â€œGroomedâ€ for West Point
Interviewer

Now weâ€™re ready.Â Okay.Â

Conrad Crane

Okay.Â Â Sure.

Interviewer

Tell me the spelling of your name.

Conrad Crane

Okay.Â Â Conrad Charles Crane, C-O-N-R-A-D C-H-A-R-L-E-S C-R-A-N-E.

Interviewer

And you said that you are from northwestâ€”

Conrad Crane

Iâ€™m from northeastern Pennsylvania.

Interviewer

Northeastern Pennsylvania.

Conrad Crane

Born up in Kingston, a little town.Â Â Like I said, it was about two-and-a-half fromâ€”about two hours and 15 minutes from West Point now.Â Â But when we started driving up to West Point in the late â€™50s, it was about four-and-a-half hours then.

Interviewer

And did you grow up in a military family?

Conrad Crane

Iâ€™m the first person in my family to go to West Point.Â Â We had the normal military background in the family.Â Â My grandfather was in World War I, with like a 55thÂ Coast Artillery just for a couple of years though.Â Â And then he went back to his civilian business.Â Â My uncle was in World War II, and then he went back or actually worked through the Air Force Civilian [Service] after the war.Â Â My father was a naval ROTC during World War II.Â

Conrad Crane

The one thing they all had in common was they all wanted to go to West Point and none of them could get in.Â Â So when I wasâ€”from a very young age, I was groomed to be the one that was going to take the shot at West Point.Â Â I had a little cadet cap when I was a little kid.Â Â And it actually worked out to the advantage of my father because my father was the only guy in his naval ROTC unit who had bet on Army for the Army/Navy games.Â Â And of course he was there for the â€™44 and the â€™45 games when he

gave an exorbitant amount of points.A A And he said he made enough money from that game to last him through the rest of the year.Â Â

Conrad Crane

But I think I was groomed from an early age to go to West Point and I was going to be theirâ€"the one to try.Â Â And I did get in.Â Â And Iâ€™m still the only one from our family who has gone.Â Â None of myâ€"my nephew tried to get in but he couldnâ€™t get an appointment. Â

Interviewer

Now your father and grandfather couldnâ€™t get in because their grades werenâ€™t high enough or that they didnâ€™t have access to the kind of sponsorship or what was the reason?Â

Conrad Crane

I think with my grandfather it was more an educational thing.Â Â He just didnâ€™t have the background to get in.Â Â My father came in second in the examinations.Â Â He had other appointments available but he wanted to go to West Point.Â Â And he wanted to get into the war and didnâ€™t want to wait around.Â Â So he took the Naval ROTC and went to Dartmouth and did four years at Dartmouth in 26 months.Â Â

Conrad Crane

My understanding is the person who got the appointment to West Point [in his fatherâ€™s place] didnâ€™t finish, which I think bothers him to this day.Â Â But he ended up being commissioned a Lieutenant JG in the Navy in the Reserves, but never went.Â Â He graduated in 19â€" right when the war was ending in the Pacific, was hitting the Pacific on a destroyerâ€"the way he always puts it, as soon as the Japanese heard he was coming, they surrendered.Â Â So he never really served any active time either.

Conrad Crane

So Iâ€™m the first one that really spent more than a couple years in active duty in our family.Â Â But it goes back.Â Â Weâ€™ve had Civil War ancestors who served like anyone else.Â Â So weâ€™ve had periodic wartime service, but nobody with a career military like me.

Interviewer

So you grew up with a kind of fascination for the Army itself?

Conrad Crane

I grew up with a fascination for West Point more than anything else.Â Â It wasâ€"really, I guess it kind of started to sink in what I was getting into or what I was really heading to whenâ€"the mid to late â€˜60s, we used to go to the cemetery because that was the only heated bathroom we could find before we went up to the football games.Â Â

Conrad Crane

Because we hadâ€"our family never took vacations.Â Â Our vacation was we went to Army football games in the wintertimeâ€"we didnâ€™t have a lot of money.Â Â I know where my parents scrounged for, but thatâ€™s what we did, went to the Army football

games.A A Started having season tickets in 1958, which was a good year to startA which is the great lonely end team that ended up ranked third in the country.Â Â Pete Dawkins, Bobby Anderson.Â Â

Conrad Crane

But we used to go to the restroom in the cemetery because it was heated.Â Â And we started to notice new graves in the cemetery of some of the people we had seen playâ€"casualties coming back from [the] Vietnam [War].Â Â And at that point, it was fairly obvious that this was not a normal avocation I was aiming towards.Â Â It didnâ€™t really change my mind at all, but it did focus me a bit more.

Conrad Crane

So initially I was kind of groomed to go to West Point.Â Â And it was only at that time I started to think about, I was also going into the Army.Â Â But by the time I got my appointment in 1970 and went, I was still very determined that I was going to make it through.Â Â And that was what I wanted to do.Â

Interviewer

What was it then that you think attracted you to West Point other than the family interestâ€"?

Conrad Crane

Well, I just gotâ€"I was attracted to West Point because of the way it looked, the way everybody acted.Â Â I had an individual in my hometown named Mark Scureman who graduated in the class of 1966 who lived next to my grandmother.Â Â And I used to talk with him when he was home and watched him go through his career.Â Â He was an all-American wrestler at West Pointâ€"we used to go sometimes to see the wrestling meets and watch him and talk to him.Â Â And he took me back behind the scenes and talked to the cadets.Â Â

Conrad Crane

I remember I met the first captain of the class of 1965â€"a guy named Bob Arvin.Â Â Of course, he was killed in [the] Vietnam [War] and the gym was named after him.Â Â I remember having lunch with him, which was one of those, you know, I think I was in seventh grade at the time or something.Â

Conrad Crane

It doesnâ€™t happen too often you get dragged into the weapons room in the gym and sit down and hereâ€™s the first captain and have a hamburger with him and talk about what itâ€™s like being a cadet and where heâ€™s going and visions for the future.Â Â I was just impressed with the whole aura of what West Point was all about.Â Â And I just wanted to be a West Pointer.

Interviewer

Is that aura of excellence though of leadership, of patriotism?Â Â What is it you think thatâ€"how would you describe that aura?

Conrad Crane

I guess it was special service, I guess.A A Itâ€™s a couple things.A A It was not just that I was attracted to that you were a part of something bigger than yourself, but also the fact that youâ€™re going to be somebody special.Â Â I think my Cullum number is something like 32,000, something like that.Â Â Thatâ€™s how many people have been able to successfully complete West Point.Â Â

Conrad Crane

Youâ€™d become a part of the Long Gray Line, everything the Long Gray Line had done.Â Â And everywhere you go, youâ€™d always be a West Pointer.Â Â Itâ€™s something that would always be with you.Â Â Again, it was justâ€”I felt that I would accomplish something special and continue to do special things, and again, be part of something much bigger than myself.

Interviewer

So you joined which class then?

Conrad Crane

Well, I came in the class of 1974, which I came in July 1st, 1970.Â Â One of the drawbacks perhaps of being an historian is you can get into the documents later on.Â Â And I realized that my class was one that basically if you qualified, you got in.Â Â They were so desperate to fill those slots in 1970 that if you qualified, you were good to get an appointment.

Interviewer

And why was that?

Conrad Crane

Low number of applicants.Â Â There werenâ€™t a lot of applicants, and there werenâ€™t a lot of qualified applicants.Â Â It was a tough timeâ€”in the middle of [the] Vietnam [War], public opinion was very much against the war.Â Â Now, I would have made it anyway, I think, at least I tell myself I would have.Â Â I was a merit scholar; I had terrific grades; I was very active in school.Â

Conrad Crane

I had an appointment from my local representative, and I was one of the ten names that were submitted by both senators, and they all claimed me.Â Â Again, I went in with real high academic standing.Â Â I had almost maxed the SATs.Â Â I had, like, a 1560 out of a 1600 on the SATs.Â Â So I felt I would have made it anyways. Â

Conrad Crane

But it wasâ€”our class took quite a hit.Â Â We started with 1,375, but only graduated a little over 800.Â Â So we took some pretty heavy casualties in that time period.

Against the Grain of a Generation
Interviewer

Weâ€™ll speak to that because your whole generation was sort of going the other direction in a sense.Â How did that feel to you?

