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Captain Joseph Kinzer was a US adviser with one of the best South Vietnamese divisions, the Airborne Division, for part of 1967 and 1968 and then served as a junior staff officer. He saw plenty of action with the Airborne Division, and has interesting comments about their efficiency- but his comments do not reflect the average ARVN division. The best ARVN units were as good as the best US units, but ARVN units tended to fluctuate considerably depending on their leaders. Kinzer took part in the large operation that finally relieved Khe Sanh after its siege, and then spent time on the staff before leaving Vietnam in mid-1968. This interview was part of the Army's program to interview officers and find lessons that could be implemented to help win the war.

Interview Conducted 11 June 1968 at Airborne Division Advisory Detachment, Airborne Division Headquarters, Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Republic of Vietnam

Interviewer: MAJ Charles C. Pritchett, 20th Military History Detachment

MAJ PRITCHETT: This is MAJ Charles C. Pritchett, Commanding Officer, 20th Military History Detachment, Headquarters, United States Army, Vietnam [USARV]. This morning, 11 June [1968], we are located at the Airborne Division Headquarters (ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam]), Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Saigon, Republic of Vietnam. And we are interviewing CPT Joseph W. Kinzer, an infantry officer, who is one of the division liaison officers. Prior to becoming a liaison officer, CPT Kinzer was a battalion senior advisor within the [ARVN] Airborne Division. He has been in country approximately a year and is scheduled to rotate within the next ten to fifteen days back to CONUS [Continental United States], or Stateside, assignment.

When did you come into the Army? CPT KINZER: 1959.

MAJ PRITCHETT: 1959. What have been some of your major assignments, or your major assignments since that time? CPT KINZER: The first five and a half years I was an enlisted man. I was with the 3d Infantry Division in Germany, the 2d Infantry Division at Fort Benning, GA, and the 'Old Guard' at Fort Myer] in Arlington, VA for two years. I went to Officer's Candidate School in 1964, was commissioned in September 1964, went to jump school and was assigned to the 82d Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, NC. I spent 30 months with the 82d Airborne Division, went to the MATA2 course at Fort Bragg; was then assigned to Military Assistance Command, Vietnam as an advisor. Upon arrival in country I was assigned to the Vietnamese Airborne Advisory Detachment.

MAJ PRITCHETT: What have been your assignments in country? CPT KINZER: For the first four months I was the senior battalion advisor with the 7th Vietnamese Airborne Battalion. After that I was assigned to what was then the 3d Airborne Task Force as liaison officer.

MAJ PRITCHETT: I'd like to ask you a few questions in regards to your tenure as the senior advisor to the battalion. How is or was the battalion advisory team organized? CPT KINZER: The authorized battalion Table of Organization and Equipment was three personnel per team: a captain, first lieutenant, and an E-7. I was the senior advisor. 1LT Arvin was my assistant battalion advisor. MSG Larson was my weapons advisor.

MAJ PRITCHETT: How did you employ these people, or utilize them on a day-to-day basis? CPT KINZER: In an operational environment the battalion worked normally in two elements. It is organized with four rifle companies. Consequently the battalion commander would maneuver his unit in two-company sized units. The battalion executive officer with one unit and the battalion commander with the other. As the senior advisor, I would be with the battalion commander and I employed the assistant battalion advisor with the executive officer, maneuvering with two companies. The weapons advisor would normally be with the lead company, generally with the command group of the lead company that was under the control of the battalion commander. He worked directly with me most of the time.

MAJ PRITCHETT: What were your specific duties as the senior advisor to the battalion? CPT KINZER: This is everybody's question, really: just what are the duties of an advisor. In my experience with the battalion and with this division over the past year, I've found that the Vietnamese Airborne Division being what it is, having the leadership and the caliber of personnel, and the training they have is ... advice, tactical advice, you give very little. Because they are good tacticians and they employ their units properly. They are sound tacticians across the board. I found myself and my advisors acting 75% of the time as a go-between or liaison between the Vietnamese unit that we were with and US and Free World forces' combat and combat service support units. To give an example, helicopter gunships, US tactical air strikes, US artillery (US Marine Corps most of the time up in the north), resupply and medical evacuation missions. And I was head coordinator, more or less, for the battalion commander in the employment of these Free World forces.

