

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

**JOHN SOUTHWORTH**

Special Forces, Marine Corps, Vietnam War

2010

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**John Southworth, (1937- ). Oral History Interview, 2010.**  
Master Copy: 2 audio cassettes; analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

### **Abstract**

This interview encompasses the military service of John Southworth, a Wauwatosa native, who served primarily in the US Army Special Forces during the Vietnam War era. Southworth describes his enlistment in the Army in 1956, and an overview of his time at basic training and signal school, where he joined the recently-created Special Forces as a radio specialist. Southworth then describes this next level of training, which included attending US Airborne Jump School. After his graduation in January 1958, he was assigned to the 77th Special Forces, a multinational unit stationed in Bad Tölz, Germany. Southworth recounts the extensive amount of training exercises he participated in across Europe. He also relates meeting President John F. Kennedy in the early 60s as part of a demonstration while he was in Germany. The interview continues with some information on his wife and family at this point in his life. He then outlines additional training exercises, as well as some of the instructional responsibility he was given.

He left Germany in 1964 and returned to the States, coming to Fort Bragg to work as a staff NCO until 1966. Southworth then lays out the process by which he attended OCS. Soon after his graduation from that program, he deployed to Vietnam. For the vast majority of the remaining time in the interview, Southworth details his extensive involvement in a myriad of Special Forces operations throughout Vietnam. Often serving with both native and American soldiers, he recounts times out on patrol, rescue missions, and many other situations. In 1967, Southworth assumed the position of S-3—the officer in charge of planning and executing operations—a role he acted in for much of the remainder of his deployments (the second began in 1969) to Vietnam. In April 1970, Southworth was awarded the Bronze Star. He continues by relating his experiences in the service post-Vietnam, including a period at Fort Benning, Georgia as well as his time as an instructor at the Northern Warfare Training Center in Alaska.

He retired from the Army at Fort Devens, Massachusetts with the rank of major. Southworth begins to conclude the interview by reflecting on what a positive personal experience his military service was, and how he is involved with the Veterans of Foreign Wars organization. He then speaks about his job teaching 6th grade in Stratford, Wisconsin, fully retiring in 1999 after twenty years as an instructor. The interview ends with descriptions of the lives of his children up to this point.

## **Biographical Sketch**

John Southworth was born in 1937 in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. He enlisted in the US Army a year out of high school in 1956. Soon after, he joined the Special Forces, where he would serve for the vast majority of the remainder of his time in service. Southworth participated in numerous operations during the Vietnam War in various capacities within the Special Forces. Including his post-conflict service, he attained the rank of major. After retiring from the US Army he taught 6th grade in Stratford, Wisconsin until 1999.

Interviewed by Patrick Gould, 2010.  
Transcribed by Amy Williams, 2014.  
Edited and Abstracted by Joe Fitzgibbon, 2014.

## Interview Transcript:

Gould: The date is July 26th, 2010. The time is 10:15, and we're at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. My name is Patrick F. Gould, and I'll be interviewing John A. Southworth. John, why don't you give us a little bit of background of who you are and where you're from.

Southworth: Fine, Patrick. I was born in 1937 in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. Our family moved to the family farm not long after I was born, to Taylor County, Wisconsin, north of Owen, and for the next three years lived there, and then when I was about seven years old we moved to Owen, where I attended public schools there in Owen, and graduated in 1955. Met a girl in 1955, later, and became engaged and we decided at that time that there might be a military obligation so we decided to wait as far as getting married. And, so, therefore decided to join the Army, with a couple of friends, and, so, on the day we had selected and signed up basically to go to our physicals, I was the only one who showed up that day [laughs]! And, that went to Minneapolis, and there's where I took the physical, and joined the U.S. Army as a reserve for two years, and then went to Fort Chaffee, Arkansas for basic training, and then communication school.

Gould: Okay, so you enlisted right out of high school into the Army in 1955?

Southworth: Actually, I joined in late '55—well, wait a minute—no, March 15th, 1956. So, I almost worked a year for my father at home, on the farm, and drove truck for my brother at the same time. And, then after basic, went to signal school, and during that time received a real "Dear John", and so, no longer became engaged and at that time a recruiter happened to show up at the signal school needing some radio specialists for Special Forces. So, at that point, I joined Special Forces.

Gould: Okay, go back a little bit—[Southworth laughs] Go back a little bit and tell me about boot camp at Fort Chaffee. What was that like?

Southworth: Boot camp was easy for a farm boy. I mean, we're used to long hours, a lot of work. The fact is I put on probably twenty-five pounds during that boot camp, which later on in airborne school, created a little difficulty 'cause I had a hard time doing pull-ups, chin-ups. But otherwise, running and walking and working really was very simple. It just didn't seem like a lot of work at that point and was kind of fun. It was long hours and dirty conditions during basic, which is naturally supposed to be that way, I was asked at that point to go to OCS [Officer Candidate School], and I determined no, I had no intentions of staying beyond two years. So, I declined that and went to signal school.

Gould: Okay, so you graduate from—you graduate from boot camp, and then you go to signal school and where did you go to signal school?

Southworth: Fort Gordon, Georgia—

Gould: Okay.

Southworth: And that was a six-month radio repair course—the last course that used *tube* radios. And we learned how to build and repair and also build and repair transmitters and receivers, that were, you know, used in U.S. Army. However, like I said the last course to use tubes, so from there on it was transistors and so everything changed, but circuitry, pretty much similar, so we could still, do trouble-shooting and do repair, too.

Gould: Okay, now you're at Fort—Fort Gordon, and you say a recruiter from-?

Southworth: From Fort Bragg [NC], Special Forces, that came and recruited me, so, several of us, in fact one of the young men who I joined the army with from Grantsburg [WI] I met at St. Paul [MN]—he went with me and we spent actually the next, probably, seven, seven and a half years together in the same unit, so upon getting to Fort Bragg we had to attend like a pre-airborne school type thing so that we would be prepared to go to airborne school. And that was difficult, that was a lot of running-two-actually, that's what we primarily did, was physical training for about two months.

Gould: That seems like a major jump, going from becoming a radio operator to going to Special Forces at the time.

Southworth: Mhm.

Gould: Was there any trepidation, any concern making that, that jump—[Southworth sighs heavily]—or what were you thinking?

Southworth: No, no, there was so much professionalism right off the bat in Special Forces, and Special Forces was pretty new, that it came into being actually from, you know, really, bare roots in 1952, so this is 1956, there still was only one Special Forces group overseas—that was the 10<sup>th</sup> Group—in Germany, and then the 77<sup>th</sup> Group, which later on became the 7<sup>th</sup> Group, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. And, attended jump school, parachute school. And I had never been in an airplane before! So, that was a new experience and, you know, naturally the very first time—with all the ground training, you're trained so well, though, that it's automatic. You just do things when you're told, like "get ready", you know, "stand up", and so on. And, the same thing is true—of course, you get on the aircraft, it's like, "What in the hell am I doing here?!", type of thing, and then, of course, when

the commands come you just go ahead and jump and, I had made my sixth jump before I'd ever landed in an aircraft, so that was kind of different for me, too. But, everything—I sprained my ankle at one of the jumps, but otherwise no injuries. And, fortunately, throughout the whole—all the years—I was airborne for seventeen years, and I had one back injury, and that was over in, actually in Sardinia [Italy]-the island of Sardinia. Maybe I can tell that a little later, but attended the jump school, graduated from there, uh, and then joined the Special-the 77<sup>th</sup> Special Forces at that time—took the Special Forces training, and qualified—it was quite a long process. At that time, we didn't have language school there, and it was not a requirement. But, once you get to the detachments, then you had to go to language school, which I did later.

Gould: Now, all of this is occurring at Fort Bragg?

Southworth: Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Gould: North Carolina.

Southworth: Yes, yes.

Gould: What did—tell me what was the most challenging part of your training between jump school and your Special Forces training. Or, maybe most-the most memorable part that you can recall from that time in your life?

