

Lee A. Chilcote '64 Th'65
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
The Dartmouth Vietnam Project
May 11 and 23, 2015
Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

CHUNG: Today is May 11th, 2015, and this is Hannah Chung, an interviewer at the Dartmouth Vietnam Oral History Project [sic], and I'm at Room 109 at the Rauner [Special Collections] Library with Mr. Lee Chilcote [pronouncing chill-KOH-tee] today.

CHILCOTE: CHILL-coat.

CHUNG: CHILL-coat today. Sorry about that. All right, thank you so much for taking your time to have this interview with me.

CHILCOTE: Sure.

CHUNG: Great, great. So yeah, first of all, I would just would like to kind of hear about, like, your background in, like—so your childhood experiences and your memory, like, the neighborhood that you lived [in] as a child, and what are just—like, where you come from and what did your parents do? So if we can start from there, it would be great.

CHILCOTE: Okay. Well, I grew up in a city that's known as Beachwood, Ohio, at a time when it was a village. In Ohio, that means there were less than 500 people living in the area. And it was quite undeveloped. My parents moved there in 1940, built a home in a park-like setting. The history is interesting. The—a family by the name of Blossom, which is a very well-known family in Cleveland, owned this land, and my father was a young—then in his 30s—went to Mrs. Blossom, who was then living, and asked her if she would consider parting with a two-acre parcel so he could build a home. And it was the first time in *his* life that he had had an opportunity to own a home. They had rented up until that point of time. And amazingly, she said yes, so my dad built his home in 1940. I was born in '42, so that's where I grew up.

CHUNG: Great. So you pretty much spent all your childhood in that house? Like, did you ever move?

CHILCOTE: I moved in 1960, which happened to coincide with the year I started Dartmouth [College], so I never lived in a different house through my child and adolescent years.

CHUNG: Oh. Okay. So I guess then you got to become, like, really close with your, like, neighbors and, like, you made a lot of friends in the town.

CHILCOTE: Well, there were very few actually residents. We had about ten homes on the street, and you could go several miles in different directions before you got to any other populace, so it was a little isolated, actually. It wasn't the inner-ring suburb type setting. It was more rural.

CHUNG: Okay.

CHILCOTE: We had large fields behind us and open areas.

CHUNG: So I'm assuming that you probably spent a lot of time in, like, open fields and, like, outdoor [sic] as a child.

CHILCOTE: Yes. We didn't have that much to do, to tell you the truth, so we would use the outdoors, and I did crazy things like chase butterflies, and we would climb trees and all that sort of thing that—actually, I live in an inner city now, and it's not the same.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Right. And I guess—so since it was a very not very populace [sic] neighborhood, like, the school was also very small when you started.

CHILCOTE: I actually, the first school I went to was a one-room school, where they had six classes together and I think three—well, one teacher. Actually, one teacher, a Mrs. Szabo [pronounced ZAY-bo], S-z-a-b-o. And she would put the younger kids up front and the older kids in the back, so it was literally one through six, and that's the only school we had in the village at all. This is very close to Shaker Heights, Ohio, so kids would normally go to Shaker Heights High School or Cleveland Heights High School, which are two neighboring, inner-ring suburbs that were more developed than Beachwood was at that point. I only went one year,

though. Then I went to University School, which is an independent day school in Cleveland.

CHUNG: Okay. And when did you start at the University—

CHILCOTE: Second grade.

CHUNG: Second grade. I see. Mm-hm. And so I guess you went to middle and high school and, like, around that area as well?

CHILCOTE: Yeah, I went to University School. It was—the school was located in Shaker Heights, just a couple of miles away. And that's where I went. Mm-hm.

CHUNG: Great. Great. So I guess now that now there you had, like, more peers and more people around, like, starting in University School, so how was that transition for you?

CHILCOTE: Well, I was pretty young. This is, like, 1949, so I was six, seven—six, seven, that age.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: I loved it, because I suddenly had a class of 15 students. Schools were small in those days. The populace hadn't built as much as it has today. And so we had—it was fun.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Great. And what was it like—like, what was your, like, favorite study area in high school and middle school?

CHILCOTE: I was very strong in math and languages, so I took Latin and French from the time—from sixth grade if you can believe that. And we actually—we did pre-Latin and pre-French in sixth and seventh grade, and then those that did okay went on and—so I actually had six years of French, a couple of years of Latin. So that was one.

And the other was math. Math was a very strong subject, and we were lucky to have teachers that took a great interest in you, so I just got more interested, and they got more interested in me, and pretty soon I was a pretty good math student.

- CHUNG: Great. Was there anything else other than, like, academics in terms of, like, extracurricular activities then?
- CHILCOTE: Oh, yeah. I played three sports. I played soccer. I tried out for football in sixth grade. I wasn't a very good football player, so I switched and played soccer from that time on, all the way through Dartmouth. And I was a swimmer, uh, a diver, and I did that. And in the spring I did track, and at one point I switched to tennis, but as far as the competitive sports, varsity sports, those were the three sports: soccer, swimming and track. And, I played all the way through, from seventh grade through—actually, through high school, and then I continued to play soccer at Dartmouth and ultimately coached with [Alden H.] "Whitey" Burnham here at Dartmouth in 1965.
- CHUNG: Great. I guess you were involved in lots of activities in high school, so what was it like to kind of interact with, like, your high school peers, and, like, did you, like, make really good friends, and, like, what did you guys do?
- CHILCOTE: Our classes were pretty small. I guess I have to differentiate between grade school and high school. In grade school, the classes were pretty much together, but in those days the teachers were often housewives, and they really weren't expert teachers. They were friendly, and they were very supportive, and they were motherly, but they weren't great teachers. Most of them were women. And we'd occasionally get a really good, tough teacher in a particular subject, and so we were, we weren't—I don't think we were taught that well. But, like most students, you self-teach yourself and you figure out a way to learn.
- CHUNG: Right. Mm-hm. And that's the real way to learn, I think, but—great! And I guess now the time has come when you need to kind of consider what you're going to do after you graduate high school, so kind of what did you have in mind? What are some options that you were considering?
- CHILCOTE: Well, in those days, the college selection process was very primitive. What I did is went to my father and his friends and them where *they* thought I should go to school, and I'd get suggestions of Yale [University], Williams [College], Trinity [College], Dartmouth. My father went—Dartmouth was a

family tradition. My father was '30, my brother was '57, and I had an uncle who was '45. So Dartmouth was in my sights. But I didn't really explore the idea of going to a public university or going out of this range of schools. It was sort of the Ivies and other elite schools. I never really gave any thought to anything else.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Okay. So I guess kind of what brought you to Dartmouth? What about Dartmouth attracted you to—

CHILCOTE: Well, I loved the outdoors. The one thing I didn't mention is that I was—having grown up in a very rural neighborhood, we became pretty acclimated to the outdoors, and I loved being out in the woods, and there were lots of woods around us and so forth, so that attracted me. And I knew that I was a skier, so that was part of it. I did a lot of canoeing. That was a part of it. And the outdoor hiking and so forth were probably three factors.

Dartmouth even then was known as a teaching college, someone where you could really get to know the professors and learn, so that was attractive. But I frankly don't think I gave it that much thought. I was accepted at Williams, Trinity and Dartmouth, and I had almost pre-decided to go to Dartmouth if I got in.

CHUNG: Right. Great. So when you first arrived—had you visited Dartmouth before you got accepted to Dartmouth?

CHILCOTE: Oh, yeah, it was my first choice. I didn't even tell my father that, but it was.

CHUNG: I see. So how did it feel when you first arrived on campus now as an accepted student?

CHILCOTE: It frankly was scary. I can remember to this day waving goodbye to my mother, and she was very stoic and just immediately left, and there I was, all alone, really not knowing what to do. But as I think they do today, within a day I think we were up on Mount Moosilauke, on the freshman trip.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: I lived in Brown Hall, which is the Choate dorms. They were then just built in 1959, and we were the first occupants of those dorms. I looked at them today, and they're in pretty bad shape. [Both chuckle.] But that's where I was, Brown Hall. I immediately made pretty good friends with the others that were on our floor and in our dorm, and I think I made the transition reasonably well.

CHUNG: Great. And what did you study at Dartmouth?

CHILCOTE: I went into engineering and immediately plunged into math and physics courses. The math, of course, was with John [G.] Kemeny, who ultimately became president of the college. It was his second year of teaching, I believe. He had headed the Princeton [University] math department and was a brilliant mathematician. And he had a sidekick, a man by the name of Professor [Thomas E.] Kurtz, who was actually tougher than he was. And Professor Kurtz was, was a brilliant mathematician. And that was a shock because I didn't realize, because I hadn't been out in the world very long, that a lot of the public high schools had done a very good job of teaching calculus in high school. Our school, which was really a very fine independent day school, hadn't—we hadn't had any calculus. We had advanced algebra. And looking back on it, I realized that we kind of became stalled in learning advanced algebra, but they never thought of giving us calculus, so it was totally foreign to me, and I really struggled a lot because they were new concepts and almost everybody in the class had had a full year of calculus before they got to Dartmouth.

CHUNG: Right. Mm-hm. And so you started—you began taking engineering courses, I guess, later in the year. You need to take math and physics before.

CHILCOTE: No, in those days, it was up to you to arrange your schedule so that you got both an A.B. [bachelor of arts] degree and a B.E. [bachelor of engineering] degree, and we had I think a much broader—they had just started the three-semester program, and they just started the multi-selection of courses, so you just had to arrange your own schedule. And there hadn't been enough experience at Dartmouth to know how things had worked, and we weren't allowed to take a semester off here and there; it was straight on through.

CHUNG: Oh, okay. Mm-hm.

CHILCOTE: So we had three trimesters straight on through, and there wasn't any choice about it. Well, on the one hand, that was more concentrated; on the other, it allowed you to do things like take engineering science. And also I tried to get in an English major, and I also tried to take some French. What helped me is that I got advanced placement in French. I got placed all the way to a junior at Dartmouth in French, so I got credit for, like, four courses of—I didn't major in it, but it satisfied the liberal arts requirements.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: And I also entered Naval ROTC [Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps], and that had a requirement for eight history courses, military history courses. And those didn't count in the liberal arts degree department, so I actually had to take history. So it was a juggling—I had to go to summer school two summers to finish on time at Dartmouth.

CHUNG: Okay. Yeah, it sounds like there were a lot of courses to take.

CHILCOTE: Yeah.

CHUNG: And you said that you also tried to major in English at some point?

CHILCOTE: Yeah, I took—I got through freshman and sophomore English, and then when my service was completed in 1968, I came back to Dartmouth and took three more courses, and so I—it didn't matter; I wasn't trying to complete a major, but I did take creative writing, English literature and so forth, junior and senior courses that you would have had had you had a major.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Okay. Yeah. What actually interested you to kind of consider [an] English major?

CHILCOTE: Well, because I had been very strong in English in high school. I know I mentioned the math, but I was advanced English in high school, and I loved it. I had a very good

English teacher in high school. I really came to adore him over the years. He was very well read, and he was very considerate and supportive of the students, and he really interested me. I couldn't do it all, so I had to make a selection, so I stayed with the engineering science and just worked in the rest when I could. That's all I could do.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Great. Yeah, so other academics. I read from your essay in our *Dartmouth Veterans: Vietnam Perspective* book that you were also very actively involved in outdoor activities as well.

CHILCOTE: Yes.

CHUNG: Yeah, so would you tell us a little bit about that?

CHILCOTE: Yeah. As I mentioned, I got that from—I went to a lot of camps [chuckles] when I was young, and through those camp experiences, I loved the outdoors, so I joined the Dartmouth Outing Club, and at least during the fall of my freshman year—except for sports, I did what I could do, and I loved to ski, so instead of going out for swimming—Karl [B.] Michaels [sic; Michael] was the coach then, and he was pleading with me to go out—try out for diving, but I could see I would have been a second or third diver, and I didn't want to do that, so I just said, *I'm going to ski and enjoy myself in the winter and just go with one sport*, so it was soccer.

And as far as the outdoor activities, the thing that probably interested me the most was the canoe club. The Ledyard Canoe Club had been going since the 1930s. There were a group of us—a guy named [Peter D.] “Dan” Dimancescu [Class of 1964], who ultimately became a film writer, and a guy named [William W.] “Bill” Fitzhugh [Class of 1964], who were both in my class. We were, I'd say, the heart of the Ledyard Canoe Club. I think they were, like, president and vice president and so forth.

We really were interested, so we did a lot of canoeing, and then we took the trips down the Connecticut [River]. I went on three trips down the Connecticut, and that was all Ledyard Canoe Club plus others. And we had a great time with all that stuff.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Great. Right. And I guess the biggest kind of the extracurricular activity, like, so to speak, that you were involved with at Dartmouth was Naval ROTC. Is that correct?

CHILCOTE: Well, in addition to sports and these outdoor clubs and stuff, yeah, NROTC was a requirement. I had signed up in the Reserves and was a reservist from 1960 on, and committed to active service. Originally, it was Reserves, and then I got interested in—someone suggested that I could become a pilot, so in I think March of '61—I'm not sure—I was flown down to Pensacola, Florida, and went on T-34 trainers [Beechcraft T-34 Mentors] off of aircraft carriers, which was a real thrill, and so that was to see whether I had the aptitude, the eyesight—they ran you through as if you were a preflight candidate. And I passed everything, so I could have become a pilot, I suppose. I was trying to find what things in the Navy I'd want to do, and I was pretty sure I didn't want to just sit on a ship. And so I was trying to figure out this Navy experience.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. So, yeah, kind of, I guess, again going back to your essay, I think it said that you received some encouragement from your dad, and then you kind of considered—that's how you considered joining NROTC.

CHILCOTE: Well, I went to him and asked. The encouragement really came from some classmates. There were—at that time, I think there was 175 people that actually served in the military in our class of 600. I don't know. My recollection is that we had about 150 in the ROTC programs, between the Army and the Navy. I can't be sure of that number, but it's something like that. And there was kind of a groundswell within our class to do some of these things, and I don't remember who I met, but I met a number of classmates who said, "I'm going to go into NROTC," and I said, "Are you from a military family?" And they said no, and I said, "Why are you doing this?" "It looks like a great experience."

