

Interviewer: Okay could you go ahead and state your name just so it's at the beginning of the tape?

Cochran: Thomas Cochran

Interviewer: And where were you born at?

Cochran: Princeton Kentucky well actually I was born in Eddyville in the land what is known as Land between the Lakes area on 13 December 1931. But after moving from the Land Between the Lakes we moved to Princeton in early 1941 I believe it was either late 40 or early 41 and I remained there through all my childhood years. Attended school there and left school in my junior year for the army.

Interviewer: What was your father's occupation?

Cochran: My father was a retired serviceman also disabled from World War I.

Interviewer: Okay that gets the next question did you have any family members that served in the military. Any other family members?

Cochran: Yes I had four brothers and I who all served two other brothers and one other brother served with me not with me but served in the air force in Korea. And then a younger brother and I both served together in Vietnam he served three tours and I served one. And he and I served that tour together because I had him assigned to my unit. I didn't want him down alone in the boonies.

Interviewer: Oh so you also served in Vietnam?

Cochran: Oh yes I did.

Interviewer: Would you mind after I go through these if I have my questions here if I go through some Vietnam questions?

Cochran: Certainly

Interviewer: I didn't remember hearing that so I guess it's a good surprise. And you said you enlisted correct into the army?

Cochran: Yes April 1948

Interviewer: And your method of service was?

Cochran: What do you mean my method of service?

Interviewer: What was your job in the army I'm sorry?

Cochran: Okay initially I was infantry as is almost everyone. And I was infantry during my period in Japan and Korea 1948 through 1951. And then I in my capacity as an assistance storage specialist I received quarter master MOS. Upon returning to the states in late 51 I was with the 101<sup>st</sup> airborne training division at Fort Breckenridge or Cambric Ridge Kentucky I was an NOC in charge of testing the recruits there. From there I went to an unusual unit in France which was called Scarwrap and everyone thought

of us as being a female unit but Scarwrap actually means special category of army with ad-force. So our job was to build airfields rapidly for the air force. And we not only built airfields in France German and England we demolished the old airfields of World War II and then rebuilt them to our specifications of today and turned them over to the French Government the German Government and the UK.

Interviewer: Wow and your where did you go to basic training?

Cochran: I had basic training in Fort Knox Kentucky.

Interviewer: Do you have any interesting memories from that or?

Cochran: Yeah really I have some interesting moments from Breckenridge. My father surprised me on graduation day and was there for the graduation ceremony and accompanied me home from Breckenridge. But that's about the only interesting thing that I can tell you about because during basic training you are on the move 24 hours a day doing something somewhere.

Interviewer: And for more advanced training where did you go after basic training?

Cochran: For more advanced training actually I had no more actual training other than on the job training. As in transportation I had on the job training in the engineering department of heavy construction. I was licensed to operate every piece of heavy equipment in our engineering battalion in Germany and also in Europe. I did receive some specialized training in England in 1955 on operation of a 34E paver. Now that is a concrete paver the runs on tracks and you pave your airfields using this paver. So yes I did receive specialized training on that 34E paver. Upon return to the states because of some of the skills that I did have and had learned on my own I was sent to the research and engineering command in Fort \_\_\_\_\_ Virginia. And there we tested the less see the Jim Paid which was an air actuated platform that you could actually surf along the ground on. A ground effects machine we called it so then we did the lark and that's a landing aircraft retriever and our first job with that was to retrieve the capsule of the John Glenn flight over Florida. And I have pictures of that somewhere around here from the that was the lark 5 and after the lark 5 was adopted from our testing we began a large cast of a lark 15. In order to obtain the test results that we needed to assure that the army could use that was to transport it to the west coast and try it in the 26 foot waves off of Monterey. And we tested out there for six months and it was finally adopted by the army and it was a magnificent vehicle for use in Vietnam during the Vietnam conflict. It ran on rubber tires on the highway and was a boat in the water is what it was. But there I was involved in four different prototype piece of equipment for testing. And the ground effects machine was one the larks were another one the snow train was another one. That one was one that ran on multi fuel systems and we took it across the ice cap. I say we I reneged from that one I had just finished the lark 15 test and had been gone from home already for about seven or eight months. And I turned my equipment in at \_\_\_\_ Arizona the colonel says Sargent C you are to go across the ice cap with the snow train. I says colonel do me a favor and give me an hour and then call headquarters and tell them that you missed me I am on my way home. He did and I came back to Virginia to research and engineering and I didn't go across the ice cap. \_\_\_\_ we incidentally call Disneyland we had all kind of equipment we tested that was unbelievable and I have pictures of all of that.

Interviewer: I'll probably make it back to some of that in a little bit. You're more of a wealth of information than I knew going in so I'm trying to organize those. What did you think about the state of military preparedness at the beginning of the Korean War?

Cochran: It was terrible it was terrible. After World War II the military became an all-volunteer force and we had people that couldn't read or write. We had leaders that had received their stripes or their bars from World War II in a battlefield manner that were uneducated that could not lead could not teach it was terrible.