MAJ PRITCHETT: When you were out on an operation, how was a decision reached to employ, say, light fire teams and also air strikes, and would you give me a talk-through on just how the decision would come about, and how the strikes would actually be called in? CPT KINZER: When the battalion initially made contact, of course, the battalion commander would develop the situation, move forward, and make an estimate of what he was up against. Based upon his and my estimate, we would reach an agreement, mutual agreement. Or he would tell me what he felt should be employed. And, of course, I'd make my own decision on this as to the effect of what he wanted to employ, whether it be gunships or artillery. And rarely ever, if ever, did we have any disagreement on what to employ. And he would just merely request to

me to "get me a set of gunships" or "I'd like US artillery reinforcing fires on this" or "I'd like naval gunfire fired on this." And I would in turn forward my request to the brigade senior advisor, who would in turn contact the US supporting unit. And the supporting fires (the naval gunfire or the gunships) would immediately be brought on station.

MAJ PRITCHETT: Did you have an assigned FAC, or a naval gun (ANGLICO) team, or artillery FO? CPT KINZER: During the operations, along the coastline, we did have an ANGLICO team attached to us. And this was if we decided to employ naval gunfire, which we did on many occasions, it would just be a word from me to the Officer in Charge of the gunfire team to fire such-and-such a coordinate. As far as FACs are concerned, we were unique in comparison to any other ARVN unit in that we had our own organic US FAC team assigned. And these FACs were constantly with us on all operations and acted as our eyes and ears on many an occasion, as a radio relay. And of course they did a real fine job bringing in tactical air strikes against the enemy.

MAJ PRITCHETT: Was this a Vietnamese FAC or a US type? CPT KINZER: This was US Air Force types. And they had generally three to four aircraft and eight to ten FACs all the time. And where each brigade (or task force, as it was then called) was then assigned so many FACs and so many aircraft, depending upon the duration and location of an operation. They stayed with us throughout the operation.

MAJ PRITCHETT: You mentioned the fact that you coordinated a lot with US units. How were you as an advisor and the battalion that you were working with accepted by the US units? CPT KINZER: To put it in plain English, with open arms. I feel, in my experience working with US units, that most all US units that I've worked with are eager to work with ARVN, to find out what ARVN's capable of doing, to find out how they work, and to really work on the US-ARVN relationship as far as combined operations are concerned. And my duties during this particular time I would be a spokesman or coordinator for the battalion commander to the US commander. I would present his scheme of maneuver, his plan of fire support, to the US commander, and coordinate any fire support or anything like this that we were depending upon the US for. And this worked extremely well in all cases.

MAJ PRITCHETT: It's my understanding that the ARVN units are not under the command of an American unit. Would you describe just how these operations, when they're out in the field side-by-side (the US and ARVN units, that is, or airborne) how is the overall operation controlled? CPT KINZER: It has been my experience in working with US units, alongside of them, the ARVN commander commands the ARVN units and the US commander commands US units. As far as the operation itself is concerned, the coordination between the two commanders is such that its not, in fact, anybody controlling ARVN but ARVN and US but US. What I mean to say here is the commander still maintains chain of command and his reports go to his headquarters, be it ARVN or US. The cooperation and the coordination between the two units is such that the operation runs very fluidly and it is well-coordinated.

And this is where the advisor plays the major role. And this is where I felt that the advisor really either did the job or he didn't do the job, because of the complexity of the US organization. We found that on many occasions, we found it hard for the Vietnamese to grasp the concept of how the US were operating. And with the magnitude: their resources and their capability to move, and shoot and communicate. And we found that without the US advisor working with ARVN, that the Vietnamese commander would have had little or no concept of what the US was capable of doing.

MAJ PRITCHETT: Do you recall any specific examples you'd like to relate at this time? CPT KINZER: I think a shining example of this was Operation PEGASUS/Lam Son 207, which was the Vietnamese name for the operation. This involved a combined operation with the 1st US Air Cavalry Division, 5 of the 26th US Marine Regiment, and the 3d Airborne Brigade of the ARVN Airborne Division. The mission was to relieve the pressure around the Khe Sanh combat base in I Corps. We were being supported by the 1st US Air Cavalry Division during the operation, and it was very complex as far as we were concerned because, as far as the advisors were concerned, because we had never been exposed to the complete resources of an air mobile division to date.

