

**Robert Lee Whitman
Veteran**

**Mark Koziol
Interviewer**

**New York State Military Museum
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MK: I'm Mark Koziol, the curator at the New York State Military Museum. Today is Monday, August 27th, 2018. It's eleven o'clock. And we have here Robert Lee Whitman. Mr. Whitman, if you would give us your full address currently.

RLW: Okay. 4437 Cedar Bush Road, Gloucester, Virginia. 23072.

MK: What branch of the military were you in?

RLW: Army.

MK: Were you in the New York region when you signed up for the military?

RLW: Yes, I lived in Schenectady and I joined the New York Guard.

MK: When did you join the Guard?

RLW: Around 1947.

MK: And you stayed in the military until when?

RLW: In 1984 I was off active duty, but 1989 was when I got a full retirement.

MK: You were in the Korean War, right?

RLW: Yes.

MK: What, what unit were you in when you were in Korea?

RLW: I wasn't in Korea.

MK: Oh, I'm sorry.

RLW: It was because of the unit I was in.

MK: Okay.

RLW: During the Korean War, I went through OCS [Officer Candidate School]. The unit that I wound up in was between the 3rd Armored Division, 1st Armored Division. I was in a battalion in the 1st Armored Division. I'm trying to remember the number right now, but I had the only recon platoon there. The unit that I was primarily in was the 9th Cavalry Regiment. The 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments were the two black cavalry regiments in the United States Army. When Truman integrated them, he transferred everybody out and put all new people in. I was the fourteenth guy assigned to the 9th Cav at that time. And I became a Buffalo Soldier. If you're not familiar with the name, the blacks kept their black hair close-cropped which strongly resembled the coat of the buffalo. So the Indians called them buffalo soldiers.

MK: Okay.

RLW: And I became a full-fledged Buffalo Soldier.

MK: How long were you in the 9th Cavalry Regiment?

RLW: I was with the 9th Cavalry Regiment a little over a year. And what happened was, we were continuously on orders to Vietnam with only fourteen people. When we started getting people, that was fine. The trouble was we didn't have any operations. Our tanks were worn out. We had a complete new contingent of tanks coming to the unit. I never saw them. We never got them. To this day, I don't know where they went. But in the meantime, everybody in Korea said, where are you? We want you. We were on first-line battle reports and the whole nine yards. We knew where we were going to go. We knew what targets and the whole work. The guys that they cranked up, if all of a sudden they needed a whole bunch of firepower and tanks, we went in and did it. You know what I mean? We weren't part of a division or anything else like that. We were corps-level troops that supported when and where needed in a hurry.

MK: So, during the war you were stationed in South Korea or you were stateside?

RLW: Oh no, I never got to Korea.

MK: I'm sorry. Okay, so you were stateside, right.

RLW: Well, I was on orders for Korea as an individual seven times. But I was still in the unit. The unit was going and that took priority, so as a result, I didn't go. An interesting aspect of that thing is, when I went through OCS, we were all tankers. It was armor OCS. There were only two of us in the class that actually got armor assignments. Everybody else went to Korea as a forward observer. At that time in the Army, the Air Force didn't have their air control guys down there with the units like they do today. We had to be

capable of forward observing, bringing in the artillery and air strikes, the whole nine yards, everything. In any case, everybody in the OCS class went over and became FOs, [except for] two of us. One went down to Fort Carson and got into a tank unit. I went to Texas. Oh my God. What's the name of the fort in Texas?

MK: Fort Bliss.

Unidentified female speaker: Fort Hood?

RLW: Fort Hood, yes. I went to Hood. And that's why I went to the 1st Armored Division there. But then they screened everybody out of the 9th Cav, and I was one of the relatively new lieutenants, and they said, Bob, guess what? We'll see ya. [gestures waving goodbye] I went up and I was in the cav, which worked out great. It was one of those things. It kept me out of Korea, which did not make me happy at the time. It showed you I was young and foolish. [laughs] But overall, it worked out good.

MK: Very good.

RLW: Oh, by the way, I was the S-4 for the whole regiment.

MK: And what is S-4?

RLW: Oh, S-4 is the logistics officer.

MK: What were some of the duties that you would perform when you were an S-4?

RLW: Well, I was responsible for all the tanks coming in and ordered all the spares and so forth. The tanks came with what they called on-vehicle material. So every tank you got...if it had machine guns on it, those come with the tank. Anything that was with the tank came with it. But spare parts and things like that didn't come with the tank. Well, we knew what tanks we were getting, so we ordered everything that went with the tanks, and we got that. But we didn't get the tanks. We had a heavy tank battalion title, but we were really a regiment. For example, we had our own aviation section. Everybody else didn't get that. Our radios communicated with everybody. In other words, we talked to the guys upstairs in the airplanes. We talked to anybody that was out there with us, artillery, armor, infantry, you name it. We communicated with everybody. We would have been very handy later on in a thing like Grenada where the Navy, Army, and Air Force went in and they couldn't talk to each other because everything was on the wrong frequencies.

MK: Tell me something about your combat experience. Where were you first under fire and what was your feeling?

RLW: Combat experience was all in Saigon, all in Vietnam. I will tell you about my first unit in Vietnam.

MK: Sure.

RLW: I went over to Vietnam as an individual. I was a tanker. They didn't have a big need for tankers. And the way the replacement system worked, you could be on orders for this unit, but if they needed you someplace else at a higher priority, you didn't get to that unit. So, I never got to an armored unit in Vietnam. What happened was, there were two of us, a fellow named Thompson and me, that were en route to Vietnam and we got hauled up to the Department of the Army. A three-star general briefed us. He was the Chief of Support Services for the United States Army, which included the function we were going to get. What happened in the Army, you had a concurrent return program where the bodies of deceased personnel for all the services weren't just buried like they were in previous wars or anything like that. They were processed in-country, whereby they got embalmed and bodies were looked at from the standpoint of wound data and autopsies and things like that. The bodies went home to the undertaker who was closest to the next of kin and did the final preparation on the body and buried it.

The personal effects were handled by a personal effects depot. In Vietnam, it was very easy to acquire things like Seiko watches and other things of that nature. So, if a guy was in Vietnam for, say, five or six months, the chances were excellent that he would have things that he would have gotten out of the economy. So, as a result, they had personal effects, which got very interesting, by the way. At any rate, to make a long story short, I got the personal effects depot because our congressionals' personal effects that never got home were stacked five or six feet laying flat on the floor. We played games with them. That's what we did. A couple of examples. We had a young guy who I would have resurrected from the dead. Unfortunately, he didn't come back. He owned an elephant and the family wanted the elephant. Now, it wasn't a big elephant. You didn't have big elephants in Vietnam. They're not like African elephants, but it was big enough. We were obliged to ship the elephant home. You can't imagine what it takes to ship an elephant home. You got to get elephant shots, you got to get people that will take it. You can't necessarily put him on an airplane. All little things like that. Considering all the problems involved, plus what's the family going to do with the elephant anyway? I went out to the unit and I brought several cases of a beer with me as a peace offering. [laughs] We discussed the problem, wrote a letter up, and had everybody in the unit sign it, which we sent to the next of kin explaining how the elephant was really the unit's good luck mascot. They took the hint and donated the elephant to the unit. We gave the elephant a send-off. We patted him on the rear end. [laughs] Then we wrote another letter to the unit, which cost me another three cases of beer, thanking them for [unclear] 12.17. But, you have to remember, we had to screen the property. An individual had a whole bunch of very nice

pictures showing young ladies all together and so forth. Did you send those to his wife? No. But we had a case of that and we got all these lovely pictures. The pictures looked like they were made in the home where the guy came from. We had home pictures, we had his wife's pictures. It looked like the wife, it looked like the home, so we figured, oh, these are pictures of the wife. Excellent pictures. I hated the Polaroid Land Camera because gals could do anything anytime with that. In any case, to make a long story short, we said, well, these have to be her pictures, so we sent them home. Because if we didn't send them home, she was going to come back and say, where are my pictures? So we sent them home. We got a letter back from her. Did she say, thank you? No, she said, Where did you get my sister's pictures? That was the type of thing you ran up against, you know what I mean.