Interviewer: Okay and it asks if you do you have any personal experience with this or personal examples of this?

Cochran: Well sure

Interviewer: Could you go into

Cochran: Yeah in Korea my commander I won't call his name because it was all a matter of fact. But our regimental commander was relieved of duty for lack of leadership ability in the seventh day of our being in Korea replaced with another colonel. That colonel was killed within an hour of his assuming command on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of July in Jonan. We had NCOs that were cowardly and deserted us most all of our officers within the first 12 days had already deserted us and took all radio communications mode. We had no communications with anyone and then one of our lieutenants who assumed command of what was left of us took us out of our being surrounded on the \_\_\_ River on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of July over a mountainous terrain at night. And was almost court marshaled for doing so because he was sighted as having not received orders to abandon that position. And his report was how could I respond when I have no communications and know not where any of my headquarters staff personnel are. He didn't get court marshaled actually he got a medal for it and I'm proud to say that was Lieutenant Stiff Archie Stiff who later became a full colonel and retired as such deserving.

Interviewer: When the war began or when North Korea invaded South Korea when you first heard about it did you expect that the U.S. was going to

Cochran: We knew it already. On the very day that the North invaded the 25<sup>th</sup> day of June we of the 34<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment were put into trucks and we went and searched the entire \_\_\_ peninsula of Japan having word that they had dropped paratroopers in. We didn't return to our unit or to our barracks until the first day of July and when we returned on the first day of July we were told to get certain things packed and get ready to deploy tomorrow morning and we did. We packed up all of our belongings marked it for storage and took along one set of khakis and our fatigues and combat gear. And at four o'clock in the morning we were woke up put on ships sailing to Pusan. We arrived there about six o'clock that evening and marched out to Camp \_\_\_. Spend a day there and moved up to \_\_\_ actually we were supposed to have gone into Suwon but in route we learned that Suwon had already been overrun by the north. So we our train stopped at Chownan.

Interviewer: Okay I talked to you this a little before but if you could go into some depth on it your experiences with Task Force Smith and going up to find.

Cochran: Okay lieutenant Kerns and I were dispatched on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of July to go forward and make contact with Smith. Well at Inson we ran into the remnants of Smith who had already been attacked at Olson. One of Smith's captains my lieutenant I and the Korean general in charge of that sector had a meeting in a school house there in Inson as to what was going on. We learned there that there was 30,000 Korean 20,000 Korean troops and 30 tanks T43 Russian tanks in route between Inson and Olson. Lieutenant gave me instructions to immediately get back to our lines let our troops know what was

going on I commandeered an abandoned 54<sup>th</sup> field artillery 2<sup>nd</sup> field artillery jeep and took off. In route I picked up three or four stragglers of Task Force Smith and took them along with me. When I got back to the lines I informed our captain we formed formations on either side of the road to watch for the tanks and the North Koreans coming in our direction. And the next morning we realized that they had gone around us and were now on our flanks so we had to retreat to keep them from getting behind us since they were already in front and on both sides. We moved back and then we sent out parties scouting parties to find out the status of the North Koreans. I and my lieutenant were in a cemetery and the Korean cemeteries they are buried in little mounds. And we had a machine gun in the front mound front of the cemetery in that row of mounds and Lieutenant Kerns was giving the machine gun squad a firing order for across a rice paddy along a railroad track where the North Korean troops had taken up positions. I was about ten to fifteen feet behind my lieutenant and he stood up started to motion for me to come with him and got a bullet right through the head and he sloped down. We had one other one who got shot through the arm shoulder he survived and Lieutenant Kerns was killed instantly from that bullet. We managed to get away from the North Koreans at that position. I and one other man went into a barn to our left flank after we departed that area and there was three other men already in that barn. And I noticed there was only one door and that was the door that we went in. I told them I says I'm not staying here I'm getting out and I says you ought to come along with me I said there's only one way out of this barn and we just came in it. So I took off as did this friend that was with me those three remained in that barn some 40 years later I learned that one of them was killed the other two were taken prisoners of war. My very very good friend was one of those prisoners of war spent three years Jack Browning. But I told Jack I says my God Jack I told you guys there was only one way out he said I know Tom.

Interviewer: Have you talked to him at all about that?

Cochran: Oh yes every year we talk about it. He doesn't come to reunion any more he's blind now. But he spent three years in POW camp he wrote quite an article I've got it I've got the article he wrote about that being captured.

Interviewer: Did they the North Koreans were known for using I don't know brain washing tactics and things like that did he

Cochran: Tying hands behind their back and shooting then in the early days too. A good friends of mine that I grew up with he was one of those had his hands tied behind his back with \_\_\_ wire shot through the head. So we up early on let's say from the first two weeks of the war we were told it would be best to take your own life because if you didn't they would.

Interviewer: That's interesting I've never heard that part before. And that was common knowledge basically to all the soldiers in the first couple weeks of the war?

Cochran: Oh yes and then for some reason they turned it around and started taking prisoners but early on they didn't take no prisoners.