Conrad Crane

It was different when I went home.Â Â My own coterieÂ of friends knew what I was doing and were very supportive.Â Â But it wasâ€”you were looked on differently in a lot of other parts of the country.Â Â I was spit upon in the Port Authority Bus Terminal one time when I was there in uniform,Â which kind of had an impact.Â Â I had a couple of friends whoâ€”I was there one time for a cadet trip when they were havingâ€”with some of the Earth Day marches in early 1971, April 1971.Â Â I got a cadet trip for something, and I canâ€™t remember what it was for.Â Â

Conrad Crane

I remember Iâ€™d walk along the streets and one of these parades went by.Â Â All of a sudden, a couple of my high school buddies run out of one of the crowds carrying a North Vietnamese flag and asked how I was doing.Â Â That didnâ€™t impress the upperclassmen I was with.Â Â That was notâ€”but a lot of my friends were doing different things. Â

Conrad Crane

And it was never quite the same.Â Â I mean, you go home and youâ€™d realize that you were going in a different direction than everybody else.Â Â And it tended to move you furtherâ€”I think I tended to mature faster.Â Â West Point does that to you; it makes you mature faster.Â Â I just kind of moved away from that group pretty far.Â Â Youâ€™d go home and youâ€™d get together with people for the first year or two.Â Â But after a couple years, people tended to drift and do other things. Â

Conrad Crane

And at that point, most of the peopleâ€”but then I would bring classmates home.Â Â And the people weâ€”what we were doing basically with the classmates I brought home.Â Â It was just a shifting group of comrades at that point.Â Â But there were some outstanding guys I brought homeâ€”my parents still talk about how much they eat.Â Â Nobody eats like a bunch of cadets on leave, as they found out much to the chagrin of their budget on a number of occasions.Â Â

Conrad Crane

But it was a different time.Â Â We watched Vietnam collapsing on television.Â Â My military history instructorsâ€”Colonel Armstrongâ€”heâ€™d just come back from Vietnam.Â Â Colonel [Rod] Paschall was just getting ready to go to Cambodia, and we had a little map of Cambodia on the wall.Â Â And we were keeping the dimensions of how much of Cambodia was still free, and making little bets among ourselves whether Colonel Paschall was ever going to get there.Â Â It turned out he did.Â Â I think he was there for two weeks, and then he had a Medevacâ€”he had helicopter evacuation to get him out of there.Â Â But we didnâ€™t think he was going to make it.Â Â But that was the DR we were in.Â Â

Conrad Crane

We watched Vietnam on television; we had a South Vietnamese classmate.Â Â And we basically advised him to go to Canada and not to go back.Â Â It was obvious once the Paris Peace Accords were signed that South Vietnam was doomed, at least to us it was obvious.Â Â But he did go back and was commanding, I think, an MP company in the fall of Saigon; spent ten years in the reeducation camp.Â Â And our class project became trying

to get him home, which we eventually did.A A And I think in 1985, we finally got him out of there.

Interviewer

Where is he now?

Conrad Crane

Heâ€™s living in the Washington area, I believe. Tam Minh Pham is his name; â€œPhantomâ€ as his name got set up on most of the drill rosters and stuff. But he was a little guy; a lot of spirit, and one of the guys who survivedâ€”one of the 800 or so that graduated. The big story about him or the most famous story about him was when we were going through Airborne School as cadets, when they had their big dropâ€”he only weighed about 80 pounds soaking wet, I thinkâ€”and when we had the big drop, everybody was on the ground and he got caught in updraft and he was just hanging up there. Everybody was looking up and watching him hang there. But again, our class project was to get him home. And eventually in the mid-â€™80s, we got him out of his situation.Â

Interviewer

Did you have any sympathy with those who opposed the War in Vietnam? Iâ€™m not talking about those who were spitting on soldiersâ€“â€“but the questions that were really actively debated at the time as to whether it was a wise intervention or not.

Conrad Crane

My sense is we werenâ€™t big into questioning at that point. We had some interesting interplay with the different protesting groups. Every Earth Day especially, in the springtime, we used to get all types of protests on campus about the war. The Ladycliff girls would come down and the Vassar girlsâ€”which we always enjoyed; it was good to haveâ€”anything to get girls on the campus was fine. Weâ€™d take them even if they were protesting. You had all the stories floating around. At one time, they wereâ€”one of these protesting groups was handing out flowers to the cadets as we were going by. One of the football players took a flower and ate oneâ€”just to irritate the protesters.

Conrad Crane

We had streakers; mainly Ladycliff girls would try to streak down diagonal walk, which always caused a reaction. There were cadet streakers in those days. It was a strange timeâ€”not many. Â And once they cracked down, it kind of killed the streaking.

Conrad Crane

So we were kind of part of our generation, but not quite part of our generation. There were a number of people in the classâ€”I donâ€™t know how manyâ€”who had basically gone to the prep school for a year to avoid the draft. And after they had gone through plebe year and they had met their two-year commitmentâ€”I donâ€™t remember exactly how it worked, but a number of them just got out. They had met their commitment; they were no longer eligible to go to Vietnam; and they basically just used that as a draft dodgeâ€”a few people. Â For most of us though, we knew what we were possibly getting into. And it didnâ€™t worry us thoughâ€”again, when the Paris Peace Accords were signed in â€™73, we knew we werenâ€™t going to go anymore.

Interviewer

You would have assumed that you would have gone. Right?A

Conrad Crane

Right. We assumed we would have gone. The class before us had some prettyâ€”the class of â€™73 had some disciplinary problems that we got briefed on pretty much every month. Thereâ€™d be another assembly to say, â€œHereâ€™s what the Class of â€™73 did this monthâ€â€”you know, not getting haircuts, drug problems, whatever it was. We were beat up about the head and shoulders a lot about, â€œYouâ€™re not going to do the mistakes the class of â€™73 did.â€ We felt we had a standard to uphold. And we really went through a crucible, our class. I mean, it really was. Our beast was very hard. My understanding again from going through the documents was that when General Sam Walker came in to be Commandant, he thought that beast had become too soft and wanted to go back to the harder beast.

Conrad Crane

And we did brace. We went back to bracing. We did have shirt wrinkles, all that stuff. We had a very, very hard beast, a very hard plebe year and had heavy casualties because of that and heavy attrition. So the ones that got through had really had been forged in a crucible of a very, very tough cadet experience, I think.

Immersed in the Aura of Vietnam
Interviewer

But you went to West Point because of the aura of West Point, because of the family interest in West Point, because of your love for tradition, and the meaning that the Academy took on for youâ€” you said it was West Point that attracted you, not necessarily the Army. But now youâ€™re in a position in 1970, â€™71 where youâ€™re thinking, not only are you going to into the heartbeat but youâ€™re going to go to a very difficult and divisive war. Were you scared?

Conrad Crane

No, I was never scared. Maybe when youâ€™re young, you donâ€™t think that far down the road. It was scary enough being in the Army really. Â In 1972, I went on my cadet orientation training. And I went to an air defense site in Fulda, Germany. And there I am a juniorâ€”Iâ€™m basically a junior in college, and I was between the second and third year. And I was an acting platoon leader for a self-propelled hawk battery. And Iâ€™d been there for about a week, and I was put on duty officer. Back in those days, there werenâ€™t a whole lot of restrictions. I was on the duty roster. â€œOkay. You got duty officer in the barracks this weekend.â€ And I showed up on Friday, and I got my briefing on the enemy at 45 and I clip a bullet. And they said, â€œPretty dicey in the barracks and hereâ€™s what you should be expecting.â€ And youâ€™ve got to make patrols and walk around.

Conrad Crane

And the first night I was on duty, I walked around a corner of the barracks and there was a knife fight going on. There was a circle of soldiers and a couple guys going at it with a knife. And I remember that I walked inâ€”Iâ€™m the duty officer. I felt like I got to do something about this. Iâ€™ve got to stop it. So I remember I jumped in the middle between the two guys with the knives. And I remember looking at them and saying, â€œWhy donâ€™t you guys grow up?â€

Conrad Crane

In hindsight, that was really stupid. And I think they were stunned because my actions were so stupid. And thatâ€™s what kind of stopped it. And it really wasnâ€™t real smart. I mean, I wasnâ€™tâ€”but it stopped the knife fight. They were kind of stunned, they looked at me. And I said letâ€™s break it up and everybody go back. And I went up in a room with one of the guys. I ended up drinking a beer in the guyâ€™s room, with the one guy. He was talking about why he was in the knife fight, what was going on in the unit. And I realized, boy, this is a pretty lousy army right now. And I had a lot of drug problems in the unit. One of the officers was smoking hash every night and invited me to smoke his hash with him. I mean, it was a reallyâ€”oh, boy.

Conrad Crane

It was a bad army. It really was. And so I wasâ€”and I thought about it afterwards. And inside, I still wanted to go. I enjoyed working with the soldiers. I enjoyed working with the equipment. I liked Air Defense because I had a chance to get some of the more technical aspects as well. I was not looking forward to some of the people Iâ€™d be working with, but understood that there were other good people out there as well. And Germany was interesting. I was in Germany, and we had a chance to wander around and see some of the country. So I wasâ€”so that was in â€™72. And the war, of course, still is going on then.

Conrad Crane

But we knew our own participation was winding down. Vietnamization had been announced. So the chances of going were not high, we know. That didnâ€™t really discourage us. At that point, weâ€”young men tend to think youâ€™re immortal sometimes. I donâ€™t think we were really afraid of going. And all our instructors were Vietnam veterans. Every class was filled with lessons from Vietnam and their experiences over there. And so we were immersed in the Vietnam aura.

