

Chapter 1
Interviewer

Today is August 17, 2012. We're in the studios of West Point Center for Oral History with Russ Campbell. Thank you for coming in, Russ.

Russ Campbell

You're very welcome.

Interviewer

Could you spell your name for the transcriber, please?

Russ Campbell

First name is Russ " R-U-S-S.

Interviewer

Is it Russ or Russell?

Russ Campbell

Well, it's actually Russell but I prefer Russ, R-U-S-S, and the last name is Campbell, like the soup, C-A-M-P-B-E-L-L.

Interviewer

And where are you from? Where did you grow up?

Russ Campbell

Originally from Rhode Island. Grew up in Rhode Island.

Interviewer

What town in Rhode Island?

Russ Campbell

The town of Pawtucket. My family actually immigrated and settled in the town of Central Falls, which is a small ancillary town to Pawtucket.

Interviewer

And what does your father do?

Russ Campbell

He was in the army, he was in World War II. He entered the army through the ROTC program and was commissioned as an officer, and was in the Coast Artillery, and part of the coastal defense of New England, based in Rhode Island, fortunately for him. And then eventually he went to the European theatre, stayed in the army, was downsized and then when the army demobilized, a lot of the ROTC officers reverted to their NCO ranks, and then they re-promoted them to officers and he eventually retired as a major.

Interviewer

And so how old were you when he retired from the Army?

Russ Campbell

I was about 14 or 15?

Interviewer

And what did he do from there forward then? What was his second career?

Russ Campbell

He became a schoolteacher.

Interviewer

What subject?

Russ Campbell

He was a Phys ed teacher and English?

Interviewer

In the public schools?

Russ Campbell

Public schools, yeah.

Interviewer

In the school that you were attending was he there?

Russ Campbell

In the school that you were attending was he there?

Interviewer

Now was it assumed that you would join a career in the Army when you were growing up?

Russ Campbell

I wouldn't say it was assumed, but it was probably something that we desired as a family. I was the oldest of five children and my father was very pro the military, very pro our country, and that was instilled in all of us. I was very interested in going to West Point at a young age and I read all the Red Reeder books that were written by Colonel Red Reeder, and was very much impressed by them. My father was assigned to West Point for a short period before the Korean War. He was on a plebe basketball coach group. So I got exposed to it early on.

Interviewer

So you'd been to West Point a number of times before you actually came here?

Russ Campbell

Actually came here, that's right. So I applied like everybody else. We didn't know anybody, didn't have any contacts, went the Congressional application route.

Interviewer

Who was your sponsor?

Russ Campbell

Pastore, Senator Pastore. But I didn't make it the first go-around. I was an alternate, and I checked all the boxes on the form for what institution do you want to go to? So I checked them all. US Marine, US Naval Academy, Air Force Academy, all that. So the first time around I was an alternate for the Air Force Academy. The primary person went, so that was the end of that. And I went off to the University of Rhode Island for a year and decided I'd give it one more shot. I gave it one more shot and I got the primary congressional appointment at that time.

Interviewer

To what, to West Point?

Russ Campbell

To West Point, yeah. So that's how it started.

Interviewer

Tell me about your mother. What was her maiden name and where did she come from?

Interviewer

So your parents met in the Army?

Russ Campbell

Actually they met in Rhode Island. I don't remember the circumstances around that, but they did meet there. I think it was kind of like a blind date setup, that's how a lot of people met in those days.

Interviewer

You said you're one of five children, and you're the oldest.

Russ Campbell

I'm the oldest.

Interviewer

Boys and girls, how did that break down?

Russ Campbell

I had two brothers and two sisters?

Interviewer

Anyone else enter into the Army?

Russ Campbell

No, nobody else entered.Â They all had different careers, and they did fine.

Interviewer

So you come here and your plebe year would have been 1961?

Russ Campbell

â€™61.

Interviewer

So tell me the atmosphere in the country in â€™61 when you came here?

Russ Campbell

Â I would say in â€™61 things were pretty quiet.Â There was nothing controversial going on in â€™61.Â There was no Vietnam War, there were no overseas conflicts, at least none that we were aware of, so it was a good time to be going into one of the service academies.

Interviewer

It was the height of the cold war though.

Russ Campbell

But the cold war was going on, yeah.

Interviewer

We had the Berlin crisis and all that.

Russ Campbell

We did have those things, but they seemed far removed.Â At least in my mind, they were far removed from me.Â It was pretty abstract for a young 18-year-old person, so it was really more going to West Point for the opportunity, plus we didnâ€™t have much resources in the family so it was good to get the appointment.

Interviewer

But did you sense by coming to West Point and entering the Army that you would end up in combat at some point?

Russ Campbell

You know, I didnâ€™t really give it that kind of thought.Â It wasnâ€™t something that I saw as consequential to the academy program, that as a consequence of getting a degree youâ€™d end up going into a combat situation.Â Certainly that was a reality need a possibility but it wasnâ€™t something that I thought a lot about, thatâ€™s for sure.Â I was more focused on the education and the opportunity.

Interviewer

Your plebe year, what was your beast barracks like?

Interviewer

What was the hazing like?

Russ Campbell

So the upper classmen were pretty aggressive in terms of verbal challenges and putting you down and asking you to recite this and recite that and if you didn't do it, 10 pushups, do 20 pushups, do this, do that, okay, try again and next time get it right, if you don't do it right you're going to be back down there. Sometimes they'd even gang up on you and you'd get two or three upper classmen at you.

Russ Campbell

When they went across the sally ports, which were the stoops, which were about half a dozen steps higher, they would pass and you could see their ankles. And I said, that's what I've got to do, I've got to watch until I see the fellow that's got the red socks on. So I was doing this, I was jogging around, and some guy saw me, some upper classman saw me, he pulled me aside and said, "Hey smackhead, what are you doing?" "Sir, I'm looking for the man in the red socks."

Russ Campbell

Oh my God, that was all I needed to say, and this guy starts calling all of his buddies, "Hey, guys, we've got one over here." Tell me what you're looking for. "Sir, I'm looking for the man in the red socks." Well, I had five guys on me in nanoseconds. Finally they had me so confused, and they ended up starting to laugh, they thought it was funny. Then they turned me loose and got me pointed in the right direction, but to this day I still remember that story, reporting to the man in the red socks instead of the red sash.

Interviewer

Who do you remember from your class, who did you bond with in those early days?

Russ Campbell

Well, we bonded with the fellows that were closest to us. In Beast Barracks it was the squad that we were in, and we really depended on each other to get through, we helped each other out.

Interviewer

Who were some of the people? Name some names that you remember from that episode?

Russ Campbell

There as Jack Blaugh, I remember him. Jim Harvey, John Malpass, and a couple of others escape my memory.

Interviewer

Are these men that you're still in contact with?

Russ Campbell

Well, I know of them. Every once in awhile there's an email that goes back and forth, or we see each other at reunions and pick up right where we left off, and remember those days when we went through Beast Barracks together.

Interviewer

You were at the academy when John Kennedy was assassinated, which must have been a startling news development for the entire academy, am I right? Do you remember what it was like?

Russ Campbell

There were a couple of things that occurred while we were cadets. One was—and I'll get to that. The first one that occurred that was significant for us was MacArthur coming up to the mess hall and delivering his final address to the entire corps. We were present for that, and that was an incredible event. Even as a plebe to be sitting in that mess hall and totally captivated by MacArthur's speech and eloquence.

Interviewer

What do you remember about the speech?

Russ Campbell

Well, there are a couple of things I remember. First of all, it was so incredibly well delivered without a note. Secondly, I loved the way he started out. He started out and said something like, "I was leaving the Waldorf Astoria Hotel this morning and the doorman said, "General, where are you heading today?" And the general said, "Well, I'm going up to West Point." And the doorman said, "Sir, very fine place, have you ever been there?" And I always thought that was kind of neat.

Russ Campbell

Then he went into this speech, what I would call the duty, honor, country speech, and how he wove that into his great oratory voice. As he delivered it, the mess hall was in absolute stunned silence. You could hear a pin drop. Even though there were 2400 people in there, you could hear a pin drop. And when he got to the end and finished with duty, honor, country, the place just erupted. Everybody on notice jumped up and clapped, I remember that quite well.

Russ Campbell

The next big event was the Kennedy assassination, and I can remember we got the word in the afternoon. It was maybe 1:15, 1:30, I was in a history class, a social sciences class, and the P came into the room and said, "I really have some upsetting news." He was a little shaken, and he said, "President Kennedy has just been assassinated." And we just kind of like sat there in disbelief wondering, "Wow, what does this mean? What's going on? What do we do?" And he basically, the professor said, "I'm not in a position to continue this class, I'm dismissing you. Go back to your rooms till we get more information and more news on what has happened and what's behind it." And that's the way it went. We kind of all staggered out in

stunned silence back to the barracks and then waited for any news that we could get as to what had happened, and was it an individual, was it a conspiracy?

Interviewer

You had to wonder, I'm sure, as many people did at that time, whether this was a signal of some kind of international engagement that would have called upon you all as soldiers eventually to engage in some response.