Interviewer: Moving on your unit was part of the retreat towards the Puzon perimeter correct?

Cochran: We stayed in the Puzon perimeter yes for a month close to a month I guess it was before we started to move out of the Puzon perimeter. That's when McArthur had said he had moved everything

out of the Puzon port that would float. And he says you will either swim or you will fight and that's when we started to push.

Interviewer: And okay did you encounter any other U.N. forces during that time period say Greece, Great Brittan or any other places?

Cochran: No they had not come in yet. During that time frame not even our own troops had gotten there yet and when I went back in in August the 25<sup>th</sup> division and the 1<sup>st</sup> \_\_\_ division and the 2<sup>nd</sup> divisions had gotten there. And I got tied up with the 25<sup>th</sup> division the 24<sup>th</sup> regiment which was an all-black regiment evidently the paper work had assigned me to the 24<sup>th</sup> division not the 24<sup>th</sup> regiment okay. But they sent me on the wrong bus truck so consequently I ended up at the 24<sup>th</sup> regiment not the 24<sup>th</sup> division. But this unit that I found this black unit they told me stay with us we know where the 24<sup>th</sup> division is and we'll drop you off there. So I stayed with them for a couple of days until we got back to the 24<sup>th</sup> division headquarters. I think at that time we were over in the I can't remember the name of that valley but it was over on the sea side up from Puzon \_\_\_\_\_ up the \_\_\_\_\_ area.

Interviewer: Okay so y'all started pushing forward from Puzon. How much longer was it after that I can't really tell before you were shipped out from the concussion? And what was in between that if you don't mind.

Cochran: Probably two months November and I guess about that time we were up around the close to the Nantong. I believe it was let's see Kadong Haydong at Haydong I believe it was where I was moved back and sent back to Japan the second time.

Interviewer: Okay what happened between when y'all started pushing out at Puzon and when you were

Cochran: It was great for the American forces. The resistance was practically nothing I mean it was just like marching forward with no contact. And the North knew then that we were ready to fight. Of course we were reinforced considerably by then and we had weapons that would actually work. Not the ones we took with us we had new weapons. We had the 3.5 bazooka no longer the 2.36 that bounced off as a BB of the tanks. And we had artillery we had tanks small tanks but we had tanks. We had armored personnel carriers and we had all four divisions plus more forces coming in.

Interviewer: Okay so on your duty two fourteen mission two Bronze Stars could you tell me a little bit about the circumstances surrounding?

Cochran: Well my Bronze Stars were from those two Bronze Stars were from Vietnam.

Interviewer: Vietnam okay

Cochran: The first Bronze Star I got was for my services to the 4<sup>th</sup> infantry division by making periodic runs from Camp \_\_\_ into the town of Pleiku. And this was on a road that was heavily hit on occasion by the Viet Kong. And we didn't have enough people to actually guard that road but if I had to make runs for the division to Pleiku which was a 20, 25 mile run and I had to make that almost on a weekly basis. That's what the first Bronze Star was for. The second Bronze Star was for after we had moved to \_\_\_\_\_ from Pleiku and we still had units at Pleiku standing down in 1969. I had to go and inventory all of their classified information top secret secret classified and confidential. I had to go down and inventory box all of that up take it back to \_\_\_ and prepare it for shipment to Okinawa. And I had to do that over a

period of a month month and a half. So over three hundred and something boxes of classified information that was during our stand down on the 4<sup>th</sup> division. And I received a second Bronze Star for that and I should have received the third Bronze Star in June but things were so hectic we were being hit almost every night. I didn't get that Bronze Star and for what reason I don't know I never looked into it but we were being hit almost nightly with snipers who were living right in the compound with us. Working in the fire department living in caves they had back in the mountains behind us.

Interviewer: What was your impression of General Douglas MacArthur?

Cochran: My impression of Douglas MacArthur is as any old soldier who knew him and served with him he was the top general best one that I guess the army has ever seen. Had it not been for Truman firing MacArthur there wouldn't be two Koreas today there would be one. MacArthur we if you know anything about the Korean War we had actually taken North Korea over we were on the Yellow River and Truman made us come back made us fall back to below the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. We had already taken North Korea so it was only because of MacArthur that we had done that and could have kept the one Korea by putting down a barrier of cobalt from sea shore to sea shore along the Yellow. Not so Harry S who happens to be a cousin of mine.

Interviewer: Seriously how?

Cochran: Distant very distant yeah. My ninth grandfather was King \_\_\_\_ chief of the Tarmac tribe in Virginia and he was also Truman's relative and an ancestor as well.

Interviewer: And what did you I don't think that you were actively involved in Korea then but or were you when Ridgeway replaced him.

Cochran: Yes

Interviewer: What was your you were?

Cochran: I was still involved in a support way yes. Ridgeway was a good general he was a good general but he wasn't a Douglas MacArthur.

Interviewer: And after the you were injured could you talk a little bit about your support capacity and what you did there?

Cochran: In the hospital or what?

