

Interviewer:

Good afternoon. Today is 13 November 2015, and I am in the Center for Oral History with Mr. Kenneth G. Carlson; and how are you, sir?

Kenneth Carlson:

Iâ€™m fine, thank you.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Could you please spell your last name for us?

Kenneth Carlson:

C-A-R-L-S-O-N.

Interviewer:

And youâ€™re not the only Carlson in your class, are you?

Kenneth Carlson:

I am not the only Carlson in my class. Thereâ€™s another guy with the same name, Kenneth Carlson, and he is Kenneth R. Carlson. He was a wrestler. Iâ€™m Kenneth G. Carlson. I was sort of a basketball player.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Did that cause any problems for you?

Kenneth Carlson:

Absolutely. The day I reported in to the gymnasium, I walked in the door, you know, with my little bag, and the people who had the roster there said, â€œYouâ€™ve already signed in.â€ I said, â€œNo, I havenâ€™t. I just walked in the door the first time.â€ They said, â€œKenneth Carlson. You just - youâ€™ve already signed in.â€ And I said, â€œI really have not.â€ And they said, â€œOh my gosh, thereâ€™s two of them, Kenneth G. and Kenneth R.â€

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

Kenneth Carlson:

So when we were in Beast Barracks, I was getting his laundry, which was much too small for me, and he was getting my laundry, which was then - so now our classmates know me as Ken Carlson, Large. And he used to be Ken Carlson, Small, but he didnâ€™t like that, so heâ€™s not Ken Carlson, Handsome, and Iâ€™m Ken Carlson, Large. And it works out fine. He became an F.B.I. agent.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. As long as youâ€™re good with it, Iâ€™m fine with it.

Kenneth Carlson:

Ah, yeah, Iâ€™m happy with that.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Tell me a little bit about your background - where youâ€™re from and where you grew up.

Kenneth Carlson:

Iâ€™m an Army brat. I was born in Detroit. My father deployed to World War II just after my birth. He went to the Pacific as an Army Officer. He was going to be part of the invasion of Japan from the Philippines. He was an Ordnance Officer, which is why we were in Detroit. He came back - no, Iâ€™m sorry, he did not come back. My mother and my brother and I went to Japan after the war was over, and we were part of MacArthurâ€™s Pioneers.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

We lived in Yokohama, and my brother played with Arthur MacArthur - they were both about the same age - and he went to school through some sort of a mail order program. And I was two years old at the time. I learned to speak Japanese before I learned to speak English, because I had an amah who taught me Japanese.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

Kenneth Carlson:

And a little blond-headed boy, you know, walking around saying [Japanese phrase]. So anyway, when we came back I was three years old, and letâ€™s see, where did we goâ€¦oh, we went to the Naval War College. My dad was a war - they didnâ€™t send him to the Army War College, â€™cause they wanted him to transfer into the Air Force, the brand new Air Force, but my father wanted nothing to do with the Air Force. And so they said, â€œWell, youâ€™re a rising guy.â€ You know, heâ€™s an O6 by that point in time. â€œSo weâ€™ve got to get you some purple experience.â€ So they sent him to the Naval War College, which was pretty cool. We enjoyed that time, although I was too young to really remember it. And then we moved around for 16 or 17 more times, until he finally ended up in the - well, we ended up in Vietnam as a family.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

Iâ€™ve got a little article here that Iâ€™m going to give you a copy of. This was from â€œVietnamâ€ magazine.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

Kenneth Carlson:

And I published an article in this, and this is 2009, called â€œMy Whole Family Served in Vietnam.â€ Itâ€™s a two-page article. But the interesting part about it is a lot of people say, â€œMy dad served, my brother served.â€ Not many people can say, â€œMy mom served in Vietnam, too.â€

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

Kenneth Carlson:

But my dad was the Deputy Chief of the MAG under Hanging Sam Williams, from World War II. He got the name â€œHanging Samâ€ because he was in charge of the executions at Nuremberg.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

He was a Lieutenant General, and he was the head of 50 or 60 Americans in the country. My dad was a Brigadier, and there was one other Brigadier. So we lived in a very nice mansion, with servants, and drivers, and all that kind of stuff, but they had to go on the social circuit every night, for three or four things a night. And it was really bothering my mother for two reasons. She started to become an alcoholic, but secondly, she was standing in high heels on marble stuff for hours on end every day, and it was beginning to hurt her back. So in the middle of my second year there -

Interviewer:

What year was this, sir?

Kenneth Carlson:

This was 19â€¦letâ€™s think here. 1957-58.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Kenneth Carlson:

Okay? I got there in â€™57 and we came home at the end of â€™58, so I was there for two years. And at one conference that my dad was coming out of, he lingered for a few seconds after the conference. You know, all these Generals are very well-timed as to where theyâ€™re supposed to be and when. He lingered to talk to somebody at the conference, and a huge planter outside the office building where this thing was blew up. It was targeted for him.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

He was supposed to be killed by this planter exploding. So my mother was a little upset about that. And then three weeks later, the Viet Minh - they weren't Vietcong at that time - the Viet Minh drove by on a motorcycle and threw a hand grenade under my school bus. Of course, the school bus was moving, so, and I was sitting up front, thankfully, but it blew up the back of the school bus, and a lot of kids were cut up pretty badly. So within a period of a month, they tried to kill my dad, and they tried to kill me, and my mother then was becoming frantic. So just at that point in time, SINCPAC sent orders to Vietnam that said, "We want General Carlson to go to Laos, and take his family to Laos to start the MAAG in Laos, which had - there wasn't anybody there except Laotians, and I presume some North Vietnamese. And he said, "No, I'm not going to, I can't do that." So he and my mom stayed up all night one night writing a letter back to SINCPAC, which it ended up being stamped "Top Secret," as to the reasons why they couldn't do that.

My brother was still here at West Point. He hadn't been with his family for two years. They're trying to kill us. A lot of different things. Anyway, they rescinded those orders and he was sent back to the Pentagon, where he got promoted too for his second star, and retired in 1962.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. How was it living in Vietnam for you? Except for the hand grenade under the bus.

Kenneth Carlson:

Except for the bad parts?

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Kenneth Carlson:

I had a lot of fun in Vietnam. I mean I was a 13, 14-year-old kid. I had a diplomatic immunity card, and so -

Interviewer:

That's dangerous.

Kenneth Carlson:

That got me and my friends out of a lot of trouble, because I'd just flash this at the white mice, and they'd go, "Oh, I got to let these teenagers go." But we only went to school in the morning, because it was too hot in the afternoon to be able to stay in these quonset hut classrooms. And so in the afternoon we all went to the Cercle Sportif in Saigon, which if - were you - you weren't in Vietnam, no. But that's the French sports club. It was about a block and a half from my house, near the Presidential Palace, and it was still populated by French girls, 'cause their parents were still working in Vietnam, even after the French left. So I would go over there, and I was learning French in school, but I really learned French by talking to the girls in the bikinis. At 14 years old, I had to be able to communicate with these women.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

Kenneth Carlson:

So I had a pretty good time. We went to Hong Kong. We went to India and took some side trips. And then we finally came home in late 1958, and we went - instead of back across the Pacific, we went around the world, came back through Paris, and I flew across the Atlantic on the second 707 to ever cross the Atlantic.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

The first one that went from New York from Paris, we got the return flight and went from Paris back to New York.

Interviewer:

That's exciting.

Kenneth Carlson:

And that's the first jet, of course, I'd ever been on.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Now, a second ago you said "white mice."

Kenneth Carlson:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Some of our listeners might not know what you're talking about.

Kenneth Carlson:

Oh. That's the Vietnamese police.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Kenneth Carlson:

They all wear full white uniforms, and they've got, you know, a cross-belt and all that stuff, and a revolver. But when you see them, that was the white mice.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. All right, so I imagine you learned to speak French pretty well, then.

Kenneth Carlson:

I was a pretty good French speaker. I took it throughout high school. I took it here and I got into advanced French, and I've used it during times in Europe, but if you don't use it, you lose it.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

Kenneth Carlson:

So.

Interviewer:

Did you learn any Vietnamese?

Kenneth Carlson:

No.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Kenneth Carlson:

Well, I learned Vietnamese swear words.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

Kenneth Carlson:

We all knew those.

Interviewer:

Of course. So what year did you arrive at West Point? Was that '62?

Kenneth Carlson:1962.

Interviewer:

Okay. And what was your expectation when you showed up?

Kenneth Carlson:

Well, first let me say my dad did not want me to come to West Point. He's a '31 graduate.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Kenneth Carlson:

My brother's a '61 graduate, and he said, "Look, Ken, you are a National Merit Scholar. You have other opportunities. You've got Ivy League schools who are trying to recruit you to come. Why don't you do that?" And I said, "I think I will. I think

lâ€™ll go to Princeton.â€ And then President Kennedy gave his famous speech about  
â€œLet every nation know, whether they wish us well or ill, that we will go anywhere, pay  
any price, to protect liberty.â€ And I said, â€œDad, lâ€™ve changed my mind. I want to go  
to West Point.â€ And I had an appointment already, so I had a choice. And he said,  
â€œAre you sure, because itâ€™s not going to be pleasant?â€ And I said, â€œlâ€™ve  
heard stories from you, and lâ€™ve heard other stories from Gunnar,â€ my brother,  
â€œand so I will be prepared.â€ Well, when I walked in the door, I was too well prepared,  
because we had - you know, you pick up and drop your bag. The first day, when the man in  
the red sash tells you to drop your bag, you drop your bag. Well, I set mine down. â€œPick  
it back up, smackhead. I told you to drop your bag.â€ And I dropped my bag and it  
bounced, because I had filled it with foam rubber to protect all of my shaving gear and stuff  
that was in there.

And so the guy looked at it and said, â€œYour bag just bounced. Open that up.â€ And  
they saw all the foam rubber and stuff, and they said, â€œOh, itâ€™s one of these guys  
who knows all the inside stuff.â€ And then they learned my father was a General, and at  
that point in time, my Plebe year was toast. I mean there werenâ€™t enough First  
Classmen in the world who could get my neck to go back.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. So it was a challenge.

Kenneth Carlson:

It was a challenge. But I was a good student. I was on the Honor Roll most of the time. I  
graduated 57th in my class, out of 579, so I -

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

Sneaked into the top 10%. But I was not a Star Man, but I didnâ€™t have any academic  
problems. One of the things that they did with me was my Tactical Officer called me in one  
day. Itâ€™s never a good idea to have to be called in by the TAC, but he called me in, and  
said, â€œI need your help.â€ And I said, â€œYou need my help?â€ This is when I was a  
Cow. And he said, â€œYeah, I need to give you a new roommate.â€ And I said,  
â€œWhoâ€™s that, sir?â€ And he said, â€œKevin Kelly.â€ I said, â€œWell, lâ€™d be  
happy to room with Kevin. Whatâ€™s the problem?â€ Heâ€™s in the ejection seat.â€  
Which means he currently stands last in the class, and if he goes deficient in anything,  
heâ€™s gone - and he was a great hockey player. So he said, â€œlâ€™m moving him in  
with you because youâ€™re the closest thing weâ€™ve got in this Company to a Star  
Man, and I want you to help him with academics.â€ So I said lâ€™d be happy to do that.  
Well, Kevin would come home from hockey practice, and he would say, â€œI need to rest  
my eyes for just a little bit,â€ you know.