Southworth: Well, one of the exercises where—there was no rank worn during the Special Forces training. Officers are, you know, all rank is stripped off, so you really don't know, other than when you're talking to some people and if you happen to ask them the rank, but most the time it wasn't—rank was not talked about, basically. So, during Special Forces training and Cherokee Trail, Operation Cherokee Trail, which is the final exercise—everybody switches jobs. So, you might be the team commander, you might be the team radio operator, you might be the weapons person or whatever. You change jobs throughout so you're cross-trained all the way right from the start. And there's basically five different skills that people learn—the, you know, Special Ops, dealing with intelligence; communications, weapons, medical training, and demolitions. And those five things—there's two men in each team, with those skills. And then leadership-wise, you have a team sergeant, and then a team leader, which is normally a captain, and then a lieutenant for a team-mate, at that time. That has since changed, too, over the last, probably, roughly twenty years. They changed the XO, the executive officer, to become a Warrant Officer. And now—and that, usually is because they'll take an operation sergeant or an intelligence sergeant, and recommend him—if he's selected leadership potential for an officer, they'll have him attend—and in this case it's always a "him", for the team, the detachments are only, men. Ladies are in the

support units, but not in the teams. Anyway, then they would select a person to go to more officer training and then he would become an XO and go through the ranks as far as warrant officer is concerned.

Gould: Okay, you've completed your Special Forces training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina—

Southworth: Yes.

Gould: What's the date right now, when you graduate from that training?

Southworth: [Sighs] I graduated in probably January of 1958.

Gould: Okay, now talk about your first duty station-your first duty assignment. What did you do, and where were you at?

Southworth: I was assigned to, Bad Tölz, Germany-my first duty assignment after Fort Bragg, because the 77<sup>th</sup> really was not-it was a lot of training, but I didn't really get into a detachment there. The team training then began as OJT-"on-the-job-training", at Bad Tölz, Germany, where we were expected to operate with the team-"A" detachment or "B" detachment. In my case, I was in an "A" detachment, which is the smallest detachment that calls for all those skills, and, in that we had Lodge Bill, which are people who came from Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and all of those mixed in with the team. So we had numerous languages spoken there, within that particular team. But almost all of those men, who are Lodge Bill-we called them "Lodge Bill" soldiers-they had a special, they were accepted into the U.S. Army-in two years they could become citizens. And once a year they had to go back to the United States, and then the second year they could become a citizen. Anyway, we would have fall exercises, we would have training constantly, our training schedule was, you know, we had winter training, summer training. Winter training was ski operations across-we were right at the edge of the Alps in southern Bavaria. So we were only like seven kilometers, which would be about four miles from Austria, and that was our operational area at that time for training. And once a year we would have the FTX—the "field training exercise", where we would go into isolation, and typically go to Orleans, France, and stage out of there, and then parachute back into various different countries, and have a guerrilla force which would be, actually, American Special Forces guerrilla leaders. In other words, they would be like master sergeants, captains, who would speak the language and work with either German soldiers, National Guard German soldiers, or, in some cases, other Americans who would wear civilian clothes the whole time. During that time, I think the very first time my team got selected to jump into Greece. I went into Greece two different times. We jumped in right near Mount Olympus, in fact. And so, in fact there's a little

humorous story there, is that a bunch of us said, "Well, Greece-it's, my goodness, the Mediterranean, this has got to be very warm!" So, we selected a really— sleeping bag, a real thin sleeping bag- to take with us, and, all except one took those sleeping bags. They were wool, they were old Korean sleeping bags, and our wives sewed parachute silk on the inside of them so they wouldn't be so itchy, you know, type of thing. They'd also give a little warmth. Well, once we arrived there, near Mount Olympus, we soon discovered that it got cold at night. So, we would end up putting other clothes on to keep warm, and use the waterproof bag on the feet, and stuff—just anything to keep warm. And when we would have re-supply drops which we would have—we would parachute in, we'd have our initial three days' worth of food, and then we'd get all of our rations, all of our food, all of our supplies, demolitions, the whole works-all by parachute—we'd—parachute. My job, is, then, I was a radio operator, radio repairman, so my job was to receive communications, and we had two communications contacts a day-two minutes at a time. And it was all dead-all blank broadcast. So the communication was sent from France to Greece.

Gould: How old were you at the time?

Southworth: I was— probably twenty at the time. Twenty years old.

Gould: And what was your rank?

Southworth: I was, a, an E-4, specialist fourth class when I started. When I left in 1964 I was a staff sergeant. So I worked up through that. But, the re-supply drops, I do remember one night where the guy with the big sleeping bag, he went on the re-supply, and of course the rest of us drew straws to see who would get his sleeping bag to sleep in that night. And I didn't win it, so anyway I continued to make do with the little sleeping bag. And I still have that little sleeping bag, too, and it brings back a lot of fond memories.

Gould: This is a few years before the building of the Berlin wall. What was your—

Southworth: Yes.

Gould: —Or did you have any perspective, any thoughts on the Cold War as it was going on in Germany at the time?

Southworth: Yes, [laughs] the Cold War was a real thing for us. And, not to—it's no longer classified, but my team, we actually, our country was Poland. And, the second year I was there, there was two of us on the team, we were selected to go to Polish language school in Oberammergau, Germany. So that was a six months, eight hours a day-Polish culture, language, culture, language, geography-the whole

works-studying that in Oberammergau. And they had numerous European language studies there, one of them which was a year course in Russian, too—several different dialects, of the different countries. Chinese was also taught there, but mostly it was European countries. So, after six months, then— and during that time period, right after that time period, I went back-back home, met my wife, who had grown up—I had met her at my brother's wedding, and she was a sister to my brother, and so in 1961—actually, I called her—actually in December, '60—'60—called her, proposed, and we got married in March. She came over to Germany as a foreigner abroad, because she wasn't authorized to come to Germany because of the Berlin crisis, and good question there, Patrick, that they weren't allowing any—any dependents to come to Germany during that period, because of the Berlin crisis, and during that time, right after we got married, I do remember President Kennedy, with his whole entourage—came, and we went to [name of city, ??], Germany, as an “A” detachment, and we put on a demonstration for him, and we met him, and his wives [wife], and, and the whole works, and it was really a very, very, memorable experience, and I think it was that fall, I believe it was, and again, I don't remember whether it was '61, '62, or '63, but it wasn't long after that when he was assassinated, and of course, when he was there that was the time he gave that speech, "Ich bin ein Berliner"—very memorable.

Gould: Okay, a little bit about, a little background on your wife. Where is she from, and—

Southworth: Mhm.

Gould: —where was she born?

Southworth: She was born in Wausau, Wisconsin in 1942, so you can—just if, you had the time to figure out—she was very young when I met her. She was less, I think she was only fifteen. And, so, again, I was in Germany for three years at that point, and she now was eighteen. And she had grown up, and I—I was home on leave after three years. I had extended, extended, extended—three times. And I had not re-enlisted yet. So, one of the reasons, that's why I selected to attend the language school. Otherwise, I couldn't have gone. So, I looked forward to it, attended the language school, and then, well not too long after that I went back to the States for thirty day leaves—thirty day leave, went home, spent my time home, and then drove down to visit my grandmother, who was ninety-nine at the time, in Milwaukee, which was the last time I saw her, because she died just a few months later, and then took the train to Chicago, which is where my brother and his wife, and Betty was there, working in Chicago.

Gould: What is your wife's maiden name-full name?

Southworth: Betty, or Elizabeth F. Wagner, and she—she had definitely grown up, and I met her-and I didn't realize she was there. I didn't realize she was working there. So, I met her that evening, and, wow-my brother really broke down. He allowed me to use his car, which was "no-no", completely. He probably has never loaned his car even to his own son, so, [laughs], maybe he has, but I'm being-a little over-exaggerating, but he's very tight with his cars, cars are his thing-cars, vehicles, trucks-and, uh, so we went to a movie, and we talked, and we talked, we got home, and we talked and we talked some more. And, anyway, when I got back to Germany I decided this was the one, for me.

Gould: Okay, let's advance the story to March, 1961. You're married, you're living in what's then West Berlin, or West Germany-

Southworth: West Germany, West Germany.

Gould: Okay, what goes-what happened after that.