Interviewer: You said you were stationed in Japan afterwards you worked as support personnel. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Cochran: I was an assistant storage specialist we serviced all of the units in Japan on the Honshu Island of Japan I'll put it that way with assistance. To include all the hospitals and recreation areas and everything else and our job was to prepare the requisitions for their food stuff and have that ready for delivery to them on their days of pickup at the depot. And each of those units had a specific day Monday through Friday to come by and pick up their assistance. And I had or we had 23 Japanese people indigenous personnel that worked for us there in that storage facility. So was it was a good job we

enjoyed it and we kept knowledgeable of what was going on in Korea and in the service club we were always meeting old friends that had returned from combat and reassigned there in Japan.

Interviewer: And you said that they shipped you home from?

Cochran: Shipped me home from Tokyo Quarter Master Depot in November 1951. I only had about 24 hours' notice to get out of Japan because of the number of battle credits and overseas credits that I had. And I had to leave behind a Cushman motor scooter and a 1939 Ford. Well I gave the Ford away for just about nothing but I had to get rid of that and pack up the rest of the stuff and head home.

Interviewer: And once you got home is that when you started working on the air ground affects and things like that?

Cochran: No after I got home is when I became the test NCO for basic trainees for Camp Campbell or Camp Breckenridge Kentucky. I was there for one year exactly one year.

Interviewer: Okay so what did you do in that capacity I'm sorry?

Cochran: As a test NCO I had all of this equipment machine guns and other type weapons and things that they had trained on during basic training. And then I'd go out for the training when they were to be tested and set all of this stuff up. And then I had 20 men under me who manned each one of these stations and these recruits would come by and show what they had learned during their basic training to these 20 people under me.

Interviewer: Okay and what did you do after that?

Cochran: After that I went to Rosier France was assigned to this \_\_\_\_ battalion 843<sup>rd</sup> engineer aviation battalion and we were to build an airfield at Tool in Japan a fifteen thousand foot runway. It was all wooded areas we lived in tents and got a shower maybe once a week by going to public shower facilities 20 miles away in a little town there in France I can't remember the name of it. And anyway my job was transportation supervisor they made the transportation supervisor because I had some driving experience and so I had all of the dump trucks the diesel and gasoline haulers the tractor trailers and all of that under me. Had forty something drivers under me and I myself would even drive on occasionally especially the M26 tractor trailer which there was only one other person there other than myself that was qualified to drive it. It was a chain driven vehicle and the maximum speed was 16 miles an hour.

Interviewer: Chain driven

Cochran: Chain driven tractor trailer it sets up about 16 feet in the air and it's for retrieving tanks. It had cables on the rear and the trailer that tilted down you hook onto a tank and pull it up on to your trailer. And then and this it had two six cylinder Haul Scott engines in it so it was quite powerful but 16 mile an hour is not much. Now you could do 25 miles an hour with no load but you've got to be very very careful or you're liable to break those chains which are about that big the links. And if you lose that you lose everything. And we used to have to drive that darn thing from one end of France to the other to pick up equipment and bring back up to Tool. This one Corporal Rogers and I we used to have to go I say once every three months to \_\_\_\_ and pick up equipment there from the that had been brought in my sea and bring it back to Tool. And then later on in that same unit I became the operations sergeant for the

battalion. In other words I kept all the reports for where we were at on the airfields that we were constructing. So I did all of the reporting for the battalion as to the status of our projects.

Interviewer: Okay I'm sorry I don't I'm not as familiar with that that type of thing.

Cochran: I know

Interviewer: So it's hard for me to go in much depth so if you seem to know of anything that I'm missing just let me know. And what did you do after that?

Cochran: After that is when I returned to the states and became an admin specialist with the transportation research and engineering command. The command which I said that I later became actively involved as a program manager for all of the prototype equipment that we were building, erecting, constructing, and testing.

Interviewer: So as a program manager what were your responsibilities?

Cochran: As a program manager I had to keep the reports of our test results on a daily basis of these if we had to report on the curves of something on the acceptance or non-acceptance of the vehicle based on certain factors. And on occasion we would have to even have a new prototype piece build to go on to the equipment because we'd realize that we could turn this over in the water with waves of 15 feet with the wheels set as they were. But if we were to extend the wheels we could go up to 25 feet without turning it over in the water. So we put these extensions on and report on that then by the time we finished our prototype testing then the final test results were what they used to build the final machine that we use today in the army.

Interviewer: Oh okay so I know you went over them a little but earlier but the ground effects could you tell me

Cochran: Ground effects ground effects is do you know what the air cushion boats are?

Interviewer: The Huber Craft?

Cochran: Yeah Huber Craft that's what it is. It was it looked like the sleds that you probably used as a kid sledding in snow except it didn't have no sleds on it. It was just a flat boat with two knobs two handles out here. Okay these handles controlled your engine and the engines built up the air underneath this board that you were on and it lifted you about four inches above the ground and this is how you maneuvered on this ground effects machine. And the theory was to have every soldier have one of these so they would remain close to the ground and engage the enemy laying on the ground.

Interviewer: So

Cochran: It was never accepted.