So he would lie down on his bed, and lâ€™d say, â€œHey, weâ€™re having a written  
general review tomorrow in Electrical Engineering. Are you prepared for that?â€ And he  
said, â€œNo, not very well, but come over and tell me what I need to know.â€ So I read to  
him while he was sleeping, okay? And actually, I brought him up 11 files. When he  
graduated, he was 11th from the bottom; when I moved in with him, he was at the bottom.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

Kenneth Carlson:

So I succeeded. He ended up becoming a doctor. Actually, he was an OB/GYN. Thankfully,  
I never had to see him, but I said, â€œIf I ever woke up on an operating table and I saw  
Kevin Kelly with a knife standing over me, I would die right there on the spot.â€ Because  
he wasnâ€™t the sharpest tack in the drawer, but he was a really good guy, and lâ€™m  
glad he graduated.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. Thatâ€™s a wonderful story. And you said you played basketball a little.

Kenneth Carlson:

I did. I played for Bobby Knight.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Kenneth Carlson:

When he was the Plebe Coach.

Interviewer:

Right.

Kenneth Carlson:

And Mike Silliman, the All-American, was one of my roommates in Beast Barracks. So Bobby was a Spec 4 when he was working for Tates Locke, who was the Coach at that time, and they asked him - Tates wanted to move to South Carolina, and they asked Bobby Knight if he would be the Head Coach. And he said, "Yeah, but I'm only a Spec 4 in the Army." And they said, "Well, no, you won't be in the Army. We'll get you out of the Army, and we're going to make you the Head Coach." He said, "Will I make as much as a Spec 4?" And somebody wrote a number on a piece of paper and said, "This is what we're going to pay you." And he said, "Okay, I'll do it." But Bobby Knight is a hands-on coach. I mean he would grab you, you know. He used to - we had buckets. Not bottles of water; we had buckets of water. He used to kick the bucket of water. He threw chairs across the court in the middle of basketball games and got thrown out of the basketball game. But he was a super basketball coach.

And now he used to - until Mike Krzyzewski took over, he was the guy who had won the most basketball games in collegiate history.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

So I only played for him for a year and a half, though, and then I realized that I was not going to be a starter, and that he and I didn't really get along very well - probably my fault. So I left the basketball team and I went to other activities.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. And so as you progressed through, and you get ready to Branch, what was in your mind? What were you thinking about for Branches?

Kenneth Carlson:

We all had to go, in the class of '66, we all had to go to Ranger School, because they did not send us to the Basic Course. And they figured maybe if you went to Ranger School, you might learn enough about combat that you could actually succeed in Vietnam, where we all knew we were going.

Interviewer:

Right.

Kenneth Carlson:

So I said, "Look - this was at Buckner I made this decision, that I wanted to go Armor. Because I was learning all these Infantry skills, but they put us in a big concrete trench one day, and they showed us a tank attack that was coming at us, a Platoon of tanks. One would appear, and then another would appear, and pretty soon there are all five of them. And they come up, and they drive right over the ditch. And they tell everybody, "Get your head down," you know - right over the ditch. And I said, "You know, when I'm commissioned, I want to be the guy in the tank, not the guy in the ditch." And that's why I wanted to go Armor.

Interviewer:

Yes sir. And you were high enough that you got it.

Kenneth Carlson:

Oh yeah. But -

Interviewer:

Were there any other classmates that were higher?

Kenneth Carlson:

Yes. Wesley Clark was the number one man in our class, and usually the top guys go Engineers, with some exceptions. Well, sometimes there's a guy who's the number one man in class who's so gung-ho that he wants to go Infantry. But Wes stood up and said, "Armor," and I went, "Oh my gosh, there goes my chance to go to Berlin," where I desperately wanted to go from an experience that I'd had there earlier. And so at the end of all of this, I said, "Where are you thinking about going, Wes?" And he said, "Well, I'm choosing between Munich and Berlin." And I said, "Think quick, Ken; this is the smartest guy in the class." Okay, so I said, "Wes, you do not want to go to Munich. Munich is in Bavaria. It is nothing but blondes and beer, and you'll not ever learn to be a Platoon Leader if you go down there." So of course Wes chose Munich, and I was the next guy to pick, and I went for Berlin.

Kenneth Carlson:

Okay. And how was Berlin?

Kenneth Carlson:

Berlin was 90 miles behind the Iron Curtain. Am I doing all right?

Interviewer:

You're doing great.

Kenneth Carlson:

Okay. Berlin was 90 miles behind the Iron Curtain, and the Berlin Brigade, located there, had three Infantry Battalions, one Tank Company, one Artillery Battery, and one Air Helicopter Detachment. And then of course, the Brits also had a Brigade there, and the French had a Brigade. We were occupying West Berlin, and the Russians were occupying East Berlin. So I went in as a Platoon Leader of Company F, 40th Armor, and the Company Commander was 34 years old, a guy who had a lot of experience, and he said, "So when did you graduate from the Basic Course?" And I said, "Sir, I haven't been to the Basic Course." He said, "What?" I said, "None of us went to the Basic Course; they sent us through Airborne and Ranger Schools, and then out to you." And he said, "What do you know about tanks?" I said, "Not very much, sir, but I'm willing to learn." And he said, "Well, unfortunately, you can't just learn by experience -

So here's what I'm going to do." It was January of 1967. He said, "I'm going to send you to the NCO Tank Commander Course at Vilseck in West Germany, and you're going to be there with a bunch of Sergeants, but you're going to learn everything about a tank." That was the smartest thing he ever did. I mean he was a great Commander, but he sent me down there and I learned how to take apart and put tanks back together again, in the Motor Pool, in the mud. And when I came back, you know, the troops were no longer able to make fun of me. Before I left, I'm sitting out there trying to figure out how to make the tank turret slew and all that, and one of the Sergeants comes up and says, "Sir, how many times have you done that, turning it this way?" And I said, "I don't know." And he said, "You got to keep track of that, 'cause if you turn it 52 times, it falls off. It unscrews and falls off." So I'm putting stuff in the log book that says, you know, "Here's the number of times that I've turned the tank," and the troops just thought this was hilarious.

And then I'm out, again in the Motor Pool - that's where I lived. I went out and one of these guys took the external interphone off of an M68-1 tank, and he handed it to me and said, "Sir, you've got a long-distance call from America." I said, "I do?" So I picked it up, and the guy on the inside of the tank said, "Hi, Kenny, it's Mommy." And by this time, I'm going, "What?" And then of course everybody's going, "Oh my God, we got the Lieutenant again. He's got a lot to learn."

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

Kenneth Carlson:

So - but it ended up being a very good experience. One of the more interesting things that

happened to me was we had this Immediate Reaction Platoon that had to go out in ten minutesâ€™ notice, because we had to be at a Checkpoint Charlie if the Russians started making news and screwing things up again. So one night my Platoon was in - we all had to live in the barracks when that happened. One night my Platoon was called out at 4:00 in the morning to report to a certain block in the Grunewald, which is the woods that surrounds Berlin, and they said, â€œReport to CINC USAREUR -â€œ which is the Commander in Chief, United States Army, Europe, four stars - at block 68.â€ Well, I hadnâ€™t been a Platoon Leader very long, so Iâ€™m smart enough to know that I needed to turn to my Platoon Sergeant and say, â€œWell, you lead the column, and Iâ€™ll be the second in line.â€ He said to me, â€œSir, I know where block 68 is blindfolded.â€ So we got out there, and there was General - I think of his name in a minute. But he was the CINC USAREUR, and I reported to him, and he was standing there in hunting clothes next to his Mercedes. And he said, â€œLieutenant -â€œ Andrew P. Oâ€™Mara, okay? We called him A.P.O. Andrew P. Oâ€™Mara. And he said, â€œLieutenant Carlson, I want you to take your Platoon and go down to that wood line on the other end of this open area, and I want you to come through the wood line. And then when you come out of the wood line, I want you to put your unit in line, and come to me with five tanks in line driving right towards this Mercedes.â€ And I said, â€œYes sir.â€ And he said, â€œAnd I want for you to be sure to be buttoned up. Do not let me see any heads sticking out of any tanks, â€œcause I want to see if you can do this without hand signals,â€ okay? I had no clue what was coming. So we went down the road, turned into the wood line. Sergeant Ship said, â€œSir, we can line up this way. Hereâ€™s the tanks.â€ I said, â€œOkay, guys, letâ€™s go now. Everybody lock your hatches. Weâ€™re going right for the Mercedes.â€ And of course what we were doing was driving wild boar.

Interviewer:

Sure.

Kenneth Carlson:

Well, you know, I had no clue. But we drove - he got two wild boar that morning, and my Platoon pulled up right in front of his Mercedes and got out, and he said, â€œLieutenant, that was outstanding.â€ And I got a four-star Letter of Commendation as a Second Lieutenant, which is, you know, I donâ€™t think too many people get those.

Interviewer:

Do you still have that piece of paper, sir?

Kenneth Carlson:

I have it in my files somewhere, but -

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

Kenneth Carlson:

Yeah. But anyway, so my Company Commander congratulated me and my Battalion Commander congratulated me, and that was my welcome to Berlin. I met my future wife in Berlin. Sheâ€™s not a German; she was working for the State Department. And then I knew I was going to Vietnam. I was a Platoon Leader for a while, and then they picked me to be the Commanderâ€™s Aide, Brigade Commanderâ€™s Aide, which I did. And I did it for two different Brigade Commanders; Samuel Baldwin, who ended up being at Firebase Mary Ann in Vietnam as the Division Commander, and Samuel Goodwin, who retired as a Brigadier out of the Berlin Brigade. But thereâ€™s one Aide story that I need to tell you -

Interviewer:

Okay.

Kenneth Carlson:

Which is one of my favorites. Iâ€™m four days into being an Aide, and General Baldwin calls me in the office and says, â€œKen, we need to go to VIELFLECKEN. We got troops who are down there training in the zone, in West Germany. We need to go to Vielflecken,

so set up the arrangements.â€ I said, â€œSir, when do you want to go?â€ He said, â€œA day and a half from now.â€ So I come out, Iâ€™ve got a Sergeant whoâ€™s the stenographer, and Iâ€™ve got a Sergeant whoâ€™s the driver, who speaks fluent German, and I said, â€œHow do I get airplane reservations from Pan Am to get the General and I from here to Frankfurt, and then from Frankfurt back to - how do I get to Vielflecken? And can somebody give me a vehicle?â€ And Spec 6 said, â€œLieutenant, relax. Youâ€™ve got your own plane.â€ I said, â€œI do?â€ He said, â€œNo, not you, Lieutenant. The General has his own plane.â€ And I said, â€œWell, what am I supposed to do?â€ â€œAll youâ€™re supposed to do is make sure youâ€™ve got a .45 thatâ€™s loaded, make sure that you have a handcuff that you can carry the Generalâ€™s plans, because as the Berlin Brigade Commander he has to carry the contingency plans wherever he may be. So heâ€™s going to have top secret documents, and youâ€™re going to be armed.â€ And I said, â€œWell, how do I get to the airport? I have no clue.â€ And they said, â€œWeâ€™re going to pick you up in the Mercedes, and weâ€™re taking you to Tempelhof.â€ So we got to Tempelhof, and you know, thereâ€™s this old plan, a U-6. Two pilots in front, two passengers in back. Looks like a Chevrolet with wings, all right? So we got in, and the General was sitting there reading â€œTimeâ€ magazine. Of course, heâ€™s sitting on the right, and Iâ€™m sitting here. I brought my map, â€˜cause I said, â€œLook, Iâ€™m an Airborne Ranger. Iâ€™m supposed to know where I am 100% of the time.â€ And so Iâ€™m sitting there looking at the map, thinking that as we flew over East Germany he was going to say, â€œKen, what is that right down there?â€ Knowing that itâ€™s a Soviet installation, you know, he probably already knew that, so Iâ€™m expecting him to give me a quiz. So Iâ€™m sitting there; I realize suddenly that navigating from the air is not the same as navigating from the ground. You canâ€™t see the terrain features; they all look the same.