Russ Campbell

Yeah, we did express a lot of concern amongst us. Most of us were like, "What does this mean?" There's a lot of unknowns here. Is this something bigger than one guy or is there a country or some subversive element behind this assassination? And it took awhile for that to all roll out. So we lived with that for awhile and then as news came out it became more evident what was behind it.

Russ Campbell

Then the next big event that our class experienced was MacArthur's funeral. He passed away. And a selected group of cadets were selected to participate in his cortege which started up at the 7th Avenue Armory "I think 7th Avenue Armory" and then he was laid in state. Our company was one of those, so I was able to participate in that and we marched down 5th Avenue "I believe it was 5th Avenue" to either Penn Station where his remains were then moved to Washington, Richmond. So in a short period of time I'd been exposed to some really big-time events.

Interviewer

Very historic moments, each of those, right? Going back to MacArthur's speech for a moment, what was the attitude among the cadets about heroes like MacArthur? Did they have a strong historical sense, do you remember that?

Russ Campbell

I can't remember anything specific about that. Of course, we were surrounded by information about significant historical figures, the statues and the amount of respect that was given to the leaders, particularly graduates that have come out of West Point. So we were well aware of that. But I can't really

Interviewer

But you knew when MacArthur came to speak that this was a big deal.

Russ Campbell

That was a big deal. We knew that was a big deal.

Interviewer

Who was superintendent then?

Russ Campbell

I want to say Westmoreland, but I don't think it was Westmoreland.

Interviewer

Was Westmoreland a superintendent at all during the time you were there?

Russ Campbell

Yes, he was our sup. I think he was our super when we graduated. I have forgotten who was the sup at that time

Interviewer

And with Westmoreland, did you have any interactions with him when he was sup or afterwards

Russ Campbell

He was a very visible sup. He was always out there in formations. He had a very popular wife who was also visible and did a lot of things on behalf of the corps. They opened up their house, particularly for firsties, for a number of events. He was an impressive person at that time, he was probably a good sup.

Interviewer

How much did your class know about Vietnam while you were here?

Russ Campbell

Very little, very little. It was talked about maybe superficially that there's this counterinsurgency thing going on in Cambodia and Laos, something's percolating in Vietnam, but we were still going down the path of the cold war, conventional.

Interviewer

So you thought that if you were going to enter into any engagements, it was probably against the Russians.

Russ Campbell

We were oriented toward Europe, yeah, it was going to be the Russians, it was the Soviet Union. That's what our military training was focused on. It was focused on conventional warfare and the counterinsurgency thing was just starting to creep into the curriculum. At that time I don't think any of us were really thinking of going there was no war, it hadn't developed at that point. It wasn't until after we graduated that things really began to unfold.

Interviewer

So you branched artillery.

Russ Campbell

I branched artillery, right.

Interviewer

And you go where once you're commissioned "you go to Ranger School, is that right?

Russ Campbell

Well, as a class, except for those that went to the Navy or to the Air Force “ and a few did “ we all were offered the opportunity to go to Ranger School and Airborne School, which I did. I went to Airborne School first, then to Ranger School. Then my first assignment upon completion of that was Germany. I went over to Germany to join the Third Armored Division in a self-propelled 155-millimeter artillery battery. That bothered me a lot because I didn’t really know anything about the artillery. Because when we graduated, they were experimenting with a program that took the graduates directly after Airborne and Ranger School and put them directly into army units without going to the basic training program in the branch, branch basic training. So we basically didn’t have any branch training.

Interviewer

Why did they do that?

Interviewer

But you felt a little bit

Russ Campbell

I felt very exposed, I felt very vulnerable. I had confidence in a lot of other things but I didn’t have the technical expertise that would be required of an artilleryman, especially a nuclear-equipped, self-propelled artillery unit. And when I got there, they frankly didn’t know “ the company commander, the battery commander “ they didn’t know what to do with us. They didn’t know what kind of assignment to give us, had never fired a mission and so forth. So we became the commissary officer, the inventory officer, the payroll officer etcetera.

Interviewer

So you never got the training.

Russ Campbell

So I never got the training at that point. And what happened was the country then mobilized for Vietnam.

Interviewer

About ’67, right?

Russ Campbell

This is ’66. Middle of ’66 thereabouts, I’d been in Germany six months of a three year tour and got orders to report back to the US. So instead of three years in Germany it was six months in Germany and sent to Fort Bragg to a training center to be part of the cadre to train new basic trainees in rifle marksmanship. So there I am, an artillery officer in Fort Bragg training new recruits in rifle marksmanship with the M14 as they prepared to go to Vietnam, and their weapon was going to be the M16.

Interviewer

Did you know the M14, is that something you were competent in, or not?

Russ Campbell

No, I was just required to go there and be part of this team that was going to open up this rifle range. I say open it up because it had been closed since the Korean War. They had closed down a lot of things across the country after World War II and Korea. This was a rifle range that was, first, very large, it was the largest rifle range in the inventory. It could accommodate three rifle companies at the same time on the firing line. So one company on the firing line, one company of coaches, and one company behind them ready to go. With a big tower in the middle and an amplification system so you could control the firing line. And it was loaded down with brush and weeds and whatnot that we had to take out. And the old targets, there were no flip targets, they would turn targets by cables. And we had to run 220 people a day through this rifle range.

Interviewer

You sort of were learning on the job in a sense.

Interviewer

But it must have made you a little frustrated with the army. Here you had two sort of aborted assignments, one where you weren't trained properly, and another one where you weren't trained properly, and neither one had you asked for.

Russ Campbell

That's exactly right. And as time went on, we got very good at running the range but there was no manual to tell you how to run a range. We learned ourselves how to divvy up the labor and the responsibility and control three companies or two companies, whatever we had on the range at one time.

Interviewer

These are draftees you're working with?

Russ Campbell

All draftees. They had the Smokey Bear cadre that ran the through basic training, and we were a site on that training program that they came to.

Interviewer

How can you characterize the draftees at this period of time? Were they eager, reluctant, competent, incompetent?

Russ Campbell

Probably a little bit of everything. We really didn't have any problems with them. In that whole timeframe that I was there I think we only had two malingers, two guys that were definitely not going to go to Vietnam because the word was, everybody was going, and one of them shot his finger by putting his finger at the end of the barrel. And another one shot himself in the foot in order to get _____. But that's over a nine-month period, and we ran through thousands running through there. So I think they were generally resigned to the fact that they're in the Army, everybody was getting drafted unless your number wasn't pulled, and you were going to go into service.

Interviewer

That early on I think there wasn't any lottery yet.

Russ Campbell

The lottery hadn't really

Interviewer

So they were coming; basically college deferment was still in place.

Russ Campbell

Yes. So I was in touch with my other classmates and we were all talking about what was going on, what was happening, to each other, and the word was clearly being passed around that we were all going to go to Vietnam eventually.

Interviewer

And Westmoreland's in Vietnam at this point.

Russ Campbell

He's now over there.

Interviewer

He's now over there.

Russ Campbell

To be the commanding general, yeah.

Interviewer

So you're thinking you're going to be deployed, and you indeed are, is that right?

Russ Campbell

Right. So this is what I do. I get the word that I'm going to be assigned to Vietnam, deployed. And my recollection is that there was a form you had to fill out or sign and you could choose whether to go with an advisor unit or go with an American unit.

Interviewer

By advisory you mean a unit advising;

Russ Campbell

We couldn't actually go down where everything; they had it all cordoned off. The place was burning, the stench and smell and the smoke was awful. Our building was absolutely covered in dust inside because they didn't move fast enough with the air handlers and reverse, so all that smoke you see billowing around the World Trade Center was getting sucked into the building, just distributed throughout.

Russ Campbell

On the ARVN

Russ Campbell

The ARVN, right, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

Russ Campbell

Yeah. If it wasn't from, there was some way I was able to say I would prefer to go to an American unit, and it came back, and my orders, I was being assigned to the First Brigade of the 101st Airborne. And now

Interviewer

Which meant surely you were going to be in combat.

Russ Campbell

Wow, because this is an elite unit, this is combat, I'm going in as an artilleryman and I have no background other than four days at Camp Buckner, which hardly

Interviewer

Third unprepared assignment.

Russ Campbell

hardly prepared me or qualified me to be with that kind of an organization. In fact, I even remember thinking to myself, I'm going to be more dangerous to my own troops than I will be to the enemy combatants.

Interviewer

Did you speak up about that?

Russ Campbell

I did. What I did is I appealed. I went through the S1 channel and I appealed. I said, "Look, I'm going over there, I really don't have a good background, can I get into one of the basic branch courses at Fort Sill?" And although it was highly unlikely that that would occur, it did come back that I had been selected to go to the artillery basic branch training program that spring, and then I would then be deployed to Vietnam.

Russ Campbell

Now this is really important in my story because it really sets the stage for what happens later. So I went to Fort Sill. My wife was pregnant

Interviewer

Where had you met her, by the way?

Russ Campbell

We met in Rhode Island, we were high school chums.

Interviewer

Had you gotten married then right after West Point?