So I checked into it, and I called my dad to say, "I'm thinking of doing this. What do you think?" And he gave me all the encouragement in the world. He said, "That's great." He said, "I never served in the military, so I'd love to see you do that." So I went ahead.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Was there I guess anything about [the] Navy that attracted you more than [the] Army did?

CHILCOTE: Yes, I think that to me, the Navy, in my kind of primitive thinking at that time, was the Navy was a more sophisticated service and a better service than the Army. I don't know why I thought that. It's just what was imparted to me, I guess.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. And then you said that you went to Florida to see if you can become a Navy—

CHILCOTE: Right. My idea was to use my spring vacations, and I'd use one spring vacation and go to Pensacola, and another one, I went to New London, Connecticut, to submarine school [the Naval Submarine School]. I didn't really go in the school. I got to go in a submarine, talk to the submariners, ask about it, see a submarine. I'd never been in a submarine before. I don't think we went off the pier. I mean, I think we went into the ship, but I don't think we went anywhere, because I don't think I've ever been in a submarine, actually into the water.

But it was—again, these were recruiting techniques, where the Navy was—they knew they already had me for at least two years, and they were trying to interest me in a particular field, so I was taking advantage of those opportunities.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. And—but it didn't really hit you.

CHILCOTE: No. After two years of drills, Navy drills and ROTC work, I realized that a lot of the students who had signed up in ROTC were actually from Navy families, so they had a natural inclination. I had very little connection with the Navy. I had two cousins who had been in the Navy in World War II, one enlisted and one as an officer, who I barely knew. They were distant cousins. I was proud of their service, but I didn't know what the Navy was about. And the more I found out, the less I liked it because it just did not seem that being an ensign in the Navy was going to be something that I wanted to do.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Right. And after visiting, like, the Florida and New London, Connecticut, at some point you decide to change your path to [the] Marine Corps. Is that right?

CHILCOTE: Yeah. The events there really revolved around a wonderful man. His name was Major [Philip] Frazier, and he came to Dartmouth in—I think in 1962. There had been a Navy officer, the one that recruited me to NROTC, who I had met with in 1960, when I first got there and signed up to do NROTC. But he left. He got reassigned.

And so Major Frazier was a very unusual individual. He was married to a Chinese woman. He had grown up in the pre-Communist China and had lived there until 1949, I think. And he was just old enough to have really experienced that, so he knew—and he lived in mainland China, so his choice was to go to Taiwan or leave the country, and as you probably know, the U.S. military—the U.S. Marine Corps I think exited from mainland China in '49. I think that's correct. And Philip Frazier's father was a colonel in the Marine Corps and in charge of battalions in China at that time. A very unusual part of U.S. history, actually.

But I—meeting him and learning that there was this whole other life out there, where he had experienced—and he was pretty worldly, and he had served in Korea. He had served in China as a young marine, but he served as an officer in Korea. And then he—this was 1962. All I can remember is that he had just—we had just experienced the Bay of Pigs Invasion, the completely botched Bay of Pigs Invasion, under President [John F.] Kennedy.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: And he was the senior marine officer on ships for that entire exercise. And I actually was a senior marine on a ship, later, when, in the Mediterranean [Sea] and Caribbean [Sea]. I had no idea what it meant to be a senior marine on ships. I thought he ran the ship, but he didn't. He served under an admiral. But they were part of the backup for the landing force that actually attempted to land at the Bay of Pigs, which obviously is a fairly embarrassing incident in our history. But he did that, and I was very impressed with him. So that had a lot to do with my inquiring into the Marine Corps.

CHUNG: I see.

- CHILCOTE: I didn't know anything about the Marine Corps before I met him.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. So it's really—your interaction with Major Frazier that got you—
- CHILCOTE: Yes, sort of a push-pull. I wasn't enthralled with the Navy. I couldn't see myself spending even two years in the Navy. I had actually applied—because—I'd applied with the Secretary of the Navy to become a four-year Regular Navy person, but—so at that point of time, it was: Okay, you can become regular, four-year Navy if you commit to submarine or you commit to flying, and I—or you can stay a two-year and just, you know, be on a ship and serve your two years and get out. I didn't like any of those options. I didn't really want to fly. It was thrilling, but I couldn't see doing that. And I didn't like the submarine. I didn't like the Regular Navy, so I was looking for an alternative, and I happened to meet Major Frazier at that time, so that's really how it happened.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see. And I guess kind of meeting him and kind of deciding to change your path to Marine Corps. You also decided to join the—participate in the Platoon Leaders Class in that summer? Is that correct?
- CHILCOTE: Well, it's a requirement. Once I had changed to the Marine Corps, which I guess was in the spring of '62, I think, I was assigned to Quantico, Virginia,—
- CHUNG: Okay.
- CHILCOTE: —and went through that training, which is designed to be as much like the training for the enlisted service as—which is done in Parris Island, South Carolina, and it's intended to be really pretty rough. And this was the late '60s, so what we had were either veterans of the Korean War or, in some cases, veterans of World War II that were the drill instructors, the DIs. They're a pretty tough bunch.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. Yeah. Yeah, I've read some details about the experience that you had there, and, yeah, I actually became really curious. I would love to kind of learn more about, like, the specifics of, like, the trainings that you had there and what your kind of daily routine looked like.

CHILCOTE: Well—and this is no different than anyone else, but you come into Quantico, and besides the haircuts and the uniform and all that stuff, they treat you—they completely take away any dignity or self-pride that you have, and you really—you have to be pretty careful you're gonna—in those days, the DIs were not—they were allowed to do things that they're not allowed to do today, and it comes pretty close to brutalizing young marines. And they did it through forced exercise, really. So we would—the experience was that we would go on forced marches. I was a pretty good athlete, so I thought, and I was in pretty good shape because I played three sports and I kept myself in shape. I ran a lot. So I didn't think that part of it would be a problem.

But it was tough. They put 60-pound packs on your back and would march you up and down hills. The place called the Hill Trail, which I think still exists—and in Virginia in the summer it's over 100 degrees. You know, it might be all right in the woods. Maybe it gets down to the high 80s or something. But it was tough, pretty tough stuff. So that was a shock. I had never been through anything like that. And I'm quick to say that nothing at Dartmouth or nothing in my prior life had taught me to endure these tougher experiences, so it was just new to me. I mean when you play sports, you get into pretty exhausting situations, but this was way beyond that.

CHUNG: Right. Yeah. It sounds like it was a whole new level. And so did you guys also receive any kind of, like, combat skill training as well there?

CHILCOTE: Oh, sure. It's sort of a process that begins with physical training, and they're, what they're doing—generally speaking, in these PLC [Platoon Leaders Class] courses, more than 50 percent of the candidates wash out, and so they really step up the physical part of it. And a lot of the candidates are washed out before you're into it for a couple of weeks.

CHUNG: Oh.

CHILCOTE: And then they turn from the physical. They've got it down to the people who physically can handle the experience. And then they turn to some of the training that you would have.

And this is pre-officer training, because there's a whole—you have six months of officer training *if* you survive the candidate experience. But they do train you in—riflery was one. They took us to ranges. I had done riflery through the National Rifle Association, and I was a pretty good shot, so [clears throat] it just kind of came naturally to me for that part. I can remember a lot of the candidates—they would not know how to hold a rifle. They would point the rifle at people, —

CHUNG: Oh!

CHILCOTE: —and you wonder whether you're going to get killed. And the DIs would really go after 'em. But I knew how to handle a rifle, so that came a little easier.

The other kind of training we got was just in kind of basics of military tactics. They didn't try to train us too much in that because we're young candidates. They don't even know whether we're going to be in the service, so they're not going to devote lots of training to it. But there was some schooling, yes: map reading, stuff like that. Basic stuff.

CHUNG: Mm-hm, mm-hm. I mean, with, like, lots of the kind of experience outdoor and your previous experience with rifles, I guess, though it was rigorous it must have kind of come natural to you, like a lot of—

CHILCOTE: Well, I thought that—the physical part was easy. The leadership part was another question.

CHUNG: Oh, okay.

CHILCOTE: I didn't know it, but I—well, I had some I guess some inherent leadership skills. I didn't know how to bring them out, so I didn't do very well on the leadership part. I didn't even know really what the concepts were, on what they were trying to do to me to try to get me to become—

CHUNG: Oh, okay. Mm-hm.

- CHILCOTE: It took—the training—it was excellent. It's just they didn't tell you what they were training you for, so you had to figure it out.
- CHUNG: Mmm. I see. So for leadership part, did they have, like, different activities or sessions just for that, or did they just kind of observe how you do in training?
- CHILCOTE: They just observed how you did, and it's a combination of—they're judging—as I look back on it, they were judging your ability to be self-reliant and figure things out. When you really have no resources, can you figure out how to move forward in some way, whatever the activity was or whatever they wanted you to do. It's that simple. It *sounds* simple, but when you're in the middle of it and you're confused and they don't say anything to you—so they're making judgments at the same time they're trying to train you. And that was the confusing part, I think. And it is to most recruits. It's part of the process of being in the Marine Corps. And the Army does the same thing and so forth.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. So how many people sign up at the beginning, and in total, like, at the end of it, like, how many people were selected as new leaders?
- CHILCOTE: I can't tell you. You know, I'm guessing maybe that we had 300 show up on day one and maybe less than 150 who actually came out of the class at all. And then some of those, myself included, were not selected in the first go-round. So they completed the course. I completed everything physically. I did pretty well physically. But they, for leadership reasons, they did not select those people because it was all voluntary. I mean, PLC, Platoon Leaders Class, is all voluntary. You're not there because you're drafted; you're there because you want to be.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. Right. Mm-hm. And do you know, like, usually, kind of around, like, roughly how many people are selected as, like, the final leaders after the training?
- CHILCOTE: Well, as I said, something less than half.
- CHUNG: Less than half. I see.

CHILCOTE: So if there were 300, then I'm sure that number, then, would be 150.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Okay.

CHILCOTE: And then they get selected to go to Officers [sic; Officer] Candidate School. And there's no assurance, just because they're going to Officers [sic] Candidate School, that they will become officers. You have to pass that training, too.

CHUNG: Oh, okay. That's lots of—

CHILCOTE: So the PLC is, like, eight weeks or six weeks. I don't remember. And the Officers [sic] Candidate, six months.

CHUNG: Mmm. Okay. So it's much longer.

So after your experience, first experience at PLC—so you didn't make it to the leader list, but you came back to Dartmouth, and how did you feel about that? Like, did that, like, PLC experience in the summer kind of shaped how you thought about your military career?

CHILCOTE: Well, I realized belatedly that I hadn't shown the leadership skills and the efforts. You know, leadership—there's a lot of ways to lead, but one of the ways is just by maintaining your composure, your courage, your perseverance and your direction and everything. I didn't really know how to do that. Everything had come very easy to me in my life. Every activity I had ever done, I had done well on, with almost no exception, so it was a shock to me to be rejected at something [chuckles], as you can imagine.

And so I took a self-assessment and said, *You know, I really want this. I really want to do this, and how am I gonna get back into this?* So I pleaded with Major Frazier to let me back in the program. And he had warned me—and I think he could just see in me that I was not very mature at that time and I was going to be a problem. And so he warned me about it, and I didn't heed his warnings as I should have. I thought I did, because I really prepared myself physically. I went over to the gym and worked out. I was in great shape during all that period of time, and I thought, *I've got what it takes, you know?* No.

So I pleaded with him to help me get back in the program, and he did. So I went for a second summer, the next summer. And, of course, I had seen everything. I knew exactly what was up. The DIs knew that I knew, and so they were tougher on me than almost anybody in the entire platoon. They were really tough. They really got after me. But I was—I thought I was ready for them, and I really did well. I did well in every aspect of it. I was practically first in the whole platoon.

But part of the problem was that a lot of the—in the Marine Corps at that time—I don't know whether this is true today—in the Marine Corps at that time, a lot of the candidates were sons or grandsons of marines. A famous marine by the name of [Lt. Gen. Lewis Burwell] "Chesty" Puller, who had fought in World War II and Korea—his son was in the unit next to mine in PLC, and he walked around like he was already a lieutenant, because he knew everything about the Marine Corps. I didn't. I didn't know much of anything, obviously.

But the second time through, I was in very good shape, and right from day one, I knew what to do, and so it was a very sobering experience, but it gave me a lot of maturity, and I began to mature for the really first time in my life.

CHUNG: Mmm. I see. So what do you think were some, like, specific, different things that you did in the second PLC experience compared to your first one?

CHILCOTE: There's a bit of—in the military, as you would expect, there's a little game playing, where you have to be particularly stoic, quiet, submissive at the right times, and other times you have to be very assertive. And I'd learned those differences, and so I mastered those in a way. It's about having a commanding presence; at the same time, having the kind of leadership skills that someone who observes you says, "That guy's a leader." Some people are born with them; some people learn them. And there are lots of different ways to lead, but I had learned something from the prior summer, so I was able to exhibit those skills in the second summer. It's really what it was all about.

CHUNG: Okay. Great. Was there anything kind of remarkable or things that kind of stuck out to you from your second experience at PLC?

CHILCOTE: No, other than the fact that I wanted to—I think—all I can remember at this point is there were a couple of candidates who were very competitive, and they were bound and determined to do better than I did, and I was bound and determined to better than they did. And they both came—I think they—I don't remember their names anymore, but they both came from military families. And they were affronted by the fact that this non-military guy from an elite school, an elite family, from upper middle-class America would come in here and take first position in the platoon.

And the DIs could watch this. The DIs were watching the three of us or four of us, whatever there were, very closely. And they tried to provoke me into a fight. They tried to do all sorts of things because they wanted to destroy me. And it was very competitive. And I wouldn't take the bait, and I ended up—I don't remember whether I was first or second, but I was right up near the top.