Southworth: [Sighs] Well, as you can imagine, nine months later we had a daughter. And, uh, it, actually, within eleven months we had a second daughter. So we had two daughters born there. Meanwhile, [I] continued with the various different training. Our team was then selected to teach-actually, teach, air— first of all, it was teach, uh, under-water diving training, so we had a UDT [Underwater Demolition Team, precursor to the US Navy SEALs] specialist that attended the Seal, or the Navy course, and so he was our instructor, and we attended the training there in Germany, dove—in fact, as we become the recovery team for bodies and things in southern Germany, too, during that period. But it was a long course, probably a month and a half. And then we went to Ger-uh, to Greece, and dove, and trained them in, uh, diving, and we actually, we parachuted with them, also, so they were awarded their wings. They also gave us some training in mountaineering, which was really interesting and fun, too. So they were, these were the Greek, Hellenic Raiding Force, is the special unit that they were at that time, and so, [I] attended the training with them, came back. We had various different vacations and trips in Europe. At different times we went to Italy. We drove to Italy. And we were going to go to Rome, but it just got too hot in July, so, we stopped at Venice, and spent a couple of days there and then we drove back. But that was some inter—and we camped, at that time. There were camp sites –the recreational centers for the U.S. Army-had camp sites in different places, RV places. Most people didn't have RVs though, over there. Part of it is that they aren't going to stay there that long. Mine was six years, actually, and I served in two detachments during that time- an “A” detachment, and a “B” detachment. "B" would be a larger team, and

they would be normally—for every “B” detachment you would have up to six or nine “A” detachments that would fall under your operational control, and so ours was one of the teams which was the “B” detachment was not Polish, but it could handle Polish or Czechoslovakia, or some of the different countries in that part of Europe. And during that time I worked for a man by the name of Major Puckett, who actually became a colonel much later, and he's the one that actually got me to attend OCS in 1960, let's see, I graduated in 1966. But, back to Germany, just a little bit, the final year that I was there our team was selected, then, to go to Pakistan. And we went to Pakistan to train them in airborne operations. And, so, prior to that training, we, we worked full-time getting prepared to set up the schools, build some of the equipment that they would use, and we ran our own jump school in Germany—in a little jump school that was set up in—near, I'm trying to recall the name of the school, but I—it was near Oberammergau, too, in southern Germany. And we had a mixed class of about fifty men, and I think there was a couple of women who attended—support unit type people, communications. And also some German students, so we ran them through as our preparation to finally run and determine exactly what person out of the twelve men would train what portion. And I normally taught general subjects—the details of the parachute, and how it worked, and all that kind of stuff.

Gould: Okay, when do you say “goodbye” to West Germany? What year, what month?

Southworth: 1964.

Gould: Okay, and you're going to OCS there, or are you doing something else?

Southworth: No, I was turned down for OCS because of my eyesight at that time.

Gould: Okay.

Southworth: And then I went to—uh, back to the States, uh, after Pak—in fact we were delayed in Pakistan. We, we got delayed about a couple months. We were there for about—January through, almost into July, and we ran three courses there, and after the second course, they ran their own course, and we monitored and became their mentors, in the parachute operations, and then they were qualified and they got all their own equipment, and we flew back to Germany, and I think within the next week we flew back, because we were supposed to rotate back to the States a month earlier, but we got delayed.

Gould: Now, this is after President Kennedy's initiative to ramp up the Special Forces.

Southworth: Yes.

Gould: So, talk about how that's affecting your life.

Southworth: Well, it affected us because we opened another *kaserne*, flint *kasernes*, where I was at, at Bad Tölz.

Gould: What's that?

Southworth: That-*kaserne*-is like a post. It's just a small piece of property. Maybe, a couple, few acres, maybe four, five acres that has some of your training sites, but almost all of your training sites are out, realistically, with the local populace, but we opened another *Kaserne*, called Prince Heinrich *kaserne*, which was about seven kilometers from where we lived, from the Flint *kaserne*, which was at Bad Tölz, Germany. And Prince Heinrich was at Lenggries, Germany, which was less than three kilometers from the Austrian border, right on the Isar River. And that became our-we belonged then to A Company. Before that time, we only had First Provisional Company, which was one company and then a headquarters element, which contained all of the support, signal, supply, and all the logistics within that support unit, but part of the headquarters company. Now, with the growth, Colonel Puckett, in fact, is left-and he became the training group commander-and then they set up a full-time training school ran for almost two years, and they recruited men from all units in Europe to attend that training group, and now we had Alpha Company, which would have about, probably in the neighborhood of twelve to fifteen "A" detachments, three "B" detachments, they would be B Company, which was set up the same way, C Company-the same. So now we've jumped all the way from-we only had four-hundred men there when I got there, and now we're well over, probably in the neighborhood of fifteen-hundred to two thousand. And, there was a little animosity at times, because some of these troopers, you might say, would steal jobs from people who had been there, but that was soon erased, because either they hacked it-they were good soldiers, good-they became good—and most of these had no Special Forces, Special Ops training, whatsoever, before they got there-so, the training group, they really did a super job, and I know a number of those people, and I still contact them today with our reunions and things. That was a major build-up, and that's when we were authorized to wear the beret. Before that time we weren't. We did wear it in Germany, since, when I arrived, but on official, you might say, things that we thought, or the commander would think, that there might be some, visitors or something, no-then we took off the beret and wore the regular, regular hat. And we had a crest that was a Trojan horse crest, and I still have them at home, a couple of those. But that's what we wore, typically, all the time. It's a very poor hat in the winter time, because it only protects one ear. [laughs] And, anyway, but we wore that very proudly, for that period, and it was a—and I've visited the place where Kennedy—which was a training demonstration area at Fort Bragg, right near the center-the it became the John F. Kennedy Center for Special Warfare.

And that site is still in, still there today. They don't use the demonstration area, but the building is there, but now they've got much, with all the different joint Special Ops, and, different SOCOM-Special Operations Command, Joint Special Operations Command-that's there, too. Delta Force, and various different elements of Special Forces, it's much, much— and now they have 3<sup>rd</sup> Group, 7<sup>th</sup> Group, stationed there. And the 7<sup>th</sup> Group is actually moving to Florida here in the next few months.

Gould: Okay, it's 1964 to 1966.

Southworth: Yeah.

Gould: You're a seasoned staff NCO, now.

Southworth: Mhm.

Gould: You're back in the United States at Fort Bragg?

Southworth: Mhm.

Gould: I have that right? Now, what happens, during this time, or, what takes you into OCS?

Southworth: Okay, and that's where Colonel Puckett, again, he'd say, "You know, I think you may need to submit that again". So, I, well, [thump], nothing lost, nothing gained. If you don't put in for it, you'll never know. So I applied for it again, just submitted the basic, same papers with a heading-a new cover sheet basically-and, uh, submitted it, and it got turned down again. Now I'm too old [both laugh]. I'll be over twenty-eight, which was not allowed when you graduate from OCS. But, so then I went out as one of the exercise controllers, and, midst to right half-way during the exercise I get called up and [they] said, "You've got a waiver. It's automatic. You get back in here. You've got an OCS date for artillery." "Artillery?!" I said. "Oh my goodness, I didn't even apply for artillery". But that's where it was and I said, "Why?" "Oh, that's because your math scores were good." Math scores?! You know, that's the old test when I first came in service-ten years ago. So anyway I decided that was, that still was a good deal. By this time, we had three-three children, we had a son was born in 1960. Actually he was born just prior to graduation, so [inaudible].

Gould: Do you think, do you think your selection had anything to do with Vietnam ramping up?

Southworth: Yes, they needed a lot of officers, they needed a build-up of troops. They also wanted any Special Forces. They wanted, in fact, as I, I couldn't even, after I

finished OCS, I could not get out of Special Forces. I tried one time, because I wanted to get more balance, more experience in different units, and for the better part of it I got signed right back to Special Forces, and it certainly did have a lot to do with it. They wanted people, and NCOs that were experienced. So, I did go to OCS then, in fifty-in '66.

Gould: Where do you go to OCS, and how long is that?

