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(b)(3), (b)(6)

3 September 2008, 1300 to 1500

MNCI SJS Conference Room, Al Faw Palace, Victory Base Camp

By (b)(3), (b)(6)

MNFI Historian

Reach (b)(3), (b)(6)

Abstract

I'm leaving after 6 1/2 years in theater, apparently the last serving member of the Vietnam veteran 173rd Airborne Brigade. I grew up in Oklahoma in the 1950s. I always wanted to join the military, and enlisted in 1967. (b)(6)

was the focal point of dramatic experiences. There was a devastating mortar attack on LZ North English on 10 Jan 70. In 2003, I helped unscrew a huge SNAFU involving maps for the invasion. The 377th did not have this straight, so we had to fix it. The ITRC is targeting terrorist financing. It is an awful banking system here, with a lot of corruption, and a lot in the CBI, and the MoF, which ties to the kidnapping of the UK personnel. There have been threats to our personnel. Hawala system. The 173rd had great leadership, as shown by GEN Hugh Shelton and others. We are doing well militarily, but I don't know about politically. I think we're winning, provided Gol wants a stable and secure Iraq. 35 years of service have been great. Two names on the wall in Washington are especially important to me: Robert K. Parker, 12W, and Patrick D. Robirds, 21W. I named my (b)(6) for Robert. 1:51:00

Interview

1. Why did General Petraeus recognize you with an office call yesterday?

(U) I think there are two reasons. First, because I've spent so much time in the theater. Except for three R & R leaves, I've been here for 2,320 days, 6 ½ years going back to 2002. (b)(6)

(b)(6) There's no way of actually proving that, but the ITFC checked that out with the association, and they had thought the last one was a general who retired last year. I would be glad if there is someone else still serving and wearing this patch. As I said in my going away comments to the ITFC staff, I have always felt that I was serving for those guys who died in Vietnam, whose only future was a name on a wall.

2. When and where were you born, and what were your first memories?

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Is your earliest memory of it being a trying time?

4:20. (U) Yes, and that was always reinforced in me not only by my family, but by various teachers. I remember it being an atmosphere in which there was no higher calling than service to the nation. He came home in '53. My father worked for Halliburton. It was an oil well servicing company then, long before it became what it is today. My father's employee number was (b)(6) meaning he was the (b)(6) employee of the company. He was a welder's helper and a mechanic. He did not have a high school education. He worked for Halliburton for 40 years, and he used to joke that his blood ran Halliburton red.

6:25. (U) We had a small brick house in Duncan, and I had (b)(6) sisters.

What do you remember about the '50s? Was it a golden era, or was it over rated?

6:47. (U) It was golden in lots of ways, but it was scary in lots of ways too. I remember duck and cover. I can remember teachers telling us that in our lifetimes there would be a thermonuclear war between ourselves and Russia, and that was very scary. I was born close enough to WWII to benefit from the patriotic feeling, an idea that God and country meant something, not that it doesn't still. The country had come through some real trials. That was a generation in which our fathers and uncles had all fought, and they made sure they passed along the idea of service. My father was in the Coast Guard during the war, and it was the Coast Guard which drove the landing craft up on the beaches. I think they made sure that they passed along that feeling of country, of service.

How was it you joined the Army?

8:20. (U) My uncles had told me all about it, and I joined the Army to become a paratrooper, and I wanted to go into the Special Forces. I enlisted in December 1967. I went to jump school, and when I graduated, they had people there who were taking volunteers to join the Special Forces, but you had to be 19 and you had to be E4. I was 18 and an E1. So they sent me to Vietnam instead [laughter].

9:50 (U) At our induction, in Oklahoma City, they had us divided into two groups, the draftees and the volunteers. The draftees had to serve two years. The volunteers got three. I remember the draftees made fun of the volunteers, calling out things to us. An officer came out to the group of volunteers and thanked us for serving. He then went over to the group of draftees and thanked them for answering the call to serve. Then he told them they would be getting on a specific bus to carry them to Paris Island, where they would all be inducted into the Marine Corps. They were shocked and upset.

11:20 (U) In early 1968, when I joined the Airborne, there were not that many draftees. There were a few. There were a couple of different types of draftees. Those who went through jump school made excellent soldiers. There were ones that didn't mind serving and ones that did mind. There was a weeding out process, and the Airborne only received motivated troops, so we didn't have to deal with the unmotivated soldiers.

A month after you joined was the Tet Offensive. Did that register?