So what happened was that the DIs observed this, and they realized: He's going to be a candidate because he can compete with those guys. You know, it's not a whole lot different than sports, when you get down to it. It's very competitive. And the person with the perseverance, who remains composed and calm—and all those traits are the traits that I was missing the first summer and I was able to show the second summer. So it was actually an extremely positive experience, and I came back somewhat a different person after the second summer.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Yeah. I think it's really interesting. What I find really interesting is, like, your dynamic between, like—dynamic between you and, like, other—kind of the participants there and all of the drill instructors, just because you come from, like, a different background than kind of they'd come from. So other than being, like, really competitive, like, I guess, on, like, [a] daily basis, like, interaction with them, like, how was the—how was your experience with that? It must have been really different from, like, the people that you were used to interacting with as well.

CHILCOTE: Yeah. As I've said, I grew up in a loving family, but my father had not had any military experience. He, himself, had gone through the [Great] Depression and had a really rough experience, but he was bound and determined that his children would not have to suffer that same experience, so he worked like the devil to have a nice home and provide for us, get us to the right schools and give us the things that we needed to succeed. And he did all that. But for us, we'd never really experienced the harder parts of life.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: And so this was the first time in my life that I experienced anything that was really hard.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Right.

CHILCOTE: So it was very different. It was very different from the way I grew up.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. And did you, like, talk to your parents about, like, your experience there—like, that—

CHILCOTE: No. When you're 20 and 21, you probably don't talk to your parents about those things. I knew I was going through kind of a metamorphosis, and it was in a couple of ways. It was not only the—I mean, here I was in candidate school. All of the other candidates came from varied backgrounds, and I hadn't even—you know, I'd grown up in essentially an all-white village, and the only ethnic diversity we had is there were Jewish families in our community, but there weren't many African-Americans. I live in the same area now, and we have everything from Russian Orthodox to Jewish to African-American. We have a sizeable Asian population. It's wonderful. But I hadn't experienced that until I was 21 years old, if you can believe that.

Because Dartmouth, itself, was almost all eastern boarding schools. My recollection is that more than half of our class came from independent day schools or eastern boarding schools. It totally outnumbered the number of people coming from public schools, I think. And, of course, the people who

came from public schools came from the very best public schools in the country. They were like prep schools.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: They really were. And that's changed a lot, but it was pretty lily-white. I'll tell you, it was pretty lily-white, and I hadn't had any other experiences, so it was very different.

CHUNG: I see. And I guess that kind of really, I'm assuming that, your, just that—your two summers of experience at PLC really kind of changed the way you see your life and also your experience at Dartmouth as well, I feel like.

CHILCOTE: Yeah, I think that's true. I feel like I went all the way through Dartmouth without making much change. It wasn't so much the experience *at* Dartmouth; it was experience *after* Dartmouth. I'm not discrediting Dartmouth for anything it gave me. I didn't take advantage of what Dartmouth had because I was too immature and was too inexperienced to take advantage of it. So my life learning, the life change that occurred happened in the Marine Corps, and I credit the Marine Corps for that.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: I wish, frankly, maybe it had been reversed: I'd had the Marine Corps first; then I would have really taken advantage of Dartmouth. I know I would have.

CHUNG: Mmm. I see. Great. So, I mean, the second time you finished the Platoon Leaders Class now, you finished the whole, entire thing at a really higher ranking, so you made it to the official officers—

CHILCOTE: Yeah, I think we were divided into companies, and I think I finished first in my company and in the top three or four in the whole battalion. I don't remember that well, but something like that.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Okay. So then—so now you're eligible to go to the Officer Candidate School.

CHILCOTE: Yes. Mm-hm.

CHUNG: And when did you go to the Officer Candidate School?

CHILCOTE: June of 1965.

CHUNG: June '65.

CHILCOTE: All of that, I—I guess I'd finished my second at the end of '63, I guess, and so '64 and '65 were—I just focused on my studies and getting my A.B. and then getting my B.E. and getting through comprehensives, things like that and was commissioned in June of '65 at my Thayer School graduation and went straight to Quantico, Virginia, again but here, for Officers [sic] Candidate School. Now, here we're all second lieutenants. Now, here we're learning all different sorts of things. We're learning to become officers. Theoretically, the Platoon Leader Class has taught us what the life of an enlisted person is and what that service is, and this is to teach us, was to teach us, about becoming an officer.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Right. Yeah, so what are some different, like, skill sets or kind of the values that you learned from Officers [sic] Candidate School?

CHILCOTE: Well, here there was much more teaching of actual practical knowledge that you needed. We took all sorts of courses in weapons. We were at the same time, because this is a tradition in the Marine Corps—you're not treated—until you pin those bars on, the Marine Corps doesn't treat you as an officer at all; they treat you as an enlisted. And there's a purpose in that. It's to make sure that you don't ever forget that it's the enlisted man that supports the Marine Corps. The officers are no better, no worse; they're just in charge.

And so we were taught that daily, because we still had DIs. We still went through all the rigors. But we were used to it. We knew how to do it, and you had to handle it, and so if there is a softer side of a DI, we saw the softer side of the DI. But we had just as much physical exercise. We went on 20-mile hikes with 60-pound packs. You learned to walk asleep because you're so tired, you fall asleep, and you actually find yourself walking for half a mile asleep.

CHUNG: Wow.

CHILCOTE: Some people fall down, but that didn't work, either, because you get hurt. So it was no *more* rigorous; it was just *as* rigorous, and we did a lot of—we learned to drill. We learned to command troops, we were put in charge, we learned to handle our uniforms—all of the day-to-day stuff that comes naturally to officers that—we had to be taught it. They were very rigorous. Shining shoes and keeping bunks and all that stuff, cleaning rifles and so forth.

CHUNG: And your essay talks a little bit about the counterinsurgency training that you received.

CHILCOTE: Well, that was a little bit later. If you look at the history, when I started Officers [sic] Candidate School, I guess I was aware that we had increased our presence in Vietnam, but I know, looking back historically, that we didn't—till the end of June of 1965, we didn't cross 100,000 troops in Vietnam, and most of the public did not know that. I certainly did not know that.

I knew that Vietnam was looming, but I didn't view that the war had actually started. Maybe it had. It probably did, but I didn't view that it had. What I thought of was, *Well, there's a possibility that I can go to Vietnam!* I was looking at it very positively as an experience, and so I wanted to become an infantry officer.

You get a Military Occupational Specialty, an MOS, but you only get to choose it if you're in the top ten of the Officers [sic] Candidate School. So I was bound and determined I was going to be in the top ten, naturally, and I was and so forth. And I wanted to pick infantry, which is called 0302 [infantry officer], so that's what I was working towards.

CHUNG: Mmm. I see. Kind of, what about participating in [the] Vietnam War attracted you, like, to kind of consider the option?

CHILCOTE: Well, I was pretty naïve, and I thought, *This is the time in our history, my history, that I can do this. The stars are aligning. There's gonna be a war. I can be part of it. I need to do that. I can't shirk this responsibility. I wouldn't want to. And I know*

I can succeed at it, so that's about as far as I thought about it, looking from 1965 forward.

CHUNG: I see. And I guess just talking a little bit about your experience at Officer Candidate School, do you feel like now, looking back, kind of like the trainings and the things that you received there kind of prepared you well for your experience in Vietnam?

CHILCOTE: Not necessarily. It was basically World War II and Korea type training. All of our equipment, all of our training was in conventional warfare. We were using M1 [Garand] rifles, which were World War II rifles. We were told that officers would carry [M1] carbines, which is a smaller version of an M1 rifle, which had been carried in World War II. We were issued all World War II equipment. Virtually nothing had changed between World War II, Korea—Korea was exactly the same as World War II except obviously we came to an armistice in Korea instead of—our goal wasn't to win against North Korea; our goal there was to achieve a halt and protect South Korea, which was different than the goals in World War II, you know, which was to—the view in World War II was that we had to totally defeat, have an unconditional surrender from Japan and Germany or we would have failed, so we had different objectives and so forth.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Right. And you—tell us a little bit about how you thought about [the] Vietnam War and the U.S. involvement, like, while you were in Officer Candidate School. And I was wondering, among your peers, like—like, what were their perceptions or what were the words that were kind of circulating?

CHILCOTE: What we knew at that point is that it was likely that [President Lyndon B.] Johnson was going to increase the troop levels and that we were going to get more deeply involved. We didn't know what that meant. At that point, we thought the country was fully behind the Vietnam War. It was being talked about similar to Korea. There was a Cold War mentality in which, you know, they would talk about the domino effect, that if—as you know, China was heavily involved in the Korean War, and it was assumed that China would be involved in any war in Vietnam. It was also assumed that Russia would be behind China, because China

and Russia seemed to be aligned in Korea. And if you think about it, this only 12 years after the end of Korea, and we're still in Korea, and we're still at that point being threatened by the North Koreans. The Chinese had pulled back, but I think, because we had done the job and they decided it wasn't worth the gambit.

But we didn't know what to expect in Vietnam at that point of time. All I can remember is thinking, *This could be World War III. Or: We need to stop.* We need to stop the North Vietnamese from coming south, is what we were told. It's what we tried to do.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see. And, like, were there I guess—were people in general kind of enthusiastic about the idea of I guess getting more involved? Like, were there other people who were also excited about it?

CHILCOTE: I can certainly say in June of '65 I don't recall any dissent towards the war at all. None.

CHUNG: Okay.

CHILCOTE: Now, remember that I went off to Officers [sic] Candidate School, so I was in somewhat of an isolated experience from June of '65 to December. But I will tell you I didn't even know when I left the United States in December of '65 that there were people turning against the war. I had no idea. But that's because I was in the military service, and maybe things were happening, but I didn't notice and in the newspapers anything about protests, at all. So I thought the country was pretty much behind the war.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see. Great. So, yeah, like, just before you left to Vietnam—so you had had a little bit of time in between, after finishing your Officer Candidate School.

CHILCOTE: Mm-hm.

CHUNG: So—and you got to spend some more time with family, I guess, for the last time?

CHILCOTE: Yeah. My mother, who was, you know, like any mother, was worried about me, offered to drive me across the United

States or drive with me across the United States, and we did that. We drove for, like, three days through kind of a Southwest route, down through New Mexico and over to California. And I think she assumed that it was the last time she was going to see me, and I assumed that wasn't going to be the case, and we sort of left it there.

But I think what we did is I sold my car in Arizona, and we must have rented a car to get to Camp Pendleton, California, where she dropped me off. I don't remember. And she may have flown back. I don't remember the details. But we had a great trip. It was wonderful.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Right. Yeah, it sounds like a great road trip. So, yeah, right before you left, you were at Camp Pendleton to receive a little bit more training just before you left.

CHILCOTE: Mm-hm.

CHUNG: And what was that training about?

CHILCOTE: There were two parts of it, and, as I remember, it was two weeks. Maybe it was longer. I don't remember. But we were assigned—my orders were actually to the 25th [Marine] Regiment, which was I think a missionary brigade, the first elements of which had already been deployed to Vietnam. So I was with the rear elements of the 25th Regiment, I think.

And I was told that we were going to conduct live-fire exercises, which—what that means is that you literally send troops out, crawling with their rifles, over a range. There are machine guns behind them, and they fire over their heads, so if a marine actually got up, he'd probably be killed. There's about 12 inches of difference. And this is so that the troops will experience live fire. They'll know what the sound of bullets whistling over their heads is like. Now, it's a little safer than that, but that's about how it goes.

And there was rifle training for the troops, and there was tactical training, so squads would move on the ground and be taught how to spread out, and we were in charge. We, the officers, the lieutenants would run the troops. So we began to feel the responsibility of—you know, if we'd lost a troop in

a live-fire exercise, it would have [been] a pretty tragic event. We never did, but—

So it was experience on two levels: It was one more training for us as officers, and it was really tough training for those kids. And so that's what that was about.

The other thing: We had in-class training. And we had map reading, and I could do that. I had just taken it, myself, as an officer, so I knew how to read maps and teach the reading of maps. And other things: weapons and—they'd hand you these booklets, you'd study them, you'd teach and everything would go fine.

The one course that I didn't get any materials for—although, now that I've been away from [it] this long, I found a book—was insurgency training. And as you know, the United States had not been involved in a counterinsurgency before Vietnam.

CHUNG: Mm-hm.

CHILCOTE: So what happened was they handed us a manual, which is—it was published in June of '65. I actually have it. I meant to bring it up here to Dartmouth, and I didn't. I left it on my dresser. It was the published manual by the U.S. Defense Department of U.S. counterinsurgency techniques. And in the manual they cite a brutal military leader by the name of [Ernesto] "Che" Guevara. Che Guevara, as history has revealed, has been shown to be one of the most brutal leaders. He would do anything to keep his position, his military position. He'd kill his own troops and kill civilians. It's pretty bad.

But we didn't know that. Che Guevara was a hero in South America at that point because the populace didn't know all that about him, either. No one knew. And we thought: This fellow really knows all about guerilla warfare. Who better to learn from than him?

Well, the trouble is, the United States didn't know what he did. They didn't know what he did. They just kept mentioning his name. And so I went to my commanding officer. We were, you know, kind of thrown together, and the units—the

major lead units were already in Vietnam, and we're sitting there back with this, you know, probably 2,000 troops all over the place, not knowing exactly what to do.

So I go to the commanding officer and say, "Well, what am I supposed to do with this counterinsurgency? I can't teach from this little square book." And he just looks at me. He says, "You'll figure it out, Lieutenant." So that's what I did. I just figured it out, and I think the troops were almost laughing at what I was trying to teach. It's all right. You get through these things.

CHUNG: So what did you figure out? What were the details that you taught the troops?

CHILCOTE: I think I made it up, to tell you the truth.

CHUNG: [Laughs.]

CHILCOTE: What are you going to do, right?

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: You got an hour's class, and you got to teach it three or four times. You just do the best you can.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. That's true, because there's no contents—

CHILCOTE: Smile a lot. [Laughs.]

CHUNG: Right. [Laughs.] I see. So do you think the training at the Camp Pendleton kind of gave you a I guess better preview of what it would be like to be in Vietnam?