And we found that working with the Cav is something like you've never experienced before. I mean, they have, like I said before, have the ability to move rapidly and on short notice anywhere in this country. And the Vietnamese were very receptive to this. I feel they did a remarkable job. And the mission entailed moving the 1,800-man brigade from along the coast by Quang Tri to the Laotian border around Khe Sanh combat base. And with the cooperation and the coordination between the ARVN commander and the 1st Brigade of the Air Cavalry Division, this operation was effected with little or no trouble.

The operation itself went off extremely well. And many of the US commanders and the US aviation support units that were actually moving our troops commented personally to me and the senior advisor on the flexibility of the airborne troops, their know-how, and their willingness, and their ability to respond to different situations.

MAJ PRITCHETT: When was the operation conducted? CPT KINZER: The operation kicked off with the 3d Airborne Brigade on the 7th day of April and terminated on 14th day of April, 1968.

MAJ PRITCHETT: Would you give a brief run-down on how the ARVN airborne battalion is equipped? CPT KINZER: Most weapons and the equipment in the ARVN airborne battalion are typical of a US battalion with two exceptions. The VN airborne battalion has 60mm mortars and the 57mm recoilless rifles whereas the US battalion has four-deuce [4.2-inch] mortars, 81mm mortars, and the 90mm recoilless rifle. This was the only difference in equipment. The ARVN airborne battalions are completely outfitted with the 5.56mm M-16 rifle, the 40mm M-79 grenade launcher, and the 7.62mm M-60 machine gun at this time. And this makes our working with the US units that much more fluid in that it doesn't create a real

supply problem. Ammunition is 99% compatible, and this definitely helps make the situation move a little bit faster.

MAJ PRITCHETT: You mentioned supply problems. What specific problems have you encountered as a battalion advisor? CPT KINZER: During the time I was with the battalion, we didn't really experience any problems as far as resupply was concerned. Probably because of the nature of the operation. We were operating along the coastal region, around Hue and Quang Tri in the I Corps Tactical Zone. And normally we had a line of communications by road, and on certain occasions where we did have to resupply by air, it was coordinated and conducted by VNAF (the Vietnamese Air Force), using their helicopters.

As liaison officer to the 3d Brigade, we found that working with the US units, we depended upon them entirely for our support. And it took a little adjusting, to say the least, to learn the new SOPs that especially the 1st Cav used, and learn their system for doing things.

The real problem we had was trying to get our counterpart to make a sound estimate of his resupply needs far enough in advance for the US and ourselves to react to the requirement. The requirement for positioning the ammunition and/or rations, and allocating a sufficient number of aircraft to move the same supplies. This was one of our biggest problems, getting, getting our counterpart to see far enough ahead and make an estimate of what his requirement would be at such-and-such a time, and go ahead and submit that requirement to us so we would have enough reaction time to position the supplies and get them rigged for airlift, and get them in there. This problem only existed for a short while, probably two days. And once they saw the need to get this information most expeditiously, they would forward the request directly to us, give us enough reaction time, thereby allowing the resupply to proceed with no problem.

MAJ PRITCHETT: As a battalion advisor, would you discuss the unit's maintenance program that existed in the battalion, and any actions that you might have taken to better it? CPT KINZER: This was one of the points of interest when I initially joined the battalion. The battalion was in a semi-reserve status or in a 'stand down.' They had just recently returned from an operation in I Corps. And one of my first questions to the battalion commander was what kind of program he had organized for maintenance. And he just spread the whole thing before me, what each company would do, and how it would be accomplished, how the weapons would be cleaned and inspected. And it came off just like he said it would.

