

Interviewer:

Good afternoon. Today is 18 May 2015, and weâ€™re in the Center for Oral History with Major General Retired Ira Hunt. Good afternoon, sir, and thank you for being with us.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Good afternoon. Thank you for having me.

Interviewer:

And welcome back for your class reunion.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, thank you; Iâ€™ve had a wonderful time.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. So sir, could you tell us a little bit about yourself; about where you grew up and what your parents did, and about your name.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, my father was an Army Officer that he had been a lawyer, and when World War I came along, he and his partner were able-bodied, and they joined the Army, as patriots did. And he liked the Army and stayed in. And he had several college degrees, a very learned man, and he went to PMS&T duty at Lincoln, Nebraska. I was born there July 23, 1924. From that duty he went to the Advanced Course at Benning, and then because of his education, which was legal as well as economics, they asked him to come up and teach at West Point in the Social Science Department. At that time they hadnâ€™t gotten into economics hardly at all. And he taught there for three years, and then we were transferred for one year and they wanted him back, so my father came back to teach another three years.

This is between â€˜27 and â€˜33, and â€˜34. And so I grew up at West Point, and I loved the Cadets. You know, I just admired them so much, and all I ever wanted in life was to be a Cadet. That was my goal in life, and thatâ€™s why I got to West Point. Itâ€™s very difficult trying to get into West Point in those days, but luckily I finally made it that I went to college for two years at Vanderbilt. And my summer at Vanderbilt I would go to Washington and walk the halls of Congress, and knock on the doors and say, â€œIâ€™m Jimmy Hunt. I want to go to West Point.â€ And they were very considerate, and so I got a First Alternate the first year, and I came up. They sent me a telegram and said, â€œReport to West Point.â€ I said, â€œOh, Iâ€™m in,â€ and they said, â€œNo.â€ They found out when I came up here that my Principal was color-blind, and they were waiting to see if theyâ€™d let him in.

So I stayed here a week and I had to go back. So the second year I walked Congress again, and I didnâ€™t get an appointment. I did get an appointment to the Naval Academy, but I turned it down; I didnâ€™t want to go there. And so they expanded it in the war. I got here July 1 - obviously - 19 - what was it - 1940 -

Interviewer:

â€™41, sir?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

â€™41, yeah.

Interviewer:

Now, you said -

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

â€™42.

Interviewer:

Your name is Ira, but you said you went by Jimmy.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Yeah. Well, my fatherâ€™s name is Ira, and my mother had a favorite uncle who was

named James. And so when I was born, she said, "Look, Daddy," to my father, "I'll name him after you because I love you, but I want to call him in memory of my uncle." That was Uncle James, and so they called me Jimmy. I remember when I went to first grade in Newton, Massachusetts. The teacher called the roll, and she says, "Ira Hunt?" I said, "No ma'am. My name is Jimmy." She said, "Your name is Ira, and I'll call you Ira," so I got up and walked out. So my mother called my father and said, "He just walked out of school, and what are we going to do?" So my father came back and explained to the teacher why I was called Jimmy, and she called me Jimmy; and that's the last time I had it be a problem.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. And you said you got here in '42.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

'42.

Interviewer:

Was there an accelerated schedule?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

There was a three-year course. They started and the first class was called January '43, then they had June '43, and then we went through a three-year course. The summer was chock full of military material. Went to all the posts, fired all the weapons. It was a very interesting time.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

But we hardly had any leave.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Yes sir. Well, we'll get back to that portion in a second. Growing up here, where did you live on post?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, it's interesting enough. They have an annual drawing at West Point.

Interviewer:

Right.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

And as you know better than I, if you draw a house and you don't like it, you can throw it in and hope you get a better one. So my first year I lived in the North Apartments, my second year I lived in the South Apartments, and my third year, I lived on Kingsley Hill. And moving every year was kind of bad, I thought, but my second tour, my father's tour, they had a new group of houses on Reservoir Hill, and we moved into a brand spanking new house. It was a gorgeous house up there. We had three years at one place. It was really nice.

Interviewer:

Okay. So those are what they now call Lusk Reservoir Housing?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

That's it, Lusk Reservoir Housing, yes.

Interviewer:

Very nice. Those are nice houses.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

They're very nice. And my house was right in the cut of a hill, and behind the house 50 yards they had one of the four Revolutionary redoubts. Fort Willis was the name of it.

Interviewer:

Right.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

And so as a young man, I could go up and play war at Fort Willis, thinking about the military. I've always enjoyed the military.

Interviewer:

So I imagine as a young man growing up, you probably not only saw those Revolutionary War forts, but all the other Revolutionary War forts around the post.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Of course. Of course, Fort Putnam was the big place, you know, and when we were younger we used to go there for picnics and things. But West Point is a great place to grow up, a great place to work. I came here as a Cadet. I came here as an Instructor. By the time I was 25 years old, I'd spent half my life here.

Interviewer:

Well then, tell me - how was it different for you as a child vs. as a Cadet and then as an Instructor?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, you know, unfortunately, my mother died when I was almost 13 - 12. And my father was on military duty at that time; they had the floods in the Mississippi, and they had all of this. So from that time on, I had been on my own. And that's very bad for a young man to be on his own for five or six years and come to West Point, because the discipline is something that you've been missing out because you were on your own. So my first year, I didn't do too well in the demerit situation. I finally figured out you can't beat the system, and when I figured out the system was good, I just settled down and did very well in my class. In fact, you know, and I want to tell you this, the place I wanted to stand first in my class was Military History, but I don't know how I missed it, but I stood 10th in Military History.

But I stood second in Tactics. I stood third in Military Instructor Training, and military things I like.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. So how was the training? Tell me a little bit about the training here.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, the training was fascinating. They just bought the land out here we called when I was here Camp Popolopen. Now I think you call it Camp Buckner.

Interviewer:

Camp Buckner, yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

And we went out there, and that was great training. We got to fire the weapons out there. But in the summer, they sent us up to Pine Camp. We went up to Pine Camp with the training of the military groups they had up there, and so our summers we spent were just intense training with the idea we were going to get in the war. We were looking so forward to getting in the war, and we were so disappointed when we didn't.

Interviewer:

What was it like being a Cadet when you were getting all the reports about what was happening in World War II?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, you know, we had one of my classmates in the H2 Company was Daly, Mike Daly. He couldn't hack the academics, and Mike Daly got found; and he went out and he went over and got himself a Medal of Honor, and he came back while we were still First Classmen. And there's Mike Daly with all his ribbons and all his experience, and he'd gotten out and gotten in, and that's all we wanted to do. We all looked at Mike Daly and said, "God, what are we doing here? Why aren't we out in the war?" And so that answered your question in a left-handed way, but the idea is we wanted to get out, and we're stuck here.

Interviewer:

And when did you graduate?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

1945.

Interviewer:

What day, sir?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

5th of June.

Interviewer:

5th of June.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Okay. And so the war was over in Europe.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

The war - VE Day had been passed.

Interviewer:

Right.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

When we graduated, VE Day was over, but the war was still going heavy, and no one every dreamed of the nuclear weapon or atomic bombs at that time. So we were looking forward to that. When we graduated we went down; I took Engineers. A hundred of us took Engineers that time, and we were out. I remember VJ Day very well, laying a minefield in the dark. And the news came it was VJ Day, and we said, "The heck with this," and dropped everything and went into Washington to celebrate.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

And it wasn't really a celebration. We were sad because now we've missed out on everything. But as you know, everything in hell broke loose after that.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. So a hundred of you went Engineer Branch. How big was your class?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Class graduated 854; some say 852, it was around there, what difference does it make?

Interviewer:

Right.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

We were 854, and 100 went into the Corps of Engineers at that time.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. And so after World War II ended, what did you do?