Southworth: Fort—it would be in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, six months, graduated in May of 1966, son was born April, '66, so, the fact is, Betty couldn't be there for the, graduation, to pin on the, the bars, my mother did that. She arrived there.

Gould: So, you put on second lieutenant's bars—

Southworth: Yes.

Gould: —and they throw you right into artillery school?

Southworth: [Sighs] no, artillery school-that's part of the six months.

Gould: Oh, I see.

Southworth: Yes, and I was the leadership graduate of the course. I really worked hard during that course, ended up being the company-the battery commander [on] two different occasions, because it had some problems. So, anyway, [I] graduated, and went right back to Special Forces at the school, at JFK Center to teach and attend the PSYOP [Psychological operations] school. [laughs] Which was a, I think, about a month and a half, about two-month school. And [I] never really worked in that job. I become—attended their instructor course there, and became an instructor for just a few months and then I got orders for Vietnam.

Gould: How long was the Psychological Operations course?

Southworth: I'm thinking it was only about two months long, but it gave me an insight because, of course, at that time everything was slanted toward Vietnam. So, it gave me an insight. I read the book *Street Without Joy* by Bernard Fall, and it gave me a lot of background on Dien Bien Phu, and a lot of history of Vietnam, and also, of course, the aspect of PSYOPS-how it'd be used. And, see, that also became one of the jobs of the executive officer-[he] became also the PSYOPS commander, you might say, for that team, and as a team you'd normally have a sub-sector headquarters in addition to the team, in fact—

[Audio cuts out at around 31:26.00, and resumes again at 31:38.10]

Southworth: Okay, on the “A” detachment in Vietnam, the normal-the executive officer was also the sub-sector commander, and also in charge of PSYOPS. That was, in our case, the team was located at Tung-Toi [sp?], and that was called “A” detachment A432, and it was located up the Mekong River near a little town called Hyung Woo [??], and also the district or province headquarters was Chau Doc. And that's spelled C.H.A.U, and D.O.C, okay? We didn't have a lot to do with Hyung Woo, but, or, pardon me-with Chau Doc, but we would coordinate with them occasionally, with the province. But our sub-sector, which had regional forces, popular forces, troops-they called them RFPF or sometimes called "Ruffpuff", and they would be in Hyung Woo. And we had about a three-man detachment that stayed, actually, in that-Hyung Woo-a little sub-sector headquarters, and they were typically medics-a medic and usually one, probably an operation sergeant or a team sergeant—not a team sergeant, often but he would rotate back with himself, and also the SFC would be the intel sergeant. And I would make weekly trips down there for meetings, and we would do a lot of aid things-medical trips for the community and out in the village, during the day time primarily, at night it was pretty much closed-in, but our area was pretty well-controlled, 'cause our teams were on, we basically had one-third of the unit, and we had three companies that were all indigenous, primarily—almost entirely Vietnamese, and they were also Hòa Hảo, which is a religion at that particular regional area there, and there are *many* religions in Vietnam, oh, just hundreds of religions, it seems like. But that was a very specific religion to that area, and in fact as our counterpart who was a major, he was a Hòa Hảo leader in that area. He'd been in that area for a long time, and so he had a good feel for the people and a good feel for the intelligence, and we kept out one-third of our troops all the time, two Americans with them, all the time, twenty-four/seven. And so, and we went all-our particular operational area went all the way to the border-Cambodia, it came across to a canal that come out at Hyun Woo, and the other border was the Mekong River, which went up to Chau Doc, and then up into Cambodia.

Gould: I want you to go back, just a little bit and tell me what day or what month and year you specifically arrived in Vietnam, and then give me your general impressions, of what I think is your first combat zone—

Southworth: Okay.

Gould: —Albeit, West Germany certainly during the Cold War was not, was not in the rear, but tell me what you were thinking when you first get to Vietnam, and what your thoughts were about the zone, and where you were operating.

Southworth: Sure. Actually, I can step back just a little to the day we arrived there. There were some parachute flares going off. We arrived there at night, into Tan Son Nhut Air Base, and of course we didn't have any weapons or anything, and they dropped us off, and literally the airplane just turned around, taxied, and took off. They didn't refuel or anything, they were gone.

Gould: What sort of an airplane dropped you off?

Southworth: It was, actually a contract airplane, with two stewardesses—two or three stewardesses. [thumps hand] And they just dropped us off and [thumps hand] got out of there, basically. And we spent the night, which was a real experience in the sense that we had different odors that came, you know, that you could smell. And, of course, the next morning we discovered the reason why: we were located real close to the pit area that they were burning with diesel barrels, the excrement from the soldiers. And that's what they always did, that was who-people who had details for that, that was not a good detail, as you can imagine. And I think we spent just that one night there, and the next day we flew to Nha Trang, which was the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group headquarters, and that's where we received basically our assignments—where we were going to be stationed in the country, and that's located in Two Corps, the country itself is spread out into four corps—four corps areas, all the way to the north which goes to the border, went to the border of South Vietnam and North Vietnam, and then all the way—Four Corps being the delta region, which was primarily rice, and the area where it flooded and you had a monsoon season and so on. So we attended training there, and then we were all put on a LST or a boat, which is a landing ship—, tank, actually, is what it stands for. I guess you're familiar with that. And we were sent out to an island and dropped off, in small elements, and basically we had to do, just kind of a patrol, but it was an acclimation process to the weather, to the, you know, to the, to the climate and so forth. So it was a three day thing where we were practicing good security, practicing, —and of course, sleeping on our, with nothing other than a poncho, and, uh, you'd sleep on the rocks— and, do, you know, good security as far as doing—but a small element, like six people together, where'd you'd do a little, a wheel type of thing, where, you know, being able to touch each other, and no communications, and it was just kind of an isolation-type-thing, too, so you can get a feel for working with other people and people who were strange—you didn't, other than, sometimes, some of whom you'd flown over with, but you'd never met before the trip. And, and that served well as far as getting acclimated, and all, getting used to the country a little bit. We didn't get out in the town at all, the city. And then three days later, we were, moved back, and then we were sent, we flew to Cần Thơ, and Cần Thơ is the capitol of the Fourth Corps area. I believe it's still called Cần Thơ, and it's C-A-N-T-H-O, two words: Cần Thơ . And

from there we received our “A” detachment assignments, and I was assigned to A432, which is much north—

Gould: What does that mean?

Southworth: That's the detachment number. The four stood for the “Fourth Corps”, so each corps had their-started out with “4, 3, 2”, or “1”. And the thirty-two, there was thirty-two camps in the fourth corps at one time. They actually went up and down, if they, if they converted a camp to Vietnamese, they sometimes would relocate and use that same number, if they'd move the team, for example, to another, to another camp. But they would have a different name, like ours was Tung-Toi, and there might be [inaudible] to it, or something, but they would use the same number a few times, a lot of different teams. I don't know the total number of teams, but I'm guessing it was between forty and fifty teams who were in the country-in the highlands, and northern, you know in the [inaudible]-different areas of Vietnam. And, we would have an AO that was probably around-AO, meaning “Area of Operations”-like OA or “Operational Area,” too. It's the same thing, it's a synonym. Probably about ten kilometers square, something like that, and sometimes it would be bigger, depending on what kind of an area, what kind of activity that you had. Our—we were on the river. So, we had a camp that was, we had an airstrip for the summer. It was just a grass airstrip, and our total, we had one truck, and that was a deuce and a half, a two-and-a-half-ton truck, that could go out to the, we had to go out the side of the camp, and then go to the airstrip, so there was no security other than, we had a couple of little, patrols out there, but very little security on the camp. And then we had an outside camp and an inner camp which is our detachment, and that's where we had our, all of our—we had our generators, which were totally self-contained. And then we provided the electricity for the outside area-the three companies that were stationed there—we had barracks for them that we built, which were basically bamboo, and just a very brief—

Gould: How long was your tour in Vietnam, and what kept you awake at night? What did you worry about when you were over there?