Interviewer

But sometimes soldiers were so eager to get in the fight that if something like this happened, theyâ€™d be disappointed. So were you disappointed?

Conrad Crane

I donâ€™t know if we were disappointed because going in the Army was such a challenge. I mean, it wasâ€”once we got out, it was such a challenge every day in that, you know, later on when I missed Desert Storm, we were disappointed. That was going to be our war. After Vietnam , we didnâ€™t have a chance. And then Desert Storm came about and I was a student at Fort Leavenworth and nobody was going to let us out. So we sat there in Fort Leavenworth. All of us were very disappointed. We had missed our war at Fort Leavenworth.

Conrad Crane

But at that time, Vietnam, I think it wasâ€”it didnâ€™t disappoint us, I guess, that we didnâ€™t get to go. We knew it was a discouraging war. We knew what it had done to the country. And none of the veterans really talked about it being very enjoyable over there.Â

Interviewer

Speaking as an historian, so now that you look back at it, what are you feelings towards that war and the American decisions made in that war? I know thatâ€™s a big subject, but if you could just touch lightly on it.Â

Conrad Crane

Well, weâ€”lâ€™ve always been big onâ€”thatâ€™s another thing that attracted me to West Point was the honor that West Point always demands, and the views, and its graduates. And I felt that in many cases, thatâ€™s what America was doing was honoring its treaty commitments. It was standing up with an ally. It was trying to stop the flow of Communism. It was trying to do the right thing. Did it have the enemy perceive correctly? No. Did it go about it the right way? No. Did it draw the right lessons? No.

Conrad Crane

But in the end, it was trying to do the right thing. So therefore, I think the action was justified and the right thing to do. They could have done it a lot better, and we could have learned a lot differently from it. The value for me and today has been kind of developed in that era. Iâ€™ve been educated in that era. Iâ€™ve grown up in that era, at the end of Vietnam. When I was trying to write the counterinsurgency doctrine and involved with policies for [the] Iraq [War] and [the] Afghanistan [War], I can think back on that time and get a sense of what was left behind and the mistakes we made.

Conrad Crane

So in that case, it has been very useful to be able to think back; not just going through documents and reading other peoplesâ€™ ideas, but thinking back on my own at that time to try to get a sense of what was left behind and what we need to retain.

Interviewer

There were many different historical positions on the war, whether it was the war that was lost by the politicians or a war that could never have been won, a war that was being won, but we abandoned it. Which of those do you fall into, if any?

Conrad Crane

Well, Iâ€™ve thought about it a lot. I donâ€™t think it was an unwinnable war, but Iâ€™m not sure we could have paid the cost. I think we could have done like the French. We could have mobilized and brought massive forces in there and pushed the Vietnamese out of the cities into the countryside and secured most of the area. But they would have still been there. They werenâ€™t going to give up.

Conrad Crane

They would still have been supplied by the Chinese and the Soviets. And they were not going to give up. And the question is whether you wanted to occupy that. And they would have killed the Great Society. It would have sapped national blood and treasure for years and years and years. And if you read Clausewitz, Clausewitz talks about balancing the resources that youâ€™re willing to commit with the gains you hope to accrue. And if it gets to the point where the costs are going to be higher than you think the gains are worth then thatâ€™s a war you should get out. We may have been at that stage.

Conrad Crane

I think we could have done it smarter. I think we could have done a better mix between the military and non-military actions, done better with pacification. But in the end, it would have been a great expense. It would have a taken a full mobilization. And it would have been years and years and years of expenditures. And Iâ€™m not sure we were willing to

provide. I donâ€™t thinkâ€”there were those that say we were winning the war at the end.

Conrad Crane

After Tet, and after the North Vietnamese changed their strategy, they realized that the key to winning the war is in Washington and not in South Vietnam. So we were really allowed to do a lot of things in South Vietnam in the early â€˜70s where the North Vietnamese really donâ€™t care. Thereâ€™s a great revelation in one of Bob Sorleyâ€™s books, The Abrams Tapes, where he goes through and he has a lot of excerpts from the meetings Abrams is holding in Vietnam with his staff.Â

Conrad Crane

And thereâ€™s a revelation from, I think, General Abrams where theyâ€™re talking about, theyâ€™re advanced in the battlefield, but the problem is back home. And he says something with the fact that weâ€™re losing this war in Washington. Well, that was exactly what the North Vietnamese intended all along. They knew their main impact would be in Washington and not necessarily in South Vietnam. So as long as we were going to leave, they knew theyâ€™d eventually be able to win. So they just did everything they could to get us to leave. And once we decided to go, all they had to do was wait us out. So even though we were fighting the war better in â€™72 and â€™73, the North Vietnamese knew we were going to go.

Interviewer

So Sorley is, I thought Sorely fell more into the camp that Abrams had righted the ship and things were much better.Â

Conrad Crane

I know. And things were going better. Abrams had developed a better mix of military and civilian actions. Though there are a lot of historians that donâ€™t see a lot of difference between military actions between Westmoreland and Abrams. I think it was pretty consistent. It was a very decentralized learning process. Units learned in their areas, and the institution didnâ€™t necessarily pick up a lot of the lessons. And the areas didnâ€™t necessarily change very much either. And again, yes, I think Abrams was fighting a better war. But at the same time, the North Vietnamese were much more willing to let us doâ€”they werenâ€™t as quite as committed to immediate victory because they knew we were leaving. Thatâ€™s the danger of announcing any kind of deadline because once they know the Americans are leaving, the enemy is going to be just prompted to wait us out.

Interviewer

What would be your characterization of Westmorelandâ€™s leadership?

Conrad Crane

Iâ€™ve read what everybody else has read. And I guess itâ€™sâ€”and of course being there at the time, I saw him at West Point when we was Superintendent. He seemed very stiff. He seemed a very good professional soldier, a very conventional soldier however. And Iâ€™m not sure he was flexible and adaptable enough to deal with the enemy. We neverâ€”even a lot of the historians still donâ€™t grasp what the North Vietnamese were doing to us. One school says we should have been fighting the guerrilla war. Another school says we should have been fighting a conventional war.

Conrad Crane

Well, the answer is both. Dau tranh was throwing a whole bunch of different problems at us, political and military. And you couldnâ€™t just go along one path. You had to go along multiple paths. Â And we werenâ€™t quite prepared to do that. We had to be able to fight a conventional war, a guerrilla war and also a number of different political kind of struggles. And we never got synchronized like the North Vietnamese did. Like I said, even after the war, people couldnâ€™t quite grasp the type of enemy we were facing and how complex their style of war was.

Interviewer

Was it possible to say thatâ€”the clichÃ©, of course, is the generals always fight the last war. Westmoreland was a conventional soldier. Therefore, he was conventional in his thinking that he wasnâ€™t prepared for the kind of war that we were facing there.Â

Conrad Crane

Well, I figured he wasâ€”Westmoreland was a product of World War II and Korea [the Korean War] where he had done very well. And he didnâ€™t see it coming as a fire-power war. I donâ€™t think anybodyâ€”it wasnâ€™t just Westmoreland. Iâ€™m not sure anybody in the hierarchy really understood the importance of the non-military pacification stuff and how it all fit together. Â We had studied insurgency and counterinsurgency a lot though. And we got better as the war went on. And we did learn, and we did apply things. But by the time we kind of figured out what we had to do, the political will was gone and we were at a drawdown.

Conrad Crane

I attended a number of conferences at the Vietnam Center at Texas Tech with North Vietnamese and Chinese generals. And they talked about how they always feared an American invasion in North Vietnam. And the North Vietnamese kept their best evasions behind waiting for us to invade. And the Chinese one time had said if we had invaded after Nixon had made his overtures to China, the Chinese would not have come in. But the irony there is that during the period, we only had the political will to go in, which would haveâ€”but in the â€˜60s, if we had invaded North Vietnam, the Chinese would have come in and it would have been a much broader war. By the time the Chinese have also kind of lost interestâ€”and better interestâ€”had more interest in rapprochement with the United States. And we could have invaded North Vietnam without any major intervention from them, but we didnâ€™t have the political will to do it.

A Distinguished Class
Interviewer

Letâ€™s go back to your class for a minute. Tell me about some of your classmates. Itâ€™s a pretty distinguished class.Â

Conrad Crane

Well, we have like, I guess, four four-star generals now in our class; of course, Dave Petraeus, Skip Sharp, Marty Dempsey and Keith Alexander for the NSA. I would say of those that I knew, there was a sense that Dave Petraeus was going to be a general.

Interviewer

There was?

Conrad Crane

There was. Â He was justâ€”he did everything well.

Interviewer

Was he first captain?

Conrad Crane

No. Â He was a cadet captain, Dave. Â But he wasâ€”

Interviewer

Who was first captain in your class?

Conrad Crane

Jack Pattison, a very sharp prior service soldier.