Russ Campbell

Yeah, right after West Point. And now she's pregnant and I'm going to be heading to Vietnam, we're at Fort Sill. We basically have a few days to get back to Rhode Island. We get back to Rhode Island, she's able to get to the hospital. I drove, she flew, and by the time I was somewhere en route between Fort Sill, Oklahoma and Rhode Island she gave birth to a baby boy. So now I have a son, with orders to go to Vietnam. And three weeks later, I left.

Russ Campbell

That was a very, very tough thing to do. Left for Vietnam, like a lot of the other guys, and it was very different.

Interviewer

Now this is '67?

Russ Campbell

May '67. And it was a very lonely trip, as I recall. We got to Oakland where we shipped out of, flew out of, and I can remember the flight being all replacements. We were all replacements. Officers, enlisted, NCOs, and it was a very quiet flight. Nobody knew where we were going or what we were going to be doing.

Interviewer

And the war's already heating up too.

Russ Campbell

And it's heating up, yeah, it's heating up. A lot more on the news now about what was happening, the Ia Drang triangle and places like that were now becoming familiar subject matter for the news at night. We stopped off in Guam, refueled, and then eventually got to Tan Son Nhut, it could have been Bien Hoa, I don't remember, one of those two air bases. And I distinctly remember that the plane landed and we were ordered to get off as quickly as possible. And as we were getting off the plane, we were all coming down the gangplank and going to a holding area, and as we were going into this holding area, a whole group of combatants, basically we were all replacements, they were going to the plane.

Russ Campbell

Now we're all in nice fresh green uniforms and kind of starry-eyed and concerned, and they're coming right out of the battlefield. So their uniforms are beat up and they're hootin' and hollerin' and yelling at us. And we're just kind of looking at them and saying what are we getting into? We were there for about a day and a night and then everybody got assignments, and I was sent to the 101st which had a base camp up in Phan Rang. And there were about four or five other guys that were in that group, and we all went up to Phan Rang by air. And at Phan Rang they had a three or four day training program for all the new replacements coming in, and in that group there were three of us that were going to be forward observers.

Interviewer

So you knew you were going to be a forward observer.

Russ Campbell

Yeah, now I knew I was going to be a forward observer, but I didn't know who I was going to be with. And we get through the acclimatization program. There they had M16s so we had marksmanship practice with that. They issued us some new equipment, a rucksack which was unlike any piece of equipment we had back in the States.

Interviewer

Big difference between the 14 and the 16? Did you have to get really adjusted to that?

Russ Campbell

Well yeah, it fired differently, it was lighter, had a different magazine, different number of bullets etcetera. But it was still a weapon under development. Even though it was being deployed as the primary rifle, there were still problems with it. I can remember one particular problem was that the flash suppresser was opened, kind of like a fork at the end, and when we were out in the jungle moving through, that darn thing would get caught in the vines and the branches, and a lot of the folks were complaining about that. Eventually they put a ring on that. This is one example of how that weapon evolved. Since then all the rifles that have been prepared for the army have had that ring, or at least it's not an open element to it. I don't know if anybody knows that sort of thing, but I do remember that.

Russ Campbell

So anyway, I go to Phan Rang and the three of us officers, all lieutenants, get assigned to a unit. I was assigned to the A company, second battalion of the 502nd, which was called Strike Force. The other two guys, one of them went to another company as an FO and the third one went to one of the long range reconnaissance platoons.

Interviewer

What does a forward observer do? How would you describe that?

Russ Campbell

It's interesting, because the training to be a forward observer was very different from what was expected as a forward observer in Vietnam. Our training back in the states and here at Camp Buckner and West Point, was, remember, all conventional warfare. So the forward observer was trained to be in an observation post spanning the terrain, looking for targets, and then calling in artillery. We had no training or experience with actually moving with the infantry unit and being a mobile FO as opposed to a fixed place FO is probably the best way to describe it. And a lot of the techniques that we ended up using in Vietnam evolved through trial and error. Most of the conventional training was focused on high explosive, HE, engagement, but when we got to Vietnam we used white phosphorous, we used marking rounds, we used smoke, we used illumination rounds, and none of us had any experience with them until we got there.

Russ Campbell

So we go out and from Phan Rang I get my orders as I said to go to the A Company, and

when one of the supply ships for A Company they were already out in the jungle operating was going out, they put me on that, and that was my first helicopter ride.Â Never been on a helicopter before.Â So thereâ€™s a lot of things happening, a lot of firsts here.

Russ Campbell

And the feeling I had, and to this day I can remember very clearly, I really wasnâ€™t fearful of the combat, I really wasnâ€™t fearful of the enemy I was worried about could I perform? Â Was I adequate to the task?Â Whatâ€™s their expectation going to be of me and could I meet that expectation?Â Thatâ€™s the company commander, the platoon leaders, the guys themselves, and that was worrisome to me.Â Also it was part of the motivation for me to get to Fort Sill to get the basic branch course in the first place.

Interviewer

You didnâ€™t feel fully prepared.

Russ Campbell

Not fully prepared.

Interviewer

Not even mentally prepared.

Russ Campbell

And probably not mentally prepared.Â A certain kind of nervousness or anxiety and stress that I couldnâ€™t adequately describe today, but Iâ€™m sure that I was experiencing it.

Interviewer

Youâ€™d also been trained for a different kind of warfare, really.

Russ Campbell

A different kind, yeah.

Interviewer

So the things that happened after that are kind of interesting because I get off this helicopter and I meet the company commander.Â His name was Art Conlon, he was a grad, â€™63 I believe.

Interviewer

Artâ€™s sorry?

Russ Campbell

Conlon â€™ C-O-N-L-O-N.Â And heâ€™s very busy.Â He doesnâ€™t have time for the FO.Â Heâ€™s got a company heâ€™s got to manage, heâ€™s got platoons heâ€™s got to brief and platoon leaders and heâ€™s got to get the company resupplied, theyâ€™ve got to get their ammunition, their rations, and get organized and get moving again.Â So I get introduced to him and he said, âœOkay, youâ€™re the FO?Â I want you to know where we are at all times.Â Your job is to constantly know where we are.â€ Well, that wasnâ€™t something we were trained in back at Fort Sill.Â They didnâ€™t say that you

had to know where the infantry unit was at all times.Â But fortunately we were pretty proficient at map reading. We had a good map reading program here at that time, so I knew how to read a map.Â And the Fort Sill training also helped a lot.

Russ Campbell

So I took on that role and he gave the march order and we moved out.Â And around 6:00 or 7:00 oâ€™clock that evening, heâ€™s setting up the unit for the night.

Interviewer

What was your mission at that point?

Russ Campbell

Search and destroy â€“ search and destroy mission.Â And they had some intelligence that had been passed on to the company commander and his job was to cover certain areas in concert with other companies who are also outâ€™

Interviewer

With NVA, is that right?

Russ Campbell

NVA.

Interviewer

_____ Viet Cong?

Russ Campbell

A combination of both.Â Sometimes we knew what we were running into, sometimes we didnâ€™t.

Russ Campbell

So he calls me aside and says, â€œWhere are we?â€ So I get out my map and I say, â€œSir, I think weâ€™re right here.â€Â And he looks at it and he says, â€œI think weâ€™re over here.â€Â And what I didnâ€™t realize is he was just challenging me.Â He wanted to see if I was going to hold firm to where I said we were.Â And I said, â€œSir, I really think weâ€™re here, because I triangulated, I looked at the two markers on the map, and here.â€Â He said, â€œOkay, thatâ€™s it.â€Â He said, â€œNow, I want you to have a fire mission.â€Â This was going to be my first fire mission.Â He said, â€œSee that hilltop over there?â€ It was about 2,000 meters out.Â â€œI want you to put a couple of rounds on that and go through a fire mission and see whatâ€™s it.â€ It was a no fire zone â€“ I mean, it was a fire zone, a free fire zone, so there was no problem just picking out a hilltop and shooting on it.

Russ Campbell

So I called in the fire mission as I had been taught and got to the battery.Â I never saw the battery through all this.Â Iâ€™m calling up on the radio and go through the call signs and the scenario, the script. And they fire two rounds.Â I asked for white phosphorous.Â Initially I asked for smoke and I think they said, no, they donâ€™t have smoke, but

they've got WP, white phosphorous, which was right. And the reason for that is we're going into dense jungle canopy and if they fired HE we'd just go through the canopy, wouldn't see it, wouldn't know where it was, so the white phosphorous marks the thing.

Russ Campbell

So this thing goes out, two rounds, rounds away, and I'm looking at that hilltop. Nothing. Nothing. This was my first fire mission.

Interviewer

What had you done wrong?

Russ Campbell

And the company commander says, "So what's going on?" I said, "Sir, I don't know." So I called back and I told him, "We can't see it." So they ran through a checklist and they reassured me that everything at their end was correct and they wanted me to check my coordinates. I checked my coordinates, they were correct. So I'm still holding firm to that. And as we're going through this whole discussion, and the company commander is kind of looking at me like this, "Yeah, this is really great, you're my new FO and this is the guy I've gotta count on." And in the meantime, my confidence is going downhill, you assume the worst, that it's your fault.