Southworth: Well, again, in the patrols we took turns. I mean, we basically-everybody, you know, did their share. And, even if we were in camp, we did our shifts for security, we always had two men awake all the time. On patrol, again, we would be out, and that kept our [inaudible] secure. And we used starlight scopes, which, I don't know-explain that a little further. That's a, a piece of equipment that you attach to a scope-or attach to the rifle, the top of the rifle-and you could actually see at night, very, quite well. It took very little light to be able to— to be able to see, and I remember being on patrol, and on some of the canals, and watching the

Viet Cong go by, and we didn't want them to know we were there, so part of the orders were [that] we were not to fire on them, but my goodness, it would have just been like clay pigeons, it would have been really something, but, you know, easy, to have killed those Viet Cong, but we were instructed not to, so we didn't, because we didn't want them to know, and we were monitoring their movements, and so we could do that. [We were] monitoring their trails, how they moved, and they were on sand pans [??]. Sometimes we operated with sand pans. We had thirty sand pans on our camp, too, because over three months of the year we were flooded. So operations were by sand pan, into little wooded areas, bamboo areas, and, that was, I would say initially, was more scary. Afterwards—and, of course, there would be high points, too, where you could walk through the areas and little villages, and villagers were very aware of what was going on. They, the fact is if they knew there were Viet Cong along, they would be very close-lipped, and if that was a controlled village, then they wouldn't hardly talk to the Americans at all, but we had always had an interpreter with us, and by the way, I had attended a Vietnamese language school, also, before I went, for three months, which gave me a working knowledge of the language. That was out in Monterey, California, before, before I went. The family went with me, there—that was three months at Monterey, California, a very good experience there, but again—a lot of studying, eight hours a day, but it was located just south of, of San Francisco—probably less than twenty, twenty-five miles or something like that. But in Vietnam, the experiences in my first “A” detachment there were very good. One particular experience, we were going out on a day patrol—morning patrol actually—with air boats. Special Forces had an airboat platoon, where they had about twelve airboats. The airboat would haul about six men, a fifty-caliber machine gun, and normally would have two Special Forces troops with it, and then the other ones would be Chinese *Nùngs*, which we operated with, and they were very trustworthy, very good, good people—good soldiers. And these airboats were fiber glass—

Gould: These Chinese soldiers—

Southworth: Yes.

Gould: —were from Taiwan?

Southworth: Yes, yes, but they, but they were Vietnamese. They were Vietnamese citizens, but they were Chinese, and many of them fought with the Americans as part of the mobile strike force, which was a separate element, and I'll get into that a little bit later, mostly in my second tour, this was my first tour. These were really outstanding troops, and like I said, very trustworthy. Anyway I received, it was my turn, and I said “Hey, I'm, I'm, you know with it”. Myself and the intel

sergeant was going, and just, I mean, packed, ready to roll, and I got a call down from the sub-sector headquarters, Hyung Woo, that I was to attend a meeting, they needed me down there for a meeting. And, so, then my team sergeant, James Lewis, he then took my place, it was his turn next. And, 'cause we also, we wanted to have one of the high ranking people on each exercise, especially on each patrol, and each operation such as this, and this—where we were dealing with six airboats, too. An airboat operation is tricky, because communications is really, very—'cause it's so noisy. You have a fixed-wing engine on that thing, pushing you, so even though they're operating with headphones and everything else, it's very difficult, and [thumps hand] Jim Lewis was pretty familiar with the area. I was just, really familiar with it. Jim had been there, in the country, a little shorter than I had. Anyway, I had to go down to sub-sector. On the way down there—and then they took off, and I went down, I just about got to Hyung Woo, which was about four kilometers by a little patrol boat. And that was our way of getting around. Our roads consisted of that half mile and then to the airstrip we didn't have any roads at all. So, we're going down, and we had probably twelve, fifteen of these “assault boats”, we call them. You know, fiber glass boats with a fifty cal—a fifty horsepower Mercury motor on 'em. And, anyway, they got hit. And I was monitoring the frequency the whole time, and I thought to myself, “What in the world are they doing there?” They should've never been where they were at. They were in the canal, uh, the Hyung Woo canal, which went across the Cambodian border and went right through—that was actually the border line, and they had [thumps hand] set up an ambush, and ambushed [thumps hand] the things. They, they—one of the boats was disabled, and it floated over to the, the other side, and that one they captured. They had another boat that they damaged severely. Jim Lewis was wounded. I came back as soon as I could, and I went out with sand pans, to be a rescue and also just a recovery team. And, got to their group, we had one boat missing, and, I think two of the Chinese *Nungs* were killed. They were—we had recovered them, I think maybe one, we didn't—and the captain, who was with the airboats, in charge of the airboats, he was killed, and one other man was missing. And so, we got there and secured the area and, this time we had some gunships available, but the aircraft, again, the communications with airboats, that was one of the fallacies, the problems we had with—'cause they would go up, I mean you could jump three-foot, three-foot, banks with it. So, that wouldn't be—because the way they push, the water is pushed in front of them, so they can go right over the top of a three, four-foot bank. But that was a really scary trip. And I felt always guilty for that.

Gould: When you went out on this rescue mission—

Southworth: Yes.

Gould: —Did you have any close air support or artillery to back you up with this—

Southworth: No. Our mortar wouldn't reach us there, and we had a 4.2 mortar, and there was no artillery in our area at all at that point. For Special Operations they would get some artillery, but not, not in our AO. Our AO was considered to be fairly secure, especially during the day. At night, they can move around because it's very easy to move. And they can be resupplied through Cambodia, because they're right on the border. I always felt very, very guilty about that particular operation. Whether I could have done something different, I don't know. We did recover— my diving experience helped, because we were able to dive, I was able to dive down, connect ropes and stuff to the, to the airboat. And we stayed overnight on that site which is only maybe a kilometer, if that, from the Cambodian border, and we secured it just in our sand pans, and the next morning a CH47 helicopter came in, and we were able to attach cables to it, to the boat, which had fifty cal, [machine guns], it had some of our communications gear in it, and we were able to secure all that, and, pull it out, and get it out of there. But, like I said, it was just—kind of, a—I always had some strange feelings, regarding that. We had our landing zone, during that whole wet season—the monsoon season—was actually a pierced steel planking put on British pontoons out on the Mekong River. So that was the only LZ [landing zone] that we had as far as communication—bringing and mail, bringing in whatever we needed. Supplies, food, and so forth.

Gould: It sounds like you're actually the vanguard, you're ahead of LBJ's-Lyndon Baines Johnson's-escalation in 1965. You're actually there before the escalation—

Southworth: Well, this is '67—

Gould: Oh, this is, oh—

Southworth: This is '67.

Gould: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm mistaken. Okay.

Southworth: Yeah, yep, yeah. But you're very familiar with those, those periods! And, so, we had escalated, but a lot of teams, also, were converting. We had, in fact, after my six months there, I went to Cần Thơ, and became the assistant S-3, which was in charge of all air operations, and I was also the conversion officer and I converted three teams. Three teams went totally Vietnamese, because they felt that secure. And we were in the process of doing that, you know, throughout my whole, that whole six months, of converting teams.

Gould: Okay, your tour in Vietnam—your first tour-ends. What happens then? When do you leave, and where do you go?

Southworth: I left in March, then, of 1968, and, went back to Fort Bragg [laughs]—five times at Bragg, all total—and [I was] assigned to the 82nd Airborne. I was a captain when I arrived there, and I was artillery, so I became the liaison officer for the artillery battalion there at Fort Bragg, and less than a month later I got my orders as an infantry officer. So, and fact is, I was an artillery umpire on an artillery exercise when I got my orders, so I gave the critique as an infantry officer, and the battalion commander, he kinda said, "Well, Captain Southworth, this isn't going to get you out of the artillery, because I have a—a special job for you. It calls for an infantry officer in the Davy Crockett platoon. And we had two Davy Crockett platoons in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. That was—the Davy Crockett—are you familiar with it at all? That was the only [pauses] atomic weapon—

Gould: Oh!