Interviewer

Where is he now?

Conrad Crane

I donâ€™t know where Jack is now. Â But everybody knew Dave was going to be a general. Â He was a little ambitious, very capable, married the Supâ€™s [Superintendentâ€™s]Â daughter. Â Thatâ€™s a pretty good sign of potential, of future success.

Interviewer

Was he resented for that? Â Actually itâ€™s interesting there areâ€”I have some experience speaking with cadets recently about first captains, and they were often resented. Â He wasnâ€™t resented?

Conrad Crane

No. Â

Interviewer

Theyâ€™re ambitious is what I mean, for their sort ofâ€”

Conrad Crane

I didnâ€™t catch that. Â I mean, he wasâ€”

Interviewer

â€”comes out of a first captain. Â What I mean is the notion that theyâ€™re the most ambitious member of the class. Â Itâ€™s looked on a little bit sort of likeâ€”

Conrad Crane

There were some people in our class we thought were too ambitious and people that were not popular. Â But, like I said, our own first captain was pretty popular. Â And I donâ€™t think that Dave was not perceived as being too ambitious, I mean, ambitious to the part where you have to step on people to get ahead. Â Dave was never seen as being that way. Â And with Dave, he was just good at everything. Â Pretty much everything he did, he was good at. Â Again winning the Supâ€™s daughter was a real prize. Â I mean, Holly [Knowlton] wasâ€"the Superintendentâ€™s daughter, a good-looking woman in a place with no women at that time and 4,000 guys; a lot of competition. Â And it was a real sign of Daveâ€™s future. Â And I know heâ€"and General Knowlton was a good mentor for him as well.

Conrad Crane

Were you friends with Petraeus?

Conrad Crane

I was in military history class with him. Â If I can remember correctly the first time I really ran into Dave was we were in military history together. Â He was very, you know, we got along well. Â He was a good student. Â We remember that experience down the road. Â On the other hand, somebody likeâ€"I remember Marty Dempsey. Â I knew Marty pretty well. Â Nobody would have said he was going to be a general. Â I mean, you just look at some guys and say, â€œThat guyâ€™s going to be a general.â€ Â And other guys, you say, â€œThat guyâ€™s a good guy, but I donâ€™t see him as going.â€ Â I donâ€™t think any of us would have predicted that Marty Dempsey would be a four-star general. Â

Interviewer

Well, he does seem like the quintessential good guy, doesnâ€™t he?

Conrad Crane

He had a good sense of humor, and he did a lot of things. Â He didnâ€™t seem overly ambitious. Â And he was just a good guy. Â In our classâ€"I was in E-4. Â I was Company E-4. Â And the senior guy from our company was Steve Speakes who ended up as a three-star general and recently retired. Â And nobody would have thought Steve would be a general when he was there. Â He was so nonconformist. Â

Conrad Crane

I mean, Steve wasâ€"he took Chinese because nobody else was, just to do something different. Â He used to go to the Hotel Astor in New York to sit in a chair that Hemingway sat in. Â He just was a very different, very perceptive guy. Â But nobody ever thought or saw him as being a general either. Â But Steve went on to do great stuff for the Army. Â

Interviewer

Did you have ambitions to be a general?

Conrad Crane

I donâ€™t think I looked that far ahead in my career. Â I wanted to do well. Â I wanted to do well in the Army, and it gotâ€"

Interviewer

But youâ€™re a pretty cerebral guy. A I would imagine you had a notion that you might move at some point. Â

Conrad Crane

I was not a mover. Â I was a first start. Â The highest rank I ever got was to be the Company First Sergeant. Â And thatâ€™s what I graduated as was the E-4 First Sergeant. Â I was always good administratively. Â I always had trouble with physical education early on. Â And because of that, I hadâ€”I passed P.E. in my plebe year. Â My crucible was plebe year physical education. Â I went into the last day of the course. Â I was eight-tenths deficient. Â And we had the mile run. Â The last event was right before graduation was a one-mile run in combat boots and fatigues. Â And in order to pass P.E., I had to run a 5:39 mile. Â I remember that. Â And my classmatesâ€”

Interviewer

A 5:39 mile with boots?

Conrad Crane

With boots. Â I had to run the track at Target Hill. Â And I trained for that to try to build my stamina for months. Â Everybody knew it. Â And the wholeâ€”

Interviewer

Knew that you wereâ€”

Conrad Crane

Everybody knew I had to run a really fast mile. Â And the company, the E-4, my classmates in E-4 were going to make sure I did it. Â And they got out there. Â And the good runners were going to run me and everyâ€”I mean, it was a team effort. Â And I ran a 5:38. Â And when I crossed the finish line, I was exhausted. Â I just collapsed in the heat and started throwing up. Â I was deathly ill. Â I was so sick. Â And it wasâ€”but I passed. Â I was ecstatic because I passed but I was just completely exhausted. Â

Conrad Crane

And everybodyâ€™s sitting there, and Iâ€™m just sick and weak and tired. Â And I was sitting by the side of the stands there at Target Hill and our tack officer for some reason went driving by, Major Rack. Â And I guess heâ€™d been down to kind of watch what was going on. Â He said, â€œThat was a good job, Mr. Crane. Â Iâ€™ll see you up at formation.â€ Â Oh, man. Â I had forgot about formations. Â He was driving up. Â And I had to stagger up that hill to get back. Â I was so sick.

Conrad Crane

But it wasâ€”I mean, I owed itâ€”I wouldnâ€™t have done it if it wasnâ€™t for the company mates getting me around that track. Â I made it by a whole second. Â And I remember I got back to the barracks and I got a postcard out to send to my folks. Â And I put down final physical education grade, 2.00. Â And I filled it with 0â€™s, and then I mailed it out because I exactly passed. Â But because of that, I always got low ratings for the peer reports because physical education went a long way. Â

Conrad Crane

And I just didnâ€™tâ€”and I wasnâ€™t the most military people either. A I had a hard time shining shoes and polishing brass. Â And I just was not the neatest guy. Â I could do well in the classroom, but the military and the physical stuff, I was not as high. Â So my ratings were not that high. Â And I knew I was going to go out in the Army and do pretty well, but nobody saw me as a general either. Â But I was going to go out in the Army and do a good job and see where I ended up. Â So I didnâ€™t have anyâ€”I expected to do well in the Army. Â But I wasnâ€™t committed to get stars at that point when I graduated.

Interviewer

Who were some other memorable members of your class?

Conrad Crane

Wow. Â I mean, in our companyâ€”Iâ€™m trying to think of E-4. Â Mike Deeter was our company commander who was a good, good friend. Â I mean, again, Steve Speakes, watching Steve go through the Army has been a great pleasure and how well he did. Â Kurt Norman was my roommate for most of the time I was there. Â

Conrad Crane

Actually, his father was a naval officer. Â And kind of following himâ€”again, itâ€™s been hard to keep touch as weâ€™ve got scattered through the Army. Â Our class never scrambled. Â We stayed the same company, so I really got to know theâ€”it started out as about 30-some guys. Â I think we started out with 36 members of the class of 1974 in Company E-4. Â And I think we ended up with 18â€”very heavy casualties.Â

Conrad Crane

And you are pretty close to that group and some of the guys in your regiment. Â Bill Hopkinson in our company was another outstanding guy. Â Eventually, he became a doctor in the Army, got out as a colonel and is now running a hospital in Chicago. Â But you knew the guyâ€”you didnâ€™t know the broader classes well. Â You really knew your regiment more than anything else and running into people out in the Army. Â

Conrad Crane

And here at the [Army] War College, Iâ€™ve gotten to know some of the guys here at the War College better than I did there. Â Weâ€™ve got a pretty hardcore of class of â€™74 here at the War College. Â Bill Johnsen, the dean, is my class. Â John Martin in the Strategic Studies Institute is a classmate. Â I remember Bill Pierce, who teaches; Ed Filibertiâ€”who teaches here. Â Jerry Johnson. Â Itâ€™s just weâ€™re a very close group and here are the class of â€˜74s. Â

Conrad Crane

And of course we all are relishing Martyâ€™s success and Daveâ€™s success and accepting that as some of our own. And we helped get them where they are. Â And whatâ€™s great when they have the change of command at CENTCOM for Marty Dempsey and for Dave Petraeus, there were a whole bunch of us down there. Â We had a big dinner with the two of them. Â And it was a great experience.

Conrad Crane

There were a lot of us down there, trading old stories and talking about it. Â And it was typical of Dave and Marty as well.Â Dave was very friendly and a good guy and a little

reserved as he always is. A And Marty came off with this ribald Irish ballad that would curl your hair. Â Iâ€™m amazed we can get away with it in mixed company to kind of set things off. Â He was very entertaining the way he always is. Â But it was a great night. Â It was a great night for the class, not just for theâ€”

Interviewer

Now that you look at them and they are four-stars, what are the characteristics that you think they share with historically the other four-stars? Â What does it mean to be called the fourth star? There was an attempt to sort of come to some terms with that with fourâ€”present day four-star generals. Â But what does the fourth star mean?