Interviewer:

Upon graduation, being Engineer, they gave us a choice. "Where do you want to go?" The war was over in the Pacific. I said, "I'll go to Europe." "And what do you want to be?" At that time, they had only one Regiment called the Special Service, Special Engineer Regiment. And what did they do? Hard Engineer jobs. I said, "Well, if I'm going to be an Engineer, might as well get in and learn the most I can." So I went over to the 333rd Engineer Special Service Regiment, in a small town not far from the Rhine called Gross-Gerau. When I reported in, we were building two bridges across the Rhine, one a railroad bridge, which there was no railroad bridge anywhere across the Rhine, and one a highway bridge, which was at Mainz, which was the only bridge between the French and the American Zone. So we worked on those bridges, you know. When I say we worked, we

worked from dark to dark, 14 hours a day, getting them through. We were very proud of what we were doing. And every Autobahn bridge was broken up. We had to repair those bridges, and so I enjoyed my tour; rebuilding war-torn Germany was my first tour. Halfway through that tour, they were having trouble in Trieste. The Yugoslavs were creating pot shots and a few things, and they needed to have Regular Army people down there. They had the Mediterranean Theater made a levee in the middle of the European Theater, so I went down to Trieste. And that was the best thing that ever happened to me. It's really a disciplined military outfit. The sharpness doesn't compare with anything in the military today. That was in the 333rd. They had brought in these people from engineering corporations. They were sharp engineers. They knew how to build bridges, but all they wanted to do was go home. Their discipline was terrible. One day our Colonel went to the Commanders Conference, and when they measured the two Regiments of morale, which we had in those days was incidents of venereal disease and delinquency reports, and my Regiment was the bottom of both. And the Colonel came back, and he said, "Hunt, I want you to run a course for all the men who had venereal disease, and make it so tough on them that they'll never want to do it again." So I worked out a course that went from 5:00 in the morning till 11:00 at night, and they had to only run that course twice and everything stopped. You couldn't do that today, but it worked then.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. How were the German people?

Interviewer:

At first they were reluctant. I'll tell you two stories. Some stayed reluctant forever. We had a lot of displaced people, and the town at the border, one of them was Kassel. Kassel was really bombed out during the war, and they said, the head of the Military Affairs over there said, "We've got to do something for the DP," and so they gave our Regiment the requirement, with the Germans, to build Displaced Person Housing. And we went and made up a form of a wooden house, and we got the huge lumber from Bavaria and sent it up to Kassel, and one of our people put them together with a stove. But in doing it, we had to do a lot of blasting for the land and everything, and so we'd go around and say, "Look, we're going to blast here, and if you have your windows closed, it's going to break the glass. So please open your windows at such-and-such a time. It's only going to last 5 seconds, 10 seconds."

And sure enough, a lot of the people would say, "We won't do a damn thing that the Americans want," and you could hear the glass jingle because they didn't open the windows. So there were some people that were still reluctant at that time. But over time, they saw Germany being rebuilt, and they were very favorable toward the Americans - extremely favorable.

Interviewer:

Did you have any issues with the process of de-Nazification?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

No, we didn't at all ourselves. I was too low down. But one of the things in building a railroad bridge; in order to get help on the manual labor, we brought in a German Railroad Battalion, and we had those people. And we didn't guard them; we had what we called Polish Guards. But we had to feed them, and we couldn't get any rations for it. And so the Colonel of our Regiment said, "Well, let's pick a couple Sharpshooters, and we'll go out in the countryside and shoot the deer and the boar." Well, that pleased the Germans tremendously. They couldn't have any firearms; they weren't allowed, and they were ravaging their crops. And so we'd go out, and we fed these German P.O.W.s on venison. They lived pretty high horse, all of that.

Interviewer:

How long were you in Europe?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, I stayed, unfortunately, 40 - I'm trying to add it up - 42 or 43 months.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

When I went down to Trieste, I enjoyed it so much. I was a Company Commander down there, and the best duty in the world. As I look back on my military service the time in Trieste was sharp troops with great Commanders. It was absolutely wonderful.

Interviewer:

And what was the best mission that you had while you were down there?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, when we were down there we had a lot of missions. One of them which was quite interesting, we had tanks. But our area was so restricted, we couldn't fire the tanks, so the only way we could do them was in Austria. So we went up to where you could fire tanks in Austria. They had these bridges that you couldn't cross with a tank, so we had to go up and put in Bailey bridges. We had to reinforce those. That was a very interesting job, to go up to Austria so we could fire our weapons.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

The Company that I got had just had two Company Commanders relieved. One got relieved because on a Command Inspection they were in such bad shape, so they said, "Well, they need a -" and in fact, it was a classmate of mine. And they said, "We need some mature man." They got a gray-haired Captain go up there, and they gave him three months to improve, and the General wouldn't even walk through the place. He looked at the troops, and he relieved him, and so I got the job. And I'm very proud of that job, because they gave me three months, and I got a Superior on the inspection, and the next year I got a Superior. The only Company in Trieste to ever get two Superiors in a row, and they only gave three Superiors each year, so I turned that into a great outfit. I'm very proud of it.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Now, being where you were in Europe, what was your experience with the beginnings of the Cold War?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, in Trieste you're right in the middle of it. You know, that founding of the Iron Curtain we call it started in Trieste and went up to the North Sea, and the Yugoslavs were very, very anti-U.S., and they'd do everything they can. Every rock you saw on the hillside was painted "Ho Chi mo Tito." And the May Day is a big day in Communism, and so our Commanding General said, "Well, we're not going to let these people march. We'll have our parade on May Day. So we had a parade, and we were trying to counter - I'll give you one example. I was waiting for some friends in a square, at noon on a Saturday. Three men dressed in business suits came out of a factory that was there on the square, and they got about 20 feet out, and 10 or 15 men came and grabbed them and beat them up and threw them onto the ground, and oh, they beat them up terribly. And then went away - so they were trying to help these men, and I said, "What happened? Who are these people?" "Communiste. Communiste." So it was a tough time over there.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Then after Europe what did you do?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, after Europe they told me I was going to get civil schooling. As I told you before, I wanted to be a good Engineer, so I said, "I'd like to go to M.I.T.," which they sent me up. I went a year to M.I.T. That was a fascinating year. In my class at M.I.T. amongst the civilians, the military people far outshone the civilians. And the reason, at West Point we had to recite every day in class. We were disciplined; we did our homework, we did our work. They gave these awards for performance, so there they gave five, and of the five, three were our military people, so we did well there. So then I went down and taught in the Department of Mechanics for -

Interviewer:

What year did you start teaching, sir?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

1950 to '52.

Interviewer:

Okay.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

So then they decided that they were going to have Exchange Instructors with the Naval Academy, and I was nominated to be the first one they had. Whether they'd had it in the past I don't know, but they hadn't had it, and they wanted to set this up, and I understand now they don't do it anymore. But anyway, they picked me out to go down to the Naval Academy, and I went down there and taught the same subjects, thermodynamics. Down there, thermodynamics is a big deal in the Navy, 'cause they run everything on steam, you know. That's what they call it - not thermodynamics. I taught steam. But when I left, the Commandant called me in, General Irving. He said, "Jim, you're going down there. When you get your feet on the ground, I want you to write a report to me comparing the two systems." I hadn't been on the job a week, and the Admiral called me in. He called me in for two reasons. One, he called me in and said, "Look, we've had lousy results in our Parades down there at Annapolis. The Company that wins the Parade gets the Color Girl, and that's a big deal," and he said it got all fouled up the year before.

He said, "Hunt, I've given you five Marines, and you're going to judge the Parade, and we're going to have no problems." I said, "Thank you, Admiral." And the other thing he said, "Well, now that you're down here, you taught at West Point, I'd like you to give me a report comparing the two systems." Both of them, unbeknownst, asked me the same damn question.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Was your report the same for both of them?

Interviewer:

Yes. I reported verbally to one, and wrote something up for General Irving, but I don't know where it is. But there's a big difference in the systems, so I had to hurt both people's feelings.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. So what did you find?

Interviewer:

You really want to know?

Interviewer:

If you want to tell me, sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, I don't mind telling you that I thought that, first of all, you look at instruction down there. At the Naval Academy, they would not give you the cookbooks that we have at West Point - that we had at the time. They made their guys, if he didn't know the formula, he had to derive the formula. But also, at West Point we have Sectioning, and I was used to

teaching First Section, where the guys really were smart, and you're trying to stimulate them, and Last Section, where I'd just look to see if I'd get a glimmer of recognition at all, trying to stop them failing. But the Naval Academy, they don't do that, so you could have the First and Last man, and you can't teach to the capability of the student. I didn't think that was as good. So as far as instruction went, I thought the fact that we could have cookbooks, which is the way you do when you get out. You've got to where to look for it, was bad. Down there, discipline at the Naval Academy was stronger than at the Military Academy.