12:30 (U) It did, and it's interesting to note that a month before my induction, over Thanksgiving 1967, at Hill 875 at Dok To, 2nd battalion of the 173rd was overrun by NVA Regulars. Well, they were not

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overrun. They fought surrounded for four days. When they ran out of ammunition, the first six helicopters to come in for an emergency resupply were shot down. 4th Battalion/173rd was airlifted in to an LZ 17 miles from 2/173, and they fought their way through the triple canopy jungle to reinforce and resupply 2nd battalion. The story of what they did made me want to be airborne.

14:30. (U) Two months after I came in, the war really changed a lot because of the Tet Offensive. It became much more unpopular. There was a before and after. Before Tet, 80% of the media coverage was very positive. It seemed like we were winning. In fact, after the Tet Offensive, we certainly were winning, on any military scale that you wanted to put to it. We were winning the war on the military scale of things, both before and after Tet, but the North Vietnamese knew that the way to undermine American will was through the media and through body bags, and that eroded support at home.

(U) I went to basic training and then infantry school at Ft. Ord, then jump school. I then went to the 82nd Airborne Division as a filler. I was picked with four other 11Bs for Vietnamese language training at Defense Language Institute for six months. It was ten hours a day, six days a week of Vietnamese. I joined the 173rd in Vietnam in June 1969. In 1970, I extended for two more months in Vietnam so that I could drop five months of service. That way, I got an early out in August 1970 and could enroll immediately in college.

18:20. (U) The year that I was in Vietnam, I was with the 4th Battalion of the 173rd. I was the only American linguist in the battalion, and it was very different from those who were just 11Bs. I reported to the S2. We had Kit Carson scouts, who were North Vietnamese who came over to our side, they "chuhoid," and would serve as interpreters for company commanders. We found that about a third of these guys were not translating correctly. They were, in effect, spies. They were hiding bad guys and implicating good ones through their translations.

21:40. (U) In the fall of 1969, we had a hamlet call Can Hau. We had so many problems there. A 173rd patrol went through Can Hau at dusk. When the platoon reached its destination, the platoon leader took a headcount and discovered he'd lost the last two guys in the patrol. We don't know, and were never able to find out, whether they were scarfed up by the enemy, quietly, or had slipped away to see girlfriends. The patrol leader didn't find out until he got back to the platoon that he was with and did the headcount. We always thought they were scarfed up by the enemy. We went back into the village and looked and looked. My role in that . . . and for days, weeks, and months after . . . would be to go back into the hamlet with a patrol, as there were other Americans there, and I listened carefully to what villages talked about, trying to catch intelligence since they didn't know I knew Vietnamese. I never heard anything about those two guys. We did later find on a Viet Cong one of the 45s that those guys had. In the area that we were in, they normally didn't keep prisoners alive very long, especially from the 173rd. Whenever we had an honest kill, someone armed or in an NVA uniform, we'd put a 173rd patch on their forehead, so those guys would know who had done it. They hated us and we hated them. It probably didn't turn to well for those two guys. I think they later went to KIA from MIA, but I don't

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know how or why. In one visit to the village, I heard an old woman mention something about an earthen cellar, of which there were dozens.

(U) We found a tunnel that had some arms and ammunition at the entrance. We called down warning that anybody in the tunnel had better come out. No one did, so we dropped a couple of grenades in, and we killed a couple of guys hiding inside.

(U) We found a group of Vietcong who were fishing. We surrounded them and they took off for a bunker in the reeds, taking shelter. We took out a couple and there were two left. One of our guys closed in, and when a third guy popped up with a rifle we cut him in half. That left the fourth guy, a 16-year-old, Din van Sith, who surrendered and told us he'd been kidnapped. We also found documents that said there was going to be a meeting that night. The Viet Cong typically committed atrocities against those who were cooperating with us. A company prepared to go after this meeting. Two platoons went around back to set up blocking positions. I was coming into the village, Can Hau, from the front with another platoon. We were some 300 meters from the village when we saw a light coming out from it toward us. I was point, and I didn't know if this was a lone individual, a couple of guys, and a platoon or company. I sent word back to the LT asking what he wanted me to do. He sent word back up to pull my knife out and take care of the first one. We didn't have any idea how many guys were behind him.

32:10. (U) I received my orders, and I was ready to carry them out. I pulled my knife out and got ready, and that light kept coming closer and closer. I didn't know what I was going to do. When the light was 50 meters away, it suddenly turned right down rice patty dike, away from us. Was I ever so glad, and I do not know to this day what was behind that light. We had asked for the night vision scope to be sent up, but they had left it back with the platoon. We moved on into the village, and got about 100 yards, and they were meeting around a fire. One thing they used to do with people who had helped us was torture people who had helped us, like put their kids' arms and legs in boiling water. We got within a 100 yards, and a dog started barking. This alerted the enemy, and then a machine gun opened up on us, but he was high, as they were frequently. We had a fire fight, and the NVA tried to head out the back side, and they ran into our other platoons. One guy died on that mission going into the village, and I've thought about him a lot. That operation was mounted because I found the intelligence for it, and I've wondered what good did the operation do? Because it cost that guy his life. I've always felt responsible for him, because we only went in because I'd found and translated those documents we took that morning. That was the only way we knew about the meeting.