CHILCOTE: A little bit, a little bit. But we had been through some pretty good training in Quantico, so it was—it was more or less just a final learning experience, more for the troops than us. I think we had the confidence that we thought we knew what we were doing. None of us had been in combat, but we had the confidence to be in combat, I think, at that point because we felt we could—we knew how to handle our troops, we knew how to handle ourselves, and we knew how to handle our weapons, so we figured we had what we needed.

- CHUNG: Mm-hm. Right. And then you finally depart to Vietnam,—
- CHILCOTE: Mm-hm.
- CHUNG: —it says, in the third week of January in 1966.
- CHILCOTE: Mm-hm.
- CHUNG: And before arriving in Vietnam, you actually stopped by Japan, Okinowa [sic; Okinawa Island] for—briefly.
- CHILCOTE: Mm-hm.
- CHUNG: I find that experience also very interesting, so could you tell us a little bit more about that?
- CHILCOTE: Well, we were—we flew to Okinawa, and the whole reason is that you're reloaded onto transports, and I think we had three days. I don't think we—well, I don't—actually, I don't recall. Maybe we had more time. But the only parts of that experience I really remember is that I traveled around the island, and there were still a lot of remnants of World War II on the island. There were tanks and bunkers and all sorts of things. It really surprised me, because it seemed like that was a long time ago, but—
- And I remember the conditions, the living conditions were—it was a bit of a shock to me because I'd never been in any Asian part of the world. I didn't know anything. And I had no idea—I expected to see something comparable to the U.S., and I was way off.
- CHUNG: Right.
- CHILCOTE: Okinawa is pretty poor. A lot of subsistence farming, and the terrain isn't that good. [Chuckles.] So I don't know how they made their way. I don't think I was there long enough to really appreciate too much about Okinawa.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see. But I guess it was kind of the first time you saw something very different from, like, the scenery that you were used to.
- CHILCOTE: I think that's true. I had never been out of the country before.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see. Yeah. And then shortly after, you arrived in Da Nang in Vietnam, correct?

CHILCOTE: Mm-hm.

CHUNG: Yeah. So what was your first impression of the country?

CHILCOTE: Red dust. Heat. We were, of course, at the Da Nang Air Base, and I was really surprised at how sprawling this air base was and how many people were there. And they were all American, and we had a huge presence, and I don't know whether I knew about 100,000 being in Vietnam at that point or whether I learned it when I was there. I really don't know anymore. But I was amazed. And there were jets taking off every few minutes, and we learned right away they were on combat missions.

And the other impression I had is that there were—we were strained. I was told right off the bat that company size, which is usually 160, would be less than 100, and each platoon was somewhere between 20 and sometimes less. And I asked why, and they said, "Because a lot of the troops have been here 13 months. The policy is to send them home, and we've gotten a lot of people that have been injured, and they've been shipped out, so we can't get people here to Vietnam fast enough." So we weren't able to build up as fast as we needed troops in the field.

CHUNG: Mmm. I see.

CHILCOTE: So those are the first impressions that—I arrived at Da Nang.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. And so you said that—and you were attached to the 9th Marine Regiment and 3rd Marine Division?

CHILCOTE: 1st Marines [sic; 1st Battalion].

CHUNG: 1st Marine. Oh.

CHILCOTE: One/nine. [1/9; 1st Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment].

CHUNG: One/nine. Oh, yeah, 1/9 Company, right. And what are some things, like, the first few things that you did there?

CHILCOTE: Well, my memory is a little hazy here, but I think—it's amazing how 50 years goes by and you can't remember, but I believe I was out—that my first combat experience was right after I arrived. And I don't remember the number of days, but I know that I joined my platoon on a hill, and the helicopter came in about six o'clock. It was beginning to get dusky. And I got to the bottom of the hill, and because the helicopter had come in, we began to draw fire because the helicopter pinpointed where we were.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Right.

CHILCOTE: And that started my relationship with the troops because they figured, "Here comes the lieutenant. He's gonna get us all killed."

CHUNG: Mm-hm.

CHILCOTE: So they weren't shy to not say that. They just came out—the sergeant came over to me. He says, "These guys think you're gonna get them all killed."

CHUNG: [Chuckles.]

CHILCOTE: It was, like, the first thing he said. Well, the next thing that I know is we *are* in a firefight, and we're being sniped at from the top of a hill. And I was barely in charge of the platoon, and I just started to wave forward. And, by God, those guys charged right up the hill. And we were in it, right there. I lost two troops that night. It was the first experience I had. You know, you wonder, *Did I do the right thing?* I was there for—it all happened.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: You just do what—you're now trained, and you have the instincts, and you go by your instincts. You don't have a choice. And so that was—I think that was my first experience, as best I can recall.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. So what was the site that you were on, landing with that helicopter? So it's a little bit away from Da Nang?

CHILCOTE: Yeah. I couldn't tell you the exact hill, but I can still picture it. It was a hill maybe 40, 50 feet high. I don't know. And when I got there, the troops were all at the bottom of the hill. They suspected that there were Viet Cong at the top of the hill, and they were just waiting for this helicopter to get the hell out of there, so once it did, we started to move up the hill slowly, and then all hell broke loose. Because they had us down at the bottom of the hill, and they knew it, and they tracked us. They came over to this hill, I suspect, because they saw the helicopter. They knew right where we were. So they had the top of the hill position, and we didn't. And so the only thing you can do is move forward.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: It's the only choice you had.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. And was there any other lieutenants that were already leading the troops?

CHILCOTE: No. I was told that the lieutenant who had been there had been killed.

CHUNG: Oh, okay.

CHILCOTE: So there were two sergeants, as I recall, and maybe 20 men. And most of the men had been there 11, 12 months, so they were what we call short-timers, and when you're a short-timer you get scared. You think—there's a myth that a lot of people get killed in their last month. And so the troops tend to—what happens in reality is they get conservative. Instead of being as aggressive as they were their first 11 months, they begin to be conservative, and it means they don't move as fast, and they become easier targets, so it is true that more people get killed in the last month. And so that's what I'd tell them. I said, "You gotta keep movin'."

CHUNG: Right. I see. That's a very eventful kind of, I guess, introduction to the troop that you were going to lead.

CHILCOTE: Yeah, that was my baptism.

CHUNG: [Chuckles.] Right. So after that, I guess you kind of started to, like, live and spend time with the troops. So what was your first impression of the people there?

CHILCOTE: Vietnamese or our troops?

CHUNG: Your troops, yeah.

CHILCOTE: That they didn't trust me, that they trusted the gunnery sergeant. I was fortunate. I had a gunny who was real experienced. He had been in World War II. They had great faith in him. I could kind of hide behind him because—but he was professional enough that he would come to me with most decisions. He knew, but he would try not to let on, but he was training me. He knew that. And the way the Marine Corps works is that you don't get familiar with your senior staff officers, but they are like your brother because if you can't depend on them, *you're* going to get killed. And everybody is depending on one another.

So it's a very—you have to learn the relationship. You have to learn the appropriate relationship. If you're too quick on telling the gunny what to do, he will disrespect you because he doesn't trust you. On the other hand, if you're too slow, he thinks you're insecure and you don't know what the hell you're doing. So it's a little bit like the baptism of real fire. You're in the crucible, trying to test the leadership. Suddenly you realize, *All that training is come into play now, because now I have to do it, and It was pretend before, but now it's real.*

And it's intimidating to be with someone who's been in the service 35 years and be in Korea and World War II.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: And it's hard to have the self-confidence as a young lieutenant. I mean, in most cases, these gunnery sergeants were 20 years older than I was, and obviously they'd been through a lot of experiences, so I had to be careful to both respect his experience and at the same time not lose command, lose control. So it's a delicate balance.

CHUNG: Right. And how many people were there in the troops?

- CHILCOTE: There was supposed to be 42 in a platoon. I think we had around 20.
- CHUNG: Okay.
- CHILCOTE: And we lost a couple that night, so I think we were pretty low. I can't remember exactly, but I'm going to say 18 to 20.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see. And what were the roles or kind of the duties that your troops were given to do there?
- CHILCOTE: Well, a platoon is divided into three squads, and I would—the squad leaders were already assigned. They're usually what are called E-5s, which is sergeant. And they are usually the most experienced, the most trusted. And by the time I got there, they were all assigned. They were there. I could have changed any one of them, but I wasn't going to change a thing.
- Morale was pretty low. They were tired because they'd lost a lot of men, and they just felt that they were next. They all felt they were next, and they didn't see the point of them being there right at that time. And it's pretty hard when you have a brand-new second lieutenant coming in, trying to instill morale.
- CHUNG: Right.
- CHILCOTE: It's not like a sports team. [Chuckles.] But all you can do is try to lead. In other words, what I had to do, without being foolish about it, is be out in front of those troops. And, of course, the lieutenant is the number one target of the snipers because he's got a radioman next to him, and if you can see what's going on, if you were an enemy, the first thing you'd do is either try to kill the radioman or the platoon leader. Why wouldn't you? You just—you get to the heart of it.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. That's true.
- CHILCOTE: And so that's what they tried to do all the time.
- CHUNG: Right. And from your essay, I learned that [the] U.S. most did, like, civic action patrols?

CHILCOTE: I guess that's what we did. The idea of—I think the term that was used at the time was "pacification." I'm not even sure of that. But there was an effort within the military to try to make relationships with the villagers. And at that time, the villages were partly French and partly Vietnamese. Another really major culture shock I got was walking into a village and seeing white Vietnamese, and they were intermarried French-Vietnamese, usually girls, and you couldn't figure out who was who because it almost seemed like there was, like, a French person in this village. And then you'd find out that she was the daughter of a Frenchman and a Vietnamese woman, and she was the French teacher in the village or something like that. But there was no school anymore because the school had been destroyed, so she was just there, that kind of thing. You'd find that out.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: And it was really confusing because there were a lot of—I guess they're called Amerasians. Even at that point, we were beginning to see—mostly what I saw were French-Asians, but we were beginning to see Amerasians, and because, believe it or not, the United States—I didn't even know this until I got there—the United States had been there since about 1959, and so in some of these more established villages, things happen. That's what I can remember.

CHUNG: Right. So, yeah, I'm actually kind of curious about kind of your interaction with the local Vietnamese people. How was that like?

CHILCOTE: Well, it didn't go all that well. I had had a lot of French, and so somehow I thought I could perhaps—I knew nothing about Vietnamese. I knew nothing about Vietnam. But I figured that if I could speak a little French, maybe I could befriend someone. So I tried to do this. And we would—I'd stop my platoon, and we'd set up—just to make sure we didn't get sniped on. And at that point, I didn't know what was going on in these little villages.

What was really going on in these villages is the men would disappear during the day, and they'd come back at night to their wives and families. We learned this over time, and so

we would patrol at dusk, and we would generally get into a firefight because they figured they had the advantage. So we would take the risk to go into these villages at dusk, where they actually could see us better than we could see them. The troops didn't like that. I didn't like it. But it was the only way we could make contact because if we came into the villages during the day, which we did a lot of south of Da Nang, we didn't find anybody. We'd find smiling women, and they'd all just be nice to us and wait for us to—and hope that nobody got hurt.

I would go and try to sit with—I'd try to explain that we wanted to be helpful, and how could we help the village, and who are you, and what did you do. And I'd meet the mayor, supposed mayor; I don't know whether—or I'd meet the French teacher. I still have some poetry. These women were—they were protecting their husbands, who were VC [Viet Cong], and they were trying to get us out of the village, so they were nice to us, and they would give us leaflets or poems. I think some of them were real. I think some really had taught school. I think some of them made it up and just pretended that they—you know, trying to convince us that they really had been loyal to the French and therefore somebody that we should be friendly with.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: I don't think we ever knew. I mean, we got better at it, but we never really—so the pacification effort was—to say the least, it didn't go so well.

CHUNG: Okay. So, but you spent a lot of time meeting a lot of people, talking to people, but you never felt like you built any—

CHILCOTE: Well, here's the thing: We would—let's say we would be crossing a rice paddy towards the village, and a sniper would start shooting at us. So we would fire back and go into the village.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: Well, how do you think, once we get in the village and we just fired on the village—how do you think that goes with the folks in the village?

CHUNG: Right. Mm-hm.

CHILCOTE: Fortunately, we didn't kill civilians. We didn't really—we were pretty lucky. We could have because we were shooting right into the village, and the only people that were there were women. But what would happen is one of the VC that would normally be in the village all night would hide out in the village, with an escape route planned. And what they would do is they would put booby traps on the trail ahead of them, so they would back out of the village, putting booby traps. And then they'd shoot, and their whole purpose was to draw us down the paths to see if they could get us to step on mines or booby traps. Well, we knew that, so we would see where the firings come, try to go around behind and figure it out, and it was just a cat-and-mouse game. It's what it was. We did it a lot.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. So—

CHILCOTE: It was usually just one guy, and all he was trying to do was to see if he could do better than we did.

CHUNG: Right. So, like, in average, like, how many villages would you say your troops visited a day?

CHILCOTE: Well, I'd say the patrols were—I don't think we were ever out more than four hours.

CHUNG: Oh, okay.

CHILCOTE: So I think it was just a couple of—a few villages. The villages were generally spread out, so you'd have to walk a couple of miles between a village. And some of them—you know, they're just houses here and there, and you can't even call them a village. I mean, they're just—it's wherever they had rice paddies and wherever they're needed to get their water buffalo, and that's—it was kind of helter-skelter.

CHUNG: Right. Mm-hm.

CHILCOTE: There were some villages a little more organized, but not too many.

CHUNG: Mm-hm, mm-hm. So were your troops or yourself, like, ever, I guess, did these kind of pacification efforts in collaboration with the combat action platoons at that time? Like, did you guys ever work with the combat action platoons at the time?

CHILCOTE: The combat action platoons. What—who are you referring to there?

CHUNG: So they are—

CHILCOTE: We were those.

CHUNG: Oh, you guys were them.

CHILCOTE: We were the infantry.

CHUNG: Oh, okay.

CHILCOTE: We had a dual role.

CHUNG: Oh, you had a dual role.