And by that, I say at West Point you have a Plebe year, and everybody beats up on the Plebes. But after you get by Plebe year, it's a cake of soap. Down at the Naval Academy, the Yearlings, the Cows beat up on the Yearlings, and the First Classmen beat up on the Cows. And then you have your people in the Tactical Department, and they have pressure the whole time. But the interesting thing is that carries through the Navy. They are so stratified. I mean even when you get out, guys, 10 or 12 years, they don't really care about who your class, what it was; not so at West Point.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

So when I say discipline was stronger, everybody laughs at me, but it was - in my opinion.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Now, the other thing I hate to say is the Honor System at West Point was strong and rigorous, and the Naval Academy was not. They do not have the "whatever you call the code with if you cheat and don't report the fellow." You do it.

Interviewer:

The non-toleration?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Non-toleration code.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Yes sir.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. And so you had a good time down there.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Very nice.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Very nice.

Interviewer:

And so did you come back and teach back at West Point after that, or?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

No. No. When I was teaching at West Point, I was a bachelor.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

And if you understand that there's nothing to do at West Point at night. If you don't drink and you don't have a married life, you can invite people to dinner; there's nothing to do. So I decided I'd go down to Columbia and take courses. And the reason I went down to take courses, I wanted to be the best Instructor I could, so I took courses in advanced thermodynamics and all this stuff. And then I met a girl who lived in New York,



and I said, "That's fine. I'll go down and take more courses. They're over at 10:00, and fortunately, the girl I was dating and I married lived in a convent, and she had to be in at 11:00, so that was perfect for me. Had to be in her room at 11:00; had to drive back here and teach in the mornings, so it worked out well. It worked out well. And I've always done that. Whenever I could go to improve my ability to do my job, I did that.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

But anyway, to get back to your story - I got off my story. When I was teaching, they had a Professor from France, Professor KREYE - good smart guy. He said, "Hunt, do you know you can get a scholarship to go over and study in Europe." I said, "I don't know anything about it." He said, "Well, they have a scholarship called a Freeman Scholarship that the American Society of Civil Engineers gives out. You ought to consider that." And so I thought about that, and I said, "That's a good idea." So I went down to the Chief of Engineers Office and said, "Look, I want to apply for a scholarship to study in Europe. If I get it, will you let me go?" They said, "Sure," because they hadn't given one of those in five or six years. So I applied for it, and I got it, and so then I went over to study in Europe; and that all came out of my going down to Columbia. That year, they had a big flood in Holland.

February 1, 1953, and it devastated Holland. Polders got unpoldered. People lost their lives, about 1,000 people. Polders were inundated. And so the Chief of Engineers when I got the scholarship said, "Look, why don't you go and study what's happening in Holland? We've got to know, 'cause we have the same problem." In Lake Okeechobee at the time, and it's exactly the same problem we had in New Orleans. If they'd done what I found out over there, we wouldn't have had New Orleans. That's another story. And so I went over there first as a representative of the U.S. to the Dutch government to study their thing, and I worked, and that was very nice. Then I went down - the Dutch are very practical engineers. You know they've been doing this for 130 years, but I wanted to learn more. So I went down to Grenoble, France, where they had a laboratory called NEERPIK. They had a big hydraulics lab. The guys down there were brilliant in a different way, and I really learned a lot down there.

So I was able to put all the study I had at Columbia and everything else and get a degree down there, a Doctor of the University degree there. So - now, how did we get off on that tangent?

Interviewer:

You were telling me about teaching here at West Point.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Okay. So you went over and you did schooling in Europe -

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

And somewhere in between there you got married?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

My wife is a very lovely girl. She worked in the fashion industry in New York. She was doing very well as a fashion model, and so I didn't want to bother her career and she didn't want to bother mine, so when I had to go over there, I got engaged. That was in August. Sure enough, in the end of December she arrives on a boat, and she said, "It's time to get married," so we got married in Grenoble, which is another problem.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

To try to get married in France is not easy.

Interviewer:

Why is that?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, first of all, she had to have a work permit.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

And I - they don't want any indigents. I understand that. So I tried to get a work permit; I just couldn't get it. So finally one of my friends in France said, "Did you offer him a bottle of Scotch?" I say, "Oh, come on, we don't do things like that." He said, "Try it." So I offered him a bottle of Scotch, and I got the work permit, so we got married.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. And how long did you stay in Europe this time?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, you know I was on my own. They didn't give me any time period, and so I just worked hard, you know, to finish up my studying to get back. I hadn't been to Leavenworth. I hadn't been to the Advanced School. Here I am with nine years' service, haven't been to the Advanced School, and everybody else goes four, five years. So I came back in the end of November from over there, and when I came back, I had a couple of months and they sent me, thankfully, to the Associate Advance Course, for the foreign students that come in, and for the Reserve Officers, and that was fine. That was three or four years. But in the interim, they let me go and work at the Beach Erosion Board, and I was working on all these subjects of wave run-up, which are very difficult and at the time hadn't been solved, and believe it or not, I hit the pay dirt at the Beach Erosion Board.

I did solve that, and then got some papers published on that which are still mentioned in books that young people study in college. The other thing was when I went to the Chief Engineers and they said they'd let me go, that when I left the Naval Academy, my orders were to Korea. And the Sup at West Point was General Moore, who is Vice Sup at Trieste. And General Moore, when he went over to take over the Corps in Korea, says, "Jim, come on over. I'll give you an Infantry Battalion." Infantry Battalion. I said, "Gee, I'm just a Captain." He said, "I don't care, I want people that can produce. So I went down to the Chief's office and I begged him to go to Korea. Wouldn't you? I went down three times. So when my orders came out to Timog Korea when I got the scholarship, after they said I could go, I really got hacked off, and I went in to see the general.

And I said, "Look, I've been down here begging to go to Korea, but you say I'm on a stabilized tour at West Point. And now you want me to go to Korea?" He said, "I didn't know that." He called this guy at his desk; he said, "Jensen, come in here," so Major Jensen came in. He said, "Hunt came down here trying to get to Korea?" He said, "Yes sir, he's been down several times." He says, "Okay, you can have your scholarship." That worked out. But you have to, when you get something which is not proper, you have to speak up. I learned that.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

In a polite way, though.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

So after that, I went to - my Advanced Course, I went to Leavenworth. Get out to Leavenworth, they sent me to a little outfit up in Detroit called the Lake Survey, U.S. Army Lake Survey. I didn't even know what it was. Never heard of it. None of my classmates at Leavenworth had heard of it. So when I went up there, they found out that this was the outfit that maps the Great Lakes, and at that time they'd started out the Saint Lawrence Seaway Project. I don't know if you remember or not; that was a huge national project. I mean international. It was big, the Saint Lawrence. It was the biggest thing we had in America at the time. And this little outfit they had in Lake Survey, which was just keeping records, became very important, because the Canadians were vying for power, the States were vying for power. They had to know how to regulate the lake levels. They had to know how to figure out how much water goes over the falls at Niagara.

And this is something that, you know, I just had a doctor's degree in hydrodynamics and I was really suited for that. They picked the right peg in the right hole. So I went up there and I stayed at the Lake Survey for three years. Fascinating job. Finally I became the District Engineer up there; I was the first in my class at that time to get a District Engineer. I was chairman of the Working Committee in Saint Lawrence Seaway with Canadians and Americans. A really nice assignment, so I was very happy with that.

Interviewer:

It was very fortunate.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Very fortunate. And so then I got my orders to Korea. They were so happy. Even then, I just had my fourth child.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

And when my fourth child was born, my eldest child was not yet four, okay?