Interviewer: So the theory behind it was they could lay on the ground and move.

Cochran: And they could until they hit a four inch object and if you wanted to lift above it you had to get off of it and lift above it. Like if you hit a curve on a street you were dead. So it didn't work.



Interviewer: Yeah I've never heard of that before.

Cochran: It's in the museum in Fort Huston.

Interviewer: But I believe they actually use Huber Craft landing craft now.

Cochran: Yeah we had yeah we did some Huber raft landing craft there too. Yeah it's used widely used Marines have a lot of them the Army don't have too much but the Marines do.

Interviewer: And the lark 5 and 15 what was

Cochran: The lark 5 and 15 was a retriever and an assault boat like. And it ran on land and it ran on water. It had Cummins diesel engines in it I don't know if I have a picture I may have a picture. Here's some of the things we tested was a boat paraglider and incidentally we tested the paragliders too. Here we go that was a lark (showing a picture) that was the 15. We were taking it to California from the Arizona desert to the ocean and we were going down this mountain and we lost power. And I'll show you the results I think I can show you the results yes I can show you the results (showing a picture).

Interviewer: It scratched pretty good didn't it?

Cochran: Yeah

Interviewer: He had a leather jacket in there he couldn't even get his leather jacket out. Here is the driver of the vehicle truck.

Cochran: How did he get out?

Interviewer: He bailed out he saw it coming he knew he didn't have no choice so he bailed out.

Cochran: That's me in the Southern Command I was the administrative assistant to the commander in chief of the Southern Command a four star general. And Scottsdale one afternoon the general and I come out together I had to stay until he was finished every evening and then lock the safe up. And we were coming out and Terry and his brother and sister and his mother were sitting out waiting for me to come out at the post office and we the general and I walked out of the headquarters building and we were walking over to the post office. And Terry says dad why does the general have to stay until you lock up the general came over and rubbed Terry on the head and said because your dad is a really important person. I thought I had some more pictures of I'm sure I've got them.

Interviewer: Were you at all involved in that?

Cochran: No I was just the program manager on that one I wasn't above I wasn't onboard with them at in Florida when they retrieved it.

Interviewer: And that was a lark 5 that was used?

Cochran: The lark 5 that was a smaller group than the 15. Oh well one of the kids could have got it for a souvenir or some of my friends could have. I guess it ain't there.

Interviewer: And you mentioned the snow train that you got.

Cochran: Snow train uh huh

Interviewer: What was that?

Cochran: The snow train it was a monster. It was a locomotive with tires and tracks both and it could use anything as a fuel to include horse and cow dung, straw, brush anything.

Interviewer: Just by burning it?

Cochran: Yes it was a multi fuel thing and we took it across the ice cap it pulled trailers it pulled three or four trailers behind it. And our last I don't know why it was never adopted for use but it was it worked.

Interviewer: What was it intended use for?

Cochran: Artic use but the army decided that any war that we would eventually be engaged in would never call for such a piece of equipment as that.

Interviewer: And then was there any other things interesting things that you worked on or heard about during that period?

Cochran: No not that I can think of.

Interviewer: What did you do after working in this?

Cochran: Research and engineering?

Interviewer: Yes

Cochran: I we moved to I asked for duty as a reserve advisor and we went into Seattle Washington and I was a reserve advisor for a civil affairs unit and a MP battalion for two years.

Interviewer: And what did you do as a reserve advisor?

Cochran: As advisor I would consult with and inform the commanders of the units what new procedures were coming along, obtain the regulations for them, obtain training literature and borrow equipment for their training usage from the army. And accompany them on their annual active duty training wherever it might be and more or less was just a gopher for the reserve units.

Interviewer: What did you do after that?

Cochran: After that I became a

Interviewer: And around what time are we talking about?

Cochran: Okay that was in 1963, 63 in Seattle Washington. And then in 64 I moved to Rock Island Illinois and became a recruiter. And that was just before Korea Korea was I mean Vietnam. Vietnam was on the

mind of your young men in high school at that time. So recruiting was not the best thing to be doing at that time. There was no way hardly that you could make your quota. And I remained there for close to a year and I decided I had not been at a military instillation in well since I married my wife and I had three children that had never been assigned to a military instillation. It was always out in the civilian like atmosphere so I requested I resigned from recruitment and requested troop duty with the 101<sup>st</sup> airborne.

Interviewer: Quick question before we go into that before Viet and that was before Vietnam

Cochran: Yes this is before Vietnam.

Interviewer: Did you encounter a lot of resistance there or was it just a lack of interest?

Cochran: For Vietnam?

Interviewer: For recruiting

Cochran: Oh God no one wanted to go to Vietnam. And you know there was the draft coming along and everything else.

Interviewer: Okay

Cochran: And the only ones you could talk into going into the army back then was someone you put in the army to keep them from going to jail or something like that for some offense that they had committed and the judge worked with you to.

Interviewer: And those were pretty much the only people you could recruit.

Cochran: Yeah and it was a caliber of person you didn't want anyway in the military. And I'll get on to that later from a subsequent assignment of mine following recruiting duty.