CHILCOTE: Yeah. I wasn't over there for pacification. We had a little instruction in it, and we were trying to do it. Nobody really gave us orders or direction in that regard at all. This was something that each individual officer would try out, because we didn't—we knew enough to know that if all we did is come in and destroy villages, we weren't going to get anybody on our side.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: And I was naïve enough to think that I could actually get somebody to support us. And the villagers did act friendly. What I didn't know at the time was that, in most cases, they were just doing it as a façade.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see.

CHILCOTE: The only thing they were really interested in was their families and their men.

CHUNG: Right.

- CHILCOTE: And their men were bound and determined to figure out a way to get us, but the only thing that was going on at that point—and this is the first part of my tour, the first six months, because it was early in the war—was just sniping and booby traps. That's all it was for—day after day after day.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. Right. Mm-hm. The reason I asked that is because, like, I was doing some research and looked at some of the troops that were dispatched to Vietnam. Among them, Marine Corps Division. And I've learned that there was this combat action platoon that was just dedicated for counterinsurgency and pacification effort, so I was just wondering how that worked, whether they were just, like, a task force team that was kind of added on as, like, an ad hoc or whether, like, other, like, established or installed regiments kind of worked with them.
- CHILCOTE: I didn't experience that. All our platoons—and this is kind of a style that the Marine Corps has. Each platoon did everything. Whatever was required to do, the troops were one unit, and all units were asked to do all that was required, and that's the way the Marine Corps operates. Nobody had—there may have been a special platoon. I never saw one.
- CHUNG: Oh, okay.
- CHILCOTE: And our company—you know, there's three platoons in a company. Each one of our platoons was assigned to do all of the—whatever it took, and sometimes we'd be ordered to take action. Sometimes we would react to things. There were some pretty rough experiences. So what I'm speaking about is the early days. I mean, I think—I couldn't give you a number of months. I was in Da Nang from, what, till June of '66, and I would guess the first month or so was like I described.
- CHUNG: Right.
- CHILCOTE: Then things began to change.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. And so was there any kind of—so you said there wasn't really any specific direction on how to kind of

approach these villagers and, like, talk to them, like, from above. Did they give you any, like, tips or, like,—

CHILCOTE: No, I think the U.S. forces were learning what to do, and we didn't know. And as they gathered in Viet Cong, as they captured Viet Cong, they would interrogate them and patterns began to evolve, but I don't recall knowing at the outset that—the Viet Cong did two things: Either they had a pretty elaborate tunnel system somewhere in the village, which you had trouble finding, or they would leave the village entirely and come back only at night. But you wouldn't see them during the day either way. And I don't think we—I mean, we figured that out, but I don't think anybody told us that. Nobody knew what the patterns were.

I can remember late in my experience, we interrogated Viet Cong and they confirmed what we knew all along. And we did—on occasion, we would find a Viet Cong in a spider hole and get a hold of him, but it was a rare day. I mean, I think the Viet Cong figured out that they couldn't stay in the spider holes because we would find them, and so they went completely out of the villages, for the most part.

And what I'm talking about is the area close to Da Nang right now. Later in my experience, we did operations south of Da Nang. Those were different.

CHUNG: Right. Mm-hm. So, yeah, actually—

CHILCOTE: So this might take us to, like, the first six weeks or something. I don't remember exactly, but six weeks, two months, something like that. So I would guess that I'm speaking up through, you know, April, May of '66, something like that, if I had to put a date on it.

CHUNG: Right, because at some point you get assigned to the headquarters and service company of the—

CHILCOTE: Well, before that, I went on—I think I went on some operations, Operation Georgia,—

CHUNG: Right, right.

CHILCOTE: —which was—what I think happened—it's hard to even know, but the Marine Corps was becoming impatient with these little forays out from Da Nang. All we were doing is going maybe a mile or two from Da Nang and trying to interest the villagers in supporting us, and that wasn't working, and you could tell the Viet Cong were beginning to try to get closer and closer to Da Nang Base, and then they would withdraw.

So in typical Marine Corps style, they organized an operation that would go out much farther, and we went much farther south. The village that I can remember or major village is a place called An Hoa [pronounced ANN WAH], I think. It's hard to remember these things. But I think that's where we saw our first real action, where there was actually, like, a Viet Cong squad or a Viet Cong platoon that actually—where there was more than a couple of snipers that came after us, and they would stand their ground a little bit more. I think that's—I think that might have been April, May of '66 if I'm remembering this right.

CHUNG: So the Operation Georgia lasted about two months, you would say?

CHILCOTE: I think so. That was before I went back to the headquarters. The headquarters part I think was part of a reorganization within the Marine Corps. They realized that they had split their forces between the north and the south. We had some marines up north, but we didn't have enough, and activity seemed to be picking up up there.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: And we had completed our operations in Operation Georgia, which—as I said, that involved more engaged combat. In other words, with hindsight what I see is that the guerillas were learning how to fight us; we were learning how to fight the guerillas. And they knew or were making concerted efforts of picking their spots to face off with us.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: And they would flee and stay away in other spots, and we were trying to figure out what this cat-and-mouse game was

all about. In the meanwhile, there was activity in the north which involved the beginnings of the North Vietnamese Army coming south, and I think they were getting intelligence—and this is all with hindsight, but they got intelligence about troops coming down the Hồ Chí Minh trail, so the concept of interdiction of the Hồ Chí Minh trail began to develop. They didn't have enough troops.

So I think I was pulled back, along with a lot of other people, so they could figure out what would happen.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: And the decision was made that I'd be assigned to another unit, in 2/9, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines [sic; Company G, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment].

CHUNG: Mm-hm. So, yeah, before we kind of move on to your own experience at the headquarter, just maybe talk a little bit more about your combat experience at Operation Georgia, because that was very different from kind of the other, I guess you said, encounter with the snipers. So how did that go? Like, what was your kind of general, like, experience or kind of—

CHILCOTE: It was much faster moving. We were given orders to search and destroy. This was not any longer—we weren't dividing our efforts between trying to be friendly with the villagers. We were going in, looking for VC, and we were really trying to make something happen. And it was somewhat effective, in the sense that they didn't expect us to be moving so fast. And we would move in these troop carriers and on foot, and we'd move right through these villages. And on occasion we would get into a firefight with some of them, and were successful in some cases.

Usually—and I had some pretty tough experiences there, where I lost troops, where we were set up, ambushed. I think I went through a couple of different ambushes in that experience and lost a couple of troops. Pretty bad—pretty bad experiences.

CHUNG: Right. Yeah, so I guess what was the general kind of atmosphere of your troops during this operation? Because it sounds like—

CHILCOTE: They were fired up. The earlier time—I hope this isn't revisionist. I think it's how I remember it. I remember there being a kind of a low morale, but a lot of those troops had gone home, and there were fresh troops come into the unit, so all of a sudden our unit got younger in terms—I remember having a lot of 17-year-olds in the unit. And they were basically farm boys who had volunteered to come into the Marine Corps and from places like Iowa and Nebraska and so on, or they had volunteered to get out of their cities. The blacks were from the cities [chuckles]; the whites were from the farms. That's my memory. And there was no one with a terrible amount of sophistication. But they were smart kids. They were smart, hard-charging kids who really wanted to fight for our country.

And we figured out how to move quickly through the villages, and we were pretty effective. We found the faster we moved, the more action we got. The more action we got, the more successful we were. So we kept rolling. We covered a lot of ground. I can't tell you how much, but—

And we damaged a lot of villages. We probably killed civilians. I can remember some of that. There was—I don't remember the village anymore, but there were a couple of firefights that were really tough, and the unit ahead of us got nailed. I think they lost six or seven men. We came in right behind them and bailed—tried to bail them out, and we didn't lose anybody, but it was awful. It was pretty bad.

In that instance, I think I remember a Vietnamese interpreter who was a VC, a Viet Cong, who had betrayed the unit. He led them into an ambush, and the troops turned on him and killed him immediately when they figured it out.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: I can remember that.

CHUNG: So was it common for each kind of troops to have [a] Vietnamese interpreter with them?

CHILCOTE: No, it was a luxury. We didn't have anything. We would try to find someone in the village to talk to us, try to look into their eyes, figure out whether they were telling us any bit of truth, and we knew for sure that there were people loyal to the South Vietnamese government. I mean, obviously the South Vietnamese government had troops. They had ARVN [pronounced AR-vin] [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] troops. And so we would talk to them and ask them what we could get out of the villagers, and they would tell us. I wasn't an intelligence officer, so I don't know much about it as an infantry officer, so I just did what came naturally to me.

But I know that we thought we had some support. We thought these villages were split. And one of the things we thought we were doing was to try to build support. They figured if we were present, the South Vietnamese Army was present—so sometimes the South Vietnamese Army—we didn't do—I didn't do much coordination with the South Vietnamese Army. Other units did. And on occasion—I mean, obviously, if someone had an interpreter, presumably that interpreter had been checked out by the ARVN and was trustworthy. Well, that was—I described an instance where that didn't happen, and so forth.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Right. So were you able to—like, when you were visiting the villages and kind of interacting with the local Vietnamese people, were you able to feel, like, lots of times the presence and the influence of ARVN, or—

CHILCOTE: No, I didn't. And my experience may be unique, but I didn't work with the Vietnamese Army. I think other units did. I had no assistance in anyone suggesting that I should, or did I ever see many units. I would see a few. If I went somewhere where there was some kind of headquarters of our units, I would often see ARVN troops there.

CHUNG: Oh, okay.

CHILCOTE: But I didn't—why they were there, what they were doing or so on—but we didn't do coordinated operations.

CHUNG: But I guess you never really encountered, like, independent ARVN, like, units or headquarters.

- CHILCOTE: No.
- CHUNG: Okay. That was not with the U.S. Army, I guess.
- CHILCOTE: With the Marine Corps. I didn't—how it was done in other parts of the country or with other officers, I don't know.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. Okay.
- CHILCOTE: I've never inquired, all these years. [Chuckles.]
- CHUNG: Right. Uh-huh. But I guess in the part that you were in, the reason why I became a little bit curious about that is because it's kind of that's what you hear a lot about the involvement of ARVN, how that a lot of times the U.S. military was not really—like, wanted them to be more involved and more present.
- CHILCOTE: That may have been a difference between the Army and the Marine Corps. I'm not sure. I'm speculating a little bit. But in the south part of the country, the Army I think, and maybe some of the other veterans would be better to speak to that—
- CHUNG: Right.
- CHILCOTE: —may have worked with the ARVN. We didn't. The Marine Corps is a pretty independent force, and for whatever reasons, we didn't do that. We pretty much worked on our own. I never had an interpreter. I did find people who could speak enough English that I could find out—and they were helpful on occasions.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm.
- CHILCOTE: So it's sort of—you get some reinforcement because some people are being loyal to you, and you get some feelings of antagonism from people who you know are lying to you and are not telling the truth, so it was a mixed bag.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. Do you have any specific kind of encounters that you remember till nowadays with either it be a person who was more supportive and more on ARVN's side or whether it

be someone who was, like, really antagonist, from, like, the local villages?

CHILCOTE: Well, I think not at this point, not at this juncture, if we're keeping chronological. I know that very late in my tour, when I—I actually became part of operations, because they wanted to take me out of the field. I had been in the field almost 13 months, and they wanted to take me out of the field. But they felt my experience would be helpful, so they set me up with—I had to write interview questions, then organize interviews of captured VC. And I think I actually—yeah, I think it was just—just Viet Cong. It wasn't North Vietnamese.

There, I learned a lot about what was actually going on. At the time, in June of '65, I don't think I really knew. I intuitively knew not—I was getting feelings that I could trust less and less the populace. Just in that short, three-month period, I could feel the change. I know that. But, you know, what degree and how much, I don't know.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see. Great. So I guess was it, like, after the end of Operation Georgia that you were assigned to the Headquarter and Service Company [sic; 1st Marine Brigade, Headquarters and Service Company]?

CHILCOTE: Yeah. We had had a fairly rough time in Operation Georgia, and I think there was a feeling that "we don't want to overextend these troops and officers, but, on the other hand, we have these needs, so we're going to pull them back the headquarters and decide what to do." I volunteered—I asked to go north. And they looked at me, like, "What, you don't like your unit?" I said, "Oh, I love my unit, but I want to go north." And so after a point of time, they—I think they sent most of us north. I don't even remember anymore. I think they sent most of us north.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Okay. But you came to [the] south. Is that correct?

CHILCOTE: Hm?

CHUNG: You came to the headquarters of, like, it's more of the southern part of South Vietnam, wasn't it?

CHILCOTE: No, I think the—It was an H&S company. I think it was in Da Nang.

CHUNG: Oh. Okay.

CHILCOTE: I don't—did I write something different in the book? Because I don't remember anything different right now.

CHUNG: Uh-huh. So I think the part that I'm—

CHILCOTE: I never got farther south than maybe 25, 30 miles south of Da Nang.

CHUNG: Oh.

CHILCOTE: I never got to any of the areas where the Army was. There were actually—to my knowledge, no Marine Corps units got farther south than we were.

CHUNG: Okay.

CHILCOTE: I could be wrong.

CHUNG: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, I guess the part that I was referring to was the time that when you went to the little—the town—like, when you started doing the interrogations.

CHILCOTE: That's many months later.

CHUNG: Oh, that's many months later.

CHILCOTE: Yeah, that was in I believe November or December—maybe '67.

CHUNG: Oh. Okay. So, like, the part where—because it says that—

CHILCOTE: I think.

CHUNG: Right. So the first time that you conducted your own interrogation was May 31st of 1966.

CHILCOTE: Okay.