So all of a sudden, I go into this sudden panic says Iâ€™ve got to know where. But thereâ€™s - Iâ€™ll ask the pilots, okay? So how do I talk to the pilots? I know thereâ€™s got to be a way. Theyâ€™ve got a General in the back seat. Thereâ€™s got to be a way to talk to the pilots. So Iâ€™m looking around, looking around. â€œOh, here -â€œ got a little tube on it, you know, and a little sort of a funnel, and so I say, â€œHey, can you guys hear me up there? Hey, can you guys hear me up there?â€ And the General drops his â€œTimeâ€ magazine, and he looks at me and says, â€œKen, why are you talking into the piss tube?â€ I went from 6â€™5â€ to 5â€™5â€ in a matter of nanoseconds. I said, â€œSir, I didnâ€™t realize. I was just trying to talk to the pilots, and I couldnâ€™t figure out how to do it.â€ He said, â€œLet me show you how you do that.â€ Reached forward and tapped on the helmet of the copilot, who immediately turned around and said, â€œWhat can I do for you, General?â€ So I was so embarrassed. But then he thought it was great, because when we got back from Vielflecken, we were on the social circuit in Berlin, as you might expect.

And he would say, â€œHey, let me introduce you to my new Aide, and let me tell you about the first time we flew on the plane.â€ I became the laughing stock of Berlin, but I got a really good OER, so.

Interviewer:

Sir, thatâ€™s good. Now, you said you had experience in Berlin before.

Kenneth Carlson:

Oh yeah. Yeah. When I was a Cadet on AOT, which is now Cadet Troop Leader Training, I guess.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Kenneth Carlson:

I went to Crailsheim in Germany, and then a couple of classmates and I went to Berlin after we were done. We had a few weeks before we had to go home. And so we were sitting - a friend and a good classmate friend of mine, Rick Sonstlie, were sitting by the new wall. Not the new wall, but the wall had only been up for two years. This is â€˜64, summer of

â€ˆ64. And so weâ€™re having a beer, and weâ€™re looking at a little old lady standing on the corner with a red light-green light thing, and she keeps looking at her watch, and then the light keeps changing and she never crosses the street. And then she looks at her watch again, and she reached in her handbag and she pulled out a pair of binoculars, and she looked across the wall. And so we stood up - we didnâ€™t have binoculars, but we stood up and looked across the wall. And about five or six blocks in, a little old man leaned out of a seventh story window with a pair of binoculars, and they waved at each other, and they blew a kiss.

And then she put the binoculars in her bag and started walking away. And so I ran over to her, and with my terrible German, I said, you know, â€œFrau, Frau, what is it that we just saw? Who were you looking at?â€ She said, â€œThat was my husband.â€ I said, â€œHow is it that your husband -â€ and she spoke good English. I said, â€œHow is it that your husband is in East Berlin and youâ€™re in West Berlin?â€ â€œThe day the wall went up, he was on a business trip in East Berlin. I have not been able to talk to him nor touch him for the last two and a half years.â€

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

And at that point in time, Iâ€™ve got to tell you, the meaning of freedom was never clearer in my mind. And I said, â€œI want to be stationed here. I want to face these guys on the other side of this wall and give them the Italian salute every single day.â€ And I pretty well got and was able to do that, because my Tank Platoon was moving around all the time, and we saw the Russians all the time.

Interviewer:

Wow. That is an incredible story.

Kenneth Carlson:

So thatâ€™s when I said, â€œI want to be in Berlin,â€ and thankfully, thanks to Wes Clark, I got to be in Berlin.

Interviewer:

And so when did you return back home from Germany?

Kenneth Carlson:

It was in the - let me see. Let me take a look at my cheat sheet here.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Kenneth Carlson:

I left in October of â€ˆ68 and got home for a short leave, and then deployed straight to Vietnam.

Interviewer:

And who did you go to Vietnam with?

Kenneth Carlson:

Myself. I was an individual replacement.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Kenneth Carlson:

It was just after the siege of Khe Sanh, and the Marines needed a lot of help, so they brought the First Brigade of the Fifth Mech over from Carson to give them more Armor support, because they realized when the Marines were surrounded at Khe Sanh that it couldâ€™ve gone either way.

Interviewer:

Right.

Kenneth Carlson:

And so when that Brigade came over, they had a Cavalry Troop with it, and they took a Brigade slice, A Troop of the Fourth Cavalry. But thatâ€™s not where I was supposed to

go. I had a set of orders worked by General Goodwin with his good friend, George Patton, who was commanding the 11th ACR at the time - this is George Patton's son, of course. He offered me a Cavalry Troop at the request of General Goodwin, who said, "This guy's good, and you ought to take him." So I had a set of orders from DA, and I got to the 90th Replacement Battalion, and everybody's rushing around to go to these classes and so on, and I'm just looking for a jeep from the 11th ACR. I want to get out of this Replacement Detachment as fast as possible. And so a Major comes up and he says, "What are you doing, Captain?" I said, "Well sir, I'm just looking for the 11th ACR transportation, because I've got orders for the 11th ACR." He said, "Let me see those," and he took them from me and he tore them in half. And I said, "Sir, what are you doing?" He said, "This is Vietnam. We don't give a damn what DA says.

We're sending you somewhere else, and in fact, we're sending you as far north as you can go in Vietnam before you're in North Vietnam. We are sending you to Dong Ha. And that's what I did.

Interviewer:

Wow. And so what was it like once you arrived at your unit?

Kenneth Carlson:

Well, first let me tell you what happened when we landed at Dong Ha. They told me - I was going on a C-130, so we had to stop a couple of different places, but when I got to Dong Ha, they never stopped the airplane, because the Marine airport there was under shelling. So the C-130 went rolling down the runway, and they opened the back and they kicked our stuff out, and we ran out the back door. They handed us helmets, and we ran for the nearest cover.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

Welcome to your new unit. 157 artillery coming in on us.

Interviewer:

Running off the C-130?

Kenneth Carlson:

Running off the C-130 as in out the back -

Interviewer:

And it's still moving?

Kenneth Carlson:

And it's still moving, and they just pushed the bags out. We left everything there, and they handed us helmets, and we ran. We went back and got our bags later on.

Interviewer:

Holy cow. That's a

Kenneth Carlson:

Yeah.

Kenneth Carlson:

That's an incredible welcome.

Kenneth Carlson:

I never - I had been to Danang, as far north as Danang, when I was a kid, but I never even knew where Dong Ha was. And they said, "It's the last airport in Vietnam. If you fly past Dong Ha you're in North Vietnam, and you're screwed."

Interviewer:

Holy cow.

Kenneth Carlson:

So I went down and got into this Replacement Detachment again, and they issued us a uniform, and they told us, "Get some patches sewn on by the local Vietnamese," and they gave us each an M16 rifle. I had never fired an M16 rifle before, nor did they give us an opportunity to until the second night.

Interviewer:

What did you train on as a Cadet?

Kenneth Carlson:

M14.

Interviewer:

Okay. So the second night.

Kenneth Carlson:

Second night our perimeter was attacked, and they came into the Replacement Detachment, some Major came in and said, "You guys, any of you guys Officers?" "Yeah, we all are." "Okay, get your stuff on. Here's a clip for your M16. I want you to go to this bunker, I want you to go to this bunker." And so I ran out there and took charge of a bunker. And we weren't under a ground attack, thankfully; if we had been, first time I fired my rifle, it jammed, and I didn't know what to do, so. It was, you know, thankfully, it was not a big ground attack, but it was a big attack, and so that was the first day. Yeah. And then two days later, I got called in by the Brigade Commander, and he said, "Captain Carlson, have you ever been a Calvaryman?" And I said, "No sir. I've been a Tank Platoon Leader." And he said, "Well, you're about to become a Calvaryman. I am relieving the Commander of the A Troop, 4th Squadron, 12th Cavalry, and putting you in."

And I said, "Sir, when will that be?" I was kind of hoping to be a Staff Officer, you know, and get my feet on the ground. He said, "Report down to the Landing Zone Nancy tomorrow." And I did, and I was suddenly in command of 318 guys and 44 combat vehicles.

Interviewer:

Okay. What type of vehicles did you have?

Kenneth Carlson:

M48 tanks and armored cavalry assault vehicles, which is a 113 with a 50 turret on top of it, and then two M-60 machine guns pointing out of either side.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Kenneth Carlson:

And I had radar tracks, I had maintenance tracks, I had a medical track with a full set of Medics in it. Like I said, 44 combat vehicles, and that doesn't include any of the wheeled stuff.

Interviewer:

Okay. And what was your mission?

Kenneth Carlson:

Well, interestingly enough, my mission was not to do what the Brigade told me to do, although they did give me missions occasionally. They attached me to a Tank Battalion, the 1st of the 77th Armor. But the 1st of the 77th, I was attached to them, but they never gave me a mission. Because the first time I took the troop to the field, which was about four days after I was in command, the first helicopter to land was a Marine helicopter, and it was the Commander of the Third Marine Division. A fellow by the name of Ray Davis, who in World War II won the Navy Cross, and as a Battalion Commander in Korea won the Medal of Honor.

Interviewer:

Holy cow.

Kenneth Carlson:

And a couple of Silver Stars, and a couple of Bronze Stars with V. He was a stud, and I didn't know all that stuff about him at that point in time. But he said, "Ken Carlson, I haven't met you yet but I've heard a lot about you." So obviously they were doing some research, too. And he said, "Now listen, you've got a unit that moves faster with more firepower than anything I've got in my Division, and anything

youâ€™ve got in your Brigade.â€ The words 911 didnâ€™t exist in that day, but he said, â€œYouâ€™re going to be my fire truck. Whenever I call you for some strange mission, you turn on the red lights and just move like hell.â€ And I said, â€œSir, how will I know what the mission is?â€ He said, â€œMy operation shop will call you and tell you what needs to be done. But if you ever have a question about any mission that I give you, hereâ€™s my card.â€ And he reached into his fatigues and pulled out, you know, essentially a business card. And on the back of it, he wrote his frequency and personal call sign, Sudden Death 66.

And he said, â€œIf you ever have a problem, I only give this to Battalion Commanders, but Iâ€™m giving it to you. So you call me if thereâ€™s a problem, okay?â€ And eventually I had to do that. A little later on down the line, I had to do that, because I got a stupid order from his Headquarters. But you know, I was walking around with a get out of jail free card, essentially. Call the two-star if you need to. Skip all your chain of command.

Interviewer:

So thatâ€™s your second time in Vietnam, having a get out of jail free card, right?

Kenneth Carlson:

Yeah, thatâ€™s exactly right.

Interviewer:

Diplomatic immunity -

Kenneth Carlson:

And now, Sudden Death 66.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Kenneth Carlson:

How to get in touch with him.

Interviewer:

Very good.

Kenneth Carlson:

That was great.

Interviewer:

So howâ€™d everything go?