Russ Campbell

Then all of a sudden, about a thousand meters off to the left we start to see a white column coming up through the jungle canopy. So I said, "Sir, there it is, it's over there." So we assumed we had the wrong hilltop. So I radioed back to the battery saying, "We've spotted it, it's such and such," and I said, "drop," I guess it was right 400 or something like that. And they made that correction. And then they came back and said that they have rechecked everything and they had fired a charge error. So now they corrected the charge error, fired what was originally the right information, and it was on the hilltop that we had started out on. So that was my first fire mission, a charge error.

Russ Campbell

That night I had to fire in a couple of defensive targets that I learned about, they call them DTs, and the company commander said, "I want you to put four DTs out there and let me see the map." I want you to put one here, one there, one there, one there. So I fired those in, same type of fire mission, and what the purpose of that was to get the guns to register on four different targets that would sort of establish a quadrangle around the infantry company. So that if we were hit in the middle of the night or we were to execute an ambush, we could call in that defensive target that was closest to that point, and the guns were already registered and prepared, the data had already been processed, so they could get two rounds out right away. So it would be something like "fire defensive target 3" or "red bravo" or whatever the code was, and that's how they did it at night. So already in the first night I've had five fire missions the white phosphorous and four defensive targets, and that was my first night.

Interviewer

How did it go from there?

Russ Campbell

From there there were a number of interesting engagements. We had a fair number of firefights. I moved with an RTO, radio telephone operator, who carried the radio and had a big antenna sticking out of it, and always moved with the company commander and the first sergeant of the company. And for the first couple of weeks, I never really saw the company because they were always spread out in the field and in the jungle. Once in awhile when the platoon leaders would come to the command post, I got to meet them over several days, I got to meet the platoon leaders, and those were what I called the five lieutenants four platoon leaders and the FO were the lieutenants. And we developed a pretty good bond over time as our proficiency and our working together as a team emerged. You really became very dependent on one another and very confident in each other's abilities.

Russ Campbell

We set up many an ambush. I don't know how many airlifts where we were lifted out and then moved to another location on an air assault. Basically, an air assault operation. We'd be out there for three or four days, they'd send in the helicopters, we'd load up again and move to a new area and come in, and the landing zones would often be prepped with artillery and tactical air to neutralize them so that when we came in on the helicopters, we stood a chance of getting off at the LZ safely. I as the FO was responsible for most of that artillery coordination and support going in, so I did a lot of flying and artillery adjustment from the air in preparation for some of these raids, and then we'd go in.

Interviewer

How was the NVA as an enemy?

Russ Campbell

First of all, they were highly skilled. They were good. I used to refer to them as being very elusive. We rarely saw them. They were so good at camouflage and moving very stealthily and quietly, especially at night.

Russ Campbell

So the first assignment that I got of a major nature was to go to Chase Paris where the Federal Reserve Bank and the comptroller of the currency were threatening to close down Chase's operation in France because of inadequate controls and lack of being able to reconcile the bank's books. So I got prepared. Again the Fort Sill, go to training school. I said, "I don't know anything about the back office, I've got to go somewhere." So they put me through an intensive training program in London and Frankfurt, and then I went to Paris and took over this effort.

Interviewer

Did you ever see an NVA soldier eyeball to eyeball during the course of this?

Russ Campbell

Not eyeball to eyeball, but I certainly saw them within a certain distance, and I called in artillery on them out in the open on a number of occasions. But I personally did not come

face-to-face with one where itâ€™s me or him. That did not happen.

Interviewer

They moved very carefully.

Russ Campbell

They did, yeah, and we did too. That unit that I was with, they were really an elite unit. They were well-trained, highly motivated, very skilled at maneuver, and very supportive of one another. They were real pros. And thatâ€™s how it kind of went. Weâ€™d get orders to lift off and move to another area, AO. The companies rotated, the three companies in the battalion, the 502nd, theyâ€™d have two out and one in. The one in would be with the artillery battery, Charlie battery, which supported that battalion, and theyâ€™d have a perimeter around them and that perimeter would be the stand down infantry company. So for that four or five days weâ€™d set up that little CP, that company would set up the perimeter and not be out in the bush. So they got kind of a break. When youâ€™re out in the bush you were moving and in some cases engaged, sometimes you werenâ€™t, sometimes you had food, sometimes you didnâ€™t. The longest time I was out I think was about 25 days in one continuous operation.

Interviewer

How long was your deployment?

Russ Campbell

It was a full year. Whatâ€™s interesting, this whole Fort Sill thing becomes really paramount, because had I not had that training, I could not have been the forward observer I was. And by the time I rotated out, I was very good. They didnâ€™t want me to leave. The company commander didnâ€™t want me to leave by the way, a different company commander, we changed. There was a lot of changeover. People got wounded, people were killed, officers, NCOs, they got sick, emergency situations, so there was a lot of turnover. And in my own battery, they had a reorganization at the brigade level to establish another battalion with another set of companies and a new battery. That became Delta battery. And they had to build Delta battery out of the resources that already existed. So Delta battery, they took the battery XO from Charlie battery who I was a part of and made him the new battery commander. And in order to replace him, they pulled me off the line, and thatâ€™s when the infantry company was really quite concerned, because Iâ€™d been with them now for four months and been through a lot of engagements. When they get used to the FO, they donâ€™t want to lose a good FO, and I was a good FO, I really was. Not to brag or anything, but I was good.

Russ Campbell

So I was pulled out to become now the battery XO, battery exec. Iâ€™d only been the FO for four months and about two, two and a half months later through all of this change, the battery commander was brought back and I was moved up to battery commander. Now Iâ€™m about two years ahead of the age group. And it was all because I went to Fort Sill, because the choices they had werenâ€™t that many, and I had the most experience, believe it or not, now. From none to the most in four to six months. Because of Fort Sill I knew how to run a gun, I knew all the positions of the gun, I knew how to lay a battery, and basically function as an XO. I also was familiar with the fire direction center, how to do the computations, how to do the management of that, even though there was an FDO, fire direction officer, in the battery.

Russ Campbell

So I went from lieutenantâ€¦

Interviewer

And that experience is really critical to your being able to command a battery.

Russ Campbell

Well, it really did become a major factor, because now I was one of those rare people in the first tour that not only had the on line experience with the infantry company as an FO, and really understood that end of things, but now Iâ€™m a battery XO so I understood running a battery.â€” So I had the two in the same tour of duty. Usually you wouldnâ€™t get that, it would take two tours over in Vietnam to get that combination, much less now to become the battery commander.

Russ Campbell

So I became the battery commander in November and took it over, and I was the battery commander for the Charlie battery, 2nd and 320th Artillery for the rest of my tour, which went until the end of May.â€” The Tet offensive split the tour.â€” I had a crackerjack group of NCOs, good officers, the men, I never had a discipline problem.â€” These guys were highly motivated.

Russ Campbell

It was the end of January. End of January â€™68 when it started.â€” We didnâ€™t know it, we were getting a lot of information and contacts intelligence-wise and we were being moved around in response to that.â€” What we didnâ€™t realize at the time, this is late December and the first part of January, is we were responding to their movement and positioning for the Tet offensive.â€” So what happened is we got all this intelligence, then we moved out in response to it.â€” In the meantime, they had moved out and forward and they were being dispersed to their pre-Tet positions.

Interviewer

Letâ€™s back up for a second, for viewers who donâ€™t know what the Tet offensive was.â€” Will you describe it and how you experienced Tet while you were there.â€” May â€™68, is that it, or March â€™68?

Russ Campbell

Not that I was aware of.â€” I mean, just a lot of stuff was showing up but we didnâ€™t know what it was and we were responding to it.â€” Then weâ€™d go out into the AO, the area of operations, and it would be quiet.â€” Weâ€™d go, â€œWhere are all these guys?â€” Where are all these infrared fires theyâ€™re picking up?â€” and that sort of thing.

Interviewer

No intelligence telling us that this was happening, right?

Interviewer

So you knew something was afoot.

Russ Campbell

We knew something was afoot but I don't think we had any idea of what was mobilizing. And then it happened, and then they launched this incredible across the country. Every little provincial capital and small village went on. But we repelled every one of them. The ARVN and the army, they didn't hold on to a single one of them in the whole width and breadth of it. So from a tactical standpoint, we defeated them. And from a strategic standpoint it's so much influence back in the US and the government that if they were able to launch such an offensive, gosh, this war is over. It was misinterpreted, at least as I look back on it, a lot of people didn't understand that we literally destroyed their capacity and capability to launch another offensive of that size and magnitude, no way they could do it. And they admitted afterward, after the war, their general said, "We could never understand why you didn't take advantage of the fact you had us so beaten down and our losses were so heavy that you didn't come in and take advantage of that."

Interviewer

But the mood back stateside was that it was an example

Russ Campbell

It was a disaster.

Interviewer

of the kind of firepower they could command, that we were in for a longer and a bigger fight than we had anticipated.

Russ Campbell

It clearly discouraged our politicians and government officials.