MAJ PRITCHETT: I've heard it said before by some people that the ARVN soldier takes very good care of his own personal gear, but has a tendency somewhat, sometimes, to maybe let crew-served type of equipment (crew-served weapons, vehicles, and radios) kind of go their merry way until they completely will not function. What's been your experience in this line? CPT KINZER: In the 7th Battalion I feel that a member of a crew-served weapons team realizes that that weapon is going to provide as much if not more support for the unit as a whole than the individual rifle carried by a soldier and consequently he takes real good care of it.

It's been my experience, as far as the vehicles are concerned, I can speak from a personal example here: my vehicle, when I got here, was in real bad shape because it had been run and not taken care of and I took it back to the motor pool (or had it towed back). And within two weeks they had put a new engine in, had four new tires on it, and really had it in top-notch running condition. Every time we went to the field, I'd leave my jeep with the motor pool and it was just in immaculate shape when I got it back.

MAJ PRITCHETT: We discussed logistical or resupply problems or areas while on operations. You mentioned being in a 'stand down.' How has the ARVN supply channel functioned during these periods of time? CPT KINZER: I saw no problem at all as far as the everyday logistics problems were concerned, or the everyday logistics activities (you might say). As far as field equipment, immediately upon returning from an operation in this 'stand-down' status, maybe two or three days, it was SOP in the battalion that all TA-50 (this is field gear: boots, fatigues, web gear, so on and so forth) would be inspected by the individual units. And this would be consolidated at battalion-level immediately for direct exchange through the division G-4 channels and the troops had good equipment, serviceable equipment, when he went back to the field.

MAJ PRITCHETT: During your period as the senior advisor to the battalion, did you find that the airborne soldier was adequately fed? CPT KINZER: Yes, I did. In my experience with the battalion, I never ate (well, I say I never ate) any GI chow. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, I would eat with my counterpart; eat exactly what he was eating, which was sufficient and in certain cases was more than I could eat. The average soldier, I feel, (and I made it a point to get around and look at their messing operations they have a different concept than we do, they don't eat US C-Rations per se, they cook in their own little rice pot) had sufficient rice and vegetables and so on, and basic needs that they needed to function.

MAJ PRITCHETT: You mentioned eating with your counterpart. Who provided the equipment and supplies for the advisors? CPT KINZER: In my battalion (I'm speaking strictly for the unit that I was serving with) I had my battalion commander, or my counterpart, prior to moving out on any operation, with whom I would eat, who would be responsible for procuring my food. And his statement to me was "when you go to the field with me, don't worry about a thing. I'll feed you, I'll take care of you." And I can certainly say he did this.

MAJ PRITCHETT: I'd like to get into another area now. And this is the area of training. What type of training program did the battalion have when not actively engaged or participating in any given operation? CPT KINZER: I joined the battalion during this 'stand-down' period. It lasted for about two weeks, altogether. Again, this was one of my questions to the counterpart, what their schedule of activities would be during this particular period. And during this time we had received over 150 replacements right out of basic training who had not been school trained in the functioning and operation and firing of the M-16 rifle. My recommendation to him was that we get them into a classroom for some classroom-type instruction on the basics of this weapon and after that get them to a rifle range. This was accomplished within four days

after I made the recommendation which really impressed me. And some of the instruction put out by the young first and second lieutenants in the battalion was just Fort Benning-style, I'd say. They did a real fine job of this and everybody was zeroed and qualified with the weapon prior to moving out on the next operation.

MAJ PRITCHETT: Do you consider the training program with this type weapon to have been successful? CPT KINZER: I certainly do. I think the results speak for themselves.

MAJ PRITCHETT: There's been quite a bit of controversy over the M-16 rifle. What difficulties have you noticed that have been experienced with the airborne trooper? CPT KINZER: Speaking from an experience standpoint, my company that I commanded in the 82d was equipped with M-16 rifles and we had little or no problem with them Stateside. But of course this was completely different environment. But my personal feelings on the M-16 are that it's just like your car you have back home. It has certain little idiosyncrasies, things that you have to watch out for. And it does require a lot more cleaning and care than the M-14 and the M-1 rifle. And I think this is a point that needs to be brought home to every soldier--that you have to clean that weapon and take care of it, just like you eat a meal every day. I mean, it's just got to be a constant thing. It can't be left to hang in the breeze for two or three days at a time and then suddenly realize that you have to clean your weapon. And I think that the Vietnamese airborne trooper is well-aware of this, because everybody carries a brush and cleaning rod, oil, and patches. And they are constantly maintaining their equipment on a daily basis.