Conrad Crane

Well, theyâ€™ve got that intangible leadership skill thatâ€”I canâ€™t describe it, but I know what it is when I see it. Â Itâ€™s this ability to inspire. Â They both have the ability to inspire people, to get people to follow them. Â They both learn. Â They both have a great ability to learn and adapt. Â And theyâ€™re both smart. Â And I mean, they knowâ€”thatâ€™s all part of it, too. Â Theyâ€™re both very intelligent. Â And that goes back to learn and adapt as well. Â

Conrad Crane

Theyâ€™re also very goodâ€”both of them are good bureaucratic in-fighters. Â They know how to work within the system. Â Itâ€™s working within the system while maintaining their integrity. Â Thatâ€™s the other part of that. Â A lot of people know how to work within the system, but sacrifice a lot of themselves to do it. Â They were able to be successful without losing themselves.

Conrad Crane

So I think thatâ€™s all part of it. Â And thereâ€™s also luck involved. Â I mean, any of it is being in the right place at the right time. Â But itâ€™s not just being in the right place at the right time. Â Itâ€™s also being able to take advantage of the opportunity if it arises. Â And that also has been a part of their success as well.

The Man to Turn it Around: Petraeusâ€™ Leadership in the War on Terror
Interviewer

What did Dave Petraeus bring to the present conflict, the recent conflict in Iraq that you felt was exemplary of that kind of leadership?Â

Conrad Crane

Itâ€™s interesting because what makes Petraeus the right guy in this conflict goes back to all the things weâ€™ve talked about up to now. We grew up at the end of the Vietnam War and didnâ€™t forget it, like the institution did. We retained our memories of Vietnam. Dave studied when he was at Princeton. He remembered and tried to learn from the experience. He really focused on the problems of what he would have to accomplish; a master of the broad perspective, not just military but also the political aspects; his training in the social department, what he had done in the Army; again, a high level of assignments as an aide, high staffs, as well as the leadership roles; had sense of what soldiers wanted; had sense of what generals wanted.

Conrad Crane

He was uniquely shaped by his military experience to be there, but also by his educational experience to be there as well and also by his cadet experience. Thereâ€™s a lot of factors that shaped him to be where he was and be the right person to turn Iraq around and now try to turn Afghanistan around. It was a unique combination of factors that produced General Dave Petraeus.Â

Interviewer

Give me a senseâ€”just paint that picture historically where we wereâ€”what theâ€”what sort of the original philosophy was with respect to the War in Iraq and how he adapted that in a sense.

Conrad Crane

Going back to some of my relationship with General Petraeus and how he got to the counterinsurgency doctrine that he eventually played in Iraq. Again, I was with himâ€”I sat next to him in military history class. We had served together at West Point as professors on the faculty, which is another one of these great experiences that the military, I donâ€™t think, appreciates, that theâ€”

Conrad Crane

One of the forming experiences for us all is serving on the History Department faculty. Itâ€™s a unique experience with a lot of smart guys. You have the time to reflect, the time to think. It encourages the cerebral development. And that shaped us both as well. We were both there in the mid-â€™80s; heâ€™s in Soc and Iâ€™m in History. We knew of each other at theâ€”when I retired from the Army in 2000, which was very toughâ€”the Army of the â€™70s was a bad place to be.Â

Conrad Crane

That was quite an experience. I used to give a lecture at West Point about how I saved the Army of the â€™70s and talked about my experience as lieutenant in that Army. But the Army of the â€™80s was a very good force. And by the time we got to the â€™90s, it was an even better force. And the Army that struck through Desert Storm or the Army that developed through the â€™90sâ€”when I retired in 2000 and I came to the Army War College, of course we were just getting started to launch our soirÃ©es in Afghanistan and Iraq. In late 2002â€”well, let me go back earlier. When I first came to theâ€”when I retired from the Army and left the History Department, I went to the Army War College Strategic Studies Institute; my first project was to come up with the role of land power in a crisis. It was for the 2000 QDR.

Conrad Crane

So I did a study, and I basically decided the future of the Army was going to be very much in stability operations, what happens after major combat. The Army has to be differently structured, different thinking, different doctrine for these kind of post-major combat operations. Itâ€™s not a message the Army was really ready to hear.

Conrad Crane

But I continued on this stability operations track. I did a lot of writings on it and a lot of research on it. In late 2002 when the Army all of a sudden realized it might have to do a military occupation of Iraq, the War College and the Army G-3 Commission did a study of how to do that, how to occupy Iraq and how to rebuild it. And I was put in charge of the

writing. I developed a plan which came out in February of 2003, which pretty much hit exactly what happened later on. I had a very good writing team. But the Army had lost interest at that point because about the day the study was completed in late Januaryâ€”Â

Interviewer

2002 orâ€”Â

Conrad Crane

1. This was late January in 2003. Â By the time the study was completed in late January 2003 was the time that the ORHA was stood up, General Garnerâ€™s Office of Reconstruction of Humanitarian Affairs. And the Army realized whew, we donâ€™t have to do the occupation. Somebody else is going to do it. And they lost interest in the study. In the meantime, the study got out. And as the war got more complex and people realized we kind of botched the phase four stuff, the post-major combat operations parts, they got back to the study. It got a little notoriety. I was invited to do a lot of presentations on it.

Conrad Crane

And I gave a presentation at Johns Hopkins for Eliot Cohen in early November of 2005. At the same time, there was a conference on counterinsurgency going on in Washington being run by and the Carr Center for Human Rights. And I went to that and General Petraeus was there talking about counterinsurgency. And he asked me if Iâ€™d review this new doctrine he was trying to write. Later, I guess Eliot Cohen had gotâ€”

Interviewer

He was down at Leavenworth?Â

Conrad Crane

He was down at Fort Leavenworth. Later, I guess he had asked Eliot Cohen to review this doctrine. And Eliott said this needs a lot of work. You need toâ€”Â

Interviewer

Describe who Eliot Cohen is. Heâ€™s aâ€”Â

Conrad Crane

Eliot Cohen runs theâ€”at that point, was running the School for Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins. He was a key academic advisor for General Petraeus and also for President Bush later on. But Dave had given him this doctrine to review. And Eliot said, â€œThis needs a lot of work. It probably needs something. You need to put somebody in charge of revising it. And I suggest you give it to Con Crane. Heâ€™s done a lot of work in this area. I think heâ€™s the right guy to put the thing together and do this doctrine.â€

Conrad Crane

So in the middle of November, I get a phone call. And I hadnâ€™t talked to Dave [Petraeus] since the conference. And he said, â€œHey, Iâ€™d like toâ€”I asked you to review the doctrine. And instead, Iâ€™d like you to take it over to your team to rewrite it.â€ And I got my bosses here to give me some time and headed out to Fort Leavenworth in late November and got my marching orders from General Dave Petraeus what he wanted to do.

Crafting Counterinsurgency Doctrine with Locally Defined Legitimacy

Interviewer

What were the problems with the doctrine? Briefly described what the doctrine was as he was conceiving it. What were the problems that Eliot Cohen and Petraeus were recognizing at this point?

Conrad Crane

Well, the problem was the Army did have counterinsurgency doctrine going into Iraq and Afghanistan, but it was based on El Salvador, a small footprint. Major conventional forces werenâ€™t going to do it. And he realized it had to beâ€”we had to develop major conventional force counterinsurgency doctrine. So we had a young Lieutenant Colonel named Jan Horvath.

Interviewer

Stop there. What convinced him of that?Â

Conrad Crane

Well, his own experience in Iraq obviously. He had been in Iraqâ€”by the time he was at Fort Leavenworth, heâ€™d been to Iraq twice. He had done his tour in Mosul and done his tour in MNSTC-I trying to build Iraqiâ€™s area force. And he realized we had to develop a better way to look at this. There had been an effort to do doctrine before. In 2004, Lieutenant Colonel Jan Horvath at Leavenworth had been told to write doctrine and basically by himself had written a doctrinal manual, an interim manual, which had a two-year shelf life. And it was a good tactical effort. It talked about a lot of tactical aspects of doing counterinsurgency. But it really was not at the operational level. And when General Petraeus took over CAC, he realized we needed a higher-level doctrine than this, something thatâ€™s going to be more effective. But it was also part of a broader plan. The doctrine was not an end in itself.