Interviewer

Johnson

Russ Campbell

Johnson finally, you know, "I'm out of here." So that's what happened. And in the course of the Tet offensive I ended up moving that battery "we moved from the Cambodian border to Saigon because the 1st brigade was brought in to recapture some of the areas that the Tet offensive had lost by then, including the embassy." And I think it was one of the companies in our unit led the assault to recapture the embassy.

Russ Campbell

My battery was brought in and we were positioned at the air base, Tan Son Nhut, which was in close support of downtown Saigon. We never saw Saigon but we were out there. And one of my favorite stories of that situation is that my guys, we had been going non-stop, day-in, day-out for about five days and the guys were totally exhausted. I got separated from them for a couple of days and then got back to them, and when I got back to them I had orders. Everywhere I went I was being told, "You've got to report here, you've got to report there." I was told when I got to Tan Son Nhut to report to the commanding officer of the division artillery, that there had been an incident with my unit while I was out and the XO was running things.

Russ Campbell

So I reported and they said that they stood down the battery, which means they evaluated the battery was not in a condition to fight, because of exhaustion. So they gave them a 24-hour stand down to get some rest and get fed and so on, because of all these moves we made. And during that time a bunch of my guys went and climbed up the main tower of Tan Son Nhut air base, which was where the big radar dome was. And the radar dome was one of those things that went round and round and round, but it had a dome over it. And they went and painted on it, "Charlie Battery 2nd 320th Artillery."

Russ Campbell

Well, that caused a huge disturbance, and the reason I was brought in was to be chastised that what my guys did was very, very dangerous, because they used lead based paint or something and it could interrupt the radar signals. On top of that, they could have been seriously injured. And they said, "You take charge and get those guys straightened out." So I went back and I said, "I am so proud of you guys." I thought it was just fantastic that here they were so exhausted but they had the spirit and gumption to go out there and put the unit's nomenclature up on the tower.

Interviewer

Which goes to a question about morale in this time, because the typical narrative says that it went into rapid decline around now, isn't that right? But you didn't see that?

Russ Campbell

I didn't see it in the 101st. Maybe it's because of the 101st and what it was. They had a lot of great leadership, a lot of esprit de corps, they were successful in practically all of their operations, and that probably we didn't have any drug problem.

Interviewer

Or racial conflict.

Russ Campbell

Didn't have racial conflicts, I never had to deal with a

Interviewer

You must have heard about it though.

Russ Campbell

I'd heard about it. And I talked to other guys that led units and most of them say the same thing. And even though they weren't in the 101st "4th Infantry Division, 25th" if they were a line unit they tended to report pretty positive things about morale and discipline and so forth.

Interviewer

How were you affected by the loss of political support and popular support back here at home?

Russ Campbell

I tell you, I didn't really reflect on it. I must say, in fact I might even say I wasn't even aware of it. We were so involved with the day-to-day and the survival and the operations and accomplishment of the mission that these other things back here, although we were aware of them, we didn't have time to _____.

Interviewer

But you must have been aware of them when you came back.

Russ Campbell

Oh, come back, yeah.

Interviewer

So actually your deployment ends then, what month in '68?

Russ Campbell

Well, it was May '68. We fought our way up that's an interesting story, because after Saigon when we were moved, the Tet offensive now is really going. It wasn't a one-day event; it lasted for weeks and weeks. So the 1st Brigade gets reassigned to open up the Highway 1 from Da Nang to Hue. And all of the aircraft in Vietnam now being used to redeploy units to pursue the NVA, NVC and whatnot.

Russ Campbell

And the only way we could get up there was by ship, an LST, so they loaded up our battalion and our battery on a Naval LST, never been on one before, and there's no manual that told us how to get on again and off again an LST. So we load up in this LST, we all got seasick, it took us three days to go up the coast, and then we landed in Da Nag. And when we got off in Da Nag we were assigned an area north of Da Nag to support the battalion that I supported, the Charlie battery I supported, which was I had orders to open up the Hai Van Pass, which was the main pass up over the mountains that separated Da Nang from Hue and the NVA had taken control of that.

Russ Campbell

So we were given a position on the beach. Well, these guns that we had we only had five if them, not six, which was the normal table of organization equipment they had a baseplate, and the baseplate had to be anchored into the ground. Well, there was no way that you're on a beach in sand you're going to be able to anchor a baseplate and secure the weapon. Although we tried that. Right away we concluded we couldn't do this, and it was a little scary because our goal was to get the guns up and running as fast as we could, and we were very good at that.

Russ Campbell

And we were being integrated with the Marine Corps artillery defense of Da Nang. We were the one lone artillery battery. But that's what you did; you became part of whatever unit was the operational overseer of that area. So we became part of the defense of Da Nang, even though we were supporting this infantry battalion.

Russ Campbell

I radioed to them and said, "We've got a problem here," and they didn't want to move us anywhere else, they wanted to keep us there. So the Seabees, they contacted the Seabees, which is the engineering element of the Navy, and said they've got this unit down there, can you guys go down there and help them get set up. So they sent a couple of people down. They said, "We can cover this beach in dirt." I had no idea how they were going to do that but the next thing I know, within two hours, the Seabees with these gigantic earthmoving pieces of equipment that they use to build runways and piers and that sort of thing, they came down there with I don't know how many of these things, loaded up with dirt, and they went out and laid dirt, it must have been four feet deep over the sand, and then we were able to put the guns on top of that dirt and anchor them.

Russ Campbell

It reminded me, in retrospect, how many times we had to innovate or respond to situations and create solutions to problems that nobody ever even dreamed of and never even heard of this. There was nothing in any manual that told you how to anchor a 105 baseplate onto a beach, or how to get a battery off an LST. Maybe the Marines knew how to do that, but we're in the army, we knew how to jump out of airplanes; we didn't know how to get off an LST. But we did it.

Russ Campbell

We were there for maybe four weeks and the area was secured, the Hai Van Pass got opened, and the next thing we had to do was move with the infantry up over the pass with the guns and move all the way to Hue " Fu Bai, actually, Fu Bai was outside of Hue, and that's up the coast. This was a very unsettling move on our part because normally the guns are pulled by a prime mover, a truck, a three-quarter ton, and it pulls the guns so if anything happens you just detach the gun, point the gun in the direction, and you can start firing. They didn't have any trucks like that that could pull. The only thing they had available that they could get us onto were flatbed trucks. So we had to put two guns on a flatbed truck, a big flatbed truck, and no way those guns were going to become operational as long as they were on that flatbed.

Interviewer

A much more vulnerable position.

Russ Campbell

Absolutely. And our guys were so uptight because they were artillerymen, they want to be able to fire, they want to be able to operate. So we loaded it up on these flatbed trucks and went up over the Hai Van Pass and down route one all the way to Fu Bai, and made it. We were not ambushed, thank God. So here we are, we've moved by helicopter, we've moved by ship, we've moved by flatbed trucks and all of that we had to figure out on the fly.

Russ Campbell

And we get up to Fu Bai, and Hue was just now getting retaken by the ARVN and ourselves, and we were given orders to move West. We set up three or four firebases as we moved further and further west to the A Shau Valley. That was the first time we had the battery collocated with other units. We went in and we were the first battery into a place that became Firebase Bastogne, which became a huge firebase and one of the rare times when we actually we collocated with other artillery and a very large unit of infantry

that protected it.

Interviewer

What were your impressions of the ARVN?

Russ Campbell

I didn't have much contact with them. They operated independently of us. They'd be in complimentary assignments. We would have area of operations and the ARVN might be assigned one and we would have another, and there was rarely any direct contact. Although when we were within range, we were given them as a unit that we had to support if they called in a fire mission. They were sometimes misunderstood and didn't necessarily have the same discipline.

Russ Campbell

I can remember one fire mission that we got it was from an ARVN unit and it was being advised by an American lieutenant, and they were in what for us was a no fire zone. We'd gotten an overlay that said this area is a no fire zone. And the reason it was a no fire zone is this ARVN unit was going to be operating in there, so they didn't want us independently to go shooting into that thing and perhaps engage them.

Russ Campbell

In the meantime, we've taken all the information for a fire mission, the guns are already locked and loaded ready to fire, and this guy is out there screaming for help, and I'm plotting it out, and my team is, in the no fire zone. And then it occurred to me, what if this is too friendly units that have somehow banged into each other, which was not uncommon in the dark and in the jungle to get disoriented and end up hitting each other and ending up in a firefight. So I had that concern. So I not only had the concern with the no fire zone, I was concerned, I had to ask, "Are you sure that you're being hit? Are you sure that you're dealing with an enemy force here?" And he screamed, "Yes, Sir, we are, we are, we've to get help, we've got to get help." So I took a deep breath and I looked at the fire direction center guys, I said, "Fire." And I just hoped.

Russ Campbell

And the ARVN unit got attacked in the middle of the night. Two o'clock in the morning I get this urgent fire mission coming in. It goes to the FDC first, the Fire Direction Center, they woke me up, got me up. They said, "Sir, we've got a fire mission. It's plotting out into a no fire zone." I said, "We can't fire." If it's a no fire zone we can't fire. And so they said, "Sir, you've got to talk to them."