- CHUNG: Uh-huh. And that was in a little town called An Hoa. Yeah, An Hoa.
- CHUNG: Okay.
- CHILCOTE: Okay. Then, all right, then I do have it confused. There might have been two periods there. Is that where I asked the questions and all that stuff?
- CHILCOTE: Yeah. Like, when you—
- CHILCOTE: Okay.
- CHUNG: —put the list of the questions—
- CHILCOTE: All right. Well, then, that's the first time that I learned what was really going on in Vietnam then. I'd forgotten that.
- CHUNG: Okay. So, yeah, I guess, I think it's a very interesting experience that you actually had a chance to, like, interrogate the locals, so how—yeah, I would like to learn a little bit more about that. What was that like?
- CHILCOTE: Yeah. Well, as I had said earlier, I had this kind of idealized view that there were these French women who would be loyal to Americans even though they were married to Vietnamese and had grown up in Vietnam. And by that time, at the time those interrogations occurred, I knew that it was very divided, that you could—it was almost—you could go into a village, and they couldn't always hide their anxieties. And you could look and see their anxieties, and you knew that it was likely the Viet Cong were in the village then, and they were concerned we were going to find them, because those were their husbands.
- CHUNG: Right.
- CHILCOTE: So we would stick around those villages because we would try to locate those Viet Cong. It was very much a cat-and-mouse game because, you know, you can't judge human nature. You don't know whether the woman is scared because she is just scared or whether she's scared because she knows her husband is in a tunnel beneath the village or whether somebody else's husband or other Viet Cong are

planning to ambush us and that's the anxiety she's showing because she might be caught in the crossfire. All those things are possible, and you just don't know.

But I do remember that there was an increasing feeling that things were not going our way. I do remember that. And it began to appear to me that we were going to have a tough time. I had been more hopeful before that.

CHUNG: Okay. And how did you prepare for these interrogations? Like, how would you formulate the questions and—

CHILCOTE: I think that I asked someone how to do this, and they handed me some questions or told me some questions. I have a diary from which I took the questions that are in the book, and a lot of what I wrote in the book, I had to go back—I kept some pretty good diaries. I was surprised. Maybe I wouldn't have even written the article. But the diaries had dates and places, like May 31, An Hoa. I also—when I wrote the article, I checked out these dates to make sure I wasn't hallucinating, because there's military histories of the same things. And sure enough, the dates matched up, so obviously it was real. I didn't make it up. It's there. And as best—I'd have to go back and look at my diaries, but I think that I might actually have something in my diary that says, "I talked to So-and-so, and he gave me some questions, and I developed these questions." I have them written in the diary. That's why I'm thinking that. And what's in there is—I copied them into the article. And I used that little book to ask the questions.

Now, they were primitive questions. If you think about it, that's not a very natural interrogation process, but it's all I knew to do. I was young. I'd never done it before. I didn't know what I was doing, so you do what you can.

CHUNG: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And how did you decide who you were willing to approach to talk to? Like, because they're quite a bit of people in the village.

CHILCOTE: Well, again, I'm getting confused on two different times. I think that we approached friendly villagers in one way, and, if I remember, later in the December period, I was talking to suspected Viet Cong. These are at that point often women,

but they would be dressed in Viet Cong garb and sometimes were captured with a weapon, so you pretty much knew they were Viet Cong. [Chuckles.]

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: And if you left them alone, you'd be dead. So that was a different—I think that was a different interrogation. I'm not actually positive at this point, but I do remember doing something in November, December.

So I think we were trying to—in the May period, I think we were trying to devise questions that wouldn't cause people to shut down but at the same time would give us information. I don't think it was a very effective thing. I think it's just something I did, and I don't think all these years I've met anybody else that did this, but I'm sure lots of people did.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: I just haven't met them.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Yeah. Because actually the questions, I think, that you have in your article is—yeah, it was with a female villager, and, like, you have a little bit of an explanation in brackets?

CHILCOTE: Yeah.

CHUNG: And some point it says, like, "Oh, it becomes clear that she's a Viet Cong"—like, support at this point because, like, her responses are—

CHILCOTE: I can remember that. You could—just by asking enough questions, they'd trip themselves up, and you'd pretty much know. And I would turn them over to others, and what happened, I don't know.

CHUNG: Oh, okay. I see. So how many people—like, how many villagers would you say that, like, you talked to during the May and June period?

CHILCOTE: Well, as far as the—May, June period? Is that what you're said?

CHUNG: Yeah.

CHILCOTE: I think I only did a few what we'll call interrogations. The rest were all just us going out and trying to talk to villagers without any formality to it, so I think everything prior to that—because I think it was at one time that I had an actual script to work from.

CHUNG: I see.

CHILCOTE: I don't think I did very much of that.

CHUNG: Okay.

CHILCOTE: Because I was reassigned.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. So was your time at headquarter, like, really different from the first—like, the three months? Like, the initial months that you spent, like, doing—I guess more involving the pacification efforts?

CHILCOTE: Well, I knew I wasn't going to get shot at, so that's different.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: [Chuckles.]

CHUNG: Okay. So it was less violent, for sure.

CHILCOTE: Yeah, we were inside a perimeter.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see.

CHILCOTE: And the areas real close to the perimeter were not anything to worry about.

CHUNG: Great. So about for how long were you at the headquarter?

CHILCOTE: I don't recall. A couple of weeks?

CHUNG: A couple of weeks. Okay.

CHILCOTE: I'm not sure.

- CHUNG: Yes, because—you might be right because here it says in June 1966 you were reassigned to G 2/9 [Company G, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment].
- CHILCOTE: Yeah.
- CHUNG: So—okay, so now I guess you're in a different—
- CHILCOTE: Yeah, I'm guessing first half of June, but I—
- CHUNG: Okay. I see.
- CHILCOTE: Hard to remember that far back.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. So, yeah, when you were reassigned to G 2/9, so what were your kind of roles there? Now it's different.
- CHILCOTE: Well, I went back to being an infantry platoon commander in that setting, and the terrain was vastly different because we now had mountainous jungle terrain. We were helicoptered to—I think I went—I think my first location was Đông Hà, wasn't it? I think it was.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. Yeah.
- CHILCOTE: And they had just sort of cleared this mountaintop and created a landing strip, and we came in and set up a perimeter. At that point, there were very few—very little contact going on. It was very quiet. I don't think the North Vietnamese—I mean, we were no longer in territory where Viet Cong were. Viet Cong basically came out of the villages and were confronting the South Vietnamese Army and the Americans.
- What was obviously happening and what we were told was that the Hồ Chí Minh trail, which crossed over into Vietnam somewhere near the—I'm going to say the Cua Viet River and the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone]—it actually was in Laos and Cambodia and other places, but there it was in Vietnam. So the strategy was that we would be able to interdict the Hồ Chí Minh trail and catch Regular North Vietnamese forces as they came south. That was the idea.

And intelligence had said there were “lots of encampments along the Hồ Chí Minh trail, so you’re going to find North Vietnamese.” It wasn’t that easy, but we set up in Đông Hà for the purpose of patrolling and doing that. Đông Hà was quite a ways away from the Hồ Chí Minh trail, so our patrols were long and difficult, and I don’t think at that point we got too close to the Hồ Chí Minh trail because the jungles were very dense, and we could barely go a mile from—

So a lot of what we did was to set up in perimeter defense, which then set *us* up for probes that were made by the North Vietnamese or others against us, and so it became—we became a little bit entrenched, is what happened, at Đông Hà.

CHUNG: Right. So when you came to Đông Hà, like, I guess, unlike your previous experience nearby [unintelligible], like, you weren’t as in contact with the villagers as—

CHILCOTE: Not initially. Oh, with the villagers. No, we weren’t—there weren’t—I don’t really remember seeing any villages. I really don’t. It was all pretty dense jungle.

CHUNG: I see. So it wasn’t really a residential area, but you guys were just really trying to get down to the Hồ Chí Minh trail and hopefully catch Viet Congs who are passing through.

CHILCOTE: Yeah, it was—there were a lot of rivers and streams and steep terrain, so we’re trying to traverse this terrain and see where we can possibly interdict the North Vietnamese.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see. And so I guess that means also less of a snipers and less of, like, combat experience? Like, there wasn’t as much in violence, would you say?

CHILCOTE: Well, yes and no. There were North Vietnamese troops with mortars and even artillery, and I believe we were the 3rd Marines, and I think the 4th Marines (4th Marine Regiment) were—their names I remember, like the Rockpile [Transcriber’s note: Known in Vietnamese as Thon Khe Tri, a karst rock outcropping near the former South Vietnamese DMZ] and other places, where there were some pretty ongoing battles. So we were pretty close to the action. We could see napalm being dropped. We could see B-52

[Stratofortress] bombers. We could see a lot of mortar exchange between U.S. troops and North Vietnamese troops. And we saw a lot of casualties coming out of the field.

CHUNG: I see.

CHILCOTE: We saw some combat, but it was obvious to us that it was becoming more regular. It's hard to remember what went on between June and November, but that is what I remember.

CHUNG: Okay. Mm-hm. And what was your next major operation that you were involved in? That's Operation Hastings, I believe?

CHILCOTE: Oh, okay. Yeah, I guess—this seems like—if I'm remembering this right, it's more towards the fall.

CHUNG: Okay.

CHILCOTE: And what I remember of Operation Hastings, if it's the right one—I think it is—is that a new regimental commander of the 9th Marines [9th Marine Regiment] came to Vietnam, and he—I don't remember his name anymore, but he was a—he had been in the service for about 20 years, but he'd never really been in combat. He was too young to serve in Korea, and so he was anxious for his first encounter in combat.

I can remember thinking, *A little odd, that here I am, this guy's got 20 years more experience, 25 years more experience than I do, and yet he hasn't had any experience, and I'm thinking, All right, but he's a regimental commander, and I'll follow him.* Well, he picks me out and says, "You're gonna lead this regiment, and our plan is to go"—he says, "You've got the most experience. You're in charge of—you're going to be the point platoon for our regiment."

So that's what I did, or tried to do. And the problem was that the terrain is incredibly difficult, so you want to try to stay out of the riverbeds because you get—you know, first of all, the North Vietnamese will hear you. They'll shoot down—they'll find some location along the hillside and wipe out the unit. So I kept insisting that the troops machete their way up the hills.

Well, that would take hours, and I have a whole regiment behind me. We're trying to move through this. So we did a little bit of both, and I finally devised a technique where we would go down the river, we'd then spread out, we'd wait, see if everything is okay, we'd go down the river, and we'd change—one of the things you do is you constantly change your tactic so that you're not doing the same thing twice. So we tried to figure out different things to get us moving, because I felt this constant pressure of the entire regiment behind me, and you're closed in by this jungle. You can't—I mean, it's impossible.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Right.

CHILCOTE: It was really a bit of a crazy operation, when you think about it, to try to take that many troops and send them into the jungle and not end up in single file.

CHUNG: Right. Mm-hm. And what exactly was the goal of that Operation Hastings?

CHILCOTE: We were trying to interdict the Hồ Chí Minh trail.

CHUNG: Okay.

CHILCOTE: That was our specific tactical objective. And we did. We did.

CHUNG: Would you say it was quite successful?

CHILCOTE: Well, you know, what is success? We found a lot—what we found—and we never knew this until we saw it—we found triangular bunkers, where—the way the North Vietnamese operated is they would dig triangles and sleep with everybody facing out so that if somebody attacked them, they would be ready to fight from their positions. They were all set. It was kind of a genius. And we'd find tunnels on the corners of the three triangles, where they apparently would sleep.

Well, we kept finding these areas, but no North Vietnamese. They were stopping points. They were way stations. They were built so that as the troops came down, they could get a night's sleep and they'd get up very early in the morning and take off. But we would occasionally find—we'd find weapons

left behind. We'd find ammunition left behind. It was Chinese and Russian weapons, so we were pretty darn sure we had North Vietnamese. But we were not making contact with the North Vietnamese.

CHUNG: Mmm. I see.

CHILCOTE: At that point. So we were beginning to get closer, and the U.S. intelligence was improving, so they kept reporting, "There are units moving south. There are units moving south. Try to interdict those units." We couldn't find the units. And, you know, 1,000 yards in the jungle is like 20 miles on open land, so you can't hear anything, you can't hear anything, and that's the way it was.

And, of course, whatever routes—they would—the Hồ Chí Minh trail is hard to find in and of itself, and it's not just one trail; it's a series of trails all over the place. They knew the routes. We didn't. So we'd happen upon and say, "Well, gee, why aren't there bunkers out here?" We thought the trail was back over there. It's a series of trails. It's all over the place. It's just whatever was easiest to get south, they would take it.

And so we kept going farther and farther west. I don't—we might have gone into Laos and Cambodia. I don't know. [Chuckles.] I really do think we went into Laos, but I don't know. I'll never know.

CHUNG: That makes sense because Hồ Chí Minh trail—some of the routes did take the Laos line, so that is right.

CHILCOTE: Yeah.

CHUNG: So that is right. Okay. But I guess you guys still gathered a little bit more information than you guys had previously, so-- about Hồ Chí Minh trail, like, about the triangle bunkers.

CHILCOTE: Yeah, yeah, we could see what was happening, and we were hopeful that we could catch a North Vietnamese unit coming south right at the right time, so we would set up in different—for instance, we would set up around these triangles, quite a ways away from them, and see if a unit would go in and then we could surround them. That never happened. We tried to do that, but—so we would listen. And

what we would do is we'd have our units back, and then we'd send forward observers, and they'd be—they put on camouflage, put on leaves and other things and just lay there, hoping to—and then we could signal back and then bring the troops forward and go after them. But we didn't see anything for a long time.

CHUNG: How would you describe the general kind of the morale of the troops by then?

CHILCOTE: I think when we were in the north, the morale was good, and troops wanted to get into action. They really wanted to. They felt more of a mission from the North Vietnamese—you know, the objective was to keep the North Vietnamese from coming south, and that seemed to be a plain, doable objective. We were no longer trying to work with villagers, which we weren't very good at anyways, and so our thought was that if we could interdict North Vietnamese, that was a much better purpose. It was making a lot of sense to marines, because we really didn't have this mission of pacification. It wasn't part of our mission. We were just trying to do it because it made common sense to try us, and nobody told us not to.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Right. Mm-hm. So Operation Hasting was around the time of fall.

CHILCOTE: I think it was November,—

CHUNG: November, okay.

CHILCOTE: —is when I recall.

CHUNG: Okay.

CHILCOTE: October, November.

CHUNG: And I guess—so at the end of the Operation Hastings, that's when you had another experience of interrogating. Now this time you said Viet Congs?

CHILCOTE: North Vietnamese.