MAJ PRITCHETT: How often did the battalion participate in airborne ... excuse me, I mean airborne jumps? And how often did the advisors participate in these activities? CPT KINZER: The battalion I was assigned to was never committed to an operational parachute assault while I was there. However, in order to maintain their airborne proficiency, they are required to make a jump once every 90 days. And this is depending on the tactical situation, which of course influences it quite a bit. I, as an advisor, jump with the battalion. Administratively on one occasion here in the Saigon area. Since being assigned to the division I have made fourteen jumps with the jump school during the times when the battalion was not actively committed. But they try as time permits to maintain their proficiency and keep everybody qualified as far as parachuting is concerned.

MAJ PRITCHETT: I know about qualifications. What are the qualifications for the advisor to receive the Vietnamese jump wings? CPT KINZER: The qualifications as they stand right now are, of course, be a qualified US parachutist and complete six jumps with their jump school here at Saigon.

MAJ PRITCHETT: Joe, we've been talking about your duties as an advisor to a battalion. I'd like to ask you what were your duties were here at division? CPT KINZER: Since I left the battalion, I was working with the 3d Brigade as their liaison officer. And these duties entailed much more than any US liaison officer I've ever met in that the brigade advisory detachment

(section, rather) that they have right now consists of a five-man team: a major, master sergeant, and an E-5 (sergeant) as the brigade advisory section; and then we have the captain and a radio operator that were working as the liaison section. And in working as a liaison officer, I felt--found myself rather--doing much the same job as the brigade S-3 would do in coordination, planning.

To give you an example of this, during Operation PEGASUS I just described with the 1st Air Cavalry Division, the brigade was located at Quang Tri in a reserve status and I as liaison was brought forward to the 1st Air Cavalry Division Command Post to make liaison, to effect coordination, and get everything going for this operation that was impending around the Khe Sanh combat base. And this is an experience I will never forget. I walked in the division Tactical Operations Center, was introduced to MG Tolson's primary staff: the Chief of Staff; the G-1, -2, -3, -4, -5; the Division Engineer, and the Division Signal Officer.

And I found myself kind of on the spot because the operation was going to kick off in two days' time and I found myself making decisions for the brigade commander in how many aircraft I wanted, what time I wanted to commence the combat assault, where I wanted to establish my fire base, where I wanted to put my artillery, how much concertina wire I wanted, when I wanted the bulldozer to move in to dig the TOC slot and the gun positions, and what my resupply requirements would be, what my ASR [authorized supply rate] was for my 105mm howitzers. And it was just a little overwhelming and more than I could handle at the time. Thank God that the 1st Brigade had the requirement of lifting us from Quang Tri into the area. This was a big help to me. Their S-3 and S-3 Air and I worked two nights until midnight planning this move.

And as I said before, this is a little bit more than is expected of a liaison officer. I felt that liaison was a misnomer in this case. It should have been operations officer, because that's certainly what I was doing. What I was doing up there was coordinating all this stuff. And as it worked out in the long run, not any reflection on myself, but what I had requested from the 1st Cav was pretty much along the same lines as the brigade commander wanted. It worked out pretty well. We had our problems, but things did kind of work themselves out after we got into the operation and the brigade commander finally got a handle on what was going on got everything ironed out. It went rather smoothly after that.

MAJ PRITCHETT: Joe, do you have anything else to add to what you just ... the remarks you made about the liaison officer? CPT KINZER: I think that there's a definite need to take another look at the advisory set-up, which has been done. And certainly if the operations are to continue in conjunction with US units similar to the Cav, or any other division for that matter, that the brigade advisory section should certainly be augmented in order to cope with operations requirements, the intelligence requirements, and logistics requirements that are ever-present in working with a US unit.