Russ Campbell

So I get on the radio and this lieutenant who I never met ever is screaming for help. "Sir, we're getting killed here, we're getting a hit, I think we're being surrounded and we need help." In the meantime, I'm trying to get clearance. I couldn't get clearance through our own battalion that controls that thing. And this went on for 20 minutes.

Interviewer

Even though you didn't have authorization.

Russ Campbell

I didn't have authorization. This guy was so desperate. And then I concluded that even if it was a friendly attack, if we get some artillery out there it may stop the whole thing. So he screamed back, "Thank God, thank God, and then he started to give his orders, directions to move it around." So we moved it around and brought it in a little bit closer. Eventually we were successful and the contact was broken off, the artillery apparently stopped it. This whole thing went on for about two hours. It quieted down and the next morning he radioed back that they had a half-a-dozen guys wounded and a couple killed, but they were able to extract themselves from the situation without any further loss.

Russ Campbell

My battalion commander came out to the battery that morning and wanted an update from me as to what happened. I told him what happened and he said, "Well, I have to tell you, don't do it again? You understand, Captain Campbell?" I said, "Yes, Sir," and he left.

Interviewer

That's the nature of war, really.

Russ Campbell

I was so nervous. You know, you've got so much in your hands at that moment. What is the decision you make? What is the right answer? And in some cases you just have to hope for the best. And in that circumstance it came out the best.

Interviewer

Not everything's in a guidebook.

Russ Campbell

It's not. In fact, that's kind of one of the things as we're talking that I begin to realize that characteristic, we had good training, our guys were very competent and they had good leadership, they were courageous, all those good things. But some of the things that really distinguished them was our ability to problem solve and to work together as a team. If there was a problem on one gun, the other guys from the other gun sections would be over there helping them, if they had a gun jam or they needed ammo. They all run down to the ammo dump to bring the ammo back. Whatever it was, there was this sense of teamwork within the battery and a great relationship that we had with the infantry company and the infantry battalion that we supported. They really had a lot of confidence.

Russ Campbell

Part of their confidence I attribute to the fact that I had been an FO, I had been out with them. I had been with their company. I had been the XO. I'm now a battery commander, and now I'm working with the battalion commander, and in that case Colonel Buckley was the Infantry Battalion Commander, and he was succeeded by Ralph Pucken, full colonel. I think they were lieutenant colonels and then became full colonels. Two outstanding officers. And I was brought in on every briefing, every meeting that they had at the TOC, the tactical operations center, as the battery commander, and they always would ask me, "What do you need, where do you want to set up?"

Hereâ€™s three choices of a new position, which do you think is the best?â€” And we just worked hand in hand.

Interviewer

It strikes me that one of the lessons of your story as youâ€™re describing it is that ironically you began your deployment fearing that you were not prepared, and yet no one could be prepared for what you really encountered.â€” And the answer to that is you kind of make it up as you go along.â€” Thatâ€™s what you were able to do because you had the right men with you, and you were able to problem solve.â€” And the right leadership.

Russ Campbell

And the foundation for a lot of that is back here.â€” In many ways there are certain things it just does not prepare you for.â€” It does not prepare you for how youâ€™re going to react when youâ€™re face to face in a combat situation.â€” You can only hope that all of the things youâ€™ve been taught and all of the foundations that have been built for you will come into play and stand you in good stead. But you as an individual really donâ€™t know until you go through it.â€” And you may go through it many times, and then maybe the tenth time is the one where everything falls apart on you, and that happens.â€” Because the amount of stress and pressure on you and on a personâ€” I was the only FO that wasnâ€™t killed or wounded in that unit.

Interviewer

Really?

Russ Campbell

The only one.â€” And thatâ€™s day to day combat, day to day search and destroys, ambushes and so on and so forth.â€” I lost my RTO.â€” I had my pack shot up.â€” I had my radio shot off.â€” But Iâ€™m here today, which in some ways makes me feel guilty.â€” I kind of wish I could have had something, which is kind of silly, but the point being that I feel very fortunate, but at the same time feel badly for those guys that we lost.

Interviewer

Did you ever feel scared?

Russ Campbell

Scared?â€” Iâ€™ve asked myself that a number of times over the years, although thereâ€™s a big gap of thinking.â€” For 30 some odd years I didnâ€™t really think about Vietnam.

Interviewer

Wouldnâ€™t let yourself think about it?

Interviewer

Because itâ€™s too disturbing.

Russ Campbell

â€” â€” â€” It was too upsetting.â€” I know that I experienced fear, but a lot of the fear came after

the event. That is, if we were in an intense firefight, I didn't experience fear during the fight. It was when it was all over and you sat back exhausted and you're shaking, that's when you became aware of what you'd just gone through and what the rest of the guys had just gone through, and you had to kind of regroup. So there was that kind of fear.

Russ Campbell

There were a couple of operations that we went in on that I know were high in the anxiety quotient. One we were secretly or whatever brought out of this is the infantry company, A company and myself as the FO. This is an FO story. We were brought out, brought to an airstrip. We thought we were going to be doing. They said it was a top secret operation and we were disconnected from everybody else and we kind of like were pulled out and hidden away for two days. We thought we were going to be doing a jump, a parachute jump. That was the rumor that was circulating.

Russ Campbell

Well, it turned out it wasn't a jump, it was that they had intelligence that there were two American POWs that had been captured and brought into a compound on the other side of the border in Cambodia. We were briefed on the intelligence and we were shown photographs of the Hooch area where supposedly there were being held. And we came up with a whole new different mode of operandi. And that was that this was an operation, we were not going to fire, we weren't going to prep the area. It was going to be a hot attack and we were going to just fly in. We had a maximum of five minutes on the ground.

Russ Campbell

I was the FO with the artillery, but I was there more in case we ran into a huge problem, I wasn't going to be used to prep the area, I'd be used to extract us. That was my role in this thing. And we swooped in, came in by treetop level, swooped in, brought the helicopters down, guys flared out. We didn't find anything. But all the little fires were still burning. There were teapots on them. We found the two cages where these guys apparently had been held, and we had five minutes on the ground. It wasn't one of these deals where we were going to now spread out and search for them. We had to get out of there because we were on the other side of the border etcetera. So the order came, we're out of here. The helicopters had been circling, so then they came back down, picked us up and extracted us.

Interviewer

Were those men ever found?

Russ Campbell

Not that I know of. So it was a mission that we failed on, but the point of fear was we were very up tight about this mission, partly because we were going into an LZ that we hadn't prepped, and we had not done that before. And secondly, our time on the ground was going to be so limited we could not make any mistakes. We had to get in, go out, find them, and get out of there. So the day or two leading up to that as we practiced this thing and looked at the photos and interpreted where we were going and worked out how we were going to do it was one that ended a lot of guys said, "Gee, we might not be coming back from this one." We didn't know what we were getting into. So I can remember that one being a bit fearful.

Interviewer

Do you ever look back on now that you've allowed yourself to rethink what happened do you look back at any of the decisions you made with regret? That you may have put some people in danger?

Russ Campbell

Yeah, there are a couple of them. Part of them was because I had that experience on the line, somehow you develop a sixth sense. Maybe it's intuition in a circumstance, and by that I mean that I was the only one in the battery when I came out to be the battery exec I was the only one who'd been an FO. I was the only one that had been out on the line and had gotten attuned to the sounds and rhythm of battle and war as it existed in our limited world.

Russ Campbell

And I can clearly remember a situation where the battery got a fire mission and it was one of those where it was across a valley. And we were on this ridge, and the guys were patrolling on the other ridge, search and destroy, and they came under fire. And the fire mission came into us and I was standing outside, just kind of like this, because I was the CO, I didn't have to do anything, everything just operated. And I'm watching the guns. The guns go up and swing around, they've set the deflection and coordinate on the guns, and they fired off several rounds and one volley. And I had binoculars, one of the rare times the battery could actually see a target. Most of the time it was shooting over a hill or into the jungle. And I had binoculars and I was watching the movement of that infantry company.

Russ Campbell

Then in my mind as an FO, I said, well, I saw the rounds land, I could see roughly where he was trying to get to, and I said, well, his next adjustment in my mind is he should be adding 400. By that, he's got them here and now he wants to put them there and get the target bracketed. And our guys are down below that. And as I'm watching it, the adjustment comes in, goes to the Fire Direction Center it doesn't go to me so I don't know what the adjustment is it goes to the Fire Direction, they apply it and they give the commands to the guns, and the guns are getting ready to fire. And as they do that, it dawns on me, the guns didn't go up, the guns came down. So instead of giving an add 400 in other words, increase the range 400 meters from where you last fired they dropped it 400. And at that moment I realized dropping it 400 would put them right on top of our guys, because it should have gone the other way.

Russ Campbell

So I in a rare moment yelled, "Check fire!" at the same time the guns went, boom, boom, boom. And I said, "Oh God, why didn't I move faster?" I mean, the rounds hadn't even landed and I just knew that we'd just dropped about 5 or 6 rounds on our own guys, and we did.

Interviewer

How many men died at that?

Russ Campbell

Fortunately, nobody was killed, but they had about seven seriously wounded. And now

the whole operation is a shambles, now they've got to compromise their position, they've got to bring in a Medevac, and get them

Interviewer

So was it just a miscalculation?