MK: Interesting stories.

RLW: At any rate, my total guidance for the job, mind you, I listened while the three-star talked, but I didn't have room for questions or anything. He just explained the whole thing. I have to use one bad word now. The word I'm going to use would be four letters, but I'll use crap instead. [He said] Whitman, get over there and straighten that crap out. That was my total guidance. He was my ops officer all the while I was there. I only answered to one individual in Vietnam. That was Westmoreland. I wrote letters for Westmoreland. I didn't belong to anybody else in Vietnam. People wanted me to belong because of the assets that I had, in that I could send things home. I had my own customs approval. If somebody had something illicit they wanted to send home, if they got me to package it and send it, it went. That was it. Obviously, since I'm not sitting here personally without any financial obligations at all and so forth, you know that I didn't send them home. [laughs] There were other things I didn't do, too.

MK: Interesting. So you were in Vietnam from December of 1967 to July of 1969?

RLW: Right.

MK: And you were there during the Tet Offensive, correct?

RLW: Oh, yes. Oh, you asked me about the first combat time, that was the first big combat time right there. Our personal effects depot supposedly was in a secure area. I had about one hundred fifty nine guys with me. There was a little AG unit with us that had about another one hundred fifty. We had about three hundred people on what had been a French compound type thing. So we were living pretty good as far as that goes. Across the road from us was a South Vietnamese ordinance compound, maintenance-wise. There was a military intelligence unit just down the road from us. Well, Tet of 1968, we were completely cut off by an NVA regiment.

MK: Where were you based during the Tet Offensive?

RLW: At a personal effects depot.

MK: But where in the South Vietnam station?

RLW: First, we got established in Camp Red Ball. Vicinity-wise, we were, we were in the vicinity of Tan Son Nhut, but we weren't tied in with Tan Son Nhut or anything like that. I could drive into Saigon and Tan Son Nhut in about less than an hour. Because that's where the other mortuary was. Among other things, they also carried me against the mortuary so I could be like deputy commander of the mortuary. If the mortuary commander took off for someplace, he was a lieutenant colonel, I went in and filled in for him. I've got to tell you an interesting true story, which you will like. The mortuary had tours for VIPs that came over to Vietnam, which included congressmen and like that. They went to Vietnam, spent a few days there and now they were authorities on the Vietnam War and they knew all about it. They got taken to various places. So we arranged for them to bring those VIPs to the mortuary and had an office area where we welcomed them. In the office area we had briefing charts, told them what we did and how it functioned in the concurrent return program. This was located right at Tan Son Nhut, parked on the Air Force base. Parallel to us, in other words, we were on what would be called the city street, for want of a better word. If you went through our back door, you walked right over to the next parallel street. That was where the Air Force Officers Club was. So, the escorts always came to us at about eleven fifteen in the morning, so that when we got done with our briefing, it was time to go to lunch. So we said, Oh, you're probably going to go to lunch now. And the escorts said, Oh yeah. I said, why don't you take them to the Air Force Officers Club because you can just walk through our back door and you're right there. You won't have to move the cars or anything. That's your best lunch in Vietnam. They went for that. What we didn't tell them was when you walked through our apparent back door, you were walking into our processing area where all the bodies came in and all the odors that went with it and everything. The guys in the back room had a body that was just on the other side of the door where they were doing the primary investigation, so he was brand new and fresh from the battlefield. We picked one that was messed up pretty good, especially from burns and things like that. You got him through the door and they were doing the natural thing. Here was the young GI and doing the identification. You said, oh, hi Charlie, how's it going with this one? He said, well he got burned pretty badly, so I'm having a little problems with the identification. Then we went into a spiel and told them what he was doing. In the meantime, they were, shall we say, taken aback. They got to see the war and now they don't like seeing the war. Then, of course, we did cute little things. Of course, I was one of the reasons they had me

there to do that. I said, this is Wednesday. The goulash is the special at the club, so you'll fit right in on it. We took them over to the club and ate a very light lunch.[laughs]

MK: What was your rank during your time in Vietnam? I'm sure it changed.

RLW: Technically, I was a major, but I was really a captain. Because with my moving around and people not knowing where I was, I was still captain. It took them two years to make me a major beyond when I was selected for major. Now, let me put it this way. I'm still looking for back pay and things like that, though. [laughs] They didn't see fit to say, oh, you should have been a major for two years. By the way, I never had less than a major's job while I was a lieutenant. [laughs] I might have had a captain's job with it, but I always had at least a major's job.

MK: Did you receive any injuries or wounds while you were in Vietnam?

RLW: Well, I did, but I never went to the medics with them. Let me phrase it this way. You can get a Purple Heart for any sort of injury that occurred during a combat operation. If you got a scratch or something like that. Well, the bulk of us, especially with me because I was too busy, I threw a Band-Aid on or something. For what it's worth, over the time I was in Vietnam, I had seven of those and I never got a Purple Heart because I never bothered to go to the medics. One time, as a quick example, a warrant officer and I were standing there. The primary thing we got shot at within the depot were mortars and sniper fire. We weren't big enough for them to fool with. They were going to come back and wipe us out. We weren't a military threat to the NVA or the Viet Cong. At any rate, to make a long story short, that was where the mortar fire came in. To this day, we don't know what it was, but I had a warrant officer that was with me. We were standing there just talking and the mortar came in and went off between us. He went through the air about twenty feet one way and I went through the air about twenty feet in another direction. Neither one of us were physically marred or anything like that. We found out that we were capable of flight, but we couldn't hear for about three days. [laughs] The VA didn't give me a disability for that either. The only disability I got in Vietnam relating to injuries is I have jungle rot on both feet and they can't cure it.

MK: The jungle environment was much different than what most Americans lived in when they went over to serve.

RLW: I lived in every place in the jungle. For what it's worth, my jobs involved travel all over. Even when I had a personal effects depo, it wasn't uncommon for me to go out and get with the units. When I got to Tay Ninh, which was the next job that I had, I was the ops officer for the whole battalion that we had there. I went all over the place for our various operations because we didn't just operate in Saigon, we operated with them. One

of my pet peeves was I had guys out with infantry battalions. They operated right with the infantry battalion doing everything the guys did. My guys didn't get a single CIB, Combat Infantry Badge. Everybody in the infantry battalion did.

MK: What unit was that battalion that you just mentioned?

RLW: That was the Tay Ninh Support Command, sort of a title. They used the battalion headquarters for a title, but we supported major elements of the 25th Infantry Division, major elements from the 1st Cav Division, the Philippine Civic Action Group, which was an engineer group from the Philippines and the full division of Vietnamese Red Hats. That was their airborne guys that jumped. Any Air Force in the area. Anybody else in Tay Ninh. Tay Ninh was a base camp also. Anybody that was there, they got everything else. The only thing we did not do was medical. We had a post office, sentry dogs, our own arms depot. We had our own petroleum thing including a tank farm and all of the things that you operated in the field with. We brought bladders out and so forth. In other words, we did the field operations and support operations. We did all of the support operations for not only the Air Force, but especially the Army aviation. We developed the first hot refueling rearming for the helicopters. When the higher headquarters found out about it, about six months later they took credit for it and got all the commendations.