Southworth: —That the division had. And it was a—it was like a big mortar, but it had a bigger—more range, but it was a very small-yield weapon. And it had never been certified as being qualified, so he put me in a position that he figured, that you know, that maybe I could handle, I don't know, because no one had handled it before. They'd gone through inspection after inspection and it always failed it. Our security element was the 82nd Airborne chorus [laughs]. So, they were—and our platoon was about, probably about fifty men—is what it is, probably about ten vehicles, and we normally had two of the weapons-simulators that we would train with, that were just identical to the real thing, however we never did draw the real thing, naturally. I'm assigned there that fall, and I probably got there, you know, probably in May, June, something like that. And after only about a month being as the artillery liaison officer, that's when I went to the Davy Crockett platoon—57th Platoon, it's called, 57th Platoon. And, I had full cooperation with the headquarters and with the personnel, so that every Friday I could look at all the records of newcoming, incoming people. And whoever I wanted, I got. And I used that. And, troops did want to come because it was a two-year, fixed assignment, and they couldn't be deployed anywhere other than that unit during that two years. So, you can imagine, they, they looked forward to— if they qualified—and we almost, at that point— because it was a very skilled type of unit, that we had looked for college graduates and also people who had dealt with a lot of science, dealt with a lot of physics, and so I had, I just had, no problem getting recruits, and had 'em assigned basically to the unit. During that period—I was probably there six months—during that period I had one Article 15 [non-judicial punishment (NJP); permits commanders to administratively discipline troops without a court-martial under the Uniform Code of Military Justice], which would be a type of punishment for one troop, and I don't even recall what it was, it was a very minor thing, but he was gone the next morning. 'Cause we didn't

have to deal with any disciplinary problems. If there were disciplinary problems, they were gone. It was just that simple. They had top security, so it was a very good situation, and we managed—I say, myself, and the team—and the—the, you'd call him, like, a "first sergeant", but he was my, my team, platoon leader—was a, I got his cooperation, got him bought in, and all the troops did, too, and it wasn't too long, we had them really trained well. And much to our dismay—but we certainly understood it—after we got certified, they had the artillery organizational day—and that's, that's kind of like an athletic competition—and our platoon won over the whole battalion. And, fact is the—[laughs] I have to do a little bit of bragging here!—is that we took the division commander out, he wanted to join us for a run one day, and I got chewed out afterwards because we ran too fast, and one of the men fell out and he puked. Well, I didn't tell him that, but we kind of expected him to, because he was the weakest guy, and he worked in supply, and he didn't run, he didn't do anything on his own, so we, we kind of expected that to happen, so, but "Okay, yes, sir! Right [laughs]. Fine." But it was really a good feeling, and then within two weeks after we were certified, we were disbanded. [The] reason for it—very, very clear— is that a division commander, which is a two-star general should not have an atomic weapon. And I believe it, I mean, I believe that's a good, was a very good reason. And even though he wouldn't have the authority to fire that thing, it was still under his command, and that, that was not a good situation. It didn't make sense. Even though, like I said, the yield was fairly limited, it's still, I think, at this point—this would have been in 1968, yes, 1968—they were starting to realize the long-range effects of atomic weapons, as far as when they were fired, what kind of effects they would have on troops, and different things. And this was not a "clean" weapon, either. It was called a "dirty" weapon because it didn't have air bursts, you know, and it had ground bursts, which had to have long-ranging effects. [taps fingers] And, so, anyway, [taps fingers] then I served in the 82<sup>nd</sup>. I had a headquarters company, I was a headquarters company commander in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 504<sup>th</sup> Infantry—

Gould: At Fort Bragg?

Southworth: At Fort Bragg.

Gould: Okay.

Southworth: And I took a provisional company to Alaska for a training exercise. And then I received orders again for a normal, regular army unit. I got to Vietnam [and] the orders were changed. I went back to Special Forces, 5<sup>th</sup> Group.

Gould: Okay, now we've got the second bite of the apple—

Southworth: Yes.

Gould: You're going back to Vietnam—

Southworth: Yes.

Gould: What's your wife thinking about this, what are you thinking about going back? Because, this is after Tet [Offensive]—

Southworth: Yes.

Gould: Now, things are, things have changed dramatically and you should know this—

Southworth: Yes.

Gould: So, what are you thinking about when you get the orders going back into the meat-grinder?

Southworth: Well, I actually volunteered, so that I would go when I wanted to go. I was scheduled to go, like on a normal rotation, I would have been gone in November. I sped it up by three months, so that I kept my kids in school, and relocated. At that time, family was not allowed to stay on the post, or stay in the area. Well, you could stay in the area if you owned your own home, which I did at that time, but there was no family readiness groups.

Gould: November of '69, you say—

Southworth: '68, should be '68, I believe it was. And I went back in '69.

Gould: Okay.

Southworth: No, wait a minute, it would be later—no, it would be in '69. I stand corrected.

Gould: November of '69?

Southworth: I went there—let's see, it's on that paper, my first original paper. [rustling of paper] I've always questioned, we went over this the morning, with my wife, because those dates were, for some reason or other they're—let's see—'69/'70. [It] would have been in August, I believe, of '69, and [I] went to the 5<sup>th</sup> -went back to the 5<sup>th</sup> Group. And, as I said, the reason why I volunteered to go early is so that I can move my family back to Stradford [WI] at this time—that's where her folks lived, in Stradford-at this time, and move her into her grandmother's house, which was vacant at that time-the grandmother had passed away-and so she lived there for a year. The family consisted of three youngest—John was probably two at the time, and he was really—this, this, created some difficulties. He didn't want to see Dad go. And it was a very—my wife gave a little talk this past month, for the Fourth of July type of thing. I spoke briefly on Vietnam, and LZ Lambeau. And

she spoke on what it's like to be a family—to be a wife of a soldier deployed in, during Vietnam. And she talked about John, who just wanted to have me back home: "You go to that airport and pick him up and bring him home!" And, he would just—he created some real things for her, and it was very difficult for her to spend during that time. We communicated both times, basically by ham radio, once or twice during the whole year. The second time we actually exchanged tapes—little reel to reel tapes. We still have those. We've never listened to them; one of these days, we're due. But, we would communicate, and I remember one time listening to Betty, and she's talking away, she's explaining what the kids are doing, and all of a sudden—I guess it's John, doing something—she chews him out, and when she heard that tape back-and we did play it, or she played it when I sent it back, she said, "Oh! Wow! Gee, I didn't realize I'd be heard, or he would be heard, or that I'd chew him out for that period!" But it was, that was our means of communication. And letters, but she wouldn't receive letters, for sometimes, weeks, because when we were gone, we didn't write when we're out on operations. Okay back to where I was—[I was] assigned to 5<sup>th</sup> Group, and from there, I was assigned to B-40, which is underneath Company D at Cần Thơ, back to the delta again, and B-40, which is Operational Detachment B-40, which was a mobile strike force company that was called a MIKE force. But the mobile strike force—our job was a reactionary force to any team, any area that had problems—were being hit, or whatever—we were the reactionary force for that. And the B Detachment had three battalions, and these were all Cambodians, and we had Vietnamese counterparts working with us, too. And the Cambodians were very good soldiers. They were—I would say-very good. And we took very good care of them. In fact, as our wounded [sighs]— I don't know how this was accomplished—but through the embassy, we had all of our Cambodian soldiers treated in the American hospitals. And that was good, that was a real—and we took care of them. We made sure that they got prosthetics, if they had legs or arms missing, you know, we would take care of them. Whereas the culture of Vietnam was such that these would become beggars, almost automatically. They had no life from then on—they were just discarded. And so, we took care of them-the families-and that was a real plus. Because those Cambodians, they really worked and supported the Americans one-hundred percent. I mean, it really was just outstanding, very much like the Montagnards [indigenous people from the central highlands of Vietnam]. You may have heard something regarding them. The allegiance was—and sadly, that part was not a hundred-percent great, or good, because their allegiance was very difficult to transfer to the Vietnamese, our counterparts, who we worked with, they would, in most cases only take orders from us, and that was really hard—

[tape cuts out at 1:03:09.09, and comes back in at 1:03:19.03]

Southworth: Okay, I think we were talking about the experience there at B-40, and we had, I had just arrived at the Mobile Strike Force camp, and it was all, a number of, the fact is that all the troops, almost entirely, were Cambodian, with the exception of the Vietnamese Special Forces counterparts that we worked with. My first day there, the commander, Major Bridgewater, he said, "I'm going to make you my S-2, intel officer." And, I, when I went back, accepted it, I guessed, "Well, I'll be responsible for camp security and so-on." [I] talked to the other man who would report in at the same time I did. And he outranked me by maybe six months or so—same rank, captain. And he was going to be the S-3, so I accepted that— not fully though. And so [laughs] I went back in, requested to see the commander, and, I told him basically that, uh, "I want to become your S-3. This is operations, that's where I belong." And I said, "I think if you offer the S-2 job to the other guy, he'll take it." And so, [he said], "Well, what makes you think that?" I said, "Well, I just [taps hand], you know, he's a good man, but I think, I think he'll take it." So, he did offer, and sure enough that afternoon he called me in, said "You're my S-3." And so, as the S-3 we were responsible for all the operations for that particular—the three battalions. And we would always have one battalion out all the time, basically, and two back, and with that sometimes you'd have one company from one of the other battalions in support of, or directly as a—because whenever we had two companies out, we had a reaction force on site, wherever we were—kind of like a reserve, in reserve.

