speed graphic or a Rolleiflex but this, it was both at fixed lenses so you had to get close to your subject to get a bigger image. This one had telephoto lenses, has twice the size of a 35mm so the telephoto lens was about this long and I put it on and I look across the runway and on the other side of the runway, we're talking about a couple hundred feet, was an air terminal that the Vietnamese use for civilian air traffic.

There was a lot of activity out there which was very unusual. Day in and day out, there'd be nobody there, just a couple of planes a day would land and take off. I focused also and I see a DC-3 circling and also all these soldiers snapped to attention and I noticed there's a red carpet that's already there but they're lining that red carpet. A plane lands and a stout, short gentleman in a light, I thought it was white for years until I saw the colored pictures, it's tan suit, gets off, comes down the steps and walks across the runway into a waiting helicopter.

That was him, the president of the country. I took 6 pictures total, I believe. He gets and goes and I saw this other guy, he was a tall European looking gentleman and he kind of waved to us. I found out later it was Fred Nolting. He was the US Ambassador. This is coincidence, 3 months to the day from that time, Diem was overthrown and assassinated. I think there was certainly a lot of cronyism. His brother was one of the big leaders in the government but I don't know. I just can't address that.

The marine contingent was in the low 500s. I think I've read that overall American strength, and I could double check this, was 15,000, 17,000? Something like that. It was really, really small. I know the marines had the one task element, two flag group and that included two squadrons, the helicopter squadron and the base support squadron in this very small task element.

The army had other units. They called their helicopter units companies around the country. The navy had some advisory personnel there and the air force. The air force played a much larger role than we did because they're a bigger output in training the Vietnamese pilots. We shared the base with them in Da Nang. They had one at [inaudible 00:24:14] in Saigon. I don't know where else they were but they were a much bigger presence. By later standards, just a [inaudible 00:24:22] of small number of troops.

I felt fortunate. I saw more of the country than many other marines there. Let me give you a quick example. I flew out into Saigon one time, just to ride shotgun on the payroll, I accompanied the disbursing officer. We were paid in cash in those days, green bag cash. Whatever we're paid, and I think this is my figure sticks in my mind, disbursing officer picked up \$12,000 in cash, paper money.

I carried a satchel with \$475 and change because no matter what your final pay was with all the deductions, they paid it to the penny in cash. I saw a little of Saigon that day, very little but I saw much more of Saigon and other parts of the country when I came back in January 1964. I was assigned to be the photographer to the new commandant of the marine corps.

General Wallace Green was just coming off, that's January 1 and he immediately started on an inspection towards west coast and then to Southeast Asia, Japan and Okinawa and Southeast Asia. I flew down and met him in Saigon and travelled with him for 3 days so I saw much more of the country and I accompanied to some very high level meetings. I did not sit in on the meetings. I stayed in the anteroom or something.

We've got some pictures in touring and I saw more of the country, some of the remote outposts. We toured the Vietnamese marine corps headquarters south of Saigon then he [inaudible 00:26:07] up the country, stopping in our base at Da Nang and then going up to Hue which was probably the northernmost major city in Vietnam, long before the Tet Offensive destroyed it and it was a beautiful city, ancient city, citadel, much like you see about the imperial palace in China or Kiev.

That was an eye-opening tour for me and I say I was very, very fortunate. I later went back to Vietnam just 3 years ago this month and I revisited some of these very sights and one of the marines with me said, "Yeah, I didn't see anything outside our [inaudible 00:26:53] base." He was there a year and never saw anything beyond those perimeters so I was very

fortunate to have seen a little bit more than many people who served during that period.

President Kennedy took off as of January 61. Like any president, you face a lot of problems, some of it on the table for a long time but the growing unrest and insurgency in South Vietnam was top among them. Remember, we're in the heart of the Cold War and we're very concerned with anything that would give communists a little more of edge. He wanted to prevent that where he could.

During his early years we had the Berlin crisis, we had the Cuban missile crisis, we had a number of things and Vietnam was very much on that list. He was looking for ways to diffuse that, to show America's resolve to fight communism and so he established a number of people over to come back to him with advice, recommendations. One of them was Lyndon Johnson who was his Vice President and he would go over and meet with the military leaders. He'd meet with the Vietnamese civilian leadership as well as some of their military. Each one of these would come back with recommendations.

Probably the most influential and decisive over these inspection tours was one done by General Maxwell Taylor. Taylor had been chief of staff to the army, had retired. Kennedy called him back to service and he was a special military adviser to the president. He was out of the chain of command, the joint chiefs, and reported directly to Kennedy. He did this tour, I think it was October 61. He was so concerned with what he saw that he didn't even wait until he got back to the States but he sent 2 eyes only president messages from the Philippines. He made a number of recommendations that he later put in report form and talked to the president about.