Conrad Crane

It was a means to a broader end, it changed the way the Army wasâ€”changed the Armyâ€™s thinking of organization and make it more adaptive. It was tied in with a process that he called the engine of change. He was going to change the education and change the leader trainingâ€”change the training for the collective training in places like NTC, change the â€œlessons learnedâ€ process to get lessons back from the field faster.Â

Interviewer

Did he haveâ€”was there general support within the Army for him to do all this? Or were there those who were his detractors at the time, thought we should remain with a small footprint?Â

Conrad Crane

I donâ€™t know anybody who stood up against him once he started going down this track. Everybody realized whyâ€”Â

Interviewer

From the experience in Iraq that we wereâ€”

Conrad Crane

By the end of 2005, it was obvious that something was going wrong. We had to figure out a better way to do this. And so everybody was looking for a solution. And he was working on an article that he eventually published in military review on his observations of Iraq, which he really wanted to use as a basis for the doctrine. And it did become a coreâ€"it did become a key part, a key inspiration, for the directions we were going in the doctrine. And he would be the motivating force. But it was part of this broader picture.

Conrad Crane

There was a lot more going on than just new doctrine. NTC changed and they expanded the Center for Army Lessons Learned. We get lessons back from the field faster, and more doctrine is being written. And our doctrine got written faster. The curriculum with the schools was changing a lot. It was a very dynamic situation. And he was in the middle of it. He was the spider in the middle of the web pulling all the strings.Â

Interviewer

Go backâ€"what were the problems that he wanted you to fix?Â

Conrad Crane

Well, the first manual was very tactical. So he wanted to go broader, but he also wanted to get more of a sense of the non-kinetic aspects of counterinsurgency. The team, the rest of the other people on the battlefield that had to have an impact; civilian, indigenous, different aspects of protecting the people. The big focus is weâ€™ve got to protect the people. The long-term success will come from public support, not necessarily from killing all the bad guys, though weâ€™ve still got to kill some people. But your main success is going to come from popular support, which I eventually turned into this primary goal of legitimacy, whatever that means in the area youâ€™reâ€"the importance of intelligenceâ€"

Conrad Crane

So you mean legitimacy is legitimacy of theâ€"of what? What do you mean by that?Â

Conrad Crane

Okay. I flew out in November of 2005 and got my marching orders. And it becameâ€"one of the first people drawn on the writing team was John Nagl. And Nagl had already worked out an outline that he thought the manual should have in it. And that became the starting point for the outline. But I realized that the manual would need a little more than that. It would need some principles to kind of guide where we were going. And I had General Petraeusâ€™s input. I read Kitson, [Robert Grainger] Thompson, Galula, some of the traditional ones.Â

Interviewer

Yeah. Sometimes they go, or allâ€"people have written about the French experience, with the counterinsurgency. Right?Â

Conrad Crane

French and British experience in the â€˜60s, which Hart is a little classical, mostly fighting Maoist insurgencies. But I went back and read Mao and Marx and DeBray, some of the [Inaudible] stuff. I try to read some of the other counterinsurgent approaches. I solicited some inputs from RAND. The Marine Corps came onboard for the writing project that time.

They had a bunch of ideas of what was necessary for new doctrine.

Conrad Crane

And then I came up with a set of principles and imperatives that I thought should steer the doctrine and also a set of what I call paradoxes. Because I realized that one of the other things we had to do with this doctrine was break the Army out of this conventional mindset, and get them to think about what was different about this kind of war and the kind of high-powered high-intensity conflict that they really wanted to play, high-tech. They had to really get down more with the populous. This is a different kind of war among the people and try to get at some of the things that were different.

Conrad Crane

â€”and trying to come up with a principle that would kind of express this popularâ€”this population-focused strategy, and I came up with the fact that the primary goal is legitimacy. And when we first did that particular part of the doctrine and I had to come up with a definition of legitimacy, I went to Max Manwaring here at the Strategic Studies Institute. Heâ€™s done a lot of work in South America, and he came up with this definition of legitimacy. It was right out of John Locke.

Conrad Crane

I mean, you know, this contract between the government and the governed, and popular participation, and all these aspects. Itâ€™s a very Western view. In the early drafts, the manual went out, the people were regional experts, and they came back and said, â€œThis is not legitimacy in my part of the world.â€ So, it evolved, and the final definition of legitimacy in there, it recognized the fact that legitimacy is locally defined. In different parts of the world, legitimacy means different things. It could be â€œMight makes right.â€ It could be theocratic, and youâ€™ve got to figure out what that local definition is, and thatâ€™s what the people want, and thatâ€™s what will provide support for the government.

Interviewer

So, in the end, what people want creates legitimacy?Â

Conrad Crane

Correct, correct. And thereâ€™s even a phrase in there, which isâ€”which says you have to achieve a culturally acceptable level of corruption. There were some battles over that line, and there were some that said, â€œNo, corruptionâ€™s got to be completely eliminated,â€ but all the regional experts came in and said, â€œWell, you know, other parts of the world, corruption is part of what makes things operate. You canâ€™t get rid of it all.â€

Interviewer

This is the statement of how naive Americans are about the way the rest of the world works, right?Â

Conrad Crane

And thatâ€™s true, and part of the process in Iraq for our eventual success was learning to accept local solutions for things. Our solution is not always the best one, and thatâ€™s another part of this. The process of learning counterinsurgency has been to understand itâ€™s that the locals usually know better than you whatâ€™s going be successful in that

particular environment, and youâ€™ve got to learn to talk to them and get that out of them and support them at the same time while achieving those goals which you know are necessary for success in the counterinsurgency.

Conrad Crane

And the one problem that the rewrite of the manual is going to have to deal with a little better is, itâ€™s always problematic getting your allies to do what you think you need them to do, or you think they should do. Their ideas are often very different. Their culture is often very different, and oftentimes you end up with a compromise, which is really what the end best result is anyway or else you go along with their solution, but youâ€™ve got to kind of learn to get that solution, understand what it is. Iâ€™ve been amazedâ€”when General Petraeus dragged me over there in late November 2007 to check out the doctrine in action, Iâ€™m amazed at how good the forces were. And it had to be the best counterinsurgency force the worldâ€™s ever seen. Combination American military power, our economic power, our knowledge, our skills, but theâ€”Â

Interviewer

Where did that come from? Did they not have the training at that point, had they? Or there was notâ€”was that just the doctrine opposed fromâ€”Â

Conrad Crane

Itâ€™s notâ€”theâ€”we can giveâ€”Iâ€™d like to give the doctrine all the credit, but the doctrine was a little piece of a much broader process thatâ€™s going on. Most of these guys had been there three times. They had learned the zones. They had learned how to deal with the people. They applied themselves to this.Â

Interviewer

So, this is the advantage of multiple deployments is that they get familiarity with the culture?

Conrad Crane

I donâ€™t likeâ€”I wouldnâ€™t say multiple deployments, time on station.

Interviewer

I see.Â

Conrad Crane

I think, in my own view, that we actually had better deployment policies in Vietnam than we had for Iraq, especially initially. And Vietnam, thereâ€™s always been all these kind of complaints about individual rotations and theâ€”and you show up for a country for a year and all the sudden youâ€™re taken out and lacking in cohesion. But, the advantage was that we had units in place in Vietnam for eight or nine years in the same place. They built a great database of intelligence. There were no unit transitions. The First Infantry Division was in the same place. They knew the area. In Iraq, we have transition problems. Weâ€™ll put a unit in thatâ€™s a hotshot unit.Â

Conrad Crane

It does very well, but it has to learn its area, and just about the time itâ€™s mastered its

area, it gets pulled out. Another unit comes in, and they go through the same learning curve. In Vietnam, we have to worry about the unit transitions instead of worrying about individual transitions, and obviously, I think that the best solution is somewhere in the middle, maybe smaller units. The Marines have an interesting way to do it where they rotate every seven months, but they rotate people to the same place. Thatâ€™s a good way to do it. You know, the Army would tend to send somebody over for deployment, then bring them back and then send them back a year later to a different place, and they have to do the learning curve again.

Interviewer

You say when you were there you thought it was the best counterinsurgency operation. What would you sayâ€”what makes it the best? What was going on that impressed you?

Conrad Crane

The amount of learning that had gone on was phenomenal. The briefings that I was getting from units, especially American units, the soldiers and marines, their areas of operation and how theirâ€”how the social structures worked and how the leadership went and how the economies worked and how the tribes work, the mastery of all the social, cultural as well as military dynamics of their environment was phenomenal.Â

Interviewer

Iâ€™m going to come back to the question, since it was not doctrine and since it was clearly not part of the operations plan of the early part of the war, how do we have the capability to do this so fast?Â

Conrad Crane

Itâ€™s a misconception to think that Dave Petraeus showed up with this doctrine and everything changed in Iraq overnight. The processâ€”Â

Interviewer

This is Gian Gentileâ€™s point. A lot had been going on early in the war, just notâ€”

Conrad Crane

Yeah, right, but the problem is when youâ€™re writing doctrine, youâ€™re trying to balance visions of the future with insights from the past and contemporary best practices, and historians, of course, provide the insights, and political scientists provide the future visions. And then, you getâ€”the practitioners provide you with the best practices stuff, and because of the way the doctrine gets refereed and finished and you get so many inputs from the field, it tends to pull the doctrine back into contemporary best practices. And it comes to really dominate the thought.