Interviewer:

Wow.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

I had four, boom, boom, boom. So the General called me up and said, "Hey, Jim, we're going to send you to Korea, give Mary a little rest." So I wrote the Chief's Office and said, "Look, I've got a wife here with four small kids. I really can't go in November. Why don't you send me in January?" So they sent, so I went over to Korea in January, which made the OPO unhappy 'cause they really thought they had me to Korea lock, stock, and barrel.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. So what year did you arrive in Korea?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

In January 1959, was it?

Interviewer:

1959.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Yeah.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

And how was everything in Korea at this time?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Very interesting. Korea was broke. They didn't have much to do. I was in the Engineer

Section, and the Aide to the Korean Chief Engineers and I got to know each other quite well, and I was telling them, "You know, why don't you do what we did in America? Let the Engineers help build a country." I said, "You're not doing anything; you're just sitting around." And so that took on, and they started what they call the Highway 13 project, which was to build a major highway between Tegu and Seoul, the two biggest cities in Korea. They didn't have a connecting highway and had to go through the mountains, and that was a big deal over there. The Koreans loved that. They put them all to work, and they gave me a big medal that was very nice for a young Major to do that, and I became one of the members of the Highway 13 Committee, which they had State involved. I mean so that worked out nice. So then I came back then to the Chief of Engineers Office.

And one of my classmates said, "Well, they have a section there - they had a dynamic Colonel; dynamic people in that MILLER TRAIT get things done. This guy wanted to get into space, so he brought together some people, and they said, "Well, why don't you get someone who's innovative, and so get Jim Hunt." So I got over, I didn't know a damn thing about space at the time. And we started to get the Army into space, and we did. You know, Medaris is starting it with their first rocket; that was all Army going up there, and we started this satellite surveying, brand new. Now they have whole new sections, the government doing add-outs, and that's really top, top, top secret stuff. But we started it in that little group. They wanted to know if you landed on the moon, how's it going to be? Someone said, "You're going to go 20 feet in fluff." Someone said, "You're going to hit rock." So we gave a contract to the University of Michigan to use radar to see what it was.

And they came out with a solution turned out just the way it was when they landed. That was an interesting thing, but then they started a new office in the Chief of Engineers they call Plans & Policy, and so I became the head of the Plans & Policy Office, and that was interesting. When I was in Detroit for an example - I'm going to give you this example. I went in and they started talking about "We have a survey ship," and said, "Well how's the revolving fund going?" Revolving fund? I said. Well what about this budgetary thing and that budgetary thing for maps. They were selling maps. I don't know a damn thing about this. So I went out to the university of Detroit, and they said, "Look, I have to take some lessons in economics." And they said, "Well, all your stuff is in Engineering. You can't go to school in Economics here." I said, "Why not?" They said, "Well, tell you what - we'll let you take the graduate economics if you pass enough.

So I passed that with flying colors, so I got my degree in Detroit, master's degree in business, just to make me better in the job with the Lake Survey. Just like I go into Columbia to get better in my teaching. So then I came to the Chief's Office in Plans and Policy, and they were doing things in macroeconomics that were very difficult. The gold flow was a problem. We had this cost/benefit ratio. All this new stuff, that was new at the time. So I went to George Washington and said, "I've got to learn macroeconomics. I've got to do my job better." And so I was able then to get a degree called doctor of business administration, not because of anything else, but I wanted to do a better job in the Army. And so people say, "Well, Hunt, you got two doctorates. It doesn't make any difference." I only got them because I wanted to serve the government better. So I don't know where we are now.

Interviewer:

So a lesson for cadets today would be always strive to continue your education.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Absolutely.

Interviewer:

And seek lifelong learning.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Absolutely. And that's a lesson of life for anybody - for anybody.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Now, in a couple of different places you've mentioned your classmates -

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

At West Point, in both - or other folks you knew from the Academy, both in positive and negative light. How important is the Academy connection when you're out in the Regular Army? How important is that to your career?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt: It's not at all. I hate to tell you that. It's not at all, in my opinion.

When I had my Battalion in Germany, the rule came down that said the Division Commander wants everybody to attend a Founders Day conference. So I talked to my G1, my S1 of the Battalion, and I said, "Who are our West Point graduates?" He happened to be one of them. He said, "Don't you know?" "I haven't the faintest idea." I said, "It's how you perform that I care about." And when I taught at Belvoir, I was in charge of the school, okay? And they wanted everybody to go vol and dev. In other words, the war was going on, and these guys coming out of the college had a two-year commitment. They wanted them to extend it. And so I went up and talked to them, and I said, "Look, guys, we have five Divisions in Vietnam. How many of those do you think are commanded by an ROTC graduate?" And the answer was five. They were all five. And so I got a lot of vol and devs. And so the point I'm trying to make, I think it's wrong, this ring-knocker stuff. I think if you produce, you get ahead. If you don't produce, you don't.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. So where did you command a Battalion, because we were just talking about your time in Plans and Policy?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt: Then I went to National War College.

Interviewer:

Okay.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

And when I got out of the National War College, here I'm sitting with 19 years' service and I hadn't had a Battalion, and so they said, "Well, we have an Airborne Battalion opened up." I went and got my Airborne when I was teaching at West Point. And I said, "I'd love to have that." So I went over and I had a tremendous Battalion, all separate-unit, near the Rhine River in Germany, and that was a marvelous experience.

Interviewer:

What year and what Battalion was it?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

It's 12th Engineer Battalion. I got over there in 1964 to '66.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

And I was very proud of that Battalion. We did well. We had in that Battalion what they call tank dozers, and because we didn't have any tank dozers, they gave us tanks. And so because they had tanks, we had to have Tank Gunnery. And I had been on an exercise with my Commanding General, and was sitting with the Corps Commander, who happened to be Jimmy Polk, who's an Armory guy. He said, "Boy, we're having awful Tank Gunnery - people can't do it. Let me tell you how I did it." I listened to Polk, who is an Armored Officer. I said, "You know, I'm going to do what Polk does." I went

back to my Lieutenant. "Lieutenant," I said, "this is the way you're going to train your people in Tank Gunnery." So that year we qualified seven out of eight. It's a new record they had over there - they couldn't get people qualified. So this Engineer Battalion outdid the Armored Infantry in Tank Gunnery.

Interviewer:

Wow.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

And so when I had a Sergeant Major. What do you do with a Sergeant Major? Everybody does something different. So I said, "Sergeant Major, I'm giving you one job - besides the others. I want you to train my men to be Soldiers of the Month." I said, "You can have your pick of any two Corporals you want, and you'll train them, and you send them up to be Soldier of the Month." Mind you, what'd we have - we had 20 Battalions in the Division, at least, maybe more, and we won Soldier of the Month 9 months out of the 12.

Interviewer:

Wow.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Why? My Sergeant Major did it. You've got to give people responsibility, and they get it done, and that's what I've learned. I gave that Lieutenant responsibility and he got it done. Same thing I don't know if you're familiar with TPIs; you have rear nuclear weapons. We had this nuclear weapon, and I said, "You do it." So you know who gets the job done - it's the Lieutenants and the Captains, not the Colonels and the Generals.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Now, while you were in Germany from '64 to '66, you said -

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Yes.

Interviewer:

While you were there, the ramp-up is occurring in Vietnam. How did that affect the Army in Europe?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

That's a good question. It affected it tremendously. When I went there, I had a Captain and a Company Commander. I hadn't been in that Battalion three months when all my Companies were commanded by Lieutenants. In fact, some of them hadn't been in the Army more than a year. And so they took all your people with experience and send them to Vietnam, so it had a tremendous effect over there. And so I get back to my saying, you're in a training mode. All you do in the Army, Army is training, training, training. When I was - I'm getting ahead of myself. When I was in Engineer School, I watched the classes they had. I didn't like what they were teaching. I said, "Why are you teaching this? Why are you teaching that? Let's start from the beginning. Let's figure out what task you have to perform." And suppose you figure out there are a hundred tasks to perform. What do you teach at school? You only teach those that you do all the time. You teach those that are important.

If you're lucky, you teach only 20 of those 100. Who teaches the other 80? People don't realize this. It's on the job training. That's the Company Commander. That's a Platoon Leader. That's a Sergeant that you're doing. So the Army is teaching, even at West Point.