MK: What kind of refueling was that? Could you explain?

RLW: Well, okay, they flew in and with a chopper. The nice part about a chopper was it was mobile. You brought it in, put all new rockets on it, or gave them machine gun ammo if you included that, or you took them where you refueled them. Well, typically with the safety types being involved, they wanted you to shut it off and do this and do that. We never shut anything off. We refueled like they did at NASCAR. They went in and filled it up. We did the same thing with the rockets. Where it got tricky was they decided they needed different rockets than we were going to put on because what they were going to shoot at changed. So we had to have more than one set of rockets available for them to put on. So we did the rearming that way. This counted for anything that came in. You had a lot of base camps and they had artillery at the base camps. The 175mm [M107 self-propelled gun] is the best example. You could fire a tube out on a 175 in a couple of weeks without any effort at all. The replacement part on the tubes was where it got tricky because you had to get the replacement to them. You did that one of two ways. Go down the road and haul the replacement to them. That wasn't too healthy in our environment because anything off the base camp we didn't know. So, we figured out a way to rig them where you could put them under the hooks of the big helicopters. They came in and looked like a big bug. It came down over the load. We kept them on the wooden frame that they came in. We figured out how to hook up the wooden frame so you could pick

them up with that. We made A-frames and put them out at where the artillery units were. Their artillery was on a track, so they could go under the A-frame, hook onto their present tube, pick the tube up, and drive out from under. Then they dropped the tube and repositioned. We brought the new tube in, dropped it and they repositioned it over the tube. Then they hoisted the new tube up and mounted it on their track. You thought that they wanted us to bring the tubes back. No. The only thing we had to bring back were the brass rails on the tubes. Watervliet Arsenal was the source of the tubes and they couldn't get the brass for the rails, so we sent the rails back home. That was a big criteria, be sure and get the rails off. [laughs]

MK: What were your impressions of Vietnam, the environment, let's say? Was it different from what you experienced?

RLW: It was hot and wet. And dry and wet.

MK: They have two different rainy seasons that last a long time, right?

RLW: What you don't see in the movies. In the movies everybody ran around with ponchos and all like that.

MK: Why would they not wear the ponchos?

RLW: Why bother? It rains and it stops. You dried off in twenty minutes. Let me put it this way. Since we did everything at Tay Ninh. We were supporting allies, we were supporting joint [operations], the whole nine yards. That was how I became a colonel. The requirement to be a logistics officer required full colonel rank. You had to have done Allied Operations and Combined Operations. One is with other people and one with our own units. One was with the Air Force and Navy and so forth. The other one was with other forces.

MK: Like the South Vietnamese forces?

RLW: Sure, [unclear] 31.26 Koreans and so forth. Right. Yeah, so I was doing both for combat. In addition to that, I was doing it at all logistics levels right across the board. You name it, I did it. Plus I was doing it in an environment where you modified what you were doing all the time. Like I said, we modified the way we refueled, we modified the way we... and the higher headquarters took credit for all that stuff.

MK: How well did you and your unit work with the South Vietnamese, both the military units or the civilians? Did you have a lot of interaction with the civilians?

RLW: We were supporting their military units, but we weren't actually doing the operations with them. But I think we would have gotten on all right with them. The

problem with the military units was that our headquarters, I don't mean our local headquarters per se, I'm talking about the great ones way up in the sky and especially the State Department, never recognized who the Vietnamese military were. You see, you had Saigon and you had the South Vietnamese Army. But the prime military unit in our area was the Cao Dai, the ones that ran the province. They were the province chiefs and also the big religion for the province and the whole nine yards. The province chiefs ran Vietnam from a military standpoint, they each had their own army. They had the popular forces, support forces. When we put advisors in Vietnam, they were without popular forces, support forces, because they were in the provinces, individually. Our guys that were with them were supposed to be supported by the Vietnamese. I took it upon myself to go out and make sure they had what they needed. I brought steaks out to them. Everything else. I went out and got with them. We could watch the Hồ Chí Minh Trail from where we were at Tay Ninh. It was a scenic scene. You got up on the tower and brought stuff down. From the standpoint of the South Vietnamese forces, their artillery guys were very inefficient. In other words, we were supposed to be shooting on a band [gestures an area shaped like a cone] like this. The Ho Chi Minh Trail was over here. For some reason, they were shooting off to the left and the rounds were landing on the guys on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. So, we advised them about that because that wasn't where they were supposed to be shooting. Normally within a couple hours they stopped shooting at the enemy on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and got back and shot at other things.

MK: Were they using American artillery?

RLW: We provided the weapons and all the ammunition and everything. We had our own ammo dump, remember. A quick aside on the ammo dump. [gestures to someone off camera] Gloria likes this when I tell you. We didn't own the ammo dump. The ammo dump was the home of a panther. That was his home. He lived there, and nobody screwed with the panther, believe me.

MK: I bet. Interesting. Let's see. Any other stories you want to tell us about Vietnam? About the weaponry?

RLW: Well, first of all, I got rid of my M16. If you got it dirty, it didn't work. I carried an M2 carbine because the South Vietnamese we supported also had M2 carbines, so I had all sorts of ammunition for that. The major that came in and eventually took over my job got rid of his [weapon] too. He carried a .45 caliber submachine gun. He liked his much better. The guys that I had there at Tay Ninh had a tendency to acquire AK-47s and they used those. We had a South Vietnamese .51 caliber machine gun, which was designed for anti-aircraft primarily. We could use our machine in that .51 caliber. We couldn't use the .51 caliber ammo in our .50 caliber, but they designed theirs so it used our ammo. We

had that as part of our defense. We got artillery pieces, which we used for our own defenses. You have to remember, a good number of the guys in support roles, like the guys that I had throughout the battalion, came from combat forces where they were wounded and couldn't be kept in a combat unit. But they worked in our unit. They were artillerymen and they knew how to do all that. We had artillery pieces that we put on a perimeter, which used flashette rounds. Flashette rounds were little darts that came out like a super duper shotgun. You could take down all the foliage, woods, people, anything. Let me put it this way, if somebody was coming at you, it was very discouraging in a hurry.

One of the things that happened from an operational standpoint, somebody in the Army found out that everybody had gone to Vietnam. I was over one tour, well into a second tour. A good share of the guys were there on two tours, some even on three tours. You had other people in the Army that hadn't been there at all. So they said, we have to start sending those people. This was early 1969. The problem was they had rank. So if you got an NCO, you got him as an E-5 at least, or maybe an E-6 or E-7, which meant he was put into a supervisory type position. Great. [said sarcastically] But he wanted to impose stateside rules, stateside reports, and things like that. And you didn't operate that way, that wasn't the way you lived. You know what I mean. This was both officers and enlisted. In other words, you didn't get a captain or lieutenant, you got a major, maybe even a lieutenant colonel. We got a new lieutenant colonel in to replace the one that we had who was very savvy as to how things worked. My job as an ops officer was to let him think he was fighting the war and keep him out of fighting the war because he got people killed, until we educated him. For example, we had frequent ruckuses. Let me explain it to you. Ho Chí Minh Trail came right by us. When they got to Tay Ninh, they turned left. By turning left, they went through the Parrot's Beak area and provided support to anybody in the Tan Son Nhut area, which was their function to bring the thing down there. If anything was left over when they were going back home again, they went back up the trail and shot at us then. That was when we got attacked. So we never knew when they were going to do that.