Interviewer: So I know this probably covered when you go into that was pretty much every person you were there a lot of medical waiver or conduct waivers and things like that?

Cochran: Yeah conduct, medical, educational levels

Interviewer: So did pretty much everyone that went in have a waiver?

Cochran: Yeah

Interviewer: Okay and then you requested transfer.

Cochran: I requested to return to Fort Campbell. And I came to Fort Campbell my initial assignment was first sergeant of security in the honor guard. And by virtue of my position as third army as my position as security I obtained the title of third army security. In other words running security for the entire third army which was Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi all in this area Florida in this area. And then the Vietnam was building and of course we were shipping ammunition we were shipping prototype ammunition we were shipping test ammunition here there and everywhere else. And I had to guard this

from wherever it was at to wherever it needed to go and I had maybe forty something men in my unit to do this. And we ran shot gun for all trucks that transported any of this sensitive type equipment from one point to another point. It would be at least four people for each security mission of that type two in the front and two behind of all of those civilian tractors. You sometimes knew what was in your load you sometimes were not allowed to know what was in your load. But you could tell by what was in your load and not in your load by the routes that you were to go to your next destination. Now if they told you that every hour on the hour you were to call in and inform where you were at and they would give you the new destination. And we had to do that quite often when we were taking test type projectiles or bombs from \_\_\_\_ in New York down to Eglin Air force in Florida because there were some places you could go through other place you could not go through. Virginia was a very very sensitive place the pacific rules on transporting explosives through the state of Virginia especially through the towns so that's why we had to call in for routes. And sometimes a route that you would make in a matter of hours might take you two or three days because you'd be zig zagging across to go. And then from that job

Interviewer: So there were certain things even you with your position couldn't know what you were transporting?

Cochran: That's right I couldn't know what I was hauling. To give you an example I had to pick up something from Clarksville base from the navy and take to Iowa. And it was a box that's all I knew it was a box but it had to go by air that's what they said. Okay we shipped it over by air and the man was coming back he had another box. He got to Evansville and he got weathered in fog and snow about to come and everything else and he was going to have to lay over in Evansville for three days. And he called me and ask me could I send one of our cars up to pick him up. I said sure I'll come myself so I went over to Evansville and picked him up at the airport and we came back and came through Princeton Kentucky where my mother lives. My mother had a restaurant there and we stopped by mother's restaurant on the way home and ate. And we got out to Clarksville base later that night and delivered the package and they wanted to know how we had gotten it to them. And we told them and oh God hell broke loose and they had to send out an investigation team to the airport in Evansville and back track all of our route back into Clarksville base to include stopping at mother's restaurant and testing with there summiteers or whatever and we never were told what we had transported but evidently it was something.

Interviewer: Do you have any guess or anything?

Cochran: Oh sure yes because you get a load of and we were told we were taught this you get a male load and a female load of a nuclear devise within a mile of each other you've got an explosion. So if we were hauling the male load they made sure we didn't come in contact with a female load and that's why we used to have to call in for our directions and they'd change it.

Interviewer: Oh okay I did not know that.

Cochran: I didn't know that either.

Interviewer: So you were transporting some very sensitive stuff.

Cochran: Yeah we were transporting highly sensitive stuff.

Interviewer: Okay so what did you do after were there any other interesting stories to that?

Cochran: After that well yeah a lot of interesting stories for that. We had to take a load a ship load of mortar ammunition to Vietnam and the team that I had assigned to that the ship broke down had to spend a week two weeks or something like that in dry dock in Hawaii. And my wife and I received a oh a belligerent calls from all of the wives of the troops that I had on this ship they weren't too happy with me. But a lot of it was good times and a lot of it was not so fun times because we got we got screwed up in a lot of places. Down in Mississippi once a Mississippi state trooper stopped us supposedly we were speeding I don't believe we were anyway said we were and he walked back to the rear of the tractor trailer and he wanted to know what we were hauling. I told him we didn't know and he said I'll find out I said I don't know how you can find out well I'm gonna cut the lock off. I don't believe you are so I yelled for the other two in front and all of a sudden he had four M1 rifles staring at him and had to call the FBI. And the FBI had to come in and take him in and let him know that he was not allowed to cut no locks off of that type transportation. We had a little excitement from time to time. But from there I was talking about this recruiting from that assignment the Fort Campbell became a transportation or training center after the 101<sup>st</sup> went into Vietnam. And that was in 66 and I was selected as a first sergeant of A Company for the training battalion and it was almost a constant thing to see recruits come into my unit from over in the Rock Island area where I had recruited that I had rejected because of this that and the other. And I knew right away that they were not qualified and we managed to get them everyone came right back.

Interviewer: So even with the lower standards you could give people waivers?

Cochran: Oh yeah the recruiters were falsifying documents and everything else not knowing that I was right here at Fort Campbell and recognize then and knew that I had already rejected them and that they could not.

Interviewer: So even when it was relatively easy for them to get into military they were still being rejected and let in.