Interviewer:

What did that do to discipline in the Army in Europe as a lot of your senior leaders were being pulled out to go to Vietnam?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

It didn't have any effect in mine, because we had good discipline.

Interviewer:

Very good.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

We always had good discipline.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

I think discipline depends - it's just like in schooling. People say that you have terrible schools, and do you want to find a good school? Show me a good principal. It works down. Principal doesn't teach the class, but they pick the teachers. They do if they give them the scope, so.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

But that affects me when I was in OSD, when I went after I went to my Command. They brought me back to go to Secretary of Defense's Office, and I worked in an office called Office of Management and Budget. They work directly for - we had a boss who was a Navy Captain, and an Assistant Secretary, Mr. Horowitz, but we worked directly for Cy Vance and for General McNamara. So one day McNamara says, "I want to revamp the Headquarters in Europe," so that job was given to me. So I went in with McNamara, and I made out this poop sheet, and I said, "Well, you know, we can cut here or we can cut there, but they're already cut so bad, you don't want to cut anymore. They've all gone to Vietnam. You're down to bone, to nothing." McNamara says, "They're not going to accept what you have. The maximum you can give me now is what they have today." So I said, "Oh my God, how am I going to do that?" So I said, "Mr. McNamara, you can't just cut across the board 10%. You have to find out who's important, who isn't." He said, "Work it up any way you want." So I worked it up. I came in to see him one night at 11:00, and I said, "Here's what I came up with." He looked at it, and he initialed off on it. So then the Army screamed. "Oh, how can we live with this?" But what I did was I combined Fifth Corps and Seventh Army, and said, "You can't have them both at the same time. So we'll make this when we go to war, this guy goes to the Seventh Army, this guy's a Fifth Corps," and that's the way we did it. So the Army screamed to high heaven, and today they have less people than at that time when they were screaming. In other words, you could learn to get along with less, but at first it's a shock.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. And what was the concern about the Soviets at this time when they were cutting the Army in Europe?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, at that time I didn't have any problem, because that was far beyond my pay grade, okay?

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

But when I was in - where was I? When I was at the Engineer School anyway. I'm trying to think back. We formed, we had the Arab land battle technique; that's when I was teaching down at CONARC, TRADOC. And so they picked five General Officers, and we went over, and we met with five German Officers. And we sat in a Gobelintapestry castle south of Munich, you know, and we sat down, "How are we going to defeat the Russians? How are we going to do it with air-land battle thing?" And I said to myself, "Jim, holy cow - here in 1945, you were over here."

And hereâ€™s 30 years laterâ€ - it was 30 years later - â€œand youâ€™re finding out how to defeat the Russians. Before, everyone wants the Germans to be defeated.â€ So we focused everything on Russia, and when I, for my last assignment, everything was focused against Russia. And itâ€™s probably now theyâ€™re going to have to refocus to China. But Iâ€™m going ahead of my jobs, â€˜cause they all meld.

Interviewer:

Right sir. To get back to where we were, how would you describe Secretary McNamara? How was it working for him?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

McNamara was didactic, okay? And he brought with himself a team which we called â€œthe whiz kids.â€ He brought them from Ford. Charlie Rosetti and those people who are now heading companies. They were really smart guys. And so we would come at OMB. Always McNamara would give the job to the whiz kids, heâ€™d give the job to the military. So weâ€™re always going up against the whiz kids. And I found out that the whiz kids didnâ€™t have the personal part. The Armyâ€™s personal; itâ€™s people. They were numbers. They were number guys. And so weâ€™d go up against them, and we never lost, because weâ€™d put the personal into it. And so McNamara and Cy Vance, his Deputy, would side with us. And so even though he was didactic, he could see that the Army did have people to deal with, and so the job that I had, that they gave me, was moving the people out of France into Europe.

When McNamara wrote his book, he said that that job was the finest job that he did, and I was the Action Officer on that. So I donâ€™t have any complaints about McNamaraâ€™s decision-making process, but everything had to be rationalized. If you didnâ€™t have a reason, you didnâ€™t get anywhere with McNamara.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. So by this point in your career, you were a Lieutenant Colonel?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

I was a Lieutenant Colonel. I was a Colonel when I was in OSD, but was a Lieutenant Colonel. And I got promoted when I came back from Germany to go to OSD to Colonel.

Interviewer:

Okay. And then what did you do following OSD?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, in OSD, when I was over as the Engineer Battalion, I was dealing with Infantry Regiment, and I had to know more about the Infantry than the Infantry did. And so I said to myself, â€œYou know, one of these guys is going to pick me to be Chief of Staff of the Infantry Division.â€ So when my Engineer classmates were all striving to get the group over there, they said, â€œJim, arenâ€™t you volunteering to go to Vietnam?â€ I said, â€œNo. Iâ€™m going to wait. I want to go over as Chief of Staff.â€ And sure enough, one of the Generals came and said, â€œJim, why donâ€™t you be my Chief of Staff?â€ I said, â€œWonderful.â€ He said, â€œWonâ€™t you ask Mary?â€ I said, â€œI donâ€™t have to ask Mary. Letâ€™s go.â€

Interviewer:

Yes sir. And so you went over, and you were with the Ninth Infantry Division.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

It was the Ninth.

Interviewer:

And General Ewell, correct?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Yeah. Julian was the Commander, and the Ninth at that time, in the opinion of the Army, was not going very well. So Julian said, â€œLook, we got to turn this around. You can have anybody you want.â€ So he went over, and he said, â€œJim, you got to fill in the slots.â€



And so I recruited for the Ninth. And weâ€™d go and weâ€™d find a guy that weâ€™d like to be a Brigade Commander, and heâ€™d pick a Battalion Commander. â€œOh good - you think this guyâ€™s good?â€ So weâ€™d go to the Battalion Commander, said, â€œWho do you want for a Company Commander?â€ â€œOh, I donâ€™t know. This guyâ€™s good, and that guyâ€™s good.â€ So we built up a team, so we went over there with a team. And working with Ewell was interesting. We turned that Division around. We did a lot of the administrative things that people donâ€™t even understand. I give you for an example, when we got there, we had guard duty. We had people with foot disease that were very sick.

And you canâ€™t send a troop out into the water there if they have foot disease, so we had to cure foot disease. We found out that we could get what we call ho chungs, who have come in and changed sides, and they go to indoctrination camp, and they say if you want to hire them you can. So we hired everybody we could, which includes our squad leader, and the guy talked Vietnamese. He understood the tactics. So when we got there, we had at the maximum 30,000 men in the field today. We also found out with three Company Battalions, you could not do the job, because it was so varied. We needed four Companies. The Army is saying, â€œWhich is best?â€ We said, â€œWeâ€™ll go for four.â€ So they gave us four companies. And so we went from 1,000 men in the field. Then the next thing we said was, â€œThe Infantry Company has 164 people. How many people do you want in the field every day?â€

â€œOur paddy strength is going to be 120. You can have so much percent overhead, so much percent on leave, but youâ€™re going to have the field, and youâ€™re going to be field three days a week. So you have 120 on three days a week.â€ So inside of five months we went from 1,000 men to 3,500 - big change - because our concept, Ewellâ€™s concept was constant pressure. So then we had to figure out how to fight at night, and we did that. And by keeping constant pressure on them, these people just folded up. So we were very lucky over there. We had a lot of enemy. You see, what was the purpose of the war in Vietnam? The purpose of the war in Vietnam for the Americans, the Vietnamese, and the North Vietnamese, the same. You want to get the maximum number of people under your control, and the maximum amount of land. So where was the people? The people were in the delta. Thatâ€™s where the rich part is. Thatâ€™s where the land was. And so even when we left, the fight in the delta always.