MK: What was the name of the area or town? You said Tay Tinh? Would you spell it for us?

RLW: T-A-Y N-I-N-H.

MK: I'm sure we can find it on a map. I just want to get it down

RLW: No, no, Tay Ninh was a province.

MK: Oh, okay. It was a province.

RLW: Thank you. The Cao Dais were the ones that were in charge. Cao Dais were a religion where they addressed all three major religions, Christian, Buddhism and like that. Incidentally, Buddhism is not a religion, it's a teaching. Buddha was a real guy. Now if you go to Thailand, there are Buddhas all over the place and Buddhist statues all over. The statues each reflect Buddha sleeping, contemplating something, or what he was doing at the time. From that, it reflected his teaching. And Confucius was the same way. That's not a religion either. Everybody thinks it is, but it isn't. You can be a Roman Catholic and a Buddhist. The Roman Catholic church won't like it, but Buddhists don't give a damn.

MK: Did you receive any decorations or medals and commendations during your Vietnam service?

RLW: Oh yeah, I got a couple of Bronze Stars. I got a couple of ARCOMs. [Army Commendation Medal] I got a V [valor] on one ARCOM. That was because of Tet 1968. I had seven campaign ribbons from there. All the standard things that all the guys got. I didn't get a Purple Heart, as I mentioned to you. Some of the offshoot things that you might like. We were at the tail end of the supply chain because we were right next to Cambodia. You couldn't go any further legally. I went with the Special Forces into Cambodia, but that wasn't recognized either. We weren't in Cambodia officially until 1972.

MK: Right. I think LBJ [Lyndon B. Johnson] had missions that went over the border into Cambodia or Laos when he was president. That is from my readings.

RLW: Oh yeah, they did. The CIA was allowed. They ran their Air America Airline there. A friend of mine was on that. He went in the Air Force, and the next thing he knew, he was in civilian clothes, no identification, and he was flying cargo airliners into Laos.

MK: So they were flying in American supplies and men into Laos and Cambodia?

RLW: They weren't flying a lot of men. They flew some people. They got with the Laotians as Special Forces or something like that. It was equipment with supplies and so forth, to support. They were supporting the Laotian [people] because they were fighting for them. For example, I had operations all over the place. I had elements that operated up at Song Be. I thought I was home. I thought it was the Adirondack Mountains. That was just what the terrain looked like. And the...the little guys...the natives that were there. [ponders] I should have written it down. Well, they were our buddies. They were very small people.

Gloria: Montagnards?

RLW: Montagnards, yes.

MK: Oh, it was Montagnards.

RLW: We got with the Montagnards there and helped them and tried to give them stuff.

MK: Were they good fighters?

RLW: Contrary to popular belief, anybody that was shooting at bad guys, as far as I was concerned, was a recipient of anything we had that they could use effectively. Because first of all, they were between me and them bad guys, so I didn't think that was bad. Secondly, they couldn't operate effectively unless you gave them stuff. I'll give you a perfect example of how the hierarchy sometimes operated. The last couple months I was in country, they brought me down to the headquarters in Long Binh where the 29th GS, General Support Group, was and everybody operating under that. They had all the guys in the depot that handled various types of supplies. While I was there I wrote standing operating procedures [SOP] for supply and support units. They wrote up and distributed it as a recommended SOP throughout Vietnam, and it was adopted. It was accepted and operated in Vietnam. I got that much credit for it, zero. [puts fingers together and gestures zero] My bosses got credit for it, got awards for it.

MK: That's too bad, right?

RLW: Story of my life. [laughs]

MK: Are there any funny stories during your Vietnam time period?

RLW: Well, I can give you both.

MK: Sure. Give us a couple stories. You already told us about the elephant.

RLW: I'll give you a serious story first. I'll give you two serious stories first. The first story. While I was wandering through the headquarters, there was a guy who was handling all of the registration and things like that. A guy from 1st Cav, and they had a unit where they lost people at Parrot's Beak. It's called that because the configuration of the terrain looks like a parrot's beak. Charlie [Vietnamese] owned that. We didn't. They did. They lost people up there. He wanted us to come up with grave registration troops to go in and recover the bodies. I heard enough of the conversation. I said, you want us to do what? Have you been there? [He said] No. I operate over here, I don't go over there. I said, and you want us to go there? [He said] Uh-huh. I said, I'm going to ask for the headquarters right now. We want two things to happen. We want a minimum of a company of combat troops with us. We will make one trip into the area and one one trip

out. We will not go in one way and come back the same way. Your company will be with us for security. You will also be with the company and go with us. [He said] whoa, why do you want all that? I said, because I want to come back alive. I'll go with you. [He said] well, what do you know about it? I said, I just spent the better part of a year doing that for a living. I don't have to worry about it. I've been there. [laughs]

MK: Did the officer go with you to retrieve the bodies?

RLW: No, they decided differently. They decided they didn't want to do that. But, on the fun part, we stationed a good sharp lieutenant down in the depot. The depot was armed with three things: two cans of spray paint and a decal. If he found something that we needed that we could use, he sprayed over the UIC, the unit identification code. That was where it was going. Then put the decal of our unit on. Found a Vietnamese that operated the forklifts [and said], save that for shipment to Tay Ninh, because that's where it goes. And that was how we got it. What else was I going to tell you?

Gloria: The ice cream.

RLW: Oh, yes. Up at Tay Ninh. Somebody shipped us an ice cream truck in a reefer [refrigerated] truck. Remember, we didn't have generator horsepower or freezers to keep ice cream. So when we got it, we made a forced issue of ice cream to everybody that was on the whole base camp at that time. We still didn't empty the damn thing. So what are we going to do? Well, the troops said, hey, we know what to do with the ice cream. I'm one of the ones that said, what? They said, take it over to the Cao Dais. They had an orphanage there. I said, That's a great idea. So they did. They cranked the truck up, got a couple of gun jeeps, and went off the post through the enemy country. And I mean it was pure enemy country from there to where the Cao Dais had the orphanage, and got the ice cream to the kids. Now either the VC figured out that everybody was going to get ice cream and they thought that was a good idea or what, but they didn't bother us, fortunately. So we got there and that was when they had the big problem. The kids had never seen ice cream. And the equivalent of nuns that were there with the kids finally got a couple to try the ice cream. That opened the floodgates. The ice cream went zip. [laughs]

MK: So you were able to give it all away quickly to the kids.

RLW: Oh yes, yeah, we had to send the reefer truck back. Now the other thing they did, you'll like this. This reflects on the experience of some of your GIs. They sent us, for some reason, all sorts of plumbing gear. I mean, sinks and toilets, which didn't make any difference, but sinks and old piping. Things that we could use to set up sinks to wash your hands and shave, and piping where you had running water coming in. What did we

use the piping for? We went to the Air Force and got used wing tanks and flushed them out. We went to the engineers, got lumber to make big A-frames for them. Painted the wing tanks black, and put them up there. With our water trucks, we filled the wing tanks up and then ran the lines down to where we put the sink. I had several lieutenants that worked with me. At the same time, I was the ops officer and the company commander. We didn't have that many officers. At any rate, the nice part was I wrote the things as the ops officer and then implemented it as company commander. That's how I handled my drug problems too. At any rate, the lieutenants were observing this and they went over. Now remember, the water got warm in the tanks. They painted them black and they were in the sunshine. So all of a sudden they got warm water to shave with, all the troops did. [They asked] Wow! How'd you do that? I'm going, oh, give me strength. The First Sergeant looked at me, I looked at him, and I got very profound and I said, water runs downhill. [laughs] Because we had water pressure and everything.