Cochran: That's right we would reject out of every 120 that we would get for a training cycle I would say three to five would be rejected initially before they even went into the training cycle. And in the training cycle there would be more.

Interviewer: What were people commonly rejected for?

Cochran: They couldn't follow orders they wouldn't do what they were told to do just they drank shoe polish drink brass cleaner and all kind of crap cut themselves.

Interviewer: Just mentally unstable?

Cochran: Yeah mentally unstable.

Interviewer: Wow that's interesting and then you did training there were there any other interesting observations or?

Cochran: No not really everything else went pretty smooth.

Interviewer: Then what did you do after that?

Cochran: After that I went to South America and I was able to take my family there and I was the enlistment administrative assistant to the commander and chief to the southern command Sink as we called him in the administrative secretary of state joint staff office. And from there I was the first enlisted man in the southern command ever to receive the meritorious service medal when it was established in 1968. The commanding general there Robert Porter he insisted that I was to receive the meritorious service medal for my job there. I wrote the administrative standards for the command I put together a booklet for all the secretaries to use of the formats and everything else. And presenting classes to them periodically and everything plus I was the custodian of all of the top secret classified information for the commander and general. And I had \_\_\_\_ diary in my safe.

Interviewer: Whose diary?

Cochran: Shea Caverro you know the notorious one from down South America that fought along with Fidel Castro Shea Caverro.

Interviewer: You had his diary?

Cochran: I had his diary.

Interviewer: Oh dear wow that's interesting. Is there any other thing worth noting or interesting there? I'm like I say it's not my area.

Cochran: Yeah South America it was a good assignment with the exception of the three years that we were there we were not allowed to get out of the Canal Zone. There was something going on in there at all times. Noriega of course you know he was in power while we were there that ought to give you an indication of what it was like when we were there.

Interviewer: And after that where did you go to?

Cochran: From there I went to Vietnam. I didn't have to I could have retired but I asked \_\_\_\_ he was coming back to the pentagon and I asked him to find out what my next assignment was and when he came back, he called me Top, he said Top you're not going to like it. He says you're going to be the first sergeant of the 4<sup>th</sup> admin company in \_\_\_\_ 4<sup>th</sup> division. And I tore my retirement papers up and I says I'm going. I went home and I told my wife I says I'm going to Vietnam I said now where do you want to live for a year? So she selected Denver and I moved her and the family to Denver and I went on to Vietnam.

Interviewer: Was there a particular reason you decided to go?

Cochran: No I had to prove to myself that I went through one and that I could go through two. I was fragged the very night that I got to Vietnam by my own troops. My first sergeants room was highly advertised that's where the first sergeant was and I was going in there as the new first sergeant oh boy somebody threw a damn smoke bomb right through my window the first night. I came across the floor to get away from it took all the skin off this side of the leg.

Interviewer: On your first night there?

Cochran: Yeah on the concrete floor yeah unfinished concrete floor.

Interviewer: Did they ever find out who did it?

Cochran: they never found out our troops were always doing things like that putting lice on your head and everything.

Interviewer: So it's been awhile since my military history class and this isn't the interviews we have our information is more prevalent to

Cochran: You're welcome to call me anytime.

Interviewer: No I want to keep going I just if before generally it's seen as the army went on a downward slope for a while and it had to reach its \_\_\_\_ at dessert one and I can't remember who it was that basically went through and started going through forms and started kicking people out. It was probably after it was definitely after your retirement I'm sure but basically do you account like basically the person that did it fast tracked the people that were dealing drugs in barracks and things like that.

Cochran: Yeah well that started in Vietnam. Of God we had a lot of that and even after Vietnam I came back here as first sergeant of U.S. Army Garretson at Fort Campbell. And I had I guess 12 people the year that I was there 12 people that was court marshaled for dealing in drugs. One of them was the commanding general's aircraft mechanic.

Interviewer: For dealing drugs.

Cochran: Yeah he said he was well using and dealing. Yeah

Interviewer: So

Cochran: Twelve of them and they were notable their families were notable people.

Interviewer: Seriously

Cochran: Yes three of them ended up in prison but not for any great amount of time.

Interviewer: So do you think it was more of since their families were notable people their families got them in the military to try to get them in line and it really didn't work out that a way?

Cochran: It could be and it could be that they were drafted because they were drafted back in those days. And it could be that they had been drafted into the army.

Interviewer: And what else were your experiences there as far as the troops and quality any other experiences negative experiences? What would you say the main difference was between the troops in Korea and the troops in Vietnam?

Cochran: The troops in Korea were better suited for each other I would say they became friends good friends better than those in Vietnam. In Vietnam that person that you might call a friends would stab you in the back a month later. And it was just that way I mean you couldn't trust anyone in Vietnam in Korea you could.

Interviewer: Do you think that might have had anything to do with how troops were rotated out individually instead of as troops?

Cochran: I think it had to do with the type of person or various types of person you had in Vietnam compared to Korea. Let's say in Korea or Vietnam you had various platforms of people all trying to work together with which didn't work. And in Korea the people's classes were closer together they were not far separated as they were in Vietnam and I think that had a lot to do with it. It was just a social economic mockup of the troops in two places.