Fourth Corps had more conflict than all the other three put together.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Now, earlier you talked about setting up a team, and you were picking your Company Commanders, and that sort of thing. What sort of criteria were you working on to determine who was the best? What was figuring into your -

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, very interesting. Everybody teaches differently. Weâ€™re all teaching, okay? So I had these Lieutenants that came in, and they were green. They hadnâ€™t commanded a Company. And so every afternoon at 5:00, weâ€™d sit down in my office with all my Company Commanders and weâ€™d go over the day. â€œWhat did you do today? What went well?â€ â€œWell, I did this, and I thought it was pretty good.â€ Other guys hear it. â€œWhat did you do today?â€ â€œWell, you know, I had a hard time because this happened.â€ And everybody, donâ€™t do that. And so we taught these guys by learning from the others. The thing is if someone says, â€œI goofed,â€ you donâ€™t give them a bad efficiency report, because everyone in the Army goofs all the time. Show me a guy whoâ€™s not doing anything and itâ€™s the guy that never makes a mistake. Those that do things make mistakes. And so we trained them. I got a letter, oh, a couple years ago, from a guy, and it said, â€œBoy, I remember the way we had training.â€

He said, â€œYou know, next to my father, you taught me more than anybody.â€ You love

to get letters like that, but itâ€™s all training.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Now, when you were talking about increasing the number of soldiers in the field - MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Yes.

Interviewer:

That sounds like a little bit of - did operations research play into figuring that out, or can you tell me a little bit about that?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, the operations research - well, you run an outfit, we wanted to be results-oriented, okay? You know the difference between results-oriented. You talk to your Battalion Commander and said, "Well, what have you done recently?" "Well, I had 70 ambushes." "Good, good, 70 ambushes. How many of those made contact?" "One." "Well, thatâ€™s not very good; youâ€™re not planning right." So you donâ€™t want to be activity-oriented, which is 70; you want to be results-oriented, how many times you make contact. And so we pushed that, and a lot of people about the Ninth Division said, "Oh, they were results-oriented. No wonder all their guys said they had these contacts. They didnâ€™t." So we kept statistics, okay? And in a six months period - these numbers are very close to correct - that we would have 20,000 ambushes, for an example. How many made contact? We found out that less than 15% made contact. So the troops reported they didnâ€™t have it. So if 85% of our activities didnâ€™t get the enemy, doesnâ€™t mean your pressure is too much, but weâ€™re keeping, you know. And you got to learn to give attaboys. Thatâ€™s something that you - we promoted people, we gave good efficiency reports for those that are promoting. The Army lives on attaboys, the personal, and a lot of people are very reluctant to give attaboys.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Now, with Ninth Infantry Division, like youâ€™re talking about, one of the things that most students know about is Operation Speedy Express. Could you tell us a little bit about that operation?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, Operation Speedy Express, I didnâ€™t even know it existed, okay? And I was Chief of Staff. I followed everything closely. What happens is Fourth Corps decided they were going to have an operation to maximize the number of hamlets that we put under control of the military. And because of this, they gave us air capabilities. We had enough previous to that for only two of our Brigades, and they gave us enough for the third Brigade, which happened to be the one in Fourth Corps. And so in the delta, if you didnâ€™t have air capabilities, you couldnâ€™t get anything done. If you go out with a Brigade without air, you get one contact. You go with air, you get 13. Youâ€™d improved it that much. So when this Fourth Corps drive went on, which happened in the spring of '75, which they now term in the newspapers Operation Speedy Express.

That was not an operation we used within the Division. But they gave us the air assets and we went and used them to good effect, and we got a lot of improvement in the contacts we had and the enemy that was killed. When you figure out how much enemy we had down there, even when the U.S. left, the Vietnamese and the Cambodians were getting 25% attrition of the enemy. And we were getting close to 40% with all our capability and our leadership and our equipment and our ammunition. So I have no apologies. I donâ€™t know what this Speedy Express - everybody gets upset about it. You teach it, but Speedy Express was nothing more than eliminate the enemy, get as many hamlets as you have under government control. And what we did, we always conducted our operations looking at the hamlet evaluation survey.

Which hamlets were under enemy control? Go and defeat the enemy in that area. Which

hamlets were contested? See if you can build those up. And so we got that hamlet. The Vietnamese loved this - I'm talking about the government over there. They gave that Division a lot of medals, gave it a lot of? Issued a lot of credit. Even today, I talk to them, they talk about the North Vietnamese in their publications said pacification by the Vietnamese improved tremendously in the delta. That was our pacification. They admitted it. So everyone says, "You killed a lot of people." We pacified a lot of people.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Now, how did the civilian side work with the military side of pacification?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

CORDS?

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, we thought we were working hand in glove with CORDS. I'm a firm believer in CORDS. I think CORDS is absolutely essential. Mind you, understand people don't understand the war over there is that first of all, you understand it to get the most people, most land, okay? And then how you going to do it? It's a complex promise that you pacify. Three steps to pacification, okay? The first step, you drive off the enemy. Security. You don't have security, you don't have pacification. And the second step, you go in and you improve the infrastructure that you have. You can do that with the RSPF. You do that with the National Police. And the third step, which is extremely important, you go in and you build up their wells, you build their schools, you build their roads. But first of all, you've got to have security, okay? So pacification works two ways. The Vietcong could come in and drive off the U.S. and put their infrastructure in, and then they're pacifying.

So we're both trying to pacify. And so CORDS did a tremendous job, but now when did the Vietnamese put all their apples together? In 1967 they formed what they call a Ministry of Rural Developments, okay? When did we put our act together? We put our act together in November of 1967, and we started CORDS. None of that worked until after Tet, and Tet was in May. So Tet was the divining time. Up until Tet, we were doing attrition. After Tet, we were doing pacification. But before Tet, we had no means for pacification. What happened to Tet, they call it a general offensive, general uprising, the North Vietnamese do. They said they're going to have an uprising. They didn't get the uprising. In fact, they teed off the people. The people came to the government and said, "We got to protect ourself." "How you going to do that?" Well, they work up this formula; they'd get three teams of three people, with two instructors, and they'd give them weapons. They called it the People's Self-Defense Force. That grew from May of 1968 in one year over a million people. Over two years, two million people. These were those that pacified. After Tet, the RFPF stood up, these little guys. They said, "God, we got to build up the RFPF." When did they do it? They brought them under the Army. Up until that time, they had been under ARVN. They had not. They said, "We're going to give them our weapons," so they gave them the M16s. And so they started building up the RFPF. They're the ones that do pacification. You drive them away? They're the ones that do it. So pacification really started full-bore about November 1968.

Up until that time, you didn't have it. Now, you read these books - I don't want to get into it - about people don't understand what [McMoreland] was doing. [McMoreland] had his finger in the dike, trying to stop it. Abrams came along and pushed it past him, because we had CORDS, we had the government. They could come in and make these Rural Development Teams. You go and teach a fellow how to plow, how to plant, how to do this. And so as far as I'm concerned, working with CORDS was the only way to win the war.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Some folks have called the Mekong Delta the ultimate quagmire, and so with your engineering background and your experience working in Holland with the water, how did you overcome the problems posed by the waterlogged terrain?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, you know, first of all, you can't - the French were doing a good job. They built the canals down there. They tried to get the water under control. The thing about it is it's a quagmire because your rice fields take water to grow, so you're in the planting season, you're always up to your necks in the water. The troops, we figured out you couldn't leave them over 48 hours, or they get these foot diseases. And I don't think they've ever solved that problem. You know, in Cambodia, the war stopped when they had the flooding of the lake up there, because it went from being a small body of water 5 feet deep, to a body 45 feet deep, 800 miles. So you learn to live with what you have there, and the quagmire is just not a quagmire. You've got the wrong word. That's the rice bowl of Vietnam. That's where the agriculture was. That's where they grew the stuff, because of the water situation. There was no quagmire. That's a misnomer.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Now, later - well, go back to your time as Chief of Staff.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Yes.

Interviewer:

What else did you do as Chief of Staff? When did you end that job?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, I went down there in May, and then that October our Brigade Commander, he and I were flying together when it happened. We got shot down, and he got burned up. Plane crashed and a bunch of people killed. They said, "Will Jim take over the Brigade?" So I went out and took over the Brigade for a month and a half.

Interviewer:

Who was that that got wounded or injured?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Henry Emerson.