MK: That's great. We're going to have to stop in a few minutes. We got about eight minutes of tape left. Go ahead. If you have a short story, go ahead.

RLW: Okay. Oh, this is a quickie. Among other units, we had a bakery. Our bakery was down in Cu Chi, which was where the 25th Division had their headquarters. Our bakery operated great because we provided bread for everybody. Aha! I had had experience with bakeries before, so I went down and got the bakery where they could get the ingredients and they made pizza for people too. Fortunately, we supported everybody so we could get support from everybody. We got together with the engineers and we designed the bakery so the floors did this [gestures sloping downward on the sides] We cleaned all that extra flour and everything. We used water and washed it down every day. So you had a very sanitary bakery operation. Mm-hmm.

MK: Very good. All right, we're going to stop this tape? Go ahead.

RLW: While I was at Tay Ninh, the bakery unit under us as part of the operation. We had a bakery, laundry, all the supplies, grave registration, general support, direct support, maintenance. We had our own maintenance units. We had all of this under there. In other words, I was very flexible as to where somebody could be assigned. I had this trooper who kept getting Article 15s for running off. Finally, he broke down enough to tell me the reason he was running off was to go down to Cu Chi where he had a Vietnamese girlfriend. So, I said, okay, if I put you at Cu Chi, are you going to behave? He said, oh, yeah! So I transferred him to the laundry at Cu Chi. [laughs] Well, the thing with the typewriter, what I was referring to a minute ago, is we had a contact team with the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. They were down by the old rubber plantations, the big rubber company.

Gloria: DuPont.

MK: DuPont Company?

RLW: DuPont Company, yes. So at any rate, the warrant officer ran into contact with them. The warrant officer [unclear] 57.20, he went home and a new Warrant Officer came in. And he was from this bunch that I was telling you about where they hadn't had any experience. He came over and the guys immediately told him war stories and they had him scared half to death. That night, one guy went out and played Charlie coming in off the perimeter. The Warrant Officer was sitting there with his M16 on full automatic and put about seven rounds into the guy coming in. That was the end of the guy. They needed a disinterested officer to take depositions so they could resolve the whole thing. They got me. Not only was I disinterested but my [unclear] 58.11 level was nonexistent, so they figured I'd be good for that. [laughs] At any rate, they got me and sent me down there. I stopped by the headquarters and they had a legal section there. In the legal section, you had young guys who were full-fledged lawyers, which was what I wanted, who had come into the Army just as a draftee rather than try to be a lawyer because he would have had to spend more time as a lawyer. So I got one, and I was going to take him with me up to the 11th ACR. [Armored Cavalry Regiment] Great. So he said, What do I need? I said, we need a mechanical typewriter because you have to take your deposition. And take your camera. You might have things you can take pictures of. We went up. We got there and we were with the contact team. Of course, the guys were telling him all the war stories and what went along with it. I was taking depositions about what had happened with the warrant officer and like that. Well, we weren't done and it was the end of the day. He said, what do we do now? We're not done. He was looking for a ride back. I said, we'll stay over. He said, stay over where? I said, they'll put us up right here. [He said] what do you mean right here? We were on the perimeter practically. Which was what here was. In fact, at Tay Ninh, you were always right on the perimeter. Our little club that we had, that's another separate story, was right on the perimeter. In any case, we stayed. In the meantime, the guys told him all these stories. Didn't we get hit that night? Well, he didn't get shot, but the next day, I never saw anybody type so fast on a mechanical typewriter. Then we went back. And the way you went back is you went down to the aeroport, found somebody that was going your direction, and asked to hitch a ride. Well, I put him on a slick. A slick didn't have seats. You kind of strapped yourself in. What he didn't know that I knew was that the slick was a gunship, which meant that on the way back we made some runs and shot guns at people and got shot back at. But I told him to be sure and get your camera so you can take pictures. So we went back on the gunship and got into the aerial war a little bit, shot at people and people shot back. We

got back and he went into the legal section and nobody would ever go anywhere with me from the legal section after that. [laughs]

MK: They just knew better, right?

RLW: And he had all the war stories to tell and the other guys didn't. [laughs]

MK: Were there any people that you remember best from your time in the military, and if so, why? I'm sure there's quite a few. Maybe a couple stories would be nice.

RLW: You had individuals, and unfortunately I don't remember all the names. But I was constantly in units that were doing, shall we say, more than they were authorized to do or expected to do. Or let me put it this way, expected to do a whole bunch of things that they shouldn't have had to do. You know what I mean? The two that I just cited in Vietnam were perfect examples of that. The depot unit where I was doing all of the personal effects. We weren't designed for that. We just got a bunch of people and we had to put it together and do it. But one of the first things I had to do was completely revamp how they received the items so that you had separate people [for different tasks]. In other words, they came in and we had a guy that had inventory. They turned them over to us and we had a guy and an officer that inventoried the stuff coming in. Then it went into temporary storage so that when we got everything...you tried to have it be a minimum number of shipments to the next akin. We might send the things that were recovered from the body home. And then advised as we recovered the other things, we would send them. But we tried to get them all together at one time. You had to have an officer that interviewed for the stuff because he signed off as a summary court officer on the thing. I didn't have to sign it. He signed that. But you needed more of them than me because I couldn't supervise every particular thing all the time. For example, I had the warrant officer that worked with me there. We got people that were sticking their nose into what we were doing all the time, trying to get control of us, especially with the power that we had. They loved that. They wanted to get control of us. But we didn't belong to them. The only one I answered to was Westmoreland. He wrote letters to next of kin. I wrote the letter for him, and then he would adjust it because he said, well, I'm sorry about your kid, but he was doing his job. That was what happened when you did that job. Boom. He was not a politician, let's put it that way.

MK: So you worked with General Westmoreland quite often during your years?

RLW: Not that often. One of the things I had to do with Westmoreland, you'd love this. They had a report of the way the enemy dead were being handled.

MK: You mean counted or physically handled?

RLW: What we did with them. We weren't treating them very nicely or something like that. A good friend of mine was pretty close to Westmoreland. He said, Bob, you ought to go with me on this. I said, okay, I'll go with you. I don't care. So we went to every division-level unit in Vietnam to see how they handled deceased personnel. The first one didn't know we were coming, so that way they weren't prepared for us. We wrote up a pretty good thing for them. One of the ways that deceased personnel got handled was you piled them up in the local area where they came from and advised everybody there about the deceased personnel. They belonged to the families in the area. But the families didn't want to claim them because then our guys saw which family came and then they knew which family was supporting the VC.

MK: Oh, wow.

RLW: So, in many cases, the bodies were piled up, kerosene poured all over them and set on fire. That was how they got handled. But we couldn't tell people that. So we had to say they were piled up so that the families could reclaim the bodies. That was what we put in the official report that went back. But we got to know them all and they got to know me. It helped me from the standpoint of where they sent stuff to me. I explained to them about the inventory process and what we had to do with that. I got to visit every divisional unit in Vietnam. Like I said a few minutes ago, how guys were there and never got to go out and see anybody because they were at a base camp and that was it. That was their total experience in Vietnam.

MK: Right. Yet you were in every province as you said.

RLW: I was all over. I was everywhere. In many cases, I drove up and down the road. Our units that we had from the Philippines were a civil engineering type unit. They made roads. You can't imagine the amount of roads they put in. We supported them with everything you can imagine. Because we had to arrange for them to be supported with things like blacktop and engineering supplies. We had to coordinate that and the whole nine yards. That's what I meant about the units. To identify what they did and what they were designed to do. Two different things totally, because you got involved in the things that you never expected to be involved with.