Gould: Talk about, talk about your means of transportation at this time. How did you get around the country?

Southworth: Oh, pretty much entirely helicopter. Chinooks, that's the CH-47, and the Hueys, the HU-1s. Almost entirely. And they supported us very well. I mean, if you can imagine, if you get an air medal for every infiltration you have for twenty-five times, you get one air medal, and most of us went outta there with three. So, we had a lot of infiltrations, exfiltrations, and during that period we had a lot of them. And as the S-3, I'd be coordinating all the air operations to receive them whenever, be it night-op or day-op, whatever. Because we operated, you know, twenty-four hours a day, and our, we spent a good part of our time up in what's called the "Seven Mountains" area. And that's in Four Corps. Just, again, to the south of the Cambodian border. In fact, there's the city that I mentioned before, Chau Doc, this is only thirty kilometers to the—I'd believe, south, and then probably to the, I think it's to the west at that point. But it's near, you know, it's getting closer to the South China Sea, but the Seven Mountains area [is] named because there are seven mountains. One of the most common ones is called a "rock pile", which is—they—we actually the only airborne assault was actually at the base of that particular mountain by one of the Mobile Strike Force units, FB-

55, it was called. That was the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Mobile Strike Force, before each Corps area had mobile strike forces. And then they retook it, put an FOB—which is "forward operational base"—on top of that, and then over a period of a couple years, the Viet Cong had infiltrated in that mountain, and then actually isolated the FOB, and when I got there, the FOB was still in place, but it was only on top. And the Viet Cong operated around that mountain—not at will—but they operated a lot around it, and our job was to make sure that was cleared, and so we operated a lot on that particular area.

Gould: What type of, what type of combined armed support did you get, when you—during that period in Vietnam?

Southworth: We would have helicopter gunships, which were direct support—I mean, they were assigned when we had infiltrations and movement. We did have some use of APC's—"armored personnel carriers"—and that would usually be it; down in our area were Vietnamese units and we would use that sometimes, on some of the road areas and so where we could move in on the ground a lot faster, if we couldn't get air—helicopters. And one of those particular ones, we did have an operation going down into the Núi Gia mountains—N-Ú -I, and then G-I-A—the Núi Gia mountains, which is one of the Seven Mountains areas, or particular places, and our element which was two companies going out, they're mostly operating—they're all on ground basically. Our units had no vehicles other than what we could use for transport to an area. And that particular area they were ambushed, and I was the S-3, and we ended up getting some, some fast movers—sometimes it would be Navy. This particular time I think it was Air Force, and they provided support. We lost a specialist fourth class, Buker [??], on that particular operation. He was wounded several times, exposed himself; he actually won the Medal of Honor on that particular exercise—or, exercise—on that particular operation. And, but we did clear the area, and you know, recovered every—no one was, left behind—and it was a—overall it was a good operation, but it was very sad because we lost him—a young man, he was a demolition man, and [had] been trained, and had been on the team for a good, I would say three to four months, and had a lot, quite a bit of experience, uh, even as a specialist fourth class. And he, with the other NCOs—which, when we were running units like that, we had at least two Americans with each, with each company, and so, he was just like—might have been a master sergeant. I mean, he really did well.

Gould: How did the war change between your first tour and your second tour? Because, there was a—did I get it right? There's a two-year gap between your first and second time in?

Southworth: About a year-and-a-half.

Gould: Okay.

Southworth: But, the— most of the areas in the delta were even more secure. But, there were certain hot-spots. The Seven Mountains area was a hot-spot, then what's called "the Parrot's Beak", which is a marshy area, and then it went up, and it went down just like a parrot's beak—that was a hot spot, too. Other than that, there were—and troops would go out of those two areas. The Viet Cong would work out of those two areas to hit certain other spots just to kind of raise a little havoc once in a while. The Viet Cong, after the—Tet, they had lost most of their, most of their leaders, they had lost most of their troops, and they were almost like in disarray. They really didn't control South Vietnam at all. And that's when they started moving in—the North Vietnamese troops—came in, following that. We didn't deal directly with North Vietnamese troops at all, though.

Gould: On your second tour as the operations officer, what focused your mind the most? What kept you awake at night, as I asked you, in the earlier tour?

Southworth: Well, making sure that our troops were supplied, making sure that we had good air support, making sure we had transportation to where we were going, and, and that really kept me occupied almost entirely. We had an artillery battery right there at Chi Lăng, which is the base we operated on. That was our forward operating base, and we kept someone on element of the mobile strike force there, almost, a whole year, practically.

Gould: A battery of what?

Southworth: A battery of one-oh-five howitzers. And they were towed, so they could be, you know, have three hundred sixty degree swivel, they could hit any of the targets. We had—they had, what do you call, had fired them, so they had, they could fire almost any direction, and with just a little movement. These were Vietnamese units, too. They were not— there were no American units in our particular AO. We did go on a couple of combined unit exercise—not exer—again, operations, with the— it would have been, I believe, the 25<sup>th</sup> Division, out of Vinh Long, and they were combined, and I was one of the coordinators on those as the S-3. And, but they were very slow moving because they were using APCs, they were using a lot of aviation support, too. So, it was a slow-moving exer—you know, operation—and it seemed like, I don't know, I think they ran into one small contact during that whole two-day operation. There just was not much there. And intelligence had said there was going to be something there, and whether they were forewarned, who knows, 'cause the 44<sup>th</sup> tactical zone—which we found out after the war ended—had some leaders in there that were Viet Cong, in disguise. In fact, supposedly just put on their NVA [North Vietnamese Army] uniform after

the Americans had left, and which were double agents. And that's something you had to deal with. Most of the soldiers we dealt with were really, really good—the Vietnamese, and also the indigenous troops. 'Cause we had paid them. We paid all of our troops—the Cambodians, and Mobile Strike Force, and also the CIDG, which is called, the "Civilian Irregular Defense Group". Those were the ones we hired, and some of those were ARVN [Army of the Republic of Viet Nam, the South Vietnamese ground forces during the war] AWOLs [absent without leave], some of those were.

Gould: Okay, you finish your second tour in Vietnam, you're leaving the country, what are you thinking about when you're getting on it [Southworth exhales] — presumably you're getting on this, this airplane, with yourself, or you're coming back with members of your unit, and what are you thinking about when you're coming home?

Southworth: Well we went— we had to go from our—in fact, as I became a battalion commander for six months prior, prior to my leaving. So, the S-3 job was six months, and then I took over one of the battalions at Mộc Hóa, and that's M-O-C, and then H-O-A, and [I] took that battalion over, and going back to Chi Lăng, the Seven Mountains area, and operated in those villages there, and then that's where I actually, at, [I] was awarded bronze star for valor, there.

Gould: So, you're a battalion commander in charge of an ARVN, an "Army of Republican of Vietnam"—

Southworth: No.

Gould: —Or, an American 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne?

Southworth: No, Mobile Strike Force Unit.

Gould: An Army Mobile Strike Force Unit?