Interviewer:

Okay. And so then you took over which Brigade?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Took over the Brigade, yeah. And then when we got a replacement for him, then I went back to be Chief of Staff, and they extended me, so I actually was 13 months Chief of Staff. But then that fall, the Brigade Commander - it happened to be the same Brigade, First Brigade - Gerassi - wife had a terrible accident, and the family. He had to go back home. So I went over and took the Brigade for the second time. And so I used to get along well with the soldiers of the Brigade. They called me "rice paddy daddy" over there, and we got - because making the Brigade Command easy, you sit there and you watch the patterns. Everything's a pattern, you know. You see the infiltration routes, how they do, how they operate, and you go out and you put it into effect. If everybody could sit at a G3 desk and see how things are going, you could go out and be a great commander.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. And so what year was this, when you were commanding?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

I took over in September of '68 for a month and a half, then I went back in February 22, '69 -

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

And then I've stayed on. And finally they said that they were going to pull the Ninth Division out, and so I stayed on an extra month over there to help the new Commander. We have a new Division Commander, and he asked me to stay on, so I did. So I had 13 months of Chief's time.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Who was the new Division Commander?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Great guy. You're asking me things right now - I could tell you five minutes from now, but right now -

Interviewer:

Yes sir. We'll just move on then. So after that, then what did you do?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

After that, I came back and they decided that the Army had all this equipment, and that it wasn't coordinated. They didn't know what to develop. They didn't know what to do. And we've just been over there in a guerilla-type environment, whatever you want to call it, for six or eight years, and they decided that we had to form an organization to pull everything together. So that was given my job, and I became head of Battlefield Systems Integration. So I went out and got water walkers, guys that could understand technology as well as leaders, and we then decided what the Army should have, and figured out where the gaps, what was needed. And we did that for, oh, a couple of years, and then I retired.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Now, at one point, you mentioned that you were in charge of the investigation into My Lai?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Yes.

Interviewer:

How did all that - how did you get assigned that job?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Beats the hell - I mean how you get assigned anything, I don't - I was running the Engineer School.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

And they put me on orders to be the Investigating Officer to the Brigade Commander, Colonel Henderson. Everything went through Henderson. The fellow that was covering up, the Battalion Commander, got killed. So then you have the Company Commander, Medina, and under him you had a nut by the name of Calley, who should never have been an Officer. When I ran OCS, I'd never let a guy like Calley get out of OCS. If they couldn't do leadership, they wouldn't get anything. And up above, you had the Division Staff, you know, General Coster and those. And so Henderson was the linchpin between everybody, and so it took me six months to do this Article 32. Had to go from the top to bottom, the whole Division, up and down. So I made my report, and - I reported that I thought Henderson was dumb. I didn't use those words, but he had made a - negligently done his investigation.

But the lawyers thought that they could prove a case that he was complicit. Complicit means he was working with the people down below. There wasn't a case at all. So I told the appointing authority that I thought they should give him an Article 15. I said, "Nobody's been tagged for this. You put him under General Court-martial and he will not get court-martialed. You can't court-martial him. Nobody's going to court-martial him." They wouldn't listen to me, so they listened to the lawyers, and they put

him under General Court-martial, and he got off, because he was not complicit. And so therefore they ended up with nobody getting tagged. The only one they got was this guy Calley, who single-handedly killed 100 people. He was a nut. But that was criminal, not covering up investigations, not doing this. And there are two things, you know, when Westmoreland said, "We want this investigated."

Criminal activities were put under one group; the Peers group handled those, who, "Why didn't we know this? How could you cover up this? What was happening?" So that was the other half. So the only one that got tagged was Calley, which was the criminal side. The other people, to be honest with you, thought they were following orders; in other words, it's hard to separate an improper order from what - and it was really messy. The way that they gave orders - although I wrote in my report I thought Medina was not purposely giving a bad order, but it was interpreted that way. You understand what I mean?

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

The soldiers thought he was giving a bad order, that he wanted everybody killed, but he did not. And that was proven out because they gave him a lie detector test and it came out clear, that he did not give an improper order.

Interviewer:

And then at the end of the American involvement in Vietnam, you were running an organization on that side -

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

I was Deputy Commander of USAG.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

In other words, MACV was formed into USAG, and the whole idea of USAG is to help the Vietnamese fight the war. And on top of that, they gave us responsibility for overseeing Cambodia, the war going on in Cambodia. So we oversaw that. I went into - I had known the Chief of Staff from my Ninth Division time. So I went over, I knew General Vien, their Chief of Staff, I knew General Ta, their Operations Officer, because I coordinated with them when we were over there. And I said, "Well, how's the war going?" So he gave me a briefing. Man, nobody knew how the war was going. They had four different Corps. Each Corps was different; had different troops, had different terrain, had different population, had different weather. Nothing was pulling it together. And so United States was really upset, Washington, the war was still going on. So I said to General Vien, "Who's creating all these offenses?"

They wanted to know who was doing it. And he said, "Well, we have a report on every incident." I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah." "What's in that report?" He said, "Well, how big the enemy was, how many people were killed, how many we were killed, what time it was." I said, "Same stuff I used in the Ninth Division to do operations research." I said, "Oh my God, that's wonderful information." I said, "Look, I have a whole bevy of computer experts over there." They'd called off the air war; these guys are out of the Joint Headquarters. I said, "I can take this information, and I'll run it through, and I'll give you a report every week. You give me your reports daily, and every week I'll tell you how you're running the war." They thought that was a great idea. So that's what started telling them how we knew how well we're doing, and let me tell you, the North Vietnamese were beating up. They were not doing anything. The first thing that came out was obvious.

That the U.S. was leaning on them, and anything they took offensively, they called

â€œsecurity operation,â€ and they werenâ€™t doing very much. 90% of it was done by the North Vietnamese. And General Vien wanted every hamlet protected. They had 12,000 hamlets; 10,000 that they were trying to protect, okay? So I told him, â€œAfter our people analyze this, itâ€™s obvious to us that if you donâ€™t take the offensive, youâ€™re going to lose your country. â€œCause theyâ€™re picking the point, you know; they get the maximum pressure, and they take over these hamlets or villages. Youâ€™ve got to take the offensive.â€ So they took the offensive, and when they took the offensive, they were better effectively. They were better efficiently. They were beating up on the North Vietnamese. By May of that year - they took the offensive in December, when I gave them my first report - they gained back all their territory, and theyâ€™re beating up on the North Vietnamese. All this stuff about the North Vietnamese was ten feet tall was bull.

Man for man, the North Vietnamese were better. Now, I knew the Thais very well. Why did I know the Thais? Because in the Ninth Division, the Queens Cohort - thatâ€™s their elite thing - came under us, and they reported to me every day as Chief of Staff, okay? I knew the Cambodians very well; I was following that war minutely. And I knew the North Vietnamese â€œcause I fought against them. And the South Vietnamese ARVN was better, man for man, than any of them. People donâ€™t believe that, but thatâ€™s okay.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Why were they better?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Because they were better trained, they had better equipment, they had more firepower. All those things, they lost, because we cut the funding. Everything that was good for them was bad. You know, weâ€™d sent these Officers to U.S. schools for ten years over here. You go out and visit their training centers, they ran like a U.S. training center. It was really good.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

So - but the U.S. says the ARVN was not very good. You know, they compare the U.S. soldier. U.S. soldier is better equipped, better led. We made a matrix showing, comparing U.S. vs. ARVN vs. RFPF, and you know, the U.S. we said was three times better effective, six times better than the RFPF, so thereâ€™s no question the U.S. was better, for many reasons. We are better trained, better equipped, better led. But now when you compare the South Vietnamese to the North Vietnamese, the South Vietnamese, man for man, was better.

Interviewer:

Now, in all the training that you talk about that the American soldiers received, did they get any cultural training with that, on how to interact with the Vietnamese civilians or soldiers?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

We did our best. We had - in the Ninth Division we had what we called Reliable Academy, and we sent them there. The first thing weâ€™d teach them is how to stay alive. Thatâ€™s the most important thing. Thatâ€™s what the soldier is interested in. â€œI want to go home.â€ The other thing we taught them was how to treat the people. They had little cards, how to treat the enemy, and it said, â€œRespect them. Do this,â€ â€œcause you canâ€™t have pacification if youâ€™re kicking the hell out of everybody except the enemy. You donâ€™t beat up on your friends. And so that was a very important part of our Reliable Academy. After you get out in the field, Company Commanders donâ€™t talk about that. They talk about, â€œDonâ€™t do bad things,â€ but itâ€™s a negative approach, not a positive approach; do you follow me?