(U) In 1988, I struck a deal with American Airlines. They let me fly free around the country to link up with guys from the brigade. Among the guys I talked to were Medivac pilots. There was an LZ English, and North English. On 10 January 1970, North English suffered a devastating mortar attack. This pilot had just landed and his rotor blades were coming to a stop when suddenly he was told to crank back up. He was the first to arrive, and he went in when mortars were still going on.

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37:10. (U) At the MASH, (b)(3), (b)(6) was doing Triage. He got a Silver Start for this, carrying wounded out to the air craft with mortars continuing. Our pilots, the support guys, that medivac unit had Casper the Friendly Ghost as a mascot. . . NVA Regulars.

Where did you go after you left the Army, and why did you go?

40: 15. (U) I enrolled in the University of Oklahoma just to get away from it. I needed just to chill out and take whatever courses I needed to get a degree. I did my undergraduate work there. A friend of mine, (b)(3), (b)(6) was a captain in the reserves, and he told me the reserves were offering Combat Leader commissions for valor awards. I had two Bronze stars and a couple of ARCOM's for Valor. I graduated in 1976 with a major in Finance. I was commissioned in 1977. I wanted to join on SF team. I made it in and joined OD 1.4a SF Group, in Tulsa. I spent three years as the XO and then three years as the company commander. After the ODA, all I could do was join the ODB, which would have meant staff work. I decided I wanted a career, so took command of the 827th Quartermaster Supply Company with 287 people. We were in the 172nd Support Group assigned to the 90th RSC, or 121 ARCOM. I told my guys that if ever the country went to war, I was going to do my best to get activated. If they didn't want to mobilize, they needed to find another unit. We had 287 people.

As soon as Saddam invaded Kuwait and the US started sending forces, I sent a letter to the ARCOM commander volunteering my unit. I sent it through my commander, the 172nd Support Group, and he was mad. He had to send it on because I'd done it Thru his office, but he didn't want me activated.

Why?

Because the 172nd was scheduled to backfill the 1st Cavalry Division at Ft. Hood, and he, (b)(3), (b)(6) at the 172nd, did not want to start out by having to give up a company.

We were alerted on 10 January, and we mobilized on 17 January. We went to Ft. Sill for a week and then to the Red River Army Depot where we worked on shipping out Patriot Missile Systems. We spent a year there doing clean up. We did not deploy and I was disappointed about that.

What is your civilian career?

I examine and audit banks. In 1998, I became a federal bank examiner. I have CPA and CBA licenses.

How did you come to the desert?

(U) In 2002, I had just given up command of the 319th Corps Support Battalion and became the G4 of the RSC in Wichita, KS. FORSCOM sent out a list requesting volunteers. I kept trying to get a position vacancy. I have many MOSs and qualifications, particularly as a logistician. I volunteered and FORSCOM picked me up. They sent me to Bahrain depot. I was working for the C2. I wondered what C2 needed a logistician for. They had a 90K square foot warehouse with five levels of storage for maps.

(U) The best job was delivering stuff to Afghanistan. The pipes (bandwidth) were not big enough for the imagery we needed to send, so we did hand delivery of products. This was US material, and products, like for Fallujah.

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Did you see any examples of mistakes or screw ups that the system had to correct?

(U) A huge one. In Bahrain, we had the contingency stocks for maps. We had 12 million maps on pallets. The 377th was in Kuwait. According to the war plans, the 377th was supposed to come to Bahrain, pick up these maps, and convoy them to Kuwait for distribution. I expected them to come get the maps in December, but December came and went with no word. In January, I flew up to Kuwait to see the 377th and figure out what was going on. I saw [redacted (b)(6)] at CFLCC and [redacted (b)(6)] at the 377th SPO. I asked them about getting the maps, and they didn't know what I was talking about.

What had happened?

(U) They had a Class I Commodity Manager who had gone on leave. Class I is paper products, cups and paper, and they thought everything was taken care of. They had done no planning to deliver maps.