One of which was to send troops. Kennedy didn't want any part of that and so he, like a lot of presidents will, you split the baby and did some of the things recommended and didn't do the other. One of the things he recommended was to provide logistical support for the South Vietnamese Armed Forces and that's when the ball started rolling to look into sending a marine helicopter unit and [inaudible 00:29:48] the army units and other services.

The joint chief of staff didn't get the ball and they have to work out logistics. It as in early 62 that they're working on this. In March of 62, the commanding general of the First Marine Aircraft Wing in Iwakuni which was where I should have been, is told, "I want this unit, the nickname or

code name Shufly and we're going to send them to this abandoned Japanese airfield in the south in the Mekong Delta called Soc Trang.

Of course marines was always planning for some contingency. He selected the squadron which was HMM 362 commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Archie Clapp and the squadron nickname was Archie's angels. I wanted to ask Colonel Clapp, "Why that?" He said, "Damn if I know" but when we flew into Okinawa the first time, before this, he said, "Welcome Archie's angels." He said, "I guess we were somebody's meal ticket back home" because there was rotation and tours and you couldn't live to hear the successor coming.

Archie's angels was born and they started preparing. They beefed up the squadron with more aircraft, more technicians because they knew there'd be a lot of maintenance to take care of and then they sent another unit from Okinawa down to this group I was assigned to, Marine Airbase Squadron 16 sub-unit 2. They, basically in a week, restored the old Japanese airbase, made the runway usable and built a tent city for the troops to live in.

Within a week of them going in, they had a base that was operational. They had to do their own electrical, water, communication, things you take for granted but all had to be created from scratch. They used and refurbished a couple of existing buildings that had been left over from World War 2. They placed an operational base in a week and then on April 15 of 62, the squadron, Archie's squadron, lifted off to Princeton which is a helicopter ship in the South China Sea. The reason they were there, they were on a field problem out of the Philippines when they got these orders so it was a short haul down there and they were ready to go.

They esteemed the shore, they came in and it didn't take a long time to fly in but then they go back to get more supplies because they're flying helicopters and they could only carry so much. Within a week they were operational. In that intervening week, they were getting briefings, they were doing practice things, adapting to the climate and so forth but within a week they flew their first mission which was taking ARVN soldiers into a landing zone.

They were there for 3 to 3 and a half months. When they were relieved, and then they flew out and another squadron took over. It was the successor squad, this was already in the orders but the listed guys don't know it, but they were set to go North so in September of 62, the unit Shufly rotated North to Da Nang and an army unit replaced them. Part of

the reason was because of the relative lift capabilities of the helicopters. Marines were flying something initially called the HUS-1, Helicopter Utility Sikorsky and they changed it to UH-34 and they were better suited for operating in the northern climate where the atmosphere was much lighter than in Delta which is very humid and heavy.

That was the initiation Shufly and from the very beginning, they were successful. They had no casualties, they took some hits. Archie said that almost every aircraft had been hit at some point and one, this is the way it was, one hit a oil pump, docked it out and to land the aircraft because oil is very important to the survival of helicopter, as well as gasoline. They had to fly oil drum out and there's a term we use, joy ringer, fix a thing to connect it to the engine so they can fly it back for major repairs but they didn't lose an aircraft during that time. They [inaudible 00:34:49] off the baton and the next squadron just picked up.

The thing that's most interesting that I find in reading history is that they developed, they're flying by the seat of their pants, nobody had done something like this before. They're flying helicopters a little bit in Korea but the helicopter became the main mode of transportation for not only the marines, the army and the armed forces during the war. Some of these tactics hadn't been developed so Clapp and his people developed those tactics.

Here's what I want to say, they're still being used today to some extent in helicopter, how you deploy, how you do this, how you do that. To the extent to protect their lives, yeah. That's common sense but the point of all that was they were not there to leave the charge. When you talk about advisers, you're talking about maybe a lieutenant colonel, a sergeant to accompany or more of South Vietnamese. You're not talking about 50 American soldiers all decked out in combat care waiting for somebody blowing the horn and go into combat.

The same with the marines. We had one platoon that provided base security and on occasion, when a helicopter would go down in the field and could be repaired, they would stand guard over it for a limited period until you'd get it out of there or on the other hand, and it didn't happen to the Angel squadron but to other squadrons where it was irreparable. They torched it, they throw Magnesium grenades on it until it was gone.

That was it. We weren't out there in operations as Americans but sure, if you're on an aircraft and they're firing at you and you know where they are and you don't want to go down, you could return fire. I got there in

April 63. I left Vietnam late January 64 and I didn't go back until I did a tour just 3 years ago.