All right, quick true story. The last company that I had while I was in the Army, I was at Tay Ninh. The battalion commander said, Bob, I know you've done this, you've been the three and so forth. We're starting to get guys in where they can replace you at the three-level. I want you to take this company for me. [I said], why do you want me to take that company? He said, because you've got the experience and I don't have anybody with

experience. I said, you got a whole bunch of captains that need combat time commanding it. He said, I'll give it to them later. So, he gave me the company. Great. So, again, I've got lieutenants that were relatively inexperienced and I had a high VD rate in the company. The company went out and did things with the units in the area. So they brought this combat unit, that combat unit, and so forth. Well, en route, if they could partake of any, shall we say, normal, away from post-recreational activities, such as finding a young lady that was willing, they would. Did they find the gal that was clean and didn't have any little extra diseases or anything and was willing? No, they found the one that was available. So we had a high VD rate. We also had a little club that we set up, which had sort of gone to hell. So I got a couple of my good sergeants and cleaned the club up. The first thing we did was we took a fire hose to the club and literally cleaned it up. The second thing, we kicked everybody out of the club. Anybody that went to go to the club after we vamped it, was physically cured. They didn't have VD disease. Then, along with that, I revised where we got things for the club. Because before I got there, we had a lieutenant who went into Hong Kong or Shanghai, spent US dollars and bought stuff for the club, which was totally illegal. You could not do that. You got punished spending U.S. dollars in those Chinese-controlled areas. That was frowned upon, to say the least. Aside from that, they court-martialed you. So we stopped doing that. But we had all sorts of things that availed. We did all right. Such as we had a continuous supply of beer. Not only from our normal sources, but the Filipinos got San Rafael beer and brought that in, which was a really good beer. We swapped with people for stuff. Special Forces guys loved us and we loved them. Not only did I go to Cambodia with them, but I was good buddies with them because I had stuff they couldn't get, he had stuff I couldn't get. The engineers had stuff I couldn't get. I got stuff they couldn't get. I established improved barracks for all the troops. We lived better that way.

MK: What can you tell me about General Donn [A] Starry as someone that you remember from the time—

RLW: He was TRADOC [Army Training and Doctrine Command] That's later on. Donn Starry was the commander of TRADOC and I was in the doctrine shop at TRADOC.

MK: When did you work at TRADOC? What were the years?

RLW: After I came back from Vietnam, among other things, I was at the Quartermaster School. I was sent to the Quartermaster at Fort Lee to be an IG [Inspector General]. I knew too many things about Fort Lee, so the commanding general talked me out of being an IG. They put me in the school as an instructor at a higher level. I said, why don't you give me one of the training battalions? [They said], no, Bob, we want you in here. I found out later on why. The reason we taught the advanced course to majors and captains was

because they never had experience as a company commander. I got up and told them about a morning report and they didn't know what I was talking about and I was going right out of my mind. Good Lord, how did you ever become a major or a captain? The morning report was a standard report going in every day from every company-sized unit. The state of conditions of the unit including any problems they had like equipment, anybody they didn't know where they were, anybody AWOL. In other words, we were authorized two hundred people and we only had one hundred ninety two. [That meant] eight that aren't accounted for. You didn't like that on a morning report. [laughs]

At any rate, I was teaching at that level. I was writing logistics at the level where I told you before how I... maybe I didn't tell you that. I wrote what was required to be a logistician in the Army. I didn't write that you should be a colonel, but later on to be a logistician you had to be a full colonel. That was the level. The MOS logistician that was written was for a colonel. But I did write the requirements that you had to have. You had to have experience in more than one logistics area. You had to have experience with allies. You had to have joint experience. I had it all. I not only had it all, but I had it combat. Time in combat counts as double, as the same time amount in just normal operation. So if you did it for a year in combat, it was equivalent to two years anywhere else. Plus all the different problems you ran up against.

After I was there, I spent some time in reserve status for a while. My reserve status was very interesting from the standpoint of two things. The one thing that I did as a civilian was I was in the controller business at Fort Lee, which taught me a whole new aspect I didn't have from the military side. I worked in what they called the MAD. I'll remember what it stood for in a second. But I worked directly for the commanding general. That was how he knew me so well. I worked directly for the commanding general where he had problems that involved more than one of the people that worked under him. In other words, if he had a problem that involved the commissary and a unit that was supported through the commissary I could get into that problem because I was totally neutral. I wrote up a solution to the problem. Then I could impose the solution on the guys because I worked for the commanding general. I also looked for ways to save money for the Army, how to operate more efficiently. So that was our basic thing that we were written on.

Among other things, we were responsible for education for both the military and civilians that were stationed at Fort Lee anytime they were going to go into a supervisory level. If somebody was going to be promoted as a civilian where he'd be over other civilians or be promoted in a position where it would be the military and this was for his first

supervisory thing where he was over guys, we taught them how to be a supervisor. Now I found this very interesting. For example, I even talked to the civilians. If you know anything about unions, they didn't even know what a shop steward was. At any rate, I did that there. I got involved in all sorts of things. Things where I came up with improvements. Two things that I did. We had two subposts under us at Fort Lee. One was A.P. Hill and the other was Fort Pickett. A.P. Hill and Fort Pickett's primary jobs were to provide a site for operational, in-the-field training for both the Guard and the Reserves on an annual basis. Plus the same thing for units in the active Army that came in to do that. When they supported them, they came in and went right to the field. They had their own mess facilities. What they didn't have was ice. So, we bought big chunks of commercial ice and gave them to the unit. Our sources of the ice were restricted to one source. Because the vet who had to support the ice from the standpoint of sanitary content had disallowed this one and this one and this one. We went from four to one [source]. I said this is nonsense. I determined that the Army had a program where if you got the money and you amortized the improvement within twelve months, they gave you the money. I loved that program. I grabbed that program, bought ice machines to locate at AP Hill and Picket for all the units that came in. I determined how many they needed and doubled it. So they always had enough to do the job. So if some of them broke down, they got them fixed, but in the meantime they had enough to do the job. I located them at all of the mess facilities at Fort Lee. They got them too. Their ice became readily available. They had twice the capability they needed, so anybody doing a party at home went in and just filled up some bags and brought the ice home. So everybody loved you that way. Do you know what the biggest cost was? The bags they put the ice in. The biggest problem I had was with the engineers. [They said], we weren't programmed to put that stuff in, and they weren't going to do it for another six months, which would have shot my year's requirement all to hell. So the old man had a staff meeting and I brought that up at the staff meeting and guess what? The next day the engineers changed their priority and all my stuff got installed and the cost was amortized in less than six months. I liked that program, so I found another one.

They were using the IBM 360, model 40s for all of the spending reports, contract reports, anything like that. They produced these big sheets of paper [gestures about two feet by one foot] where everybody got them and they stacked up on their desks like this. [gestures about six inches thick] So I bought microfiche equipment to make the fiche. I gave them readers to read the fiche that came every day. They got little things like this [gestures about two inches square] instead of big things like that. We eventually put all of the things that were in storage on the fiche. We got all that stuff out of the old World War II buildings where it had been put, where the weight was breaking the buildings down.