MAJ PRITCHETT: What specifically should be added to the team? CPT KINZER: I think the brigade advisory section should have a staff advisor because in the operation that we have participated in, I found the senior advisor for the brigade working with the staff more than he does the commander. And only rarely ever did he ever have an opportunity to sit down and really talk out the situation with the commander because of the other requirements that were so pressing on him at the time. And one operations sergeant and a radio operator are certainly not enough. I would recommend that the brigade have a staff advisor, an operations officer, and at least two operations NCOs [non-commissioned officers] and two radio operators at the brigade level. And they certainly need something in the way of logistics. And I think they need to get the liaison officer out of the operations business and into the liaison business, where he can effectively conduct liaison as it should be conducted between adjacent units, next higher headquarters, and subordinate units. And I think that under the new proposed TD [Table of Distribution], this will be effected and I think it will make for a lot smoother operation.

MAJ PRITCHETT: Going back to the battalion team, what should be added there, if anything? CPT KINZER: I think that under the present set-up, they have augmented the team by one NCO, and I feel that this is certainly sufficient. They now have a four-man team: two officers and two enlisted men. And I feel certain that this is sufficient.

MAJ PRITCHETT: What sort of position was the other man that has been added? CPT KINZER: I don't think the addition of the other NCO will change the basic concept in the way the advisory team works at battalion level. I think that in the Airborne Division they will continue to keep the advisors out with the companies rather than keeping them all at battalion headquarters, which is SOP in some of the other ARVN divisions.

We feel, here in the Airborne Division, that in order to make a good estimate of the situation, and make a valid recommendation to the battalion commander on the employment of US and Free World Forces' support, we feel that we need a man up there who is on the scene and who can see what the situation is. It would be like, if we didn't operate like this, it would be like a battalion commander running four companies with no company commanders or no one to give him an estimate of the situation as it existed on the front. And it certainly is not the job of a battalion commander to always move to the front to make an estimate of the situation. He makes his decision based on what his company commanders tell him. And we feel if we don't have someone with that company commander to make an estimate of the advisory side of the operation, why we cannot give him valid advice on the employment of US support.

MAJ PRITCHETT: I'd like to maybe go back in the area of logistics and talk a minute about medical evacuation. What problems incurred on medical evacuation? How was this handled? And what role did the advisor play? CPT KINZER: As far as the battalion was concerned, on the several operations that we ran in I Corps, we did suffer light to moderate casualties on occasion. From the medical standpoint, I think the Vietnamese medical personnel that were working with the battalion certainly did a magnificent job, from all I could see. Regardless of what the situation or how intense the fire was, the medics were always on the scene

administering first aid and evacuating their personnel to a secure area where they could be further evacuated to medical facilities. As far as the advisor's role in this respect, we were primarily interested in: Number One, how many casualties they had; and Number Two, the nature of the wounds. And, again, here we planned for and coordinated the medical evacuation. Our primary role was in marking the landing zone, insuring it was secure, and bringing the helicopter in, and assisting with the loading the personnel on the chopper and getting them evacuated most expeditiously.

MAJ PRITCHETT: Next, Joe, I'd like to ask you what have been the major problems that you encountered as an advisor during your time here? CPT KINZER: I think one of the biggest problems that I've had as an advisor, both in the battalion and in the brigade operations, is to get your counterpart (or the Vietnamese commander) to plan ahead. I feel that they are good commanders, they exercise a lot of good leadership, but on many, many occasions I've found some commanders who did not have the foresight to see beyond today.

MAJ PRITCHETT: When you mention leadership, what has the advisor done to improve leadership within the units? CPT KINZER: In this regard, I feel that the advisors here in the Airborne Division have, in order to develop better leadership, have shown their Vietnamese counterparts where certain leaders in the division have been deficient, in a very tactful way, and have given the division staff, the division commander, and the battalion commanders guidance in how to rectify the situation. And the Vietnamese, you certainly have to realize ... well, they 'play favorites' and fail to 'call a spade a spade' in some cases. And they ... they're a little bit 'political minded' and they are--some commanders, I'm not speaking for all of them--are a little bit reluctant to step on somebody's toes because they feel it might hurt them in the long run. But this is not normally the case. Like I say, only on occasion. And they have taken (especially the division commander) has taken some real stern measures against people who do not toe the mark and who do not command effectively. And this was, in many, many cases, based on the advice of the advisors.