Conrad Crane

The intent of the doctrine was for the next war after Iraq and Afghanistan, but it very much is influenced by them, and itâ€™s very useful in them because of that very contemporary focus that it retains.Â Theâ€”what Petraeus provides and what the doctrine provides is standardization.Â Petraeus shows up, and he said, â€œWeâ€™ve got this doctrine.Â I want people to read it, and hereâ€™s how weâ€™re going to apply it,â€ and he produces his directives which come out in mid-2007 which describe his vision of counterinsurgency, and thatâ€™s not the only vision out there.Â There are a lot of ways to apply the

doctrine.A

Conrad Crane

This was the Petraeus-mode part of the doctrine, but it standardizes these best practices, and Iâ€™d argue that what happens is that you could argue that the approachâ€”the Casey approach, which was basically build up Iraqi security forces to kind of take over, may have been the right approach up till the Samarra Mosque bombing. And once Samarra Mosque bombing happens, then everything falls apart and youâ€™ve got, you know, this very bloody sectarian violence going on along with everything else and a much more complex set of insurgencies, or insurgents.Â Â It takes a different approach.Â

Conrad Crane

And Petraeus comes in, and his approach is the right approach at that time, and he standardizes what best practices are out there, and everybody gets on the same sheet of music.Â Â Everybody starts talking counterinsurgency, and he also convinces people they can win.Â Â I mean, I saw him right before he went to Iraq.Â Â I came down to Washington and I metâ€”I was in his office in the Pentagon that he had set up as he was doing his hearings on the Hill, and we talked about what he was going to do.Â Â And the last thing I tried to talk to him about was: what happens if you fail?Â Â How do you tell the leadership this isnâ€™t working?Â Â And we talked about that some, but it was obvious at the time that he was convinced he was going to make it work, and one of the best things he did when he showed up in Iraq was he convinced everybody, â€œWeâ€™re going to be successful with this.Â Â We can make this work.â€

Conrad Crane

Plus, he had the advantage of the Surge and President Bush showing he was committed as well, so a lot of Iraqis, when I was over there, said they came overâ€”they turned, especially in the [Sunni] Awakening, they joined the Awakening, because with the surge and with President Bushâ€™s statements, we showed America was still committed, that we werenâ€™t going to leave.Â Â Thatâ€™s the danger with the way that weâ€™ve done it in Afghanistan.Â Â We announced a surge in troops.Â Â Then, we also announced we were leaving them.Â Â That kind of kills the psychological oomph you get from the Surge.Â Â

Conrad Crane

President Bush didnâ€™t do that.Â Â He emphasized, â€œWeâ€™re here to make thisâ€”to ride this out,â€ and the Iraqis heard and responded to that.Â Â And so, Petraeus shows up with the doctrine and with his ideas and a commitment to victory, and he infused that in everybody, and everybody started to see thatâ€”and then, you have the bloody start of the surge, and then you start to see results, and people start to say, â€œHey, this is working.â€Â Â Then, the Iraqis start to turn, and thereâ€™s a lot of things that happened.Â Â Itâ€™s not just the doctrine, but the doctrine is an important part of the combination.

Conrad Crane

I mean, you canâ€™t say one is more important than the other.Â Â The Sunni Awakening, the Iraqis getting tired of the violence, the Shiite militia stand-down in troops, all those things are important to provide space and time for Petraeus to exercise what heâ€™s going to do.Â Â But, his vision and the doctrine are an important part of the puzzle.Â Â I mean, itâ€™s like the surrender of Japan at the end of World War II.Â Â Is that, you know,

is it the atomic bomb?A A Is it Russian entry?A A Is it the tire bombing?A A Is it the submarine campaign?Â Â Is it the relentless ground campaign?Â Â Yes, itâ€™s all of those.Â Â You take any one away and the result is probably different. Â

Interviewer

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, again, it seems like multipleâ€”

Conrad Crane

Itâ€™s not one thing.Â Â Itâ€™s multiple causes, and the same thing in Iraq.Â Â Itâ€™s multiple pieces that make this all work, but you donâ€™t have Dave Petraeus in the middle of it with his vision and it doesnâ€™t happen.

Competing Visions of Leadership in Iraq
Interviewer

And Dave Petraeus, in the middle with his vision. Iâ€™m curious as to whether the Pentagon leadership and the President himself, the political leadership immediately jumped on board orâ€”or how did he emerge as the, in other words, as the person, as the go-to person on this? Because thereâ€™s a lot of disappointment in the Pentagon leadership at that time.Â

Conrad Crane

Well, I think he had gotten recognized for his results at Mosul, which, you know, the irony of Mosul is he did a great job in 101st, but then when he pulled them out and put a Stryker brigade in, it all fell apart, and Mosulâ€™s one of the big problem areas even today, still. So, it didnâ€™t last. He has the experience in MNSTC-I with training the Iraqi forces, which was mixed success, pretty good with the [Iraqi] Army, mixed success, not as good with the [Iraqi] Police. But, he comes back and heâ€™s got the doctrine. Heâ€™s got ideas.

Conrad Crane

Heâ€™sâ€”you know, theâ€”when the president commits to the surge, he is the one guy whoâ€™s saying, â€œWe can make this thing work,â€ â€˜cause itâ€™s notâ€”the Surge is not Dave Petraeusâ€™ idea.Â Heâ€™s going to take advantage of it to execute his new doctrine.

Interviewer

Whose idea was the Surge?

Conrad Crane

The Surge is the idea of Jack Keaneâ€”retired General Jack Keane and Fred Kagan, another department alum down in Washington. Â Itâ€™s really their idea, and theyâ€™re the ones that sold it to the president, and then General Petraeus was going to make it work, but he was just seen as somebody who comes out of Iraq asâ€”with this aura of success. Â I mean, in the area, they had someone called King David with thisâ€”â€™cause they know how successful he was. Â He knows how to work. Â He understands the importance of information. Â In this kind of war, it doesnâ€™t matter what youâ€™ve done; itâ€™s what people think youâ€™ve done. Â

Conrad Crane

But, even when youâ€™ve done something good, youâ€™ve got to make sure people understand what youâ€™ve done, and heâ€™s a great communicator. Â And there is some friction between himself and the leadership about that. Â They see it as his ambition, or overexposing himself.

Conrad Crane
Interviewer

Which leadership are we talking about here? Â Are we talking about the Army leadership or the civilian leadership?

Conrad Crane

Army, army leadership. Â And the Army culture is to be the good servant, and he was seen sometimes as a self-promoter or too ambitious when reality is heâ€™s just that youâ€™ve got to get your message out. Â Itâ€™s just all communication. Â Itâ€™s all information. Â And he worked hard to do that, and he wasâ€”and I think the sense was when he went over to Iraq in early 2007 that if Dave Petraeus couldnâ€™t get this to work, no one could. Â And so, it wasâ€”I mean, he was the last shot. Â

Interviewer

What is your assessment of the civilian leadership throughout the War in Iraq? Â

Conrad Crane

Oh, this is one of those things that I guess as a DOD employee, these do not reflect the opinions of any great organization. Â Theyâ€™re purely my own, but I think that, you know, Secretary Rumsfeld was chosen to transform the military.Â

Conrad Crane

And in a peacetime environment, without the ongoing War on Terror, he might have been the right guy to do it. Â He had a lot of good ideas about, you know, knew some technology, but he was headed down this technological transformation road that was not appropriate for the war that he ended up facing. Â And my own view is that he continued to drive down that road when he really needed to turn and change direction and deal with theâ€”as Secretary Gates said, â€œWeâ€™ve got to deal with the war we have today. Â Weâ€™ve got to win the wars we have today.â€ Â And I justâ€”I think as Iâ€”and he was a goodâ€”

Interviewer

Ironic because actually he sort of, that almost sort of apes Secretary Rumsfeldâ€™s â€œWe have to win the war with the Army we have.â€

Conrad Crane

Yeah.

Interviewer

So, itâ€™s interesting sort of in both practicalâ€”both are expressing practical statements, but from different vantage points.

Conrad Crane

And I think that hisâ€”and the irony of Secretary Rumsfeldâ€™s years is theâ€”and, again, seeing this from some of the different viewpoints from the Strategic Studies Institute and watching the administration come in and working with QDR and some of the other things; the Army was already headed for transformation.

Conrad Crane

If thereâ€™s any service that shouldâ€™ve been an ally for Secretary Rumsfeld, it shouldâ€™ve been the Army, but he and the Army never hit it off. Â He and General Shinseki did not get along, and part of it was because, for Rumsfeld, the big bill-payer for his transformation was going to be the Army. Â He wanted to cut it back to six divisions, which wouldâ€™ve gutted theâ€”made the Army pretty much useless. Â And I think Secretaryâ€”or General Shinseki was trying to defend the Army while he was also trying to support the transformation goal. Â

Conrad Crane

And itâ€™s a great tragedy that somehow he never got the same sheet of music to do that, and theâ€”and againâ€”and I sawâ€”and I donâ€™t think that once the war began that the President was advised well on the course of actions to take. Â And we got deluded by the early success in Afghanistan; looked like that little air power and a few Special Forces guys would still be the way to go.Â

Conrad Crane

And we didnâ€™t even foresee the problems we were going to have in Afghanistan as well as Iraq; the post-conflict environment, the post-major combat operations environments. Â So, I guess I donâ€™t thinkâ€”the civilian leadershipâ€™s too optimistic. Â I understandâ€”

Interviewer

Do you think it is too optimistic or that it was too optimistic?