Kenneth Carlson:

Well, we did a lot of work along the DMZ. They wanted us to be a show of force. This was just after the Battle of Khe Sanh, where five American Marine Battalions were surrounded by three North Vietnamese Divisions, and were shelled. Well, the Battle of Khe Sanh lasted for, or the Siege of Khe Sanh lasted for five and a half months, and these guys were living like animals. And the C-130s couldnâ€™t get in to them, because they were being shot at by the North Vietnamese. It was Dien Bien Phu again. We were on the low ground and they occupied the hillsides, and so every once in a while, theyâ€™d send my troop up there to take a look around. Make sure that they know that weâ€™ve got forces that can move all the way to the Laotian border, so I took my troops to the Laotian border several times and then came back. And on one comeback mission I got a call from the Marine Headquarters that said, â€œStop at Khe Sanh. Weâ€™ve got a mission for you.â€ And so I said, â€œWhat is the mission?â€

And they said, â€œWhen the Marines left, they left their mines unexploded, and so we want you to go out and blow up their mines.â€ And I said, â€œDid they give us a map?â€ â€œNo. Marines donâ€™t make maps.â€ So I said, â€œWell, how do you expect - I donâ€™t have any Engineer capability in my unit, so how do you expect me to find these mines?â€ They said, â€œWe expect you to start driving your combat vehicles around the perimeter of Khe Sanh.â€ Khe Sanh is about a mile and a half long, and about a mile wide. So, â€œDrive your combat vehicles around Khe Sanh, and start exploding the mines.â€ And I said, â€œThis doesnâ€™t sound good, but okay, Iâ€™ll try.â€ So I blew up two 113s almost immediately, blew their road wheels off and now we had to fix them. But then a tank went by, and I said, â€œMaybe Iâ€™d better lead with tanks here, because

weâ€™ve got things that -â€™ and we hit an anti-tank mine, and it blew off the idle arm assembly of the tank.

And thatâ€™s a point in time where I said, â€™Cease work. Iâ€™m calling the Division.â€™ I called the O6, who was in charge of their operations shop, and I said, â€™Are you the guy who gave me this mission that Iâ€™m supposed to be exploding -â€™ He said, â€™Yeah.â€™ I said, â€™Iâ€™m not doing that anymore. I just medevaced a driver out of one of my tanks. We just hit an anti-tank mine, and we have no idea what weâ€™re going to see, but Iâ€™m not going to blow up my entire Cavalry Troop in order to do this, so Iâ€™m not going to do that.â€™ He said, â€™This is a legal order, Captain,â€™ and I said, â€™Iâ€™m not going to do that.â€™ And so that transmission ended on a bad note, and I pulled out the card, and I called Sudden Death 66. And I said, â€™Sir, this is -â€™ and he said, â€™Ken, how you doing?â€™ I said, â€™Not very well, sir. Iâ€™ve got an order from your ops shop here.â€™ And he said, â€™Where are you?â€™ and I said, â€™Khe Sanh.â€™ He said, â€™Well, what are you doing?â€™ I said, â€™Iâ€™m blowing up mines with my vehicles.â€™ He said, â€™Who is the stupid asshole who told you to do that?â€™ I said, â€™Sir, I donâ€™t know the man personally, but it was somebody from your operations shop.â€™

I didnâ€™t say it was the O6, okay? And he said, â€™And your tanks have started hitting mines - tank mines?â€™ And I said, â€™Yes sir; so I told him I wasnâ€™t going to do that anymore.â€™ He said, â€™Well, thank goodness you told him that. Iâ€™ll fix that. But Iâ€™ve got another mission for you, so collect up your guys, evacuate the vehicles that you need to evacuate, and then I want you to continue down QL9 until you get to these coordinates. And I want you to turn into the DMZ.â€™ Thatâ€™s north; donâ€™t cross the Bien Hoa River, obviously, which divides North and South Vietnam. He said, â€™Thereâ€™s a big, huge, dry rice paddy there, and I want you to set your Troop up in a perimeter which guards that rice paddy. I want all the vehicles facing outward.â€™ And I said, â€™Sir, whatâ€™s the mission?â€™ He said, â€™Set up the perimeter. Thatâ€™s all I can tell you right now.â€™ So we did that, you know, and my Lieutenant said, â€™Sir, what are we doing?â€™ I said, â€™Stand by. This is directly from Sudden Death 66, so weâ€™re going to do this one.â€™

And we sat there for a little while, and in comes a CH-46, which was the Marine version of the CH-47 helicopter. And the back ramp falls down, and out comes six guys in cooksâ€™ whites, carrying Mermite cans, and they set up along the paddy dike - and the whole thing is dry, so you know. And then theyâ€™re standing there waiting, and weâ€™re waiting, and then the Lieutenants call me and say, â€™Sir, whatâ€™s going on?â€™ I said, â€™Stand by.â€™ And out of the DMZ comes a Marine Force Recon Team of about 15 guys. They havenâ€™t shaved in a month. They are dirtier than dogs. And they come walking out, and they meet with these guys, and they make each one of them an ice cream sundae, with soup to nuts. I mean cherries, maraschino, whipped cream, maraschino cherry on top, nuts, and these guys stand there and eat an ice cream sundae. And then they hand the stuff back, and they put it all in the Mermite cans, and they walk back into the DMZ and the helicopter takes off.

And my Lieutenants again call me and said, â€™Sir, what did we just see?â€™ And I said, â€™I think it was an ice cream social.â€™ But I said, â€™I really donâ€™t know, but all I know is where the order came from.â€™ So about five minutes later, from his helicopter, the CH-46, Sudden Death 66 calls me up, and he said, â€™Ken, I bet you -â€™ by the way, this is the way Marines talk on the radio. They call you by your name instead of by your call sign. So he said, â€™Ken, I bet youâ€™re wondering what weâ€™re doing.â€™ And I said, â€™Sir, we were curious.â€™ And he said, â€™Those guys have been in the DMZ for a month, and I figured they deserved an ice cream sundae.â€™ And I said, â€™Sir, that is an excellent idea. Weâ€™re glad we could see it.â€™ And he said, â€™But in order to make that happen, I had to have absolute security of that DZ.â€™ And I said, â€™Okay.â€™ He said, â€™Because I was one of the guys in the cooksâ€™ whites, and the only way the Third

Marine Amphibious Force would allow me to be that close to the DMZ, and in that much danger, they made me promise that I would have absolute security, and youâ€™re the guys who did it.â€™

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

â€™Semper Fi.â€™ Thatâ€™s all I could say. â€™Semper Fi, sir.â€™ So I told everybody, and they said, â€™Thatâ€™s one of the best missions weâ€™ve ever had, getting those guys an ice cream sundae.â€™ But several months later, after I was out of command - I commanded for six months, which was the standard - I went to the Brigade Staff, and I got a call from the Marine Headquarters that said, â€™General Davis would like to invite you to dinner tomorrow night. The Miss America troupe is in town, and heâ€™s going to have them for dinner at his mess. And youâ€™re the only Army guy weâ€™re inviting.â€™ And they said, â€™Can you come?â€™ And I said, â€™Can I? Can I?â€™ So I started shining - you know, I hadnâ€™t shined my boots in months. I started shining my boots, and making sure I had a pressed set of jungle fatigues, and my driver took me down there and we sat there and had cocktails with the Miss America troupe. And I was the youngest guy in the room, but I was the one with the most recent combat.

Mostly they were Staff Officers from the Marine Headquarters. I was sitting across the way from the Colonel who had given me the original order, and we had an interesting conversation. But it ended up being, â€™You know, I probably didnâ€™t do the right thing, Captain, and Iâ€™m sorry.â€™ But anyway, I sat with Miss New Jersey, and Miss Arkansas, and 15 minutes - well, we were sort of in the middle of the dinner, and all of a sudden the MPs come running in and saying, â€™Sir, weâ€™re being hit by 122 rockets. We all have to evacuate immediately to the Commanding Generalâ€™s bunker.â€™ So Iâ€™m looking around at this first plated dinner Iâ€™ve eaten in half a year, and so I said, â€™Okay.â€™ So I grab a hold of Miss New Jersey, and we go out to this bunker, and it had an actual viewpoint, where you could see what was going on over the Quang Tri Combat Base. And weâ€™re watching the rockets coming in, and Miss Arkansas is on one side and Miss New Jerseyâ€™s on the other side, and explosions are going off and these women are scared to death.

But Miss Arkansas said, â€™That kind of looks like the Fourth of July,â€™ and I said, â€™No, it doesnâ€™t.â€™ She said, â€™What do you mean?â€™ I said, â€™People are dying when those things land. That doesnâ€™t happen on the Fourth of July.â€™ And she started crying. Miss New Jersey, on the other hand, said, â€™When you come back from Vietnam, where are you going to go?â€™ And I said, â€™Well, I donâ€™t know.â€™ And she said, â€™I want you to come and visit me in New Jersey.â€™ So I didnâ€™t. I didnâ€™t. I went back and married the girl that I met in Berlin, and we have 4 children, and now we have 13 grandchildren.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

So I made the right choice. But spending the night in a bunker with a couple of good-looking ladies on either side of you was an interesting experience.

Interviewer:

Sure. And what did you do after that?

Kenneth Carlson:

You mean when I left - oh, after my Command? I went to the Brigade X1 shop and answered Congressionals.

Interviewer:

Oh no.

Kenneth Carlson:

My job was - well, I had to write all the - I had to investigate and write the Congressionals for the Brigade Commander to sign, which meant that oftentimes I had to go down and visit

the site of wherever that happened. And I wasn't an IG, but I'd been a Commander, so I knew what questions to ask. And then he would sign the letters and they would go off to the OCLL. But in one particular case, it was a letter from one of Senator Kennedy's constituents, who said, "Our son, Sergeant Gibbons, was killed in Vietnam on the 1st of March, 1969, and he was on a tank. They told us that they had to seal the coffin because - well, they didn't tell us why they had to seal the coffin. We wanted to see his body." So I didn't have to go investigate that one, because I was in that battle with Sergeant Gibbons.

He was riding on one of my tanks, and he was hit by an RPG, and his body was blown apart. After I had gotten control of the situation and we had defeated the enemy that was firing RPGs at us, and I had people continuing to work that issue, I went back to see what the wounded situation was. And nobody was touching Sergeant Gibbons. And I said, "Hey, we got to police this gentleman up here. Here's my poncho. We got to start putting his body parts in this poncho." And my troops said, "Sir, he's not one of ours." And I said, "Yes he is. He's an American soldier." And so one of the Platoon Sergeants saw me picking up body parts and putting it in the poncho, to include his head, and he jumped on those other young Troopers. And he said, "You're letting the Troop Commander do that without your help? You're not thinking, guys. Get down." So everybody started helping. So anyway, when this letter came in, I knew what happened to Sergeant Gibbons. from personal experience.

And we wrote that in the letter. "The Army made a serious mistake when they said he died of small arms fire. An RPG is not small arms, and his body was dismembered, and so not really fit to be viewed in a casket. But we gave him all the honors we could possibly give him, and all the awards and decorations. He was a brave soldier." And when I turned that over to the Brigade Commander, whose name was Gibson, not Gibbons, that's the only time I ever saw him cry. So that's what I did. I wrote 200 and something Congressionals -

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

In six months, and then I redeployed back to the United States.

Interviewer:

Wow. And when you came back to the United States, what was your mission?

Interviewer:

My mission was to get married to the girl I left behind. But I was sent to the Infantry Advanced Course, rather than the Armor Advanced Course. And I called Armor Branch and said, "Why are you sending me to the Infantry Advanced Course?" And they said, "We want Armor Officers with successful combat experience to go down and tell these guys at the Infantry School where they're right and where they're wrong." So I went to the Infantry School and ended up first in the class down there as an Armor Officer. But I had to leave three days early, before graduation, because I had to report to graduate school at Princeton. So they said, "You're going to be an honor graduate, but you're not going to be a distinguished graduate." And I said, "All the tests are over. All the papers are turned in, and I am so many - you know, I had a 99-something average. Aren't I the distinguished honor graduate?" And they said, "We don't really like to give that to other Branches."

So I was a good graduate, but I wasn't the top guy. And then I went to graduate school.