CHUNG: North Vietnamese, okay.

CHILCOTE: Regular Army.

CHUNG: Okay, Regular Army.

CHILCOTE: I've got my dates a little confused because that was after I got out of the field, I think, and I think—we had one major encounter. I believe it was in December of '66. I think this is right. It was pretty close to Christmas. And after all these months of trying to find North Vietnamese, the thing that occurred that was almost bizarre was that, as I can best recall, a helicopter—we had—I think we had—[Pause.] I'd have to go back and look at this. I've forgotten the experience. But I think something had caused us to call in a helicopter for aid. And I don't remember what the event was, but when the helicopter tried to land, it was shot down by a North Vietnamese, and the North Vietnamese assumed that our unit was not there, and we had a perimeter around the area. We weren't trying to necessarily protect the helicopter; we were set up for this north Vi- —we had heard that a North Vietnamese force was coming down, and we were trying to set up to catch them in the middle.

Well, I think they sensed where we were. They didn't come down into our trap. But when the helicopter went down, they wanted to get the helicopter pilot. So they rushed towards the middle, and they did exactly what we wanted, so we were able to pounce on that unit at that time.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Right.

CHILCOTE: And we captured several North Vietnamese. We captured a North Vietnamese captain and his mistress, and I think there were two other women. It was amazing to me. I think the pilot was killed, because they got to him before we could. And it was after that that I did the interrogation you were referring to. Not of them, but I was taken out of the field shortly after that battle. That was kind of the end of my combat experience.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see. So, yeah, do you remember any kind of things that you asked that North Vietnamese captain during the interrogation?

- CHILCOTE: I didn't get to interrogate. They felt they had a pretty important person and people, so they whisked them away.
- CHUNG: I see.
- CHILCOTE: And I never saw—I saw them from a distance, and I could see that it was a prostitute and the captain and perhaps another woman, and that's all I ever saw. The night before, we had been in a firefight. The crash happened about—right at dusk or something. And, man, all hell broke loose. We were in it all night long. So as I recall, that was the next morning when there was enough light to see, if I remember this right.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. And that was one of—you said one of your last combat experiences?
- CHILCOTE: Yeah. That was the toughest.
- CHUNG: I see. And—okay, since that battle, like, how long did you stay in Vietnam for more?
- CHILCOTE: I think I was—well, I know I was there till March 15th of '67, and I was pulled back into what was known as S-3 Operations, and I can't tell you exactly when, but I'm going to say the end of December, early January. So I spent the last couple of months pretty much out of the field and was sort of ordered not to go—I no longer had charge of a unit, and I wasn't allowed to go back into combat. They just felt I'd had enough.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. So what did you do at the S-3 Operation?
- CHILCOTE: It's difficult to recall. [Chuckles.] Not a lot.
- CHUNG: Okay. So it was, like,—
- CHILCOTE: I did—this interrogation that we're thinking about occurred during that period, I believe.
- CHUNG: Okay.
- CHILCOTE: I believe. I'd have to check my notes, but I think that's right.

- CHUNG: Mm-hm. And what was that interrogation about?
- CHILCOTE: That was of the Regular North Vietnamese. It's really hard to remember whether I watched someone else did it or did some myself. I don't recall at this point.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm, mm-hm. So those were the North Vietnamese armies that you guys captured.
—
- CHILCOTE: Mm-hm.
- CHUNG: And brought—
- CHILCOTE: But not the specific troops—
- CHUNG: Not them, right.
- CHILCOTE: But what was happening was pretty obvious, is that we were catching more North Vietnamese Regular troops. They had Russian and Chinese weapons. They were bringing down large mortars and artillery. And the presence—it was obvious there had been some change ordered from Hanoi about moving Regular Army troops down because—and that was about—you know, I left in March of '67. That's when things began to really heat up.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. Right.
- CHILCOTE: So I saw a little bit of it, but not as much as the people did the next year.
- CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see. Right. Seems like you were involved in a lot of, like, many different operations and activities while you were in Vietnam.
- CHILCOTE: Well, I had the chance to see two part— two of our efforts: sort of the interdiction effort, which was attempting to more directly meet our mission of preventing the takeover of South Vietnam, which seemed more realistic and more mission oriented to us. That was the second part of it, the second six months.

The first six months was more—I don't know if you want to call it search and destroy or some combination of search and destroy and—they're like two different wars to me, in many respects, because they were very different, very different.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see. Great. Yeah, so I actually would like to ask you a little bit more about your experience in Vietnam now, kind of about the people or, like, the people from your troops and I guess your post-Vietnam experience as well. But our time has run out.

CHILCOTE: Okay.

CHUNG: Yeah. So, yeah, would it be okay if I, like, set up a time—

CHILCOTE: Sure.

CHUNG:— —yeah, to call you?

CHILCOTE: Sure.

CHUNG: So since it's like the last bit of kind of your experience and after that, so I'm assuming it shouldn't take more than an hour.

CHILCOTE: I wouldn't think so, yeah, yeah.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. So, okay. Great. Right.

CHILCOTE: Thank you.

CHUNG: Thank you so much!

CHILCOTE: Yeah, you're *good*.

[End of May 11, 2015, interview. Begin May 23, 2015, telephone interview.]

CHUNG: My name is Hannah Chung, and I'm starting my interview on May 23rd, Saturday, 2015, with Mr. Lee Chilcote.

Hi, Mr. Lee Chilcote. How are you doing today?

CHILCOTE: Fine, thank you.

CHUNG: All right. Thank you very much. Yeah, so we'll just go back to the very beginning of the time when you first arrived in Vietnam, and, yeah, talk about the people mostly this time and how your interaction was with them.

CHILCOTE: Well, starting from the beginning, I came into a platoon as a platoon leader, really on my first night in Vietnam, and the troops who I encountered were all seasoned troops. Most of them had been there close to 11 or 12 months because I came in in 1966, and most of them had been there at least—anywhere from six to 12 months, so there had been quite a few troops come in in June.

Those troops were very seasoned. We were supposed to have a platoon of 42; we had about 20, and they kind of looked at me when I first saw them, with strange amazement because here was this fresh lieutenant from the States, and they had seen about everything.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: My experience with the people, the troops was that there were a few really experienced sergeants, but they were younger than me. Most of them were 18 to 21, but they were truly experienced men, so in the beginning that's what I saw.

And then, as things progressed and men came over from the States, what happened was a lot of green marines from two vantage points. The officers had never been in combat before because they had grown up and been commissioned in that period post-Korean War and pre-Vietnam, so even though I met some majors and lieutenant colonels and so forth, none of them had combat experience. So actually, by the time I was there six months, I was more experienced than almost all of the senior officers that I served.

The troops similarly had the—the seasoned troops that I had met in the beginning, during the first few months, were rotated out, and we had to integrate—we would slowly build up our units so that we had close to 40 in a platoon, but half of them were brand-new troops from the States.

A lot of them came from inner-city experiences. As I recall, there were two kinds of troops. One were young, 17-, 18-year-olds, literally off the farm or some rural location. The other, which was probably the majority, were young troops that came from the city, and in some cases it seemed as if they were simply trying to escape their city life and the Marine Corps seemed like a good option.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: So they were eager to get into it, so to speak.

CHUNG: Right. Great. So were there any—so you talked about a few experienced sergeants that you met when you first arrived in [the] platoon, so was there kind of any kind of episode or anecdotes kind of with them in specific? Because I'm pretty sure sergeants are the ones that you kind of worked the most with.

CHILCOTE: Sure. I guess the thing I would say is that we had to really learn to trust one another, and my natural instinct was of course to trust the more senior sergeants because they had seen action and so forth. But I learned very quickly that you got in situations where I'd be alongside very young soldiers who had not been in combat, and I would have to encourage him—through our leadership. We would have to lead. So in a way, I followed what the sergeants did. The sergeants would constantly show by example what troops needed to do, and that would bring the unit together and so forth. So that's a little bit of an answer.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see. And was there any kind of anecdotes or episode that happened during combat that you remember in terms of interaction with the troops?

CHILCOTE: Oh, sure. In the beginning, in the first half of my tour, maybe the first six months up to June of '66, we would be constantly in situations where a sniper would attempt to pin us down, and the person who would be the target would be me because I had a radioman with me, so there would be constant sniper fire coming into my position.

What the troops would do is spread out and go after them. Again, there's the issue of trust, trusting that those troops

would go in behind the village and try to flush out the snipers while we were pinned down. A lot of times, there was no choice but to move forward.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: And that's what marines do, so we would be pinned down in an open rice field, behind some pathway, and we had no choice but just to get up and go forward. And so the troops would do that and use suppressing fire and so forth. That was sort of the pattern in the first half of my tour.

The second half was very different. We knew that when we were north and we up in Đông Hà and Khe Sanh, that there were Regular North Vietnamese troops moving south, presumably along the Hồ Chí Minh trail. We might have believed that the Hồ Chí Minh trail was a single-file trail, but it clearly was several thousand meters wide, and troops would come in various points and so forth.

And it seemed like what was happening was that whenever we would move towards the Hồ Chí Minh trail, they would just move farther west and avoid us or evade us. We would always get to a point and we'd find traces—sometimes leftover weapons or ammunition or clothing, but then it would usually be gone because we just didn't have the ability to work in the jungle the way they did. They were much better at that. We did our best. We tried to learn tactics that would put us in contact with them, but we weren't—usually we weren't successful.

I did have one very significant encounter with a North Vietnamese, which I detail in my article. And there, it was actually the middle of the night, and when you talk on relying on one another, we didn't even know where we were.

CHUNG: Right. [Chuckles.]

CHILCOTE: And I've describe that in the book, so unless you want me to, I won't go back through that.

CHUNG: I mean, if you don't mind, I would love to hear about that. It sounds like a very interesting anecdote.

CHILCOTE: Okay.

CHUNG: Yeah.

CHILCOTE: In a way, it's a funny story, but what happened was that we were set up around one of these triangular bunker areas that were used as way stops by the North Vietnamese as they came south. They would dribble back there in the late night, get up in the morning and keep on moving. And you could find these things about every few thousand yards, but they were in different locations. It was kind of funny. That's what I meant when I said there wasn't really a Hồ Chí Minh trail per se, because you just come upon these things. And they were well camouflaged, and when you first came upon them, you didn't know whether the North Vietnamese were there. After a while, we presumed they weren't there, and we just went charging into them. And we—as I said, we'd find miscellaneous things.

But it's funny. We had intelligence—and I don't remember—it came over the radio—that a North Vietnamese Regular company was moving south towards us, and so we bivouacked in the late evenings around this triangular area at such a distance that if they came into the area, they wouldn't spot us. It was kind of a U-shaped formation that we set up. And we expected them to come into our trap, or hoped that they would come into our trap.

What happened was there was a little encounter, and I called in a helicopter to medevac a troop, and I gave the coordinates—as best I recall, I gave the coordinates, and the helicopter pilot I think spotted the bivouacked area, and not realizing that it wasn't a helicopter pad but was this entrenched bivouac area for the NVA, he lands in the middle of this, in the evening.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: And what happened was that the North Vietnamese spotted this and immediately rushed towards the helicopter pilot, shooting at the helicopter. And it was this bizarre scene, where the helicopter crashed, caught on fire and the pilot was killed, and we then found ourselves surrounding the entire NVA company, who was lit up by the flames of the

burning helicopter. So we could see the North Vietnamese, and we began shooting. Well, naturally, we're in a U-shape, and it's at night. We had to be careful not to shoot each other.

CHUNG: Right. [Chuckles.]

CHILCOTE: And the way the helicopter landed, it landed kind of at the bottom of the U. So, as there is in any of these situations, there's mass confusion. We didn't know whether the incoming fire was coming from our own troops or from the North Vietnamese troops. But you could tell the difference a little bit because—and so forth.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: But the long and short of it was that we closed in on them. We got our troops to stop firing and closed in on them, and they surrendered. We had—a lot of them ran away, but we probably got eight to ten North Vietnamese Regulars. And one of them was the leader. I don't know what his rank was. But he had a woman with him, and that was the first time that I realized that all of these companies took prostitutes with them on their trips south. That was a regular practice. So that was a pretty exciting time. I believe that was in December or November of '66, November or early December; I've forgotten which.

CHUNG: Right. Okay. Mm-hm.

CHILCOTE: Mm-hm.

CHUNG: Yeah. Great. Yeah, that's definitely a very exciting story. I'm so glad you told me that.

And just kind of going back a little bit, I also would like to hear a little bit about what troops would do when you guys were not in action but, like, in base. Like, would you guys have conversations or, like, I don't know, maybe read newspapers together? How would you pass your time?

CHILCOTE: Well, when we were not in the field, we did an awful lot of patrolling, both during the first six months and the last six months.

CHUNG: Right. Mm-hm.

CHILCOTE: But, you know, there's a lot of time, a lot of down time. And in Đông Hà, I can remember that they built formal wooden barracks up near the airstrip, and there was, like, an enlisted man's club and an officers' club up there because at that point, we weren't under siege at Đông Hà at all. It was pretty quiet. Đông Hà is actually a village.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: The base was close to the village, and there was not a lot going on there.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: So we would have—it was a pretty nice time. I can remember that they flew in—I think it was either Thanksgiving or Christmas. They flew in cases of beer and steaks.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: And we pretty much enjoyed ourselves. Morale was high when we were in camp. It was a little bit less when we were not.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see. So do you remember any specific individual that you clicked especially well with?

CHILCOTE: Were there individuals, are you saying?

CHUNG: Yeah, any person in specific that you especially grew close to?

CHILCOTE: Well, while you're kind of intuitively dependent upon every other person, I would say that only the gunnery sergeants or senior sergeants were the only ones that I would really closely communicate to. I would go around to every man who was in an outpost and talk to him, but for the most part, they—because of the situation, they remained pretty close-lipped, and they would appreciate me coming by, but they kept to themselves pretty much. And that's not uncommon.

They want to be respectful of the officers; on the other hand, they want to be left alone. Their thoughts usually, especially if they've been there 10 or 11 months, is to get out of there.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: So they don't want—one thing, they don't want an officer around because they figure that the enemy is going to shoot at the officer and therefore they're going to get shot.