MAJ PRITCHETT: I'd like to ask you, what do you consider to have been the highlight of your tour or/and your major accomplishments as an advisor? CPT KINZER: It goes without saying as far as I'm concerned the highlight of my tour was the operation in Khe Sanh with the 1st Air Cavalry Division. It was an experience for me in not having worked with a US unit since 1967, and only in a Stateside environment. This was certainly the highlight of my tour over here. I think I learned more in the week or so that we worked with the Cav than I had in the previous six months--in their concept of doing things and just how fast they were able to react to any situation. And I feel the major accomplishment along this line was the fact that I was the 'go-between' between the US Air Cavalry Division and the Vietnamese Airborne Division. And I feel a certain sense of accomplishment here in being able to expose a portion of ARVN to the resources, the ability, and the concept that the US division is using over here.

MAJ PRITCHETT: I'd like to ask you one question. As a battalion advisor, how many times you moved back and forth across the length and breadth of the country? CPT KINZER: As a

battalion advisor ... I went to the battalion on the 1st of July and left the 1st of November in 1967. And those four months were spent in the I Corps area. However, because of the mission of the Airborne Division, it's got to be able to move anyplace in the country on short notice. And I can say I've seen that country from stem to stern, from the Cam Lao Peninsula to the DMZ: Dak To, Kontum, all around Saigon during the Tet Offensive, the DMZ in September of 1967, and IV Corps in March of 1968. So I certainly have been exposed to all the terrain features here in Vietnam.

MAJ PRITCHETT: Next I'd like to ask you, Joe, if you would discuss in detail some operation where significant contact or results was obtained, and describe it in detail, and include what role the advisors played? CPT KINZER: I guess the operation for this is what ARVN called Lam Son 121. It was a search-and-destroy operation conducted by the 7th and 9th Airborne Battalions just southeast of Hue-Phu Bai in September 1967. The mission called for the 7th Battalion to move overland and clear a series of objectives generally in a southeasterly direction from Phu Bai airfield. The 9th Battalion was to make a landing by sea, coming down paralleling the South China Sea along the coast and move inland to link up with us. Attached to the 7th Battalion was a platoon of APCs [armored personnel carriers] from the 7th Cavalry Regiment there in Hue.

MAJ PRITCHETT: That an ARVN unit or US unit? CPT KINZER: No, this is an ARVN unit. And we had one artillery battery (ARVN) in support--this was our airborne artillery battery--and we had one Regional Force [RF] company attached to the battalion.

As we approached the initial objective, we were taken under some sniper fire. The APCs quickly returned the fire with their .50-calibers [M-2 machine guns]. The firing diminished and we continued to move.

As we approached the first objective in our series of objectives, we were taken under intense mortar and rocket fire from a well-entrenched enemy. During the first twenty minutes of the battle that ensued (this was approximately 1230 in the afternoon), the Regional Force company on the left flank of the battalion suffered six killed and six wounded in the first twenty minutes. And under the heavy contact, they fell back, thus exposing the left flank of the battalion.

And I felt this was one of my most tense moments with the unit, in that the battalion commander didn't know at the time that this RF company had actually gave way on the left flank and he didn't know his flank had been exposed. I got the word from my advisor who was moving with the left flank element and as it developed, he and his counterpart (the battalion exec) plus two radio operators were the entire left flank of the battalion. And the VC had moved out of their positions and were trying to turn the flank.

And my recommendation to the battalion commander, right away, was to move the APCs from the right over and fill the gap on the left. And this was done immediately. He didn't hesitate a bit. He knew after he had gotten a handle on the situation and I had told him, he knew what had

happened. And he did maneuver the APCs over; however, the terrain didn't lend itself to rapid deployment of armor in that particular area.

The terrain could be characterized by a mosaic of rice paddies, with three- and four-foot-high dikes, trench systems, paths built up out of the dikes. And it really was difficult for the APCs to move. But once they got in there and built up a good volume of fire, the mortar fire wasn't so intense after a while.

And during this time he was maneuvering his units, I was calling the FAC who was orbiting overhead to get a handle on what was out in front of us there. And he had spotted several groups of VC--sixteen to eighteen in a group. And immediately I requested tactical air strikes. He forwarded an immediate request to Da Nang. We had air on station in about fifteen minutes.