Interviewer:

Okay. Tell me a little bit about your wedding. Where did you all get married?

Kenneth Carlson:

All right. My wife lived in Salt Lake with her family, and my folks were living on the East Coast still, and my brother was in Oklahoma at the time, I think at the Artillery School, and so we decided to get married in Salt Lake. But we couldn't do it at a Mormon wedding,

because both people have to be Mormons, and they have to be sealed in the Temple. But we did get her stake president, which is kind of like your bishop - well, it's higher than your bishop in the Mormon church - but he agreed to marry us in a civil ceremony, which we did at Fort Douglas, Utah, in the military chapel there. And it was snowing, it was December 6th, and I can always remember that because one day before Pearl Harbor Day is when I got married. So it was snowing, and we got into the chapel, and the night before, my wife-to-be said, "I am just not certain that we can do this."

She said, "We've had a lot of history together, but you're not a member of the church, you know, and I am." So I said, "Well, look. I've flown a bunch of people in here. They're planning on going to a wedding tomorrow, so I'm going to be in my blues, and I'm going to be standing up front with my brother, who's going to be my best man. If you don't show up, I'll have a little card in my pocket, and I'll say, "Ladies and gentlemen, we're not going to have a wedding here tonight, and here's the situation." And she said, "I don't know; I just don't know." So wedding came off, and she came in with her father, and they played "Here Comes the Bride," which is something that, you know, they don't do that at a Mormon ceremony. "Here Comes the Bride," and she walks up. And just about where my father and mother are sitting, she stops. She just stops. And I reach into my pocket to pull out the card, and she says, "No, no, no, no." What happened was her train got caught on a nail, and my father looks down and releases her, and so she comes bouncing forward, and we got married.

And she said, "I do," three times, and so I made sure that she was going to be good to her word, and we have now been married for almost 50 years.

Interviewer:

Congratulations.

Kenneth Carlson:

Thank you.

Interviewer:

How was Princeton?

Kenneth Carlson:

Princeton was my choice. I was selected to come back to teach in the Social Science Department here at West Point, and I asked Colonel Olvey, I said, "Where would you like me to go to graduate school?" And he said, "Anywhere you want. Anywhere you can get into." And I said, "Well, where do you prefer your people to come from?" He said, "Well, we like Harvard, we like Princeton, we like Johns Hopkins, we like Stanford. Those are the big schools for international relationships, and also for economics, and you're probably going to teach economics when you first get here." So I said, "Do you have a preference?" and he said, "No, that's your call." So I said, "I think I'll go to Princeton." And when I got there, the first day we arrived - and one of the reasons I picked Princeton is I said, "Stanford - you know, middle of the Vietnam War, Stanford is in flames, and I don't think I want to go to Harvard, because it's also equally left wing and against the war. But Princeton is a pretty conservative place."

I went to Princeton. The day we arrived they burned down the ROTC Building. Welcome to Princeton.

Interviewer:

What year was this?

Kenneth Carlson:

This is 1970.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Kenneth Carlson:

1. But we didn't live on Princeton campus; we lived off in a small New Jersey town nearby. I had a great time learning international relations, except for Richard Falk.

Professor Richard Falk was the guy who took Jane Fonda to North Vietnam - as anti-war as they get - and he was the professor of international law. So we were in one of those great big bowls, where the professor speaks and everybody sits and looks down on him, and he was lecturing on the Vietnam War, from which I had recently returned. And he said to everybody there, "There are no North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam. These are all indigenous Vietcong, who are fighting against an illegal government. The North Vietnamese are not involved in this in any way." And I stood up. I didn't say a word. I stood up. Nobody knew that I was a Captain in the Army. I started growing my hair a little bit, and I wasn't wearing a uniform.

I stood up, and he's giving his lecture, and he looks up, and says, "Who are you?" I said, "Sir, I haven't had a chance to personally meet you yet, but I'm Captain Ken Carlson, United States Army, and I've just returned from Vietnam. And I am here to tell you, sir, that there are lots of North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam. I was engaged with many North Vietnamese units, in uniform, and we had a very good kill ratio of 100 to 1, and I lost 3 guys, and they lost 318 guys. So I can assure you, Professor Falk, that there are North Vietnamese." He said, "See me after in my office," which I did. And by the way, everybody said, "Who was that guy?" you know? So I went to his office. He said, "I didn't appreciate you interrupting my lecture." I said, "Sir, I did not interrupt your lecture; I just stood up, and you recognized me, and then you asked me what was my problem, and I told you." And he said, "Well, I didn't appreciate you trying to invalidate the points that I was making."

And I said, "Professor Falk, if you missed the point, you were wrong. And I don't know why you felt like you had to be wrong, but you were wrong." And he said, "Well, don't do that again." So I got an A-plus in his course, by the way. But Princeton was - Judith Miller, who is currently on Fox News, Judith Miller was one of the classmates I had at Princeton, and she was a wild-eyed anti-war liberal. When she learned that I was an Officer, she said - and I put a little sign up on my carrel in the library that said, "War is my business. Business is good." She hated that. She said, "How can you shoot those innocent women and children like you did?" And I said, "Well, you just lead them a little bit less, 'cause they don't run so fast." I said, "Judith, we never did that. We made sure we weren't killing civilians. Now, that's not to say that no civilians ever died, but none of my soldiers ever shot a civilian." And she said, "I don't believe you." And I said, "Well, Richard Falk is your guy, then."

Okay? But now she becomes a wild-eyed conservative, and so somewhere along the line, she saw the light, so.

Interviewer:

Now, what was it like teaching in soc?

Kenneth Carlson:

The best three years of my life. I had great people around me. Don Olvey was the head of the Department. Barry McCaffrey was the Executive Officer. I was working with Jack Jacobs. I was working with Wes Clark. I was working with a whole bunch of people who are a very smart group of people. And I taught economics the first semester, and I had the only economics training I had was from Colonel Olvey when he was my instructor here as a Cadet. And I said, "Sir, you might recall that the grade you gave me was one of the lowest grades I received here in four years." He said, "That's right. That's why I'm going to have you teach it, because this time, when you teach it, you really have to learn it before you can teach it." Sometimes I was 20 minutes ahead of the Cadets. But nonetheless, I was able to do macro and micro and international economics, and the students loved me, and I loved teaching them. And then the second semester, I taught international relations, about which I knew a lot more.

And they said, "We're going to give you an elective." And the elective was public policy and administration, which is how does the bureaucracy work or not work, and I was pretty much well read into that, too. So I had an elective for the last two years. I started with

two sections; I ended up with six sections.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

People said, "You'd better go take Carlson's course." Fast forward till the time after I've retired. My wife and family are visiting me up in New York, and we're walking along, going into the World Trade Center, and two guys stop me, and one of them said, "Are you Captain Carlson?" I said, "Not anymore. I'm Mr. Carlson now." He said, "But you taught in soc, right?" And I said, "Yes, I did." "Sir, I had your class." I said, "Well, that was 15 years ago. You still -" He said, "You haven't changed much. I threw away everything except my West Point Atlas of American Wars and your course notes, and I still look at your course notes every once in a while when I'm trying to figure out what's going on in the government, because you had it right. And that's why there was so many people signed up for your course, and you had more people than you could handle." Well, my 16-year-old is standing next to me. I couldn't have paid these guys enough money to say this, you know? 16-year-olds say, "My dad doesn't know anything."

But so they walked away, and my son said, "Wow, Dad, who knew?" I said, "Well, now you do." So. I had an interesting experience working on Wall Street. Lots of interesting experiences, but you don't want to hear those.

Interviewer:

At the right time we do, sir.

Kenneth Carlson:

All right.

Interviewer:

After you left the Soc Department, where did you go?

Kenneth Carlson:

Okay, that's where I go to my cheat sheet.

Interviewer:

"Cause that's about the time when you went to the Command and General Staff College?

Kenneth Carlson:

That's correct. I was a student at the Command and General Staff College immediately after leaving. I went to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I got involved in a whole lot of community activities, 'cause I had little kids, and so I had to go referee things, and announce things, and so on. But I also - my wife let me build an office in the basement in our little townhouse that we lived in, and she kept the kids away from me, so I actually did the homework. Most guys said, you know, "This is another damn Army school." But I figured, look, this is the next level of stuff, so they also had me teaching courses there. They had me teaching courses on international relations and economics, which I could do. That wasn't a problem. But I ended up winning the Marshall Award, which was a real honor. Wes Clark had won it the year before. But as a result of that, the Chief of Staff of the Army gets to make your next assignment.

And so I didn't know that. They didn't tell me I won the Marshall Award until the day before the Marshall Award. And I said, "Well, I need an assignment." And they said, "General Rogers is the guy who's going to assign you." And I said, "I need troop time as a Major. Will somebody please tell him?" I had been promoted to Major by that time. "Please tell him that I need troop time as a Major in order to make me fully Branch qualified to become a Battalion Commander." He said, "Oh, he'll know all that stuff." So he sent me to work on the Combat Vehicle Technology Program, which was being run out of his office at Fort Knox, Kentucky, and it was not a troop assignment, and I was just - you know, I'd been, pardon the expression, I'd been screwed by the Chief of Staff of the Army. And so I made arrangements with the 96th Armor Brigade, which is at Fort Knox, and I said, "I want an XO position or an S3 position in

one of your Battalions as soon as I can get away from this Chief of Staff issue.â€œ  
â€œGotcha.â€ You know, they looked at my records, said, â€œAbsolutely.  
Youâ€™re the man.â€ And then I came down, and on the second below the zone to  
Lieutenant Colonel, and I was promoted almost immediately. So therefore, I never had  
troop time as a Major, which meant I was not fully qualified to become a Battalion  
Commander. At which point in time, I went, â€œThanks a lot,â€ you know. â€œThanks a  
lot, General Rogers.â€ So I never got a Battalion. I became a Brigade XO in the Eighth  
Infantry Division. I was the IG for Fifth Corps. And I taught at the National War College, and  
I was a member of the founding faculty of the School of Advanced Military Studies, so I did  
a lot of educational work, but I never got to the point where people would say, â€œWe  
think that this guy who we promoted twice below the zone to Lieutenant Colonel should be  
an O6.â€ One of the people at the School of Advanced Military Studies - Huba Wass de  
Czege, by the way, Colonel Was de Czege was the head of that.

And he said, â€œIâ€™ve got a Congressman coming in who wants to sit in on one of the  
seminars, and I want him to sit in your seminar. Heâ€™s a historian, and he knows some  
stuff. Send him some literature.â€ So I contacted his office and I said, â€œWhen is this  
gentleman going to be able to come?â€ and they told me. I said, â€œTell him weâ€™ve  
got a 15-man seminar. It goes from 8:00 in the morning until noon. Heâ€™d like to stay for  
a week, and weâ€™re doing the Russian-German Second World War part - the Battle of  
Kursk, and all that.â€ And it was Newt Gingrich, the Congressman from the Atlanta Airport,  
at that time; brand new Congressman, and he came in - Iâ€™d sent him a bunch of stuff to  
read, and he came in fully prepared. I told him, I said, â€œCongressman, the deal here in  
this seminar is no quarter asked, no quarter given. So if you say something, that  
doesnâ€™t make it true. Iâ€™ve got 16 smart Majors here who are likely to challenge  
you.â€ And we did that for a week, and he said, â€œThese are the best seminars in the  
military that Iâ€™ve ever been to.â€

He said, â€œYou are not trying to run the show. You are letting these guys do the work. But  
every once in a while, youâ€™ll throw in a, â€œWell, how about who thought about this,  
and who thought about that?â€ And so at the end of the week, my wife Victoria and I  
were having a dinner with Gingrich, and he said, â€œI understand that youâ€™re thinking  
about getting out of the Army.â€ I said, â€œWell, I got passed over for O6, first time, and so  
thatâ€™s the bell that says itâ€™s time to leave the ship.â€ And he said, â€œI want you to  
come work for me.â€ And I said, â€œDoing what?â€ â€œI want you to be my Chief of  
Staff.â€ And Victoria and I looked at each other and said, â€œCan we talk about that a  
little bit and get back to you?â€ â€œCause this was before he had departed. And we came  
back and said, â€œHow much would you get paid as the Chief of Staff?â€ and he said,  
â€œAbout \$70,000.00,â€ which was more than I was making, but Victoria and I said -  
weâ€™d been to D.C., and we said, â€œWe donâ€™t think that we can do that.