And the cost of that was like this. [gestures downward] Now, I didn't get credit for that because the little gal that did the records for Fort Lee was a good tireless gal who never got anybody to do anything about her problems. Her name was Ann Thompson. I said, Ann, this is it. I'm going to help you write it up and you put it in as a suggestion. I'll support it because I'm the one that approves the suggestions. You write it up and submit it. I'll approve it. [laughs] So she saved the Army all that money, and she got promoted down at Morton Monroe [?] 1.23.05 in doing records and in all of the posts throughout the United States Army. But she knew how to do those little things, so she could go out and do the same thing.

MK: Why don't we go back to the start of the story. How long were you in the National Guard? You said two years.

RLW: Two years. Well, what happened is I went to college in Chicago, so I couldn't be at drills, so they discharged me because I wasn't able to attend.

MK: And you joined in 1947?

RLW: 1947 to 1949 with the National Guard. Then 1950, 1951, I went back on active duty, regular Army. And the way that happened is they were going to draft me, because I wasn't in college at the time. I saw what they were going to do, draft me into the Marine Corps. So I went out and found the first unit I could find and joined the Army. In the Guard, I was in the headquarters, 2nd Battalion, 105th Infantry, 27th Division, New York National Guard. I was one of the radio operators for the [unclear] 1.24.44 battalion. I did communications. We did all field communications, telephone, radios, everything.

MK: Where were you stationed?

RLW: Stationed right out of Schenectady. It is Fort Drum today, it was Pine Camp then. We went up to Pine Camp for our two weeks every year. Which was interesting because I was one of the few people that I served with in the Army later on that even knew what a troop train was. We went to Pine Camp on a troop train. That was how you went. My logistics experience even helped me there because I was with a bunch of guys and we created our own logistics and had our own supply of beer on the troop train. We started to run out and got stopped because our priority was below everything. So we stopped at a place that sold beer. So four of us went running over there and we got a whole bunch of beer. We were each carrying like four cases of beer back. And another train got between our train and us. And fortunately our sergeant saw that it was critical that we get back because we had all the beer. So he managed to keep our train stalled long enough for us to get back and put it in on the ice that we had there. I was commended very highly for maintaining the supply for the troops. Then I went back on active duty, of course.

MK: Okay, so after the Korean War time period, 1953 were you in the military for the rest of the 1950s?

RLW: From the Korean War, when I came off, the Reserves put me in a logistics unit. I didn't have any armored units that I could get into, so I went into the Reserves there. But I still did things in an armored manner. For example, we had five service battalions in Schenectady.

MK: What's that?

RLW: After I had been on active duty, I wasn't in the Guard anymore. The Guard wanted to get me back, and the Guards were going to put me in a LRP, Long Range Patrol Unit, because I had the recon and armor experience. The only vacancies that they had...because let me put it this way. I looked at the guard and I knew everybody in the guard. I saw the same people in all the hierarchy units. I said, Bob, you're never going to get promoted. I stayed in the Reserve as opposed to going to the Guard. In the Guard, I got back into logistics again. Showing how it equated the things I was doing there. For example, I got into the 80th Division which had a unit that tied in very closely to what I was doing. We were the guys that gave the equivalent of Army training tests to units in the Guard, Reserve, and active Army. The Army training test was the way you determined the readiness of the unit. You went in and put them through an exercise. You determined their training level. Is everybody where they should be? Are they doing the right jobs and so forth? Their supply level, is their equipment operational? Have they taken all of the steps to make it operational? Well, while I was in my previous Reserve thing, I became the forward [?] 1.29.43 battalion there with units doing everything in the world. They called it a military maintenance management test that they gave to the unit. Or in other words, they inspected them for material maintenance management. In other words, if you had equipment that was not operational, had you done what you should do to make it operational, or anything like that. In other words, what had you done to keep your unit ready to go. I determined that.

As an aside, what you might find interesting, I went to all of the companies in our battalion, all seven of them, and they were all different kinds of companies. I went to the companies and said, hi guys, this is Bob. This is the test that's coming down. I told them what it was all about and how important it was. When I went back, I wrote a directive letter to them stating what they had to do and that I expected them to do it. I signed it as Bob Whitman. Now, I had experience doing that because I had to write to the commanding generals of the divisions in Vietnam where they hadn't done the thing. And it was a letter that was dictated to me by Westmoreland where I signed that Bob

Whitman, Captain, writing to a two-star general. [laughs] I didn't sign it for the commander, I signed it as Bob Whitman. That was why they put me at Tay Ninh. In any case, to make a long story short, we were the only reserve unit in the United States Army that passed the command maintenance management exam the first time. In the active Army, you only had about maybe ten percent of the units that passed it the first time. I mean units in the Guard and the Army Reserve. We were the only unit in the United States Army that passed it the first time. Our advisor, who was a Lieutenant Colonel, called me in and said, Bob, I see you took command of the battalion. I said, what are you talking about? I didn't take command of anything. He said, did you write this to the company commanders? I said, yeah. He said, Did you see how you signed it? I said, I signed it with Bob Whitman. [He said] I don't see a 'for the commander' line on there. [I said], oh, I forgot that. [laughs] He said, Did everybody do it? [I said,] yes. [He said] did they know you? [I said], yes. [He said], did they figure that out? I said, yeah, they knew I'd boot them in the ass unless they did it. So we did.

MK: Wow. That's good. What unit were you in during the Cuban Missile Crisis?

RLW: I was in the 413th Supply and Service Battalion. The 413th was a specialized reserve component unit that got twice as many drills and twice as many everything. Our supply went in at a very high priority. In other words, if we needed it, we got it. We didn't have to worry about it. We were on orders. If they called us on the phone, we went forward.

MK: If they called us on the phone, what?

RLW: That meant go. When the Cuban Missile thing cranked up, we were on the road. Nobody knew we left. Our families didn't know. And we were going down to deploy to Cuba.

MK: So you were going from New York to Florida?

RLW: We were going from New York to Florida.

MK: By truck, by caravan?

RLW: We had everything, we were mobile. In the unit, among other things, I got in with the [place] where things became surplus. From the United States Navy, we acquired a whole bunch of radios and the frames that went on the radios for our unit. On all of our vehicles, we used the frames. When the vehicle was used in the unit, it had everything it needed on the frames. All they had to do was crank the truck up and everything they needed was right there and they took it with them.

MK: So did you get to Florida in the middle of the crisis?

RLW: We were en route and we never got there. The crisis was over real quick. We had three days to get to Florida. By the second day, they got a hold of us and said, come back. But as far as the family was concerned or anybody, they thought we just went out on an exercise somewhere.

MK: Are there any last stories you would like to share with us about your military service?

RLW: I didn't tell you what I did at TRADOC yet.

MK: Okay, give me a summary of TRADOC, maybe a story.

RLW: I went back on active duty in TRADOC in the doctrine shop.

MK: And when was this? What year?

RLW: This was 1977.

MK: And you were at TRADOC for how many years?

RLW: Until 1981. I was there for four years, and then I went up to Fort Devens, where I was in the unit that I mentioned before, where they worked with all of the Guard and Reserve units in the seven-state area. We controlled Reserve units. We couldn't control the Guard units because they all belonged to the states. Their command line went to the governor. Unless they were activated, they weren't in our command line.

MK: Would you tell us what TRADOC stands for?

RLW: Training and Doctrine Command. They had all the training capability in the Army, and the doctrine side told the Army how it would be trained, equipped, manned, you name it, right across the board. The manual that told them is 100-5 [manual]. We rewrote that manual. To give you an idea of the level of the manual, it was a fellow named Paul Cavanaugh [?] who wound up as a general and me. We were both in the doctrine shop. I was a colonel by then. We were both scheduled to go to the War College. They came in one day and said, oh, by the way, you're not going to the War College. We said, why not? They said, what you're writing is what we teach. In other words, what we were writing for 100-5 was the curriculum for the War College. Which I had problems with because I thought in terms of what was going to happen in ten years or more when I was working with the Reserve and Guard units. I had to shift gears because those units hadn't changed. They were still at the point where I knew this was going to happen to them and that was going to happen to them. It wasn't necessarily knowledge everybody had.