CHUNG: [Chuckles.] Right.

CHILCOTE: So that's some of the thinking that went on. But you could get to know the sergeants and talk to them and learn a little bit about their lives. Particularly I remember—not so much in Vietnam, but I remember getting to know gunnery sergeants who had been in Korea and World War II and were literally at the end of their career, and it was incredible how calm and in control they were, and they were good examples not only for the men but for the officers as well.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see. And I'm just assuming that probably the dynamic within troops during the first six months, when you guys were more engaged in the pacification, and during the last six months, when you kind of moved—when you guys were doing something else, such as, like, destroying—searching and destroying the Hồ Chí Minh trail [sic]—probably brought different dynamics within troop interaction, so it would be great if I could hear how that changed.

CHILCOTE: Well, some have styled our first six months as pacification. I guess I would argue with that a little bit. By the time we got there in early '66, I think it was clear that most of the villages were fully infiltrated by the Viet Cong. You wouldn't see the Viet Cong by day, but you would sense, from the villagers that you did see, that they weren't going to be on our side. We tried, but as far as formal pacification efforts, I'm not sure there was much difference.

So in a way, both ends of my experience were search and destroy. The first six months, we really didn't have a choice because we would be set up—almost in every village there would be a sniper or booby traps or whatever, and we would end up firing and going into villages.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: Well, that's not going to win a lot of friends, obviously.

CHUNG: Mm-hm.

CHILCOTE: When we were north, while there was less contact on a daily basis,—I would say in the south, in the six months, there was contact every day. In the north, there would be whole days and weeks that literally would go by and a shot wouldn't be fired. And when we did get into it, it was pretty extended. And the difference was that the North Vietnamese were using regular Russian and Chinese weapons, so they had 81mm mortars, just like we did. They actually had 120mm mortars, which are pretty hard to carry in the jungle, and we were kind of amazed, but we actually found mortars. All of the troops in the north had AK-47s, so they in effect had automatic weapons as good or better as our M16s [rifles] and so forth.

So I'm not sure there was that much difference. There was a difference in the level of combat and the quality of the opposing troops because in the south there were just Viet Cong, and in effect [unintelligible] of villagers who pick up a weapon and try to draw us in to see if they can ambush us. In the north, that was the beginning of Hồ Chí Minh's effort or the north's effort to really infiltrate the south and take over the south. That was really the beginning of unification, the way I look at it.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see. I see. And do you keep in touch with any of the troops to this day or no?

CHILCOTE: No, I never have. My experience—when I first came back, the entire country was very much opposed to Vietnam. It was a huge surprise to me, but I just kept my head low and stayed out of the limelight. I did not go to any Vietnam events. At that point, we didn't have Internet or any way to contact units.

The only thing I did is I did go and visit troops who had been wounded at the hospitals, a major hospital in Washington, D.C. I can't remember its name right now. And I had a

couple of troops, and one was shot in the arm, and I visited him. I saw another troop who was a paraplegic and was not doing very well, and I guess I don't know whether he ever lived, but he was certainly not doing well. And I visited them.

But after that, I kind of pulled away, pulled back. I just sort of buried it all for a lot of years. And so I never made contact with my units or any people. I wondered about them, and when we got to the point of writing this book that we've written, I did try to use the Internet to look at the units, and I found some very interesting history, but I had no way—I really have found no way to reach anybody that I might have known. I do have a few names of people I would love to see again, but probably that will never happen.

CHUNG: Mmm. I see. And now, actually, kind of going off of the point that you made about how when you arrived back in the United States, the antiwar sentiment has kind of risen to a very high level, and I was just wondering: While you were in Vietnam, were you kind of aware of kind of what was going on in the U.S. in terms of, like, the war policy and the public's reception of war?

CHILCOTE: No. When I left, essentially I was out of contact with any news. Maybe not as early as June '65 but certainly by December of '65, because I was at Camp Pendleton, and you know, you get *Stars and Stripes*, which was the military newspaper, which was all how we were doing in Vietnam and the build-up of troops. And my latest learnings at that point of time were that this country was behind the war. So I learned nothing in Vietnam at all.

And as I said in my article, when I came to Coronado, California, the first night I got back, I was not in uniform, but I was obviously a marine, and I went to a club and had a few beers, and lo and behold, this guy comes up and challenges me, and I'm not a person who gets in fights, but I hit the guy, and it's probably the only three or four times in my life I've ever gotten in a fight. And they broke us up and so forth, but I was really angry because he just denounced the war and me personally. We didn't know each other.

The next day, I read in the paper, probably *Los Angeles Times*, that a marine coming off a plane in Chicago had been

shot by a protester. And I don't know whether he lived or not, but those seared an image in my mind that caused me really to withdraw from any discussion about Vietnam for a long, long time. I just couldn't believe that they had sent us all over there and that the public wouldn't make the distinction—

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: —between our service and their feelings about the war. In fact, that distinction has not been recognized until Iraq and Afghanistan. That's how long those feelings, those anti-war feelings, have been allowed to fester.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: It's been a hard—for us that served, it just was sort of a confusing situation. We went with patriotic feelings, and we feel we did our service. I think most of us were not at all antiwar. I think every one of us hates war. There's no question about that. No one loves war.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: No one loves to be in a war. But the idea that you would lump your troops in with the antiwar feelings was something I guess I really don't understand to this day.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see. Yeah, so I guess that kind of leads into the final question I have for you, which is about your post-Vietnam experience. So you said that you mostly withdrew from any of—a link to Vietnam or your service in Vietnam, so how has kind of been your life? Like, your career wise and kind of personal life wise after you arrived back in the United States after your service in Vietnam?

CHILCOTE: Well, the thing I would say about that is that the experience of being in—as perverse as it may seem, the experience of being in combat and in a war is like being on the ledge of a cliff, and you get to a point where you say, *Well, the only thing I could do if I had to would be to jump off.* And the experience that you have is so dire, so severe and so traumatic that anything else that you think about or do in the rest of your life is kind of measured against those—what are temporary yet permanent feelings that you have. You learn

to be willing to die for what you're doing because you realize you have no choice. It's going to happen or it's not, whatever it is.

So when you go on to the rest of your life, you realize that nothing can really bother you unless you allow it to. You chose it to bother you. So what that gave me, and I think it gives every marine, every soldier the same feeling, is a sense of confidence that you can do what you choose to do and can do it well.

But the second thing is that you've learned to do right by other people. And by that I mean there are a lot of choices in life, and I always made a choice, which in many cases meant earning less money, but it was the right thing to do, whether it be to do something for nothing or to help somebody when you could be earning some compensation or volunteering for a nonprofit or helping your family. Those feelings are built in the service in a time of war, and it's very perverse because you would think all you get is hardened military people, and yet what my experience is, is the people who have come out with positive feelings have come, and then true people who give back to society. I believe I've done that. I may have pledged to myself when I got out of the service that I would—even though I became a lawyer and a businessman, that I'd give 25 percent or more of my time to nonprofit causes. I've done that through my life.

I've been in a zillion nonprofits. I've been in political life. I've been in all of those things. And I'm not saying that for any personal reasons, but I got those feelings from the Marine Corps. They matured me, they made me into who I am, and I've lived a pretty good life, as perverse as it may seem.

I don't believe—I mean, other than hiding my feelings for all of these years, I don't think that I really experienced the negative, post-traumatic stress [disorder] that a lot of troops do. I guess we never know. We never know. But I feel that there was much more benefits than detriments through my service.

CHUNG:

Mm-hm. Great. So did you get out of service right after you got back from Vietnam?

CHILCOTE: No. I went on and served in the Mediterranean [Sea] for six months. I didn't stay in the United States for 15 days. And I joined the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean and was immediately thrust into the Greek Cypriot war. We were off of the coast of Greece for the Greek Cypriot war in May of '67.

Then we moved south to off the coast of Israel and watched from afar the Israel war of '67. One of the little-told stories in that is that the Israelis realized that the United States was commandeering their intelligence and getting—the information was going straight back to the White House. And some commander on someone's command decided to attack a U.S. Navy ship, and three sailors were killed. That ship was 1,000 yards off our starboard bow, and we were traveling—we were five miles from Haifa, and that's where the Israel troops were massing.

So what obviously happened—and there's a book written about this; I can't remember the name of it, but that verifies the facts, is that the United States picked up Israeli intelligence as to what they were doing, and the Israelis did not want us to interdict their intelligence, so they attacked the ship on the theory that they could cut off communications back to the White House so this wouldn't be an international incident and they could have a surprise attack in 1967.

So those were two more exciting times. But we really didn't see any action except from afar. We saw the ship strafe—the Israeli jet strafe our neighboring ship, and we learned later what had happened.

I was commanding officer of troops, which meant that I had in both cases, in Mediterranean and later in the Caribbean [Sea], 1,000 troops under my command, all of whom—almost all of whom had been to Vietnam.

CHUNG: Oh, I see.

CHILCOTE: So after six months in the Mediterranean, I went to the Caribbean, and I got out in December of '68. And I took some R&R [rest and recuperation] up at Dartmouth College. I went back and took English courses. I knew that—from being with these troops for all this time, I knew that my own

literacy, my own ability to write had declined, and I wanted to go to law school, so the bridge was to go to Dartmouth.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: And I took some wonderful English classes and spent time in Sanborn Hall and read a lot, and I took English literature and a creative writing course. Probably the best therapy that there could have been.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: It was so different. And I skied all winter. So it was a great experience and tied me back to Dartmouth.

CHUNG: Right. I think your experience in the Mediterranean and Caribbean is really interesting, so was it a very different experience from being in Vietnam?

CHILCOTE: Yes. There are some very almost humorous stories about all of that, but these troops pretty much figured they would never be sent back to Vietnam, so they—the marines aboard ship usually had a couple of years to serve, and they got their orders to go to Vietnam and were aboard these old World War II troop carriers, which were very cramped spaces. And all they really wanted was to get out on liberty in the French or Italian or other ports that we were in. We went to Nice, France, and all of the ports, typical Navy ports in Italy, all the way from Sicily on up the coast. We went to Greece and so forth.

One of the funny incidents was that—and I knew this—if you've got 1,000 marines on a ship, you know that as soon as you give them liberty, they're going to be out causing trouble.

CHUNG: [Chuckles.]

CHILCOTE: So one of the times that happened was we went to a place called Iraklio in Crete, which was a small farming seaport village, farming and fishing seaport village, where the Greek residents were very peaceful and family-loving people. Well, our marines didn't behave themselves, and I ended up in an incident where a marine goes up and tries to go to the house

of the mayor to meet the mayor's daughter. He takes all his clothes off and stands at the door.

CHUNG: [Chuckles.]

CHILCOTE: There couldn't be anything more offensive they could do to the Greek residents.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: So I suddenly found myself called down to the village square, meeting with the mayor, and every resident held a stone in their hand.

CHUNG: [Sharp intake of breath.]

CHILCOTE: They were ready to stone me to death.

CHUNG: Oh!

CHILCOTE: And we negotiated, and I was forced to take all of my troops back on ship. I thought our troops were going to kill this one marine because he had deprived them of their liberty.

CHUNG: Right.

CHILCOTE: So we worked it out, and it ended their liberty, but fortunately they'd been there for ten days, so it was just the last five days of liberty, and we sailed away, never to bother the Iraklian residents again.

CHUNG: Wow!

CHILCOTE: There were incidents like that. In the Caribbean, I went to Panama, and the troops would find the darkest, most remote places in Panama City, and they handled themselves okay except there was a little drug dealing, which was beginning to creep into the military service at that point, and we caught a couple of troops, and they eventually got drummed out of the Marine Corps. A couple of Navy men got knifed and killed in Panama City.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Ooh.

CHILCOTE: It's just part of what goes on, I suppose. But it was—yeah, it was very different, and it was a lot of fun, a fun way to end the last few years of my service.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. I see. Great. So I guess after your services in Mediterranean and Caribbean, you went back to school, and how long did you go back to school, for a few years or—

CHILCOTE: Three years. I started law school in the fall of '69, so—I'd gotten out in December of '68, so about nine months later I was back in school. I had three years of law school.

The other thing the Marine Corps does is make you a very determined scholar, and so I was determined to finish very high in my class. I applied myself in a way that I did not at Dartmouth College, or in engineering school, or at Tuck School [of Business at Dartmouth]. But I did in law school, and I finished very high, because that's what marines are trained to do. [Chuckles.]

CHUNG: Mm-hm. [Chuckles.]

CHILCOTE: And so I became a successful law student and eventually a lawyer.

CHUNG: I see.

CHILCOTE: I went right into the practice of law after that and practiced for 43 years, and, as I've said, I've tried to balance that practice of law with a healthy dose of nonprofit work all of these years.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Right. Great. Yeah, I think those are the questions that I had for you, and is there anything else that you would like to add about really anything that we talked about?

CHILCOTE: The only thing I would maybe add is just—maybe it's a repeat of what I've already said, but I honestly—today you'll find many people of our era who are—even if they served honorably and well in the Army or other services, they are adamantly opposed to the Vietnam experience. I look at it quite differently. I look at that experience as something that enriched my life in a very perverse way and gave me the

ability to do some good for this world in all of the years that have followed.

And I can't praise enough the experience of being in the military service for what it does for you. The thing I would say is that there are many life experiences that can give you—kind of as I said earlier, put you up on a ledge and challenge you in a way, and you realize the tenacity of human beings and of yourself. And lots of difference experiences can do that, but as strange as it may seem, war is definitely one of those.

CHUNG: Wow.

CHILCOTE: And so I appreciate the experience that I had, and I've always been positive about it, and I think even today, people who—I meet marines who have been in Afghanistan and Iraq, and they say the same thing. And so I think that is a quality of human nature, that it's the good that comes out of the bad war.

CHUNG: Mm-hm. Right. I see. Yeah, great. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences, story with us, and, yeah, have the secondary interview with me. Yeah, thank you so much.

CHILCOTE: Thank *you* very much. I appreciate it.

CHUNG: Right. Of course. Right.

[End of interview.]