Weâ€™ve got little kids, and we donâ€™t really think that we can.

So Iâ€™ve got other fish to fry, but thank you very much.â€ And so I watched Newt  
Gingrich grow up, thinking my life wouldâ€™ve been totally different had I resigned. And  
then the second time around, I got picked up, which I was one of two Combat Arms Officers  
non-selected in the first year who were selected in the second year. And it was because  
there were a whole bunch of Generals in the Army who knew that when I was a Brigade  
XO, I turned in my Brigade Commander for doing illegal stuff, and he got relieved. And I  
resigned my position as Brigade XO, and I sent this letter to General Vuono, who was  
commanding the Division, and General, or he was Colonel Reimer at the time, both later  
Chief of Staff of the Army, and I sent one to the Corps Commander as well. And I said,  
â€œI canâ€™t work for this guy anymore, and the honorable thing for me to do is to resign,  
and hereâ€™s why.â€ And I laid this out in a six-page letter of the stuff that he had done  
which was illegal, immoral, and fattening.

And so as a result of that, they called me back to Fifth Corps and said, â€œWe want you to  
run Reforger 83. Be the head of our Plans Division for Reforger 83,â€ which I did. And

then of course he wrote an OER on me before he was officially relieved, which then became a black mark. Once I had sent in my reclama for this thing, it became a black mark on my record the whole time I was being considered for O6. So itâ€™s easy if youâ€™re on a promotion board; the object is to get rid of files as fast as you can. You open it up, you see a black mark, you say, â€œThatâ€™s a discard.â€ But the second time around, all those people who knew that I had gotten passed over the first time had written letters to the board, saying, â€œWe have done an injustice to Ken Carlson,â€ so I was the first guy on the list to get promoted to O6.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

And at that point in time, they had been - Carl Vuono - not Carl Vuono - Glenn Otis, who was the CINC USAREUR, had been trying to get a SAMS graduate to come over and be one of his Plans Officers. But Carl Vuono, who was the Chief of Staff of the Army, said, â€œThey only go to Corps and Divisions.â€ And Otis said, â€œIâ€™ve got the Army Group, you know - donâ€™t I count?â€ He said, â€œNo, thereâ€™s not enough of them to go around.â€ So as soon as I came out on the O6 list, Otis wrote to Vuono and said, â€œI want Ken Carlson. I know Ken Carlson,â€ all right? And so I went to work for Glenn Otis. And then after him, Butch Saint. I stayed in Heidelberg for six years.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

Which was really long, but my kids had an opportunity to finish high school, two of them, anyway. And then I went back and taught at the National War College, and retired, and I finished 26 years in uniform, and four years at West Point, so when people say, â€œHow long were you in service?â€ I say, â€œ30 years.â€

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

Kenneth Carlson:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Now, did any of your children go to the Army?

Kenneth Carlson:

No.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Kenneth Carlson:

No. Actually, they - when I was talking to them about, you know, â€œAre you interested in going to West Point?â€ they said, â€œDad, we know what youâ€™ve been doing, and thatâ€™s not the life that we want. We want to live.â€ And I said, â€œYou do whatever you want to do.â€ By the time I was in Wall Street, I said, â€œI can pay for any school you want to go to, so pick which one will let you in.â€ And they all went to B.Y.U.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

Kenneth Carlson:

And they all got married out of B.Y.U.

Interviewer:

Wonderful. Now Iâ€™m going to ask you a little bit about what youâ€™ve done since the Army.

Kenneth Carlson:

Okay.

Interviewer:

But before that, I see you have a Purple Heart.

Kenneth Carlson:

Yes.

Kenneth Carlson:

And you mentioned your hearing is -

Kenneth Carlson:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Tell me a little bit about that.

Kenneth Carlson:

The day that Sergeant Gibbons was killed was called the Battle of Cam Hung. You can google it, and you will find a complete description of the battle from a number of different viewpoints, one of which is Captain Carlson's view of what happened at Cam Hung. We were on a night defensive position outside of Quang Tri Combat Base, and my ambushes were all out, ready - you know, we're trying to keep the North Vietnamese from coming in and talking to the villagers at night, and extracting taxes and things like that. So we were set up for the night, and I get this call from the Headquarters of the First of the Fifth Mech that says, "We want you to report to Headquarters immediately, and not with a combat vehicle, so bring your jeep in." I said, "In the middle of the night? Can I come in with lights on?" "No, blackout." My driver said, "Sir, where are we going?" I said, "We're going over there." You know, it was about three miles away.

He said, "Can I turn on the lights?" I said, "No." So we drove in the dark, and we got there, and thankfully, they had told people that a jeep was coming in, so they didn't kill us, and I reported to the Brigade Commander. And he said, "Ken, I'm about to ask you to do something that I've never asked anybody to do before. I want you to take your Cavalry Troop and move cross-country up to Dung Hoa. I want you to cross the Dong Ha River and get to a place called Cua Viet - no, not Cua Viet - Cam Lo. And then you'll become under the operational control of the Third of the Fifth Cavalry. They found a North Vietnamese Regimental Headquarters being guarded by two Battalions. They're on one side of a hillside. They want you on the other side with your Cav Troop." We drove all night, and you know, because we couldn't have any lights on or anything like that, I had to get off the vehicle every so often and shoot an azimuth, and we weren't on roads. We were just going cross-country, in the middle of the night.

I think that's the only time that happened in the Vietnam War, where a Cavalry Troop moved in the middle of the night without being able to be on any roads whatsoever. We got across the Dong Ha River into the place, Cam Lo, and we had not yet heard from the Third of the Fifth Cav. NICK CROCHU, from the class of '57, was the Operations Officer. And so I tried to contact him and we couldn't make contact, so I told my Platoon Leaders, "Put everybody to sleep, right now, and then you guys come and sit in my track and we'll figure out what to do." So we didn't get any sleep that night, but by that time we had heard from the Third of the Fifth Cav. "We want you to move up on this hill and line up so that you are looking down into the valley, and we're looking down from the other side, and then there's an Infantry Battalion of Marines that have put a cork in the bottle. Then we're going to blow the hell out of them with the Air Force, and then we're going to go down and see what happened."

So we sat there and watched the air show the next morning - outstanding. I mean there was napalm, the whole nine yards, and lots of snake and nape. So then it's 5:00 in the evening, they said, "Take a Platoon of yours and go down the hill, and do some bomb damage assessment for us. Find out what's left down there." So I took the nearest Platoon. I told them to lead with tanks, and they were missing a tank, so they got another Platoon tank. They went down the hill, followed by a Cav Platoon. I was in the middle of the Cav Platoon with my track. I wasn't going to lead from a tank. Got down to the bottom of the hill, and suddenly from the wood line, there were still some guys alive with RPGs. And the firefight ensued. And people were keying their nets, thinking that they were talking

on their intercom.

They were talking on the Troop net, so essentially, I lost command of my Troop, because people were - you know, I was getting nothing but talk from other people. I kept saying, "Get off this net. Get off this net." Finally I couldn't do it. And I wanted to make sure that everyone was pointing in the right direction, because I could see where the fire was coming from. I was a little bit farther back. So I jumped off my vehicle with an M16 filled with tracers, nothing but tracers, and my Platoon Leaders and I had this deal where I said, "If I can't communicate with you, and you see people firing nothing but tracers, that's me. Shoot that way." Okay? So I jumped off, and when I was running over to get to a position where I can start shooting tracers, my rifle got knocked out of my hand. And I said, "What the heck was that? I don't remember dropping my rifle." So I picked it up, kept on with the mission, and started firing tracers, and everybody picked up the message, and they all started shooting in the right place, and the firefight was over in perhaps five minutes.

We killed everybody inside that wood line. And so then on the way back, I'm walking up the hill, and first of all, I helped pick up Sergeant Gibbons, you know. I told you that story already.

Interviewer:

Right.

Kenneth Carlson:

I'm walking up the hill and there's another one of my Troopers, who was a Maintenance guy, who had gotten hit in the arm by an RPG and had a huge hole in his left arm. Name was SPEC 4 FRYLER. And he was up on the hill when we were having the medevacs, but all the Medics were down there working on the Troops. And so I stopped and tried to see what I could do for him, and he said, "Captain Carlson, I can't stand the pain. I can't stand the pain. You got to give me some morphine." I said, "I'm not allowed to carry morphine. Only the Medics carry morphine, and they're all down working on your brothers." He said, "But you got to put me out of the pain. Do something." So I hit him as hard as I could. This I learned in boxing at West Point. Bam, right in the side of the jaw, and I knocked him out. I also broke these two knuckles, which are still broken. You can see they look a little different. and so he was out. And then they medevaced - in fact, I carried him to the helicopter and put him on the medevac.

At that point in time, I suddenly realized that there was something going on with my left arm. It didn't feel right. And so I looked down and rolled up my sleeves, and I had been shot. What had knocked my rifle out was my rifle was hit by an AK-47 round, and that ricocheted into my arm, and boom, I dropped the rifle. But I didn't know that. I was pumping so much adrenaline that when I finally got to the point I said, "Hey, any Medic around here?" "Oh my God, the Captain's been hit," you know, and these guys came over, and they pulled the bullet out, and they dressed the wound. And they said, "We've got to send you back to the hospital because you may have broken a bone, but it doesn't appear to be a life-threatening wound." I said, "Well, put me on some damn helicopter, and I want to be back here soon at night, this night." And they did. they looked at me and they said, "No broken bones," and they put a better surgical wrap on it. I was back in command.

The next day, the mission was to take people down and go through, again, this time not being ambushed in the middle of just before it's dark, go down and do some dismounted patrols throughout the area where the North Vietnamese were. So I put out three patrols, all Infantry guys. I was the only Ranger in the Company, or the Cavalry Troop, so I said, "I think I'm supposed to be at least in one of these patrols, just to make sure that things don't go bad." Just before - you know, and I'm making guys jump up and down, make sure they don't make any noise with their web gear, you know, and everybody's got their faces blackened, and we're doing Ranger stuff. Yeah. And so at that point in time, a helicopter comes in, and two guys from CBS News jump out,

wearing Hawaiian shirts, and one of them has this big Bolex camera on his shoulder. And I said, "What do you want?" And he said, "We want to go with you on a patrol." I said, "I don't think so."

And the PAO, the Public Affairs Officer from the Division said, "Yeah, you got to let them do that, Captain." These guys from CBS News - Walter Cronkite, you remember him? And he said, "You got to let them come with you, but just make sure that they're protected." I said, "All right, here's what I want you to do. Reporter, you be here. Cameraman, you be farther back. I don't want to hear a word from you. Take the pictures you need to take, and if you need to talk to me, come up and whisper to me, but we're going down there, and I don't know what we're going to find. There may be fire coming back." So we go down, and we're actually walking in a stream bed, because you know, you don't walk on trails, and there were trails in there because that's where the North Vietnamese had been. And we're following commo wire, Chinese commo wire, and I have with me a North Vietnamese defector, called a Kit Carson Scout.