And the battle lasted from about 1230 that afternoon until about 1830 that evening. And as far as my role in the fight, it was primarily coordinating the US air strikes with the FAC. Marking friendly locations through my two advisors[that I had up front with them. And controlling helicopter gunships that we have. We put in about six sets of gunships. And, of course, after we got the left flank plugged up there and got things moving, I moved one advisor back to establish a landing zone.

And as a result of the action we killed 52 VC, captured 25 weapons, and we had twelve friendly killed and about 40 wounded.

MAJ PRITCHETT: You say you cleared landing zones. For what[purpose? CPT KINZER: To effect medical evacuation.

MAJ PRITCHETT: What type/size enemy unit was in there? CPT KINZER: We felt that it was at least a reinforced company because of the fact that they were firing recoilless rifles (and these are normally found at company level under the VC organization) and also we were getting some 82mm mortars intermittently, and we felt that there was at least a reinforced company in there, if not more, because 82s are normally employed at battalion level.

MAJ PRITCHETT: Was this a VC unit or North Vietnamese Army? CPT KINZER: It was the 804th VC Battalion, elements of it. What we later found out to be two companies of the 804th VC Main Force Battalion.

MAJ PRITCHETT: Can you think of any other specific advice you might have given your counterpart during the battle there? CPT KINZER: One time, I guess it was around 1500 after we effected the first evacuation, he had his troops on line and he and I walked the line and was checking everything out. He was building up a real good volume of fire. And I asked him when he was going to assault the positions. And I don't know if he was completely ignoring me or didn't know when he was going to do it, but I certainly felt this would have been the time because all the troops looked like (to me) they were just anxious to get up over those trenches

there and really get in there and mix it up. And he spent about the next 45 minutes jockeying his APCs around again and ... finally, as the battle progressed, we started getting some 60mm mortar rounds. And these were coming in real close--I mean they were popping all around the 'PCs and everything. He had his command group and myself on top of one of these 'PCs. And my advice to him was to move as fast as possible, because if he didn't that these mortars were just going to pick us to pieces. And as a result, he got the 'PCs moving and his troops did move out and sweep the objective. We finally cleared it about 1830 that night.

MAJ PRITCHETT: What was the weather like? CPT KINZER: The weather was great. Visibility was good; ceiling was about 30,000 feet, visibility is just unlimited--ten miles plus, I'd say. We really had good weather. And one of the helicopter gunship pilots made a comment that he hadn't been on a turkey shoot like this in about two months. So we really got them on the run there and they did a good job for us.

MAJ PRITCHETT: Can you think of anything else to add to this particular operation? CPT KINZER: Other than the fact that my assistant was wounded (he caught a mortar fragment in the arm). He stayed with us that night and the next morning during the resupply (which was conducted by the VNAF) we evac'ed him back to the hospital where he spent seven days. And he came back after seven days and went on to work with us.

MAJ PRITCHETT: Joe, do you have anything else to add to this interview? CPT KINZER: No. I don't think so, sir. I've said about all I've got to say about it. I hope you don't get a misconception by what I've said. I didn't want to really paint a real rosy picture, as it has not been a bed of roses. We've had our ups and downs on occasion. And I think, as I've mentioned before, that the Vietnamese like to play favorites now and then.

I think the only thing a man needs to be an advisor over here is an open mind, good common sense, and respect for his counterpart. He's got to realize his situation, the fact that he's been at this a long time, he doesn't have a lot to look forward to. As far as comparing him to an American commander, a year over here or two years and then it's back to the States again. Not dodging rockets all the time. For the Vietnamese commander it's more of the same day after day and year after year. And sometimes you have to bend a little bit to see his point of view. But there are times when you have to stick by your guns regardless of how difficult he wants to be; you've got to make him see it your way. Because if he's ever going to get anyplace, some things you've just got to make an adjustment to.

MAJ PRITCHETT: I'd like to express my appreciation for the time you've given this morning. And I wish you much success in your future assignment. CPT KINZER: Thank you much, sir. It's been a pleasure.