Producer: Oh, OK.

David Hugel: I never got back for a long time. Very few people would have seen that or have read an article post-fact that [inaudible 00:37:05] famous marine general told his son and all, it would be a great deal but most people in the early days did not envision that. Many circumstances dictated that we had one president, the president who had initiated the whole deployment die, be killed and he's gone. We had another president come in with different ideas, different background, different thoughts of how it should be done. In the early days, I don't think anybody could have foreseen how large it would have been, how large an effort and loss of life it would have turned into.

Generally, it's a 13-month shore to shore tour going overseas so I knew when I got back to Okinawa, I had only a couple months and in April, I caught another ship back to the States. We docked at San Diego and again, everybody musters or lines up on a field of some kind and they process this and it was a small group of those who came back who had less than a 120 days left to serve on active duty. They gave us what they call a convenience to the government discharge which meant I will serve until early September. I got to leave San Diego 27th of May and that was the end of my military service so it was very soon thereafter.

It's hard to answer these questions. When you think about what I knew then, what I knew much later. When I say, "Knew much later," I had no access to secret intelligence. I'm just talking about what became public knowledge. I feel a lot of opportunities were lost and there's a book out that a friend of mine wrote. His memoir but there's a very poignant chapter there. It's called, "The day it became the longest war." General Charlie Cooper.

Charlie was a Lieutenant Colonel at that time and aid to the chief of naval operations when joint chiefs were called on meeting at the White House. He was only there to escort his boss and I can't remember his name right now and bring a map chart that they were going to use for there. That is the joint chief's meeting with the president but there's no place to put the chart. In fact there were no seats for the joint chiefs to sit in so they had to stand and Charlie held the chart [inaudible 00:39:56].

Johnson began cordially and then just broke into a tirade about them and what are they recommending. It just went on and on. I'm not going to

repeat because one would be bad memory but it's there in writing. Their article, before the book, was published in the Naval Institute proceedings. He had a certain image of what should be done and he didn't want to hear what others, others being his joint chief of staff, had to say, what policy they wanted him to pursue which was much more aggressive, not bringing in another 100,000,000 or 200 troops. Just more aggressive policy and he didn't want to hear it.

Nixon did implement some of those recommendations later which ultimately resulted in a settlement of the war. I'm not going to say he had the magic formula. I'm not going to say that at all but I think Johnson was not as amenable outside recommendations. Another book published it that tells part of that story. It's called "Dereliction of Duty" written by an army major as his dissertation and I was sure that would be the end of his career. The last time I saw him, he was a Brigadier general and one of the very well liked commander over in Afghanistan.

It didn't end his career. I guess people say it had some credibility but Johnson controlled it within our interest. He and McNamara and Max Taylor was still in that mix and to some extent, whoever the ambassador was at that time and it wasn't McNamara, [inaudible 00:41:49]

Producer: [inaudible 00:41:52]

David Hugel: No. He was the commander. He succeeded Westmoreland. I'm trying to think who the, anyway, it's immaterial but it was a small group of people that controlled decisions that were made, regardless what the recommendations were. This is what I've read. I'm very proud of my experience there and my service there and what I did there and that's one of the things I'm proud to do now is talk about those early days that are relatively unknown, unreported. I said, "When we got there, nobody knew where it was."

If you talked about Shufly, if you ask 1 out of 1,000 marines, let alone civilians, they wouldn't know anything about it so that's become my mission to tell that story of what we did do, the good things. I didn't mention this but our navy doctors, the marines don't have their own doctors or chaplains or dentists. They have navy personnel or coreman.

Coreman are all navy personnel but one of our navy doctors set up a clinic for Vietnamese civilians and military dependents. One at a nearby base, one out in a remote village and they voluntarily couple of times a week went to one of those. He was later killed in a rescue mission and his associates pursued the mission after that, the clinics, in his honor.

We did a lot of good things there. We did some prior things we shouldn't have done. Is it overall worth it? I think when a country makes good, it means it needs to honor them. That's what I think, each in their own way, and some even misguided in how they interpret it that each of the presidents that was involved with the war tried to do. You're talking about the early days?

Producer: Yeah, early days.

David Hugel: I think [inaudible 00:43:51], the same people that would wash your laundry by day may have been serving the Viet Cong general at night. We took that for granted. This little village, we called dog patch, just the other side of barb wire fence, just the other side of the railroad tracks, they were cordial enough but it was off limits. You can't go there after dark. I think a lot of them had mixed emotions about the war.