Interviewer: So people were basically so different it was

Cochran: Yeah so different.

Interviewer: And what about the officers in Vietnam?

Cochran: Well some officers in Vietnam were good officers while other were not. I will say that the officers we had in Vietnam were better educated than the officers we had in Korea. However whether or not they were better leaders than those that came into Korea later as opposed to those that were there earlier. I don't know but again the later leaders in Korea were the early leaders in Vietnam so they had the experience in Vietnam early on experience. And that could have a difference in why the officers in Vietnam were perhaps a level above those in Korea.

Interviewer: And could you basically go over how long were you in Vietnam and what were your experiences there and what were you involved in?

Cochran: Okay let me take a break I have to go to the restroom.

Interviewer: Okay let me pause this real quick.

Cochran: Well in Vietnam I was the I had been assigned as the first sergeant but there was a gentleman already in the position when I got there so he I asked him did he want to remain? He said yes I said fine so I became the administrative supervisor for the \_\_\_ general. And in that capacity I was responsible for all the administration in the division all of the publications all the classified material all of the mail weekly bulletins and everything else. So myself and another gentleman we came up with a technique of producing weekly bulletins and other information in color by virtue of using color paste that we obtained from the special forces on a trade commitment I guess you would call it. They had something we needed and we had something they needed so we traded things around. And consequently we developed this and became the only division in Vietnam that could produce colored bulletins for our units and the commanding general sided us for that. And monthly we would have to do a birthday cake in color and put all of the names of the men having birthdays that month on the back cover of that bulletin. And that was a highlight I guess for us on the down side we were small the 4<sup>th</sup> division in man power and in Camp \_\_\_ up at \_\_\_ all we had in gas was gas in tank soldiers we didn't have any infantry there they were all in sites away for the instillation. Consequently the Kong would hit us with rockets and other \_\_\_ charges and everything almost on a nightly basis. They hit our NCO club with 30 rockets one night and killed several higher ups there in the NCO club. In early 69 we moved from early 70 I'm sorry we moved from an alley down to \_\_\_ which was the old base for that air assault \_\_\_. And they were a large unit and could handle that size of a base but the 4<sup>th</sup> division we couldn't control that. We were being hit somewhere every night and we had nurses walking from the hospital to their village in the



evenings before dark to be killed right on the road. And come to find out one or two of the firemen in the fire station were Viet Kong having access to us on a 24 hour bases. And then

Interviewer: The nurses that were killed was it more sporadic rocket fire?

Cochran: Not it was rifle fire.

Interviewer: Oh say they targeted.

Cochran: Oh yeah they would hide out in the bushed and shoot across the field and the road was right in front of our huts. And of course there were these drainage ditches and they'd get in these drainage ditches and they'd sight people at night.

Interviewer: You were on the fire department I'm sorry I interrupted you.

Cochran: The fire department people but then we were my village the 4<sup>th</sup> admin company was at the foot of Hong Kong Mountain. And Hong Kong Mountain we had lights thrown lights up that we used to scan the entire base at night for the Viet King trying to penetrate our fences or whatever around the garrison and inside this mountain it was learned that the King were living in there with us right inside that compound inside that mountain. And they would come out at night and do their little things and go right back into their mountain and this went on until we actually left Vietnam in late 70. We never did find all of those darn caves where they were waiting in the mountains. The day that I left the night before they threw a satchel charge in the shower killing four of our troops in the shower. And I left under red conditions and I have never lifted off of an airfield as fast as I did in a darn C130 that morning. I don't believe it took up more than 100 yards of the runway until it was in the air. And he had to get up off and up inside that compound and risk being shot down by rocket fire or small arms fire. That was a man a test of strength for that pilot who was flying that dam aircraft right dangerous but I was glad to get out of there. When we started standing down in 68, 69 when they told the forces start standing down I do believe that it got worse on us. Because as we stood down and became fewer people they were going about their sneaky darn duties of hitting us with everything they had here there and everywhere else. But all in all I don't regret my tour in Vietnam actually as I go back and look at it I think I'm quite proud that I went ahead and took that assignment. But I learned from that and some people would say that Korea was worse than Vietnam while others would say just the opposite. And I would say based on my being in both Vietnam was actually a picnic compared to Korea even though it was hell in both places.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add or is that anything?

Cochran: No no the rest of its' right there 54 years of it. I retired with 24 years in the military. I was recruited in 1985 by General Wallace for the Tennessee Guard and was given a direct commission as a captain 1985. In 1991 I was a lieutenant colonel and in 1992 I had to resign my commission because it conflicted with my duties at Fort Campbell as I was a supply sergeant there and we were bringing the troops home from the Gulf. So I had to resign my commission and Sundquist recognize me for that somewhere over there. But I enjoyed every moment of it I did 54 years for my government I did 30 more after retiring from the army with 24 and now I reap the rewards

Interviewer: Well I thank you.

Interviewer: Thank you