Russ Campbell

It was the FO's error. So there's no way in the FDC they're going to know how to correct a drop 400 versus an add 400.

Interviewer

The FO has to tell them.

Russ Campbell

The FO has to tell them that. And the FO just made a mistake. And he was a new FO. It kind of reminded me of when I was at my first firing. He'd only been there maybe four or five days, and it was so common. I guess the other thing is that my instinct told me, "That's the wrong move, stop the guns." But I couldn't move fast enough. Maybe three seconds if I'd stopped thinking, "Oh, it should have been this way and that way," but I didn't. So that was one that

Interviewer

You said there were two instances

Russ Campbell

That one troubled me. And at the same time it reminded me so many times of errors and mistakes.

Russ Campbell

Another one was when we were at Firebase Bastogne. I knew that we had an infantry platoon not at the perimeter but outside the perimeter doing patrolling, and we weren't supposed to be firing anything on this one particular ridge where they were operating. Again, a fire mission came in, and I'm watching the guns, and as I'm watching them swing around, my instincts tell me, that's heading right to where this patrol is operating.

Russ Campbell

But instead of thinking really quickly and staying stop, I ran to the FTC and said, "Where's that platoon? Where's that platoon?" In the meantime, this thing's getting processed, in seconds. We could get the rounds out in 30 seconds. And I didn't get there fast enough to stop the guns. I came out and I was yelling, "Check fire," I had my helmet on and the guns are firing, they couldn't hear me because of the noise. I took my helmet off and threw it into the gun sections area and the gun chief looks around, I said, "Stop!" And it was too late. The rounds had gone off. Well, the good news on that one was it didn't do any damage. But the point is, it was something that had gone wrong, the outcome was not bad, and what did we learn?

Russ Campbell

A A The thing I have learned in reflection is so many errors, so many mistakes can occur in combat and in war. On the perimeter you get these little outposts, two guys in each one, they're supposed to stay awake at night, one guy on, one guy off, and that one guy's half asleep. All of a sudden he hears noises and he jumps up, starts firing. What does that do? That sets everybody off firing. Throws two hand grenades and the next thing you know the noise he heard was the other listening post and they're throwing hand grenades at each other, those kinds of mistakes. Or short rounds and long rounds or aircraft coming and dropping it too close.

Russ Campbell

One of my biggest missions, the company was all engaged in a fierce firefight. I don't remember where it was, somewhere in the Chu Lai, Cam Khe area. The company commanders requested a lot of fire support, so I put in a fire mission for all available. And in that fire mission they radioed back what was available, did I want it, and they had some 8 inch and another 105 battery, an R battery. But the curious thing about this one, it was a naval destroyer, because we were not that far from the coast, like ten kilometers in. I came in and they said, "We've got a naval destroyer that has ordinance, do you want it?" I didn't even know if our scenario commands would be understood.

Russ Campbell

I never had been thought to adjust a destroyer or whatever it was they had out there. It was intense so I said, "Yeah, we'll take it." They warned me, "This is not as accurate as the stuff you're using, put it out and work it back." So I'm talking to them on the radio, that was my only mission with the Navy, but they did fire for us and we ended up successful in that engagement and the enemy contact broke off.

Interviewer

Why did it take you so long to go back to your memories of Vietnam?

Russ Campbell

I didn't know it at the time but I think that I was really suffering with the guilt and the losses, the opportunities that we didn't really fulfill.

Interviewer

But guilt for what? I mean, it sounds like you made you were extremely successful.

Russ Campbell

Well, you know, when you lose somebody, when you lose a fellow American soldier, maybe I didn't lose them, but maybe there was something more I could have done. And you come back after one of these three or four or five days out in the jungle and they have a little ceremony, they put the boots on the ground, put the rifle in the ground, the bayonet, and put the guy's helmet on, those are really unsettling kinds of things. When you see somebody all shot up, our guys, and you have to put somebody in a body bag, pieces, you come across parts of bodies after a firefight, very unsettling memories. And they keep reoccurring in your mind, and sometimes the only way I could block it out was to block it out and just not deal with it. So that's the way I came to deal with those memories.

Russ Campbell

But then I found out years later, it turned out to be dysfunctional. Because 9/11 occurred,

and 9/11 I was downtown, I was with Chase Manhattan Bank, and our major building was two blocks from the World Trade Center. In fact, we had a whole floor at the World Trade Center, plus a branch bank down below. And I happened to be out of town on the day it actually happened, but my responsibility was for the disaster recovery and contingency planning for any kind of disaster, and particularly the buildings downtown.

Interviewer

You were out of town.

Russ Campbell

And I was out of town.

Interviewer

Where were you?

Russ Campbell

I was in France. I had to

Interviewer

Where in France.

Russ Campbell

Normandy, as a matter of fact. And it was frightening to try and reconcile

Interviewer

You were there on vacation?

Russ Campbell

No, I was attending a combination business and a wedding, but I managed to get back right away and ended up the same kind of things I'd done in the army, put together a command post, assembled the guys, did an assessment and we mapped out all our buildings and where everybody. We evacuated 15,000 Chase employees from downtown during that day. I didn't because I wasn't there. Now we had to find them all and account for them. I put together a command post down there and it was just a really, really frightening place.

Interviewer

Did you lose anyone?

Russ Campbell

We lost two people were killed in that.

Interviewer

People you knew?

Russ Campbell

I did not know them, no. I did not know them. So that was a very unsettling experience. It was like going back into a combat situation. Because downtown was surrounded and cordoned off. They had blocked every road, they had police everywhere. They had military personnel. They had emergency vehicles. They had people, special ops types with black uniforms.

Interviewer

So you got back to see all that a couple days later?

Russ Campbell

Oh yeah. I was the first back into our building with two other guys. I had to put together the recovery plan and reoccupation plan of five of our buildings downtown. It took us four or five weeks to get the buildings cleaned up and then to have a reoccupation plan to get the people back in, which we did.

Interviewer

But you said this event inspired you to want to

Russ Campbell

Well, it triggered back. It was a triggering event, if you will, in the memory. I've been fascinated by this intellectually to understand how we deal with the conscious and the subconscious. I'm not a psychologist or a psychiatrist. I'm an average human being, why do I have all these intrusions? Why can't I control that thought process, if you will, those memories? Instead the flashbacks started all the flashbacks started up again, and I hadn't had flashbacks in 40 years.

Interviewer

So you remembered things you hadn't thought about for 40 years.

Interviewer

Is that because the sights, the sounds, the trauma of 9/11 mimicked in your brain what it was like to be in combat?

Russ Campbell

In some way it was a trigger, and that trigger set my mind off

Interviewer

It just opened the door to things that had not been

Russ Campbell

Hadn't been dealt with.

Interviewer

So did you enter into a depression or what happened?

Russ Campbell

It was more of a concern, because it was so disruptive. It always was at night. In the daytime I'd be in a meeting, I'd be talking with somebody like yourself, and I started running a tape of one of these incidents and lose my focus. It was that kind of distraction. And at night it was sleep disruptive. So if I had one of these episodes, if you will, that caused me to wake up and have a night terror or thrash around in bed or disrupt my wife, poor thing, and live through all of that, we finally concluded, we didn't know, something's going on here. Why are you having all these experiences and what are they? What are you seeing? I said, I'm not sure what I'm seeing? They're dreams, but it's hard for me.

Interviewer

Were you even confused whether you were dreaming things that had happened to you and you were recalling or whether they were pure fiction?

Russ Campbell

I've tried to analyze this, it's very difficult to do, but a lot of them were just fictional. That is, they were abstract events. I'd see five shadows moving through the jungle and I was going to be attacked. Or they were going to attack somebody else, or they'd disappear. Then there was a hand to hand thing, many, many, many like that.

Interviewer

It's not that they were fictional

Russ Campbell

But there were real ones. There was also the real ones, I'm saying there was both.

Interviewer

And all of them had a relationship to some reality that you had experienced at some point in your life. In other words, it was not just the shadows were scary, it's that they recalled a situation that you maybe had blocked out for such a long time.

Russ Campbell

There was that element going on.

Russ Campbell

I sought help to try and understand it. I went to my primary care physician and I said, "You know, I keep having these nightmares." And he said, "Well, you know, I know somebody who deals with PTSD, maybe you're experiencing some of that." So he gave me the referral and I went to this doctor. And that doctor was a specialist in PTSD and this is kind of interesting for firemen and policemen, and he had never dealt with a military person. So all of a sudden PTSD is not something that's limited to the military; it affects a lot of people in a lot of different ways and professions. So that was a learning point.

Russ Campbell

So he worked with me and basically I didn't have a severe case of it. One of the ways they teach you to deal with it, is to deal with it. That is, to talk about it, and to eliminate the thought processes that create the anxiety, if you will. And the more you

discuss it, deal with it, be up front with it, it eventually goes away.

Interviewer

Was that hard to do?

Russ Campbell

Oh yeah, it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy.

Interviewer

Is it hard now, even as you sit here to recall these events?