Interviewer:

Right.

Kenneth Carlson:

And he's a former Major. And we come to a bend in the stream bed, and he said, "Dai uy, careful. Could be ambush around the side." So I said, "Okay." He said, "Maybe you put men up on the hill." So I pointed to one of the machine gunners and his assistant. I said, "You guys climb out, go up there and tell me when you're ready, 'cause we're going to go around the hill, and if we start taking fire, I want you to blow away anything that does that." Well, these guys got out of the stream bed and started climbing up the hill, and the cameraman in the Hawaiian shirt says, "Hold on, I didn't get that," as loud as he could. And I turned around, and I said, "Get that guy up here." And he came up. I said, "What did you just do?" He said, "I had to get the shot. These guys were climbing out." I said, "Did I tell you to keep quiet or not?" He said, "Yes, you did, but I've got a job to do, too." I said, "Well, if you do that one more time, I personally will shoot you, and it won't be pleasant.

It'll be pleasant for me, but it won't be pleasant for you." So he was very quiet at that point in time. At the end of this patrol, we had found mountains of North Vietnamese equipment. Lots of blood trails, lots of ammunition, lots of weapons. And my guys are walking around smiling and picking up AKs, and SKSs, and North Vietnamese pistols, and so we're doing a kind of a battlefield check, and the guy from CBS News is talking to his camera. He said, "These soldiers are tired, and they're hungry, and they've been out here for months on end, and they don't know why they're here." And I said, "Cut the camera off. What are you talking about? Look around. These guys are delighted at what we just did, and all we took was a couple of casualties up on the hill, but look at what we did to the North Vietnamese Army." He said, "Captain, you don't understand.

If I want this to show up on CBS News, Walter Cronkite does not want the American Army to look good; and so I have to say the stuff that I'm saying at the end, even though I may or may not believe it." And my dad, he was still on active duty, and he saw the - well, no, he wasn't on active duty anymore. But he saw that on CBS News, and he got in touch with me by going into the Pentagon and reaching me by radio, and said, "This is Big Swede Six. Do you know who I am?" And I said, "Yeah, that's my dad, Big Swede." I said, "Yes, I do." And he said, "What the hell is going on with your unit? It looks like they're about to mutiny." I said, "Dad, that was CBS News. It was the battle count. You know, 300 of those guys got killed. I lost one soldier killed, and five soldiers wounded, and I was slightly wounded." He said, "You okay?" and I said, "I'm fine, but I don't believe anything that you see on CBS News." So.

Interviewer:

And so that goes back to what you were talking about with your professor when you were -  
Kenneth Carlson:

Oh yeah. All these guys were - all the dead guys were in North Vietnamese uniforms. All these were North Vietnamese ammo and equipment - well, some Tricom stuff, too, but. Yeah, so there wasn't any question about who it was, and what uniforms they were wearing.

Interviewer:

Wow. Okay, so that's the story about how you got wounded -

Kenneth Carlson:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

That time. All right.

Kenneth Carlson:

That was how I got wounded the first time.

Interviewer:

Oh. How about the second time?

Kenneth Carlson:

The second time was the next day.

Interviewer:

Oh my goodness.

Kenneth Carlson:

The next day we were told to pull out and go join up with the Three Five Cavalry for a new mission, and so I got all my guys together, but we had vehicles that were - and like I said, Major Crochu was the guy who was in charge - or not - he was the Operations Officer. But then "Lonesome End" Carpenter -

Interviewer:

Right.

Kenneth Carlson:

From West Point was the Commander of the Third of the Fifth Cavalry at that time, as I recall. I don't remember his first name, Carpenter, but he was the "Lonesome End." So I figured these are two guys who really know what they're doing. And on the way out of our battle position, I did not lead with my track because, although I believe that Commanders should lead from the front, they should not be the very first vehicle - target's too - so I rode on the back of a tank. I was sitting in the bustle rack on the back of a tank. I had an extra radio with me so I could communicate with the Three Five and Battalion Headquarters. And I was the one, two, three - I was the third vehicle in line. We had three tanks. I was on the third vehicle. The North Vietnamese command-detonated a mine underneath my tank, 'cause they saw there was an extra radio and an extra guy riding on the top, you know, and so.

Kenneth Carlson:

All I remember about - the bomb, I was told later, was a 250 pound Air Force bomb that had not exploded, and they turned it into an IED and command-detonated it, and they were looking for the right vehicle, so they blew my tank to shreds. And here's what I was told afterwards. I flew up in the air about 30 feet, and I landed on my back, and there was blood coming out of every orifice of my body - places where I never knew blood could come out of. And I was unconscious. And Nick Crochu was flying in a helicopter above the battle, watching all of this, and he saw that I was down. He didn't know who I was at the time - I mean Nick Crochu never knew me, but I knew him. He landed his helicopter and they loaded me in within three minutes of my actually being blown up, and they took me to Bravo Med, Third Marine Division.

And I woke up on an X-ray table with a round-eyed nurse cleaning me up from places I didn't think she was supposed to be cleaning me up from. And the doctor came over, and he said something to me, and all I could hear was "eeee." And he said, "Oh, he can't hear anything." So he wrote a note, and he said, "Your back is not broken,

but youâ€™ll pay for this in future years.â€ Future years are here, and so now I canâ€™t walk more than about a mile, because I now have scoliosis, a crooked spine. And I said, â€œWhere did I get that from? You canâ€™t get into West Point with scoliosis; itâ€™s a disqualifying affect,â€ or disqualifying whatever it is. And they said, â€œYou probably got it when you got blown up.â€ And of course, my ears, pretty clear where those came from. And so at any rate, I continued on, and finished a 30-year career with hearing aids and with a bad back, and Iâ€™m now being nicely compensated by the Veterans Administration, but. So I was wounded twice in two days. By the way, I didnâ€™t -

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

I did not get a second Purple Heart because no Medic ever treated me in my unit. Nick Crochu came down, they put me on board, they took me to Bravo Med. And Bravo Med, the Marine Corps destroyed all their medical records five years ago.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

And all their Vietnam medical records, gone. So they have no proof that I was wounded and in their facility, because they didnâ€™t admit me. They said, â€œPut this guy in a jeep and take him back to his LZ Nancy. Heâ€™s going to have to be on bed rest for at least three weeks, and he canâ€™t hear anything.â€ So I was out of command and taken down to Nancy, laying in bed. When my Troop came back in, I said, â€œPut me in my jeep and take me to the gate,â€ and they came back in and I stood up as best I could and saluted them as they came in.

Interviewer:

Wow. Thatâ€™s a goodâ€|I bet they were glad to see you.

Kenneth Carlson:

They were glad to see that I was still standing up. I was glad to see that, too.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Kenneth Carlson:

But I couldnâ€™t hear anything for a very long period of time, until I finally got hearing aids.

Interviewer:

Sure. What happened to the rest of the crew on that tank?

Kenneth Carlson:

The Platoon Sergeant was wounded. He stayed inside the vehicle, and so he received shrapnel wounds. The driver was medevaced, not on the same helicopter I was on, but he was badly wounded, and he was medevaced. I donâ€™t think anything happened to the gunner or the loader.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Kenneth Carlson:

But other than that, it was just, you know. But my rule was you donâ€™t lead from the rear. They got to see - if weâ€™re going through mine fields, they got to see me up in front somewhere, not in the first vehicle, but they got to see me up front somewhere, because I need to take the risk to show them that itâ€™s worth taking.

Interviewer:

Right. Wow. So what did you do after the Army? AFter you retired - you retired as a Colonel - what did you do?

Kenneth Carlson:

Yeah. I got a call one day - I was Professor of Strategy at the National War College, so youâ€™re teaching not just Army guys. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine, Coast Guard, FBI,

Treasury Department, and civilians, who also go to the National War College. And so I was one of their Professors of Strategy. I'm one of the guys who took them to Gettysburg and talked about the leadership lessons of Gettysburg. Of course, the Air Force guys said, "Well, what would've happened if Lee had a B-52? Wouldn't that have made a difference over there on Cemetery Ridge?" And I'm saying, "Yeah, thanks, Colonel," you know? "Thanks for your comment." But I really enjoyed that job. But then I got a call one day from Jack Jacobs, old friend from the Soc Department, Medal of Honor winner.

Interviewer:

Right.

Kenneth Carlson:

I said, "Jack, how did you get a hold of me?" He said, "I used to work there, too. Go up and look on the plaque. I used to teach there." And I said, "Well, where are you now?" He said, "I'm in London, working for Bankers Trust Company." And I said, "What do you do?" He said, "I make a lot of money and have a lot of fun." And I said, "Okay, so what can I do to help you?" He said, "Well, I've got these 14-year-olds who run this bank who know nothing about leadership, and I've told them that they need to read 'Infantry Attacks' by Erwin Rommel, which is one of the great lessons of leadership from World War I, when Rommel was a Captain. He said, "But I can't find it here except in a rare book room in London, and they want 250 pounds for it. Could you check around the War College and see if somebody had a copy of Rommel's 'Infantry Attacks,' and would be willing to sell it to me for something less than, you know, 600 bucks?" or whatever that was in pounds at the time. And I said, "Sure, I'd be happy to." So I had a look around, and there's three people who I found in the War College who had a copy, none of whom were willing to part with it, 'cause they knew how rare it was.

So I went to the Pentagon, little old lady in the Pentagon that I knew for many years, who ran the bookstore, and she said, "Rommel's 'Infantry Attacks.'" That was published in 1952. She said that from the top of her head. And I said, "Yes, it is. Do you have a copy of that?" And she said, "Oh, I don't think so, but let's go look in the storeroom." So she took a flashlight and a duster, and she took me up to the storeroom, which was on the top floor of the Pentagon, and it was one of those Indiana Jones storerooms, you know?

Interviewer:

Sure.

Kenneth Carlson:

It was kind of like all this stuff is in there. She said, "You wait here and I'll go see." And about 15 minutes later she came back with a hard copy of Rommel's 'Infantry Attacks,' 1952. And I said, "How much am I going to have to pay for this?" She said, "I have no idea. There's no bar code on it. We'll have to go down and check." So she went down and went on her computer, and she said, "\$4.50." So I put it in an \$18.00 FedEx envelope and I sent it to Jack, and he called me up a couple days later and he said, "I don't know how you did that, man, but they've asked me who is this guy, and how can we get him to come and work for us?" And I said, "Work for who?" "Bankers Trust." I said, "Jack, I'm still in the Army." He said, "Retire. It's time to retire." And I said, "Well, I don't have a resume." And he said, "Get a resume by tomorrow and send it over here. They want to hire you; they just want to see the resume."