Interviewer:

Yes sir, exactly. Now, did any of the unrest at home, did that filter over to you all over in the field?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, I'll give you an example. "Time" magazine came over and reported and said, "We're over here. The election's coming up. This is the '68 election. It said, "We want to see what the soldier thinks about it." I said, "They don't think anything about it." The "Time" magazine guys, two of them, say, "What are you talking about?" I said, "They only think about one thing: they want to survive. They're interested in going home. They're interested in their buddy. They're not interested in anything else." A month later, the "Time" guys were polite enough to come back and debrief me. They said, "Colonel, you were absolutely right. These guys don't care about the election. They want to survive." And so all this stuff about turmoil at home didn't effect the guys over there. Some it effected. I'm talking about in general it did not.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Now, have you returned to Vietnam since the war ended as a visitor?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

No.

Interviewer:

Okay.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

No.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

I may like to go back, but I have no interest in that.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. What have you done since the military?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, when I got out I was trying to figure out what I was going to do, and when I retired, because of my battlefield system integration, I gave so many lectures to so many people, to industry, that I got all these offers to consult. And so I was busy five days a week, eight hours a day, consulting. But I didn't like that. I wanted to belong to something that, first of all, that wasn't at home, where you're out or you're gone again. And the pay was very good, but I wanted a full-time job. So a friend of mine had a big contract in Saudi Arabia, and he was going to lose his contract; he was very unhappy. He asked me to go over and turn this contract around. The company was called Pacific Architects and Engineers. And so I went over and figured out what was wrong with his contract; it was very simple.

Wrote him up a two-page report. Next thing I know, he offers me President of the Company, so I took it over. It was an interesting time. They had most of their operations were in the Far East, in Indonesia, in Japan, bit operation in Japan, et cetera. And the biggest contract was in Saudi Arabia. So I did that. I was over there for three years. I kept my house here in McClellan. And I decided that I'd had enough of the life of California - it's a different life - and I came back home.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

I got back home, and another outfit called me up and said, "Jim, we're having trouble with a contract we're having in Saudi Arabia" - same damn play. "See what you can do." So I went over there and wrote a report, and they offered me a job then, so I stayed with them for ten years, and then I retired.

Interviewer:



Yes sir. Now, have any of your children followed in your footsteps?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

No. No. My boys both took ROTC.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

And they got very unhappy with my being gone. I didn't mention one thing to you, but I used to get down to the ground with the soldiers, okay? And one day a guy opened up on me about ten yards away - even closer - and I fell to the ground, 'cause people thought I'd been shot, but I was just trying to get out of the way. And so they reported back in the States about it. My wife got calls that morning, said, 'Oh Mary, it was so bad. Your husband got killed,' they reported me killed. And my children went to school, the teacher said, 'What are you doing in school? Your daddy's just been killed.' So it's hard on the women, so that went through - my kids didn't like that at all.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

I don't know how many people ever had that happen to them, but it was shortly thereafter, I had an R&R coming up, so I told my wife, 'Bring all four kids over.' They went down to get the airline ticket, it's the biggest airline ticket they ever had. I brought all five over.

Interviewer:

Where did you do R&R?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

At Hawaii.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Yeah.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Now you mention that your wife getting calls from folks saying that you'd been killed, and your children finding out about it at school. How was casualty notification handled during Vietnam?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, you know, this is on TV.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

It came over TV, so my wife, Mary, wouldn't believe it. So she called up my old office in the Secretary of Defense. She talked to Captain Cooke, Doc Cooke. She says, 'Doc, Jim's reported killed. Is that true?' Then Cooke with the DoD, you know, called Chief of Staff's Office, and says, 'Colonel Hunt's been reported killed. Is that true?' And so the next thing I know I get a phone call from Bill Knowlton, and he says, 'Jim?' I said, 'Yeah.' He said, 'You okay?' 'Yeah, Bill, fine.' He was our Assistant Division Commander; he also worked in the Chief of Staff's Office. I said, 'What's up?' He said, 'Don't do anything. Mary wants to talk to you.' And then that upset me; I thought, 'Something's wrong with the kids. Why would she want to talk to me?' at that time it was 2:00 in the morning. I said, 'Oh my God,' I had to wait two minutes, and it's an eternity I was waiting. So I said, 'Honey, you all right?' 'I'm fine. Jimmy, you all right?' 'I'm great. How's the kids?' It was an inane conversation. I didn't know what the hell was going on.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

So I hung up and I said, "What was this all about?" I had no idea I'd been reported killed. And then some days later, I found out what the story was. But that's the way she found out I wasn't killed, see; no reporting by official things. It was just some AP guy. What the soldiers did, "The Colonel" got it. He just bought the farm. And you could see me go down. Well, the reason was there was a guy in a bunker not far away. You know, 15 feet isn't very far. I'm looking at this guy, and I fell in a depression, thank God. He couldn't get me in a depression. I didn't dare look up; I just laid there for a good amount of time. And one of the reasons I was down on the ground, I was trying to rescue people out of an airplane that'd been shot down. All of a sudden they cooked off - you know, cook off, blew up, gone. Metal fell everywhere, hot metal over everybody. I looked up to see if this guy was still looking at me.

And I saw an Infantryman reach over the back of the bunker - phew - shot the guy. So then I got up and went back to work.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Boy, that's an incredible story.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

No, a true story.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Now, in all your years, because you're back here for your reunion, you grew up here, you taught here, you've been back many times, have you seen the Academy change much?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Oh, tremendously. I've seen the Academy get better and better and better. You know, I'm not one of these, "It's going to hell." What amazes me is I always get up early. This morning I got up at 6:00 and went to your Chapel up here at 6:20, and there's Cadets out running. When I was here, you'd be out of your mind to get up at 6:00 and do exercise. No, it's really true. But your system is not the same. Your system's gone to hell. Cadets are getting better, no question about it. The product is better. But I can't comprehend not having a grade every day, not reporting every day. I can't comprehend the fact that you don't Section people anymore. That, to me, was a strength. I just told you one of the reasons.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

And I can't comprehend not marching to Mess Hall, or wandering around. Those are things that are so inane. But it's not changing the product. It's just changing the system.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

And I got to learn to change the system. You're getting more like an Ivy League school.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Now, if you could give today's Cadets any piece of advice, what would that be?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Do the best you can. That's all life is about. Everybody gives these fancy ideas, but do the best you can.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Now, is there anything I haven't asked you.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

I tell you what, I -

Interviewer:

That youâ€™d like to say.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

When the Sup was - when I reported in, heâ€™d been my Commander in Trieste, and he liked me. He said, â€œJim, I want you to live on Post. I want you to be my Aide, semi-official.â€ And so whenever he had visitors come in, heâ€™d say, â€œJim, go down and pick up.â€ One of the men I picked up was Douglas Southall Freeman. Are you -

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Youâ€™re obviously very familiar with Freeman. Now, Freeman gave a talk to Cadets. They loved it. It was a nice talk. And on the way back, he said, â€œWell, Captain,â€ he said, â€œyou know, my advice to anybody is this,â€ and he says, â€œmake the most of the scraps of time.â€ Iâ€™ll never forget that. Thatâ€™s Douglas Southall - â€œMake the most of the scraps of time.â€

Interviewer:

Yes sir. And who was the Superintendent at the time? Who were your Superintendent?

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Brian Moore.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Okay.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Brian Moore was the guy that went over and took II Corps and said, â€œIâ€™ll give you an Infantry Battalion,â€ when I was just a Captain.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

That never came to fruition.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Yes sir.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

I told him that. I said, â€œYouâ€™re crazy.â€

Interviewer:

Well, thank you so much for being with us here today. This was a tremendous interview.

Thank you.

MG Ret. Ira Hunt:

Well, I hope so. I donâ€™t know. We only touched part of it. We jumped through a lot of stuff we didnâ€™t get to, but thank you for having me. Itâ€™s only 4:00. You didnâ€™t take very long.