Conrad Crane

No, I think the civilian leadership was too optimistic. Â There were competing truths out there about whatâ€™s going to happen in Iraq. Â Our study was just one of many that the CIA was much more positive, much more optimistic, and I understand to some extent why they went that way. Â But, I donâ€™t think dissent got heard enough in the environment, and thatâ€™s a challenge in any environment is how you tell truth to power. Â How do you dissent? Â How is dissent constructed? Â How do you get heard where youâ€™re not seen as theâ€”as a problem child or a naysayer? Â How do youâ€”how can you be seen as being a supporter of a program but able to change that program with a dissenting view? Â And itâ€™s a challenge. Â

Interviewer

We try to teach it at the War College here, and itâ€™s hard. Â And I donâ€™t think the administration did a good enough job bringing in dissenting views; my view as well. Â And again, I think President Bush deserves a lot of credit, though, for the surge and staying with it; carrying it out.Â

Interviewer

I forget, now when the surge was adopted while Rumsfeld wasâ€”

Conrad Crane

Yes.

Interviewer

Yeah. Â Was Rumsfeld on board from the get-go orâ€”

Conrad Crane

I donâ€™t know. Â Iâ€™m not sure. Â I know the President was, and my sense is that he wouldâ€™ve supported it. Â I donâ€™t know all the details, what went on behind the scenes, but it was a major step and a major step in commitment. Â You know, itâ€™sâ€”I donâ€™t thinkâ€”in my view, we should not have invaded Iraq. Â I think that we were containing them. Â I donâ€™t think they were the threat. Â I didnâ€™t see the intelligence, though, that everyone else was seeing about the weapons of mass destruction; what was going on. Â I thinkâ€”

Interviewer

Which clearly that was a misjudgment of the intelligence as well.

Conrad Crane

Yes.

Interviewer

The intelligence wasnâ€™t sound, soâ€”

Conrad Crane

Bad intel ledâ€”and I understand the Bush security view, which is there are bad guys out there that you canâ€™t deter them; youâ€™ve got to kill them. Youâ€™ve got to prevent them from getting nuclear weapons, which wouldâ€™ve been a danger if Saddamâ€”but I also think there was a neoconservative sense that if we could create a democracy in Iraq it wouldâ€”

Interviewer

Be infectious? Â

Conrad Crane

It would be infectious, and it would solve this terror problem, long-term problem in the Middle East, and I really think that was a key part of it. Â

Interviewer

Well, and that was built off of what we felt were mistakes with the Cold War, right, the idea that we had let the Soviet Union containingâ€”containmentâ€”has been all the talk of containment, essentially, wasnâ€™t it?

Conrad Crane

It was the sense thatâ€”to some extent, itâ€™s this view of this plant a seed of democracy

is how youâ€”thatâ€™s the long-term solution. A We realized you couldnâ€™t kill alligators forever. Â Eventually we have to drain the swamp, and how do we drain the swamp in the Middle East? Â Weâ€™ve got to make it democratic, and some of it is this democratic peace theory, which, I think, gets overblown, and we tried in the manual not to say that elections are your solution for everything, â€˜cause theyâ€™re not. Â

Interviewer

Well, and it also seemed consistent with what you said before when you said that legitimacy is redefined from one pocket to another, from one place to another, so democracy may not have the same applicable quality of generating good things the way that we think it will in every place in exactly the same form anyway.Â

Conrad Crane

Thatâ€™s correct.

Civil/Military Disconnect After 9/11
Interviewer

But, let me ask you one final question for this session because this is great and I hope we can come back. Where were you on 9/11?Â Whatâ€™s your story about where you were and what you thought about what you heard?

Conrad Crane

On 9/11, I was sitting in an office at the Strategic Studies Institute, and got the word that to turn on the television, and the first plane had hit the towers, and I remember watching the towers burn. And one of our guys was headed down to Washington to go down to a meeting at the Pentagon, in whichâ€”and when the Pentagon got hit, turned out he was on theâ€”well, on the road right near the Pentagon when it got hit, and he got caught in a big traffic jam and kind of turned around and just came back. I remember watching it, and the thing I remember most about the day was my classmate, John Martin, was also in SSI at the time, and he was on the West Coast on leave or visiting, doing something there, and we were on the phone, and we were watching the television as the first tower went down. Â And I remember him breaking down on the other end of the phone as that tower went down, andâ€”but, thatâ€™s my memory of 9/11.

Interviewer

What did you take from it? What immediately did you think about who was responsible for it and how it wasâ€”and how it changed the world, or it did not?

Conrad Crane

Well, I mean, obviously, itâ€”weâ€™ll never feel secure again. America is never going to feel as secure again. Look at what itâ€™s done to ourâ€”to all of our transportation, the restrictions that have come, the sense that weâ€™re just Americans. Youâ€™re never going toâ€”weâ€™re just going to neverâ€”youâ€™re never going to feel as carefree and fancy-free again. Theâ€”I mean, we see what itâ€™s done to the airlines.

Conrad Crane

Iâ€™m really concerned with the long-term impact on the airlines. Itâ€™s really going to tie the United States together, tie the world together in many ways, the sense of, I mean, Iraq and Afghanistan; the long-term commitment, and done in a way, though, that where

weâ€™ve got the military at war when the country is really not, which Iâ€™m still not sure what the long-term implications of that are going to be, and the strains between the military and the rest of society. I wouldâ€™ve much rather seen a much greater mobilization of society to fight this war than the kind of way weâ€™ve done it.

Interviewer

On the other hand, if weâ€™reâ€”as Marty Dempsey says, protract a war that could be 30 or 40 years. How long can you mobilizeâ€”Â

Conrad Crane

Well, thatâ€™s true. I canâ€™t disagree with that point, but I think early on we couldâ€™ve mobilized better than we did, and I think we have a sense thatâ€”Iâ€™m really worried about the estrangement between the military and civilians. One last storyâ€”I was selected as the Archivist of the Year by the Scone Foundation, a small foundation in New York City, and I was at the November meeting giving my speech after accepting that award with the elite of New York City there; Columbia University. And I got a question from the audience. This is November of 2008, and it was right about the time of the election.

Interviewer

Before or after the election?Â

Conrad Crane

It was about the day before. It was right about that time. It was early November, and the ladyâ€”the question the lady gave me was, â€œWould youâ€â€”you know, basically it wasâ€”her understanding was we had done thisâ€”the only reason we had done this counterinsurgency doctrine was to bail out George Bush, and the question was would we have done the same thing for Barack Obama if he was president? And I was stunned by the question. I didnâ€™t know how to answer it.

Conrad Crane

Iâ€™m lucky Dick Kohn, the professor at [University of] North Carolina and an expert on civil-military relations was there and kind of stepped into the breach and my stunned look and kind of talked about how, you know, civilian control the military and when the military does things andâ€”but, the sense that these people didnâ€™t understand the military ethos enough to understand we did that out of duty. And it was a sense there isâ€”you know, it was almost like everybody does everything for their own gain.

Conrad Crane

Everybodyâ€™s out to getâ€”thereâ€™sâ€”and itâ€™s almost like weâ€™ve forgotten what duty and sacrifice mean, and Iâ€™m concerned that that is still a bright and shiningâ€”those are bright and shining lights for all our military. And weâ€™ve got to reignite those in the civilian populous as well, and thatâ€™s my concern. Thereâ€™s a difference in values here.

Conrad Crane

When I was at Leavenworth, Colin Powell came to talk to us back in 1991. He was talkingâ€”one of the students there asking a question about the demise of the draft, and how does thatâ€”is the military going to survive without the draft. And he said, â€œWeâ€™ll always be able to fill the ranks with some kind of incentives. Weâ€™ll find

ways to fill the ranks.â€ My bigger concern is the other way and what happens to society when weâ€™re no longer exchanging these military values between draftees as people go in and back. And the military becomes much more a family business and much more narrower recruiting base, and I just worry that we get to a point where we donâ€™t understand each other anymore, you know, the military and civilians.

Conrad Crane

And that question still to this day bothers me that she would have thought that we did thisâ€”all that we did in Iraq and Afghanistan was to bail out our political leadership and not because of any greater sense of duty to the country. But, that was the end of it, but still stuns me, and it disturbs me.Â

Interviewer

Well, thank you very much. Weâ€™ll continue this.Â

Conrad Crane
Okay.