So they called me up and said, you know, "We'd like to extend this offer to you." And so I said, "Okay. I'll do that," and took off my uniform, retired at Fort Meyer in a ceremony my kids and my wife were able to attend. And I went back, and my brother called up - he had retired earlier - and he said, "When you took off your uniform for the last time and you were hanging it up, did you sit there and think about all that meant to you, what all those ribbons stood for, and all the stuff that you have hanging on your

uniform?â€ And I said, â€œGunnarâ€ - thatâ€™s his name - â€œGunnar, I really didnâ€™t have time to think about anything. I was packing to go to New York the next day.â€ I had to be in New York the next day. The bank gave me an apartment in New York. I stayed there for four months, learning the ropes. I had to learn how to be a broker-dealer. I had to get my license and all that sort of stuff. I did all that, and then my boss says, â€œPack your stuff. Weâ€™re going to London tomorrow.â€

And I said, â€œHow long are we going to stay?â€ He said, â€œDoesnâ€™t matter. We only take hang-up bags.â€ So I packed as much stuff as I could fit into a hang-up bag and I went to London, and didnâ€™t come back for a year.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

But in London I said, â€œWhat am I supposed to do here? I didnâ€™t bring enough shirts.â€ He said, â€œArenâ€™t we paying you enough? Go to Savile Row and get yourself some decent clothing. Buy expensive ties, and start looking like a banker, because the first rule of banking is if you want peopleâ€™s money, you have to look like you donâ€™t need it.â€ So I did all that, you know, and spent a lot of money doing it, but again, they were paying me a lot of money, and a lot of bonuses as well. So one night in London, he said, â€œHey, Ken, weâ€™re going to have dinner with Thompson Electronics tonight, the CFO and the CEO, and theyâ€™ve got a lot of money with us. So weâ€™re doing it tonight, and I want you to meet me at Heathrow in about three hours.â€ And I said, â€œWhere are we doing this?â€ He said, â€œIn Paris, of course.â€ So we flew to Paris, got picked up by a limousine, went down to a four-star Michelin restaurant - I think thereâ€™s like two of them in the world - on the Left Bank.

Tour dâ€™Argent I believe is the name of it - and came in and sat down with these guys, and they brought the wine list, and I knew my way around a wine list â€œcause Iâ€™d been in Europe for six years. And so my boss says, Andrew says, â€œOrder the wines for us,â€ and I said, â€œWhat do you want?â€ He said, â€œWell, I want to start with champagne, and then I want a wine to go with a fish dish, and then a red and a white to go with the main course, and then something for the end, some sort of cognac or whatever, and some cigars.â€ So I had learned enough about wine lists, and I asked somebody at Bankers Trust, â€œHow do you do this?â€ It was a 47-page wine list.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

They said, â€œFirst of all, do not order the cheapest wine or they wonâ€™t do business with you. Donâ€™t order the most expensive; theyâ€™ll think youâ€™re an idiot. Go about three-quarters of the way up the price list, and then start looking for stuff that you recognize.â€ And I did. And so I started recognizing stuff, and so I ordered all these wines, and the French guys, who spoke fluent English, said, â€œMon Colonel, I didnâ€™t know you got yourself a winner,â€ and I said, â€œWell, thank you very much.â€ â€œVery good choices for the wines.â€ And after a few minutes, one of them said, â€œNext to us, in this table right here; isnâ€™t that Dr. Henry Kissinger?â€ And I looked at him. I said, â€œYeah, it is. Would you like to meet him?â€ They said, â€œYou know him?â€ I said, â€œIâ€™ve briefed him a couple of times.â€ And they said, â€œWe would be so honored to meet Dr. Kissinger.â€ So I go over and I said, â€œDr. Kissinger, Colonel Ken Carlson, United States Army. You may remember me from when you came to visit the School of Advanced Military Studies, and you talked to us when you were in Washington.â€

He said, â€œYes, I do, Ken. What are you doing now; are you still in the Army?â€ I said, â€œNo, Iâ€™m a banker.â€ He said, â€œCongratulations.â€ I said, â€œIâ€™m here with Thompson Electronics, and they would like to meet you. Can they come over and shake your hand?â€ He said, â€œAbsolutely not.â€ I said, â€œIâ€™m sorry. I didnâ€™t mean to interrupt.â€ He said, â€œNo, no, no - I will come to them.â€ So Henry Kissinger gets up

and comes over, pulls up an extra chair, sits down, and chats these guys up for the better part of five to ten minutes. Signs their menus, and tells them how lucky they are to be able to deal with a guy with the integrity of a former Military Officer.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

You know, Iâ€™m sitting there going - and my boss, heâ€™s drooling, all right? So at the end of this thing, the bill came for the four of us - 1,500 bucks. And you know, I said - well, I didnâ€™t say anything. I signed - I didnâ€™t have a Visa. I didnâ€™t have an American Express card yet, so I signed a Visa card that I was sharing with my wife, and I had to call her long distance and say, â€œI just put \$1,500.00 on the Visa card. You may be concerned.â€ But on the way out, I said, â€œAm I going to get in trouble for this? Four of us for \$1,500.00.â€ He said, â€œYouâ€™re not in Kansas anymore, Ken. Youâ€™re in the banking world now. We spend money like this all the time.â€

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

Youâ€™re not going to have any trouble with this on your expense account. But thereâ€™s one thing you missed while you were trying to figure out how to sign your name and your hand was shaking. Thereâ€™s one thing you missed. They gave us an envelope - take a look inside.â€ They gave us another \$100 million to manage for them. He said, â€œYour \$1,500.00 are going to be lost in the rounding errors, but you are going to get a big bonus for what you did tonight, for introducing them to Henry Kissinger, and ordering in French from the wine list, and all that sort of thing.â€ And I said, â€œIâ€™m not in Kansas anymore.â€

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

So I had some great experiences with Bankers Trust. And then eventually they dissolved my entire division when they were starting to become Deutsche Bank. They just got rid of their international investment, â€˜cause Deutsche Bank already had that. They didnâ€™t need to duplicate that in New York. And so I went to work for a company called SEI Investments, which was a mutual fund company in Pennsylvania, and my - I had a territory coast to coast, all medical establishments which had major investment pools. My job was to go sell them the idea of working alongside of SEI, which would invest their money for them, and their 401(k) funds, and other retirement instruments. I did that for a few years, three or four years, and then I was in this big car accident. I got hit by a truck from behind, 18-wheeler, drove me into the car in front of me. I had a rental Buick that became a rental Volkswagen, and when a guy came up from the truck and he said, â€œAre you okay?â€ and I couldnâ€™t feel anything on the left side of my body. I said, â€œI donâ€™t think so.â€

So turned out there was a fire station right across the street. They came out with their ambulance, took me to the hospital, and I stayed in the hospital for about a week, and then went back to business. But I could no longer lift my bag above my head to put it in the overhead bin, and I was taking lots and lots of drugs for all the pain that I had. And so finally they said they had to let me go, because I couldnâ€™t do the job any longer, and I said, â€œFine,â€ because I had two disability policies with them, and I was also receiving Workers Compensation. And the guy who was in the truck, he had big insurance, and then USAA, I had underinsured motorist coverage. He didnâ€™t have enough coverage. So I ended up with a lot of money out of that accident.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Kenneth Carlson:

And then I was fully retired at that point in time.

Kenneth Carlson:

But you probably didn't need that on your back.

Kenneth Carlson:

No. Yeah, and that further complicated me having a back injury.

Interviewer:

Right.

Kenneth Carlson:

But you know what? Then I became a cancer patient, and I -

Interviewer:

But you survived that.

Kenneth Carlson:

And I survived that, and it is now 2015, and I'm still talking.

Interviewer:

Well, thank God for that.

Kenneth Carlson:

And I'm talking to you people.

Interviewer:

Well, that is an incredible story. Did anything, any of the things you learned at West Point or in the Army, help you in your business role?

Kenneth Carlson:

Absolutely.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Kenneth Carlson:

Absolutely. First of all, you better be honest. There's a lot of people in business who are less than honest. You need to tell people the down side as well as the up side. If you only tell them the up side and things go wrong, they'll never do business with you again. And so I made sure that all the people who were my clients understood don't react to every single move of the market. That's a stupid way of investing. But if we've got you out of balance, we're going to get you back in balance by increasing over here and decreasing over here. But we're trying to look out for your investments, not from our perspective, because we can make money by overtrading you. We don't want to do that. So I had the trust of everybody who - I had lots and lots of money under our management. But nobody ever said, you know, "We're not comfortable," because I was the guy that they were talking to.

Interviewer:

Okay. So the integrity you -

Kenneth Carlson:

Absolutely.

Kenneth Carlson:

As part of the military -

Kenneth Carlson:

Absolutely. And of course the ability to take charge when you need to, and the ability to see the difference between right and wrong, and the ability to plan ahead. And all things that you learn when you're a Cadet, and you actually practice when you're a Military Officer, they are all extremely important in business.

Interviewer:

Wow. Well sir, this has been a fabulous interview. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you'd like to say?

Kenneth Carlson:

Go ahead.

Interviewer:

What does West Point mean to you?

Kenneth Carlson:

I right now lead a group of 26 of my classmates. We come up here, we have come up here 14 times now, to help teach the professional military ethic to Cadets, now called the Cadet Character Development Program.

Interviewer:

Right.

Kenneth Carlson:

Weâ€™ve been doing that since the class of 2016 were Plebes. We were the last guys who got to talk to them as Plebes. The opportunity to come back to West Point and to give back, for all that West Point has given to us, is an amazing one. Every time I do this I take pictures of the class, and I publish them on the class newsletter, and more people say, â€œThat looks like a mini-reunion.â€ And so now Iâ€™ve got a much larger group than either â€™67, or â€™68, or â€™65, or â€™63 had, so weâ€™ve got almost 30 people who come up here at their own expense, because itâ€™s so important to try to pass on the values that were given to us, that we have tried to live for 30 or 40 years - well, for us now itâ€™s almost 50 years.

Interviewer:

Right.

Kenneth Carlson:

So I am - I just canâ€™t tell you how much West Point means to me, both having been a Cadet here, having been on the Faculty here, and then having an opportunity to talk to Cadets even now, at our 50th, as we approach our 50th year. People sometimes ask me, â€œWhere is West Point?â€ and I say, â€œItâ€™s 55 miles north of New York City, and 75 years ago.â€ They say, â€œWhatâ€™s that mean?â€ I say, â€œThereâ€™s tradition there that continues to move forward, but it is like any other place youâ€™ve ever been. There are people out there who care about each other. They care about what theyâ€™re doing. They know that they are going to be leaders of character, and theyâ€™re trying to develop their character.â€ And this is the place to do it. Itâ€™s the finest leadership school in the military. Well, maybe Ranger School is a close second. Ranger School put you through the wringer to show you what you can do. Ranger School, by the way, also, because Iâ€™d never commanded a Cavalry Troop, when I first showed up in my Cavalry Troop, the first question is, â€œDoes this Captain know anything?â€ And of course, I had never commanded in the Cavalry business. But they looked at my uniform, and I had a set of Airborne wings and a Ranger patch, and they said, â€œThis guy knows what heâ€™s doing.â€ So doing all those things starts by coming to West Point, and I was thinking when they were making fun of Ben Carson for saying, â€œI got a full scholarship,â€ I had a class dinner the other night, up in Cornwall, and we had 35 people at the class dinner. And I stood up at the beginning and said, â€œMy name is Ken Carson, and 50 years ago, I had a full scholarship to West Point.â€ Cracked them up. I also told that to the Cadets, and they all got it. Apparently -

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

Kenneth Carlson:

Theyâ€™re up on the news good enough to what that means. But it really is one of the seminal moments of my life, is to walk through here. People say, â€œWhatâ€™s the best view you ever saw at West Point?â€ I said, â€œIn the rear view mirror,â€ because I was anxious to get out.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

Kenneth Carlson:

But once I knew all the things that I knew, I wanted to go out and do it, and so thatâ€™s why I wanted to go Armor. Thatâ€™s why I wanted to go into Berlin. Thatâ€™s why I was happy to go to Vietnam. I wouldâ€™ve extended in Vietnam had I not been wounded. Iâ€™m a blessed man.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

Kenneth Carlson:

Blessed man. And surviving all the stuff that I've survived since then. So anyway, that's my story, and I'm sticking to it.

Interviewer:

Sir, that's a wonderful story.

Kenneth Carlson:

Thank you.

Interviewer:

Thank you so much.

Kenneth Carlson:

All right.