MK: What, what unit were you assigned to when you worked at TRADOC? Or did that change?

RLW: I was assigned to the doctrine shop. It was the Deputy Chief of Staff for doctrine, period. We had a total of seven of us and were originally under combat development. Don Starrey came in and said, that's ridiculous. Because we worked for a two-star in combat development. He said, you guys work for me. Boom. From then on, we were directly under the four-star. He came in and sent somebody out, normally a colonel. I was a colonel. He sent me out to go to a meeting and represent him. That meant when I walked into the meeting, I sat like this at the table [gestures at the head of the table] and all the generals at the table sat around like that.[gestures a semi-circle] I knew what the old old man wanted. So they went, blah, blah, blah and I said, no, we're not going to do that. And they went, blah, blah, blah and I said, no, we're not going to do that. I went to a meeting on the TPFDL, which is the Time Phase Deployment List, where you determined what you were going to... like, we were still talking about going to war in Europe. Time Phase Deployment List, in the event there Russia came in, was what units went when, and what other things went. I was talking with a bunch of AG types and they were very interested in post offices and going over. They were all concerned about the morale of the troops, postage, this and that. I said, do it electronically. We're not going to send any post offices, and besides, the ones we've got there now can handle the traffic. But you're not going to have mail going over. [They said], what are you talking about, Bob? We got to get the mail there, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I said, have any of you ever been in a post office? [They said], no. I said, go to a post office and go and see how many tonnages are involved in going anywhere. The tonnage capability that you had early in the war all did this. It got in an airplane, did this, and did this, and came back down. [gestures going up and coming down] The Navy won't give you a sea route for an absolute minimum of six months. [He asked], how do you know that? I said, because we talked to the Navy. [laughs]

Other interesting things that we did. We wrote the air-land battle [doctrine] while I was there. They didn't have any doctrine for air-land battle. The Air Force thought they went down to three thousand feet and supplied close air support. I was in the old Army where we did the control of airstrikes from the ground. In the new Army, which we were in at that time, the Air Force put guys out there to control strikes. A totally different environment. I knew more about bringing a combat strike on the troops than the guys from TRADOC and at Langley, which was where the combat fighter guys were in the Air Force. Because I'd done it. You know, you had to be completely aware of what it looked

like on the ground so you could translate that to the guy in the fighter plane or whatever plane was coming in to support you. Which was a whole different ball game.

Well, there were a whole bunch of things that we did like that because we were writing the whole thing. For example, we did not have doctrine for low-intensity conflict. Low-intensity conflict is anything up to using nukes. If you're not using nukes, it's a low-intensity conflict. I was the ops officer for that. I got with the Colonel...the colonel that went into Vietnam to rescue our guys that were in a prison camp there, and then they weren't there when they got there.

MK: Hackworth?

RLW: Yes. No, no, not Hackworth. Same thing, same type of guy as Hackworth.

MK: [Charlie] Beckwith? I'm trying to remember the name too.

RLW: Yes. Beckwith was out of Fort Bragg. He and I did this. [locks fingers] And of course, I was not welcomed at Fort Bragg because I was a leg. I was a tanker. I didn't jump out of an airplane. That's a separate story I'll tell you real quick.

MK: We're running out of tape.

RLW: Oh, you want to know different things I did?

MK: Oh, I know, I know. It's wonderful.

RLW: I had the riggers that were with me in Vietnam. They belonged to me. The riggers were going to get me to jump with the South Vietnamese, so I did that. [I got] Their wings and our wings. Jump qualified. [gestures wings on each side of his chest]

MK: What armored cav unit were you in, and were you in the same unit for the entire time you were in the armored cav? Or did it change according to your career?

RLW: They changed. In other words, uh, well, I forgot where I was. Most of my armored cav stuff was done...when I was writing doctrine, it included all of the armored cav units. But my armored cav unit was the 6th Armored Cavalry Regiment. And that was Armored Cav. That was the 9th Regiment. I'm sorry, I'm saying 6th, I don't mean 6th, I mean 9th. They were the 9th Cavalry Regiment and became an armored cavalry when they brought tanks in. Because they were still a cavalry regiment, but you did it with tanks, not with horses. When I went into the unit, I was one of the first white guys assigned to the unit. The unit was a black unit. They got the nickname of Buffalo Soldiers. So, I became a Buffalo Soldier. That was my primary armored cav experience right there, with the 9th Regiment. But I got involved with them indirectly in all sorts of things.

When I was doing the low-intensity conflict, I got involved with everybody that did that. For example, our primary low-intensity unit in the rear areas in the Army was MPs. They were the only ones back there with mobility. So if you beefed up the MPs and gave them more capability...I'll tell you a quick true story on that. Among other things, one of the things that came about was what you called a grenade launcher. You cranked that thing up and threw grenades like you did with a machine gun. Fort McClellan was the primary training for MPs. The commanding general of Fort McClellan, who commanded the MP school, was a female general. She was very conscious of women being employed in the MPs. Among other things, one of the weapons we came up with that impacted directly on our rear edge development was this grenade launcher. Because you could give it to the MPs and put it on jeeps or equivalent things. [The jeeps] were replaced by...I can't remember the name...the later-on equipment that replaced the jeeps. You know what I mean?

MK: The Humvees?

RLW: The Humvees yeah. Which became a general-purpose unit for everything like that. We had a demonstration for all the hierarchies and they selected a very attractive young MP gal who was very proficient but not necessarily a great big muscular MP gal. She was going to show the weapon. There was only one problem, she couldn't arm the weapon. It took too much arm strength to do this. [gestures pulling back a lever] So one of the other MPs got the rifle and armed it for him. It became a condition. If you were going to use that, you had to make sure you got people who can arm it.

But before our rear area operations came in, we wrote things that were called RAOC. That's a Rear Area Operations Center, which was set up in the rear area and coordinated cross-member support. Because prior to that, all of your rear area protection was done by the units in the rear area. And if you read their mission, it said this unit does this and this and this. In addition, it provided its own self-defense. A support unit like a gun maintenance battalion. They had individual weapons. They might even have had equipment they were working on. But they had to stop doing maintenance work to provide their own defense. It was not necessarily the most effective defense you had against Russian units. Russians had big helicopters. We didn't have the big helicopters the Russians had. The Russians could bring combat-ready battalions and equipment with their helicopters. So they had combat battalions coming in with light armor at that level, being dropped into our rear areas. What did we have to stop them? Nothing. It made for an interesting situation. So we wrote up all sorts of doctrines for that. Unfortunately, we did this in the early 1970s. By the time we started going into where we are today and all

the related things like that, they didn't read what we wrote. And anybody that would listen to me at the time, because I was retired by then, I said, read the manuals. You're not following the doctrine. [They said], oh, Bob, what do you know about it? I was going, oh my God. You're going to get people killed. And they did. Because we had the equivalent in Vietnam where they put out things on the convoy routes and blew people up.

MK: Well, Mr. Whitman, I want to thank you for your time. We've had two hours of really interesting stories.

RLW: I know I keep going, but that's all right. [laughs]

MK: Oh no, I wish we could do it all day. It would be wonderful. Thank you so much.