Russ Campbell

Well, I felt some emotions as we were talking and some resurrection of some of those memories. You saw me drink some water, all of a sudden my mouth was going dry and I teared up a little bit. A lot of times your emotions just take over. I think of some of those situations and it's hard not to. They were my guys, you know, they were my guys. And a whole year, we went through a hell of a lot together and survived. Which kind of gets me to how it was at the end.

Russ Campbell

At the beginning you've got a long way to go, a year's a long way, so you're really focused. But as I was getting closer and closer to the end of my one-year tour, I became increasingly aware of my vulnerability and I was taking less chances. I dug a bigger bunker, because we always dug in, so my bunker was a little bit bigger, a little stronger kind of thing. I exposed myself less in the open. I was very much aware, whereas before I wasn't; I'd walk around and do things.

Russ Campbell

That's another thing, you mentioned fear. I'll tell you a fear thing. In the battery at night we always had one person in the gun section awake. They had to rotate. But as the XO, my responsibility was to make sure that there was always someone. I'd have to go around the battery and check in with each gun section. And we'd have a code word for the night, it would be something that the guys would easily remember, like "home run." So you'd say "home" and they'd say "run." Well, that's great, but if you've got a jumpy guy in the gun section and you're creeping around, "home," and he doesn't hear it,

Russ Campbell

One of the scariest things I can remember doing was going around in the dark worrying, making sure that the guys were awake, and worrying that somebody was going to think that somebody penetrated our position and it was really an enemy combatant and not me. So I was always uptight when I did that. We rotated that responsibility, by the way, that was how we dealt with that.

Russ Campbell

But getting back to departure time, it was time for me to leave. I'd been with these guys this whole time. We'd gone through a lot together and we basically had survived. The word came that a helicopter was coming out with my replacement. There

was going to be a little passing of the flag out there on the CP in the battery position. And before that, I went around and said goodbye to every guy.

Interviewer

That's very hard. Very hard.

Russ Campbell

Yeah, it was tough.

Interviewer

You came back to do what? What was next?

Russ Campbell

Next it was the advanced course at Fort Sill. I always thought that was kind of interesting because now I'm going to the advanced course after being in an intense artillery environment where we were creating and writing the doctrine that now had worked its way back to Fort Sill and had now become incorporated into the curriculum. It was no longer a conventional warfare, it was counterinsurgency. It was not frontlines in rear areas, it was asymmetric. The guns were different, the deployment was not a lazy W. Now it was a star formation. And a lot of information about what types of shells to use in what kinds of situations. And more emphasis on the partnership between the infantry unit leader and the

Interviewer

You worked on that doctrine?

Russ Campbell

Well, only in the sense that people would come out and spend time with us in the field to find out how we were dealing with different situations, and that information then was brought back and somehow assimilated with information they got from other artillery units, and they changed the way that they were teaching, what they were teaching.

Interviewer

You said you were very patriotic, come from a very patriotic family, the commitment to the army and the commitment to the war. When you look back on the war after it was over, do you see it as thinking about the war here with a capital W, not just your own personal experience, do you see it as a failure, as unfortunate, as a victory, as a defeat? In your mind, how do you sum up what those men died for?

Russ Campbell

I clearly consider it a victory. We won that war. It might not have been evident at that time, and it might not have been so declarative the way I'm saying that at this moment. It was more that it evolved. But if we think back to how and why we got engaged, it was kind of like a slow drip process that got us in deeper and deeper and deeper. We thought this was it and then it got bigger and whatnot.

Russ Campbell

There was the concept, the domino theory, that if we didn't stop them here they were just going to take over another country, it would be Malaysia next and Thailand and so on, so that was percolating as justification. There was stopping the inroads of communism. China was expanding. Russia had taken a position in this thing. So those were the macro elements to it. On the ground, you didn't even think about that.

Russ Campbell

In retrospect, though, when I look at it, the reason I say that we were victorious is that no other countries fell. So the domino theory, if you subscribe to that, was eliminated. Secondly, if you were trying to stop the growth of communism, that stopped. There has been no further intrusion of communism in that part of the world.

Russ Campbell

And even though the North Vietnamese took over South Vietnam, I like to use the example of have you bought a shirt or a tee shirt or some piece of clothing lately that says "Made in Vietnam"? Because if it says, "made in Vietnam" that's testimony to the fact that we won the war, because that's capitalism. There probably is no better example than that, that our way has prevailed. It took a long time but ultimately it was successful.

Interviewer

Did you always feel that way, or in the years when you came home did you feel something a little bit?

Russ Campbell

No, it was more questioning during the years. It was like, was this really worthwhile? Did we do the right thing? I was very upset with our government for getting us in there and not giving us the wherewithal and the resources. I mean, running up to the boundaries, the borders of Cambodia and Laos, and having to stop and not being able to chase them in, or fire into those areas, those limited controls. We never went across the DMZ. We could have gone up into North Vietnam easily. We could have put a lot more capability to the fray than we committed, but we chose not to. Maybe that was humanitarian, maybe we were worried about the escalation, I don't know.

Russ Campbell

And we can sit back here and argue these things for time immemorial and we may never know, but the country lost its resolve, because it lasted so long, and there are some similarities today with Afghanistan and Iraq. The rebellion on the part of students on the campuses was pretty upsetting, especially when after the advanced course I went to graduate school and was told not to wear the uniform and not to do anything provocative that would lead to some kind of incident on campus.

Russ Campbell

I can remember for our class group that we had a social early on, right at the beginning of the semester where they wanted to bring all the new graduate students together and get to know each other, meet the faculty kind of thing. We all had nametags and everybody had a summary sheet of pages of the vita, who the people were and what they had done. Of course mine said Captain US Army Vietnam vet.

Russ Campbell

A lot of people came up to me, it was very pleasant, "Nice to meet you, I see this and that." But the one that struck me was this one guy comes up to me, sticks out his hand, looks at my nametag, looks me right in the eye and he says, "Oh, you're the fucking baby killer we've got in this class, fuck you." I said, "All right, all right, we'll deal with that down the road." That's what it was like. That's how I started there in graduate school. It was not very comfortable.

Interviewer

You came here and taught for a few years, right?

Russ Campbell

Yeah, that was neat, because two of the people that sponsored me were the infantry battalion commanders from Vietnam, Colonel Puckett and Colonel Buckley. By that time Colonel Buckley had become the head of the department here.

Interviewer

Which department was that?

Russ Campbell

That was military psychology and leadership, which is now behavioral sciences?

Interviewer

BS&L.

Russ Campbell

BS&L, that's what it is, and it's changed a little bit. He brought me back here, so that says something about what he thought of what I did over there.

Interviewer

And then you left the Army?

Russ Campbell

I left the army after that and went and joined the Chase Manhattan Bank

Interviewer

What did you do for them?

Russ Campbell

I was a graduate; my graduate degree was as an MBA, so I started out as a financial analyst in the international department and very quickly they said, "You know, we've got some problems in the bank operationally and we think that you're somebody, because of your background, might be able to solve them." I said, "Well, you know, I'm not a banker." They said, "Look, we've got plenty of bankers, we don't need a banker. We need somebody that can manage, somebody that can lead, somebody who can build a team, somebody who can solve a problem."

Interviewer

Hold on one second, we just lost your microphone. You can clip it back on to your shirt there, a little bit lower, right there.

Russ Campbell

Sorry. I went to Paris and took over this effort to rebuild the back office, get control of the accounts and the operations. I was there for two years. Then I came back to the States and went into the international systems division, and we were putting together a major deployment of a new program across the world in each country. And that had also started to flounder and they asked me to take that program over.

Interviewer

How did your army experience inform your work at Chase? Did it have any bearing on it?

Russ Campbell

Yeah, that's what I was leading up to. The element that I brought to the table was the ability to manage a team, to set an objective, organize the resources to meet that objective, and achieve success and to basically hold that effort together till the mission was accomplished. That's a lot of military terms objective and mission and whatnot but you know what, they use the same terms? They did in the bank. They said, "Our objective is to accomplish this." Okay? "We need somebody that has that ability, that can outline the plan, that can communicate the progress, that can communicate the results, that can communicate the outcome, deal with a diverse group of people and bring the project to a successful conclusion." Which I was able to do.

Russ Campbell

And I gained a reputation for doing that within Chase Manhattan and got some of the largest projects they had over the years. And some of those are some of the biggest real estate projects. In fact, to this day, the consolidation of Chase's operations in multiple buildings in downtown Manhattan was a real estate strategy to make it more productive and efficient by collocating them all and building a new facility in Brooklyn.

Interviewer

You managed that?

Russ Campbell

I was designated the program executive for that effort, and that was a five year project. And it was the largest relocation project in New York City history. We moved 6,500 people without interrupting the back office operations of the bank, to one facility in Brooklyn. It took a long time to do it, big project, and a lot of fun.

Interviewer

Well, thank you for your time.

Russ Campbell

And then I retired.

Interviewer

Yes, yes.Â Thank you for your time today and thank you for your service and I hope weâ€™ll get you back here for more interviewing at some point.

Russ Campbell

I hope that it serves not only you well and the department and your oral history effort, but I hope that it helps somebody along the line that might be tuning in.

Interviewer

Thank you so much.

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