(U) There was a map distribution platoon that was supposed to take care of this, but they were not scheduled to deploy until June, and there was no warehouse in Kuwait to move them to and use for distribution. We briefed the 377th CG, and he said figure it out. In 8 hours we came up with a plan. I only had five guys, so others gave me 34 more (I told them I needed 40 guys to make it happen). It was a huge effort, but in six weeks, we moved 12 million maps on pallets and distributed them. We finished two weeks before the invasion. We also distributed to the Marines and to coalition in AA Fox. TPFDD. A LTC.

And Camp Doha at this time was in chaos.

(U) It was terrible, and Arifjan was worse, and they were trying to push things down to Arifjan, but there was nothing there to support the effort. Communications were a complete botch. Everytime a new unit came in, they changed all the phone numbers. There were several J2s, and JCICC. [redacted (b)(6)] NAVCENT.

What do you do here in Iraq?

1.4a, 1.4b

How would you describe the CBI?

~~(S//NF)~~ It is the hell of banking. There was a time when JAM was issuing IEDs and weapons out of the CBI's basement and using it for torture. They were conducting counterfeit operations there, and it was corrupt to the core. Malign elements had taken it over. Guys who wanted to rise through the ranks made arrangements through JAM and corrupt elements to get rid of rivals. The CBI was a mile or two NW of the Green Zone. Now, its operations are scattered among different places in Baghdad. In late January, they suffered their second fire. It was arson, and it was set to destroy records that would have revealed money laundering that would have implicated current Iraqi officials. Those records would have shown the whys and wherefores, and made links to [redacted 1.4b] and showed connections to the highest officials in the Ministry of Finance, I mean the highest official there.

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~~(S/NF)~~ There is an Anti-Money Laundering Office that reports up through the MoF. Its monthly reports show the corruption, but nothing was being done. It stopped filing reports out of fear that the reports were putting their employees' lives at risk.

~~(S/NF)~~ After the fire, two folks in information technology at CGI came forward and said they had backed up all the banks data as a precautionary measure and had kept it at home. They were immediately jailed and we haven't heard from them since.

~~(S/NF)~~ There have been threats to our personnel, such as the five Brits who were kidnapped from the MoF in May 2007. We think they are probably being held in Iran, and we think Iran ordered the kidnappings for use in an exchange. There were specific threats against (b)(6) for US Treasury, by JAM. The primary threat at CBI is kidnapping. Its Force Protection Service is completely corrupt and infiltrated by JAM. 1.4b A new BG commands the FPS. The old guy claimed he had 1600 employees, but only 200 actually existed, and he and a few others were splitting \$26,000 a month in false salaries.

What is the Hawala system?

(U) It is a relatively crude but a traditional and very effective ledger system. Hawaladers are a system based on trust. You go to a Hawala in one place and want a given amount of money transferred to another location. The Hawala will call a Hawala in the other location, authorize the distribution, and then the two Hawala's settle their accounts later. The fees are typically 1 ½%, which is better than Western Union. They keep no official records, and it might be nothing more than a big chief tablet. The Hawala is designed by and for third country nationals. We have to work with and within it. There is a regulatory response. There should be a licensing process, but there is little regulation. Hawalas are waking up to the system, and they are not often willingly or knowingly aided terrorist networks. We could go out and take their money, but that has huge repercussions so we should be very leery of it.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

The 173d had good leadership. The best job was being an airborne company commander. I was a buck sergeant for Henry Shelton (later CJCS). Timmons was a company commander, and later SACEUR. There was another three star, a BG who led the operation in Grenada. What is great about company command is you are out with troops every day. Mohan.

What is important about this situation today?

In this war, militarily we are on top. I don't know about the politicians. For all the blood and treasure we've spent, if we don't take a wise course . . . We have to stay the course. I think we're winning, provided that the Gol is one that Iraqis want, Sunni and Shia and Kurds, perpetual or not. You have to have a compromising political system. Veterans of our civil war, they reconciled and had many close relationships. That helped the country.

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Is there anything else?

It has been a good 35 years of service across five decades, and I hate to see it end, because of all those guys who never made it home from Vietnam.

Any specific names?

Yes. Robert K. Parker, who is on 12W on the wall, and Patrick D. Robirds on 21W. Patrick was a high school buddy who went into the Marine Corps. He did a few weeks after getting to Vietnam. Robert Parker was one of the four linguists from the 82nd. He got to Vietnam ahead of me, and he taught me to live and survive in the field. He took leave and went home to Newbury Port, Massachusetts, a picturesque seaside town. There, he fell in love with and got engaged to his high school sweetheart. He returned to Vietnam and was killed in action on 30 November 1969. I named by (b)(6) for him,

(b)(6)

When I finish the book, the proceeds will go to the 173rd Airborne Association College fund.

My final thoughts are these: soldiers and marines today are as good or better, as patriotic, as hard working, as good as ever.

1:51:00

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