Let me say this though, that was the war. I'm just giving impressions. When I went back, they were uniformly supportive and appreciative of the Americans as tourists. They wanted to meet you, they wanted to talk to you. I remember we were at some temple down in the Mekong and one of the gentlemen in my tour group had stepped out for a smoke. We came out after touring the temple and he's talking to this young lady and he said, "She asked me if she could practice her English."

They're very eager to meet Americans. Let me say one other thing. I didn't forget it but I want to get this in earlier. I knew some personal stories and we learned more on this trip going back that life for the Vietnamese after the war was not easy of their fellow countrymen, the North Vietnamese were very, very brutal to the South Vietnamese.

One story we heard was any military cemetery, they disinterred everybody and what they did with the bodies or the bones? Any military cemetery in Vietnam today is strictly either Viet Cong or North Vietnamese troops. Somebody can check that out for you but that was what we were told on the tour.

We heard a story from one of the tour guides and these people work for the government, Vietnamese government now, about how people they knew were forced into these re-education camps. It broke a lot of people physically as well as mentally. It was a brutal takeover. It wasn't just, "OK now, we're buddies. We won the war, you lost but now we're buddies again." Again, I think, to some extent, the American public or congress let them down as their allies.

There was a learning experience on everything and one of the stories that Colonel Clapp told me was they learned early on. One, they used to call an artillery support. They stopped that because of an alert to Viet Cong where they were going and then they just had some Vietnamese aircraft. They'd find T-28s but with loaded cannon and machine guns and even that, they had to stop because it's too much advanced warning. They knew where they were going at that point.

He developed a technique. If your landing zone is here at a certain point and you're starting from over there, you don't go right there. You go to the third point or head in the direction of the third point and he said 2 minutes out, you switch directions. It gives them a little less notice of where you're going.

He developed another technique. Hold a couple of helicopters in reserve with Vietnamese troops on them so that when they hit an area and the Viet Congs start to flee, they'd flood them to that area as a stopper. They were always picking up and developing new techniques. One of the pilots told me was we should have learned more, we should have read more about what experiences the French had because they would go into a landing zone and all would be quiet and then when they go to take off, the Viet Cong would pop up and start shooting. They has this little spider holes and the French knew that. The French had faced the same where they'd cover themselves up and then once [inaudible 00:48:20] are on their way, then they'd pop up and start shooting them. There's a lot of things we could have learned, should have learned perhaps. When you're in a landing zone, it's pretty hectic. Say you have incoming fire and some of these people themselves are a little nervous that they made fire around them. It wasn't quiet. There was gunfire going off but I never saw any direct hits on them. Sometimes you get back, you see the helicopter had a hit in it.

Producer: At that point, I presume [inaudible 00:48:47] around the landing strip ...

David Hugel: Yeah.

Producer: ... motors were still not ...

David Hugel: Not for aircraft, not that I am aware of any aircraft weapon. Let me say one other thing because we alluded to, when we go in these missions, you're as much at risk as the other troops and even a seemingly routine mission, we took for granted. I got back after chow one night, my boss was a corporal and I just made corporal. I said, "Where are you going?" He said, "They got a search and rescue and I'm going to go on it." I said,

"Good luck." He runs over, grabs a camera and goes. I never saw him again.

They went out, 2 marine helicopters, they have report of an air force T-28 with a Vietnamese pilot and American observer. They've been shot down and they're out to search right now. It was late. [inaudible 00:49:51] 5:00, getting dusk and at some point, about an hour or so later they lost radio contact.

That could have been for a number of reasons. They all prayed it was atmospheric or something like that but the next morning, I sent out a wave to go look for them. They couldn't raise any radio signals though and they finally spotted some debris, including a pretty good chunk of [inaudible 00:50:22] lying on the bank of a small river. When they went in for a closer look, they took fire. They had insert an ARVN unit, infantry unit plus the VCL and when they got [inaudible 00:50:44] they got in there. Both wings were crashed and no survivors.

12 Americans died that day. 1 navy doctor, 2 navy coreman, the rest were marines. The largest single loss of life at the Vietnam war. We had a memorial service and so forth but it made you think twice when you went on with those seemingly routine missions, what the outcome would be or could be. There's a picture, you can say I had a 45 usually, sometimes a 38. Again, if you're in a situation where you're being attacked and you have no choice, you're going to use it or you should use it.

Producer: David, I want to thank you. Thank you for [inaudible 00:51:39]

David Hugel: It's been my pleasure.

Producer: Thank you for sharing that and for helping us out. Thank you for what you did and we hope that we will see more of you particularly at the big event we're going to have at the [inaudible 00:51:52] where hope to have [crosstalk 00:51:54].

David Hugel: Good Lord willing as they say ...

Producer: Yeah. Thanks.

David Hugel: ... and the creek don't rise.