Southworth: Army, yes—Special Forces, Mobile Strike Force Unit—that's correct.

Gould: And how many men are in this, in this battalion?

Southworth: About, six-hundred and fifty, seven-hundred. About one-hundred and twenty for each company, and then we had a support element, too, with medics and so forth, too. And we would keep—two companies normally gone—and so, some of my men, who—I had twelve men on the team—I hardly met them. Because they would be gone, and then I would come back, then I would leave, because I had an XO, in fact, his name was Lieutenant Bierbohn [??], come from Hungary. And I only met him about three times. [I] probably spent less than ten days with him,

and [I] had to write an evaluation based on his actions, based on what I would read, what I would hear, what I would also talk to my superiors as far as what kind of a job this guy is doing. Because I was directly a rater for him, but most of the time he was in the operational areas—My XO—and when he was there, I was somewhere else. So, it was very difficult from that standpoint, but, I do remember the operation going into a little village—as we were coming in, everyone was leaving—you have the old story, everyone's leaving: "Oh there's got to be something wrong here," you know? And so, we dug in for the night, dug in for that evening, set our, set our patrols out, and listening posts, and sure enough, we got hit, probably not long after dark, and mortared. And, they started—and we had good, we had set up a good defense, and we had mortars too, sixties [as in 60 millimeter]. I think we even had an eighty-one [mm] we brought in, too. And, and then we called in air support, we had Navy. But the fast movers can only stay a few minutes, they aren't there very long. So, we did have—we finally ended up getting a Spooky [Douglas AC-47 Spooky, a gunship] —a smo—you know, and that really provided us pretty good support, excellent support. And, we ended up, we didn't lose anybody that night. We just had, we had good people who could mark the edges well, with strobe lights. And kept our good communications. It was just what do you call—a picture—almost, the way it's supposed to be run. And even though they, they breached a little small element, we had elements ready to go to that point, and could react to it, and people were familiar enough with the area so they could go, and move to it, and support—

Gould: And, uh, a Spooky, a Spooky is a four-engine gun ship?

Southworth: No. No, that's a two-engine C-47 and it's called a DC-3, but they actually, at that time, had Gatling guns on one side of the aircraft, and they could go in a circle, and actually just, you know, just pepper the ground, and they were quite, quite good. The pilots were excellent, and they would really do a good job in support. It was a big force. We ended up—we did a heck of a job that day, that night.

Gould: Is this where you win your Bronze Star?

Southworth: Yes. Yes, yes, yeah.

Gould: Okay, and what day is this? Do you remember the date?

Southworth: I think it was April. April of 1970. I'm pretty sure. I'm not sure the exact date. I have the, the award citation at home, but I don't remember it. It took, you know, it was awhile later before I received it, and I put my NCOs in for different awards, too. And they all received their awards. It was quite an operation. We were, you know, like I said, almost continuously out, but the time when you went into contact was not every day. Not every day, and maybe small elements, and you'd

reinforce and they would be gone, or otherwise it would turn dark, and then they were gone. [inaudible] pretty much dominated the areas, small obstacle, whether it be a village or whatever, and we would have to go through. And we didn't have—I would say, again, very professional—our troops, our American troops, and also the Cambodians, which we'd have to watch, 'cause they, they didn't have a lot of mercy. If they were allowed to do things, they were very, able to do some of those things. We were very careful, and they were, they knew that we were in command and we didn't allow any atrocities that I'm aware of and my troops were aware of. We were, I considered, very, very ethical, and very, you know, by the Geneva Convention, we ran things quite well. If we had prisoners, we would take them and go by air, escort them, make sure we sent them back to Cần Thơ for questioning, and that's the way it was run. Now back to the other question, as far as leaving then, after the six months at Mộc Hóa, come back to Cần Thơ , and then back to Nha Trang, and I remember the night before we left—

Gould: What's your rank at this point?

Southworth: Captain.

Gould: As a battalion commander, you're a captain?

Southworth: Yes, yes. Mhm. Yes, that I felt honored to be able to do that, and it was probably one of the highlights of my career, to handle that many men. It was just— I felt very, very fulfilled, and felt that it was a challenging job, but I felt that I was up to it and did, did a good job. I just felt good about it, and my commander was very complementary, and a good man who supported his troops, all of them. A couple of sad things: the Cambodians—this is during the Cambodian—starting to, they were having problems in Cambodia. When we left, all of these troops—almost entirely—were recruited to go back to Cambodia, and integrated into the Cambodian Army. And that's prior to the invasion into Cambodia by the Vietnamese—the North Vietnamese, and also the, what do we call, what do they call, the KKK? Anyway, the Cambodian uprising at that time, and most of these troops were killed. And that was just a real, real, sad, sad thing. You know, to follow the papers and follow the news and what was going on there, and there wasn't a thing we could do, and I was already back in the States by this time. Got to Nha Trang, and I met one of the young men that I'd gone over with. And we decided to go to the club there, had a couple of beers, we're walking back to the barracks—this was the night before we left—and all of a sudden, machine gun fire went off. We hit the dirt, listened, looked around and I think it's a TV. It was! The movie was a gun—some type of a war movie being shown on TV, and it just—we laughed about it afterwards, but it wasn't funny at the time, because we had already turned in our rifles! We didn't have anything [laughs]! There was,

what you call, ready action drills, and things that we knew where we could go to get weapons and stuff, because immediately, if Nha Trang, if 5<sup>th</sup> Headquarters was attacked, there was a lot of, there were things set up as far as what we would do. But from there, then, the next day we flew out. So, it was exactly like you said—three-hundred-and-sixty-five days to the day that we left Vietnam the second time.

Gould: So you come back to where, and how long are you going to be there?

Southworth: [Sighs] came back to—went back to the Infantry Advance School, which was a year-long course. Actually, it was nine months, but it was a year assignment—PCS, "Permanent Change of Station", and during that year, then you'd usually have—they'd call it "snow bird", and—before and after assignment.

Gould: Is this at Fort Benning, or—?

Southworth: Fort Benning, yes, yes, Fort Benning—

Gould: —in Georgia.

Southworth: Fort Benning, Georgia. And I worked first for the research and development unit there, what, what was it called— "Test, Research and Development"—for about two months, basically doing paperwork, filling out reports, and you know, checking things out, doing things like this. A lot of menial things, but also useful tasks. Then, sometimes, and of course the, the nine-month course, and then following that sometimes you'd have an assignment, but I didn't. So the course was nine months, kind of meant to also be a little—relaxing period with the family. It was a good, good time, we spent a lot of time with the family. We had a few night operations, but—night exercises and stuff, but not much. Unit, tactics, staff operations, actually about, probably, a couple hundred people, maybe a hundred and fifty to two-hundred people—soldiers, captains, and majors attending the course, then following it there was a nuclear portion that probably thirty to forty of us attended and that was an additional, I think, three weeks. And, I also was able to get some college courses in during that time, and so [I] made full use of it—the Columbus University there—they would come on, on post [and] in some cases, would teach different classes, or you could take it at the University, which is only about six miles to the north, so it wasn't far. We made little side trips, we went boating, we went to different things as a family, so it was a very good, a good time or period as far as with fellow soldiers, fellow captains, majors, and [I] also met a Greek soldier who I had sponsored while I was there. It was kind of neat—they asked for volunteers, and so I volunteered to sponsor a Greek soldier, and he was in our class the whole time, brought him to Wisconsin, and the fact is he, he thoroughly enjoyed Christmas and New Year's in our, my—

our folks' place. And, we often—the fact is, ice fishing was totally new to him. [We] walked out on the ice and he said, "I feel like Jesus! I'm walking on water!" [laughs] It was—it was really something! And we've kept up the friendship, and actually in 2005, we visited him, and we visited him on a—he had an island home in Thassos, lived in Thessaloni—he lives in Thessaloni—Thessalonica, and [we] met his wife, who he had met, or who he'd actually married after he left the course in 1971, and just—[we] met his two children, and I didn't realize it, but he had become a two-star general, and so, that was really kind of an eye-opener for me too, to see him. I retired as a major, in 1976.

Gould: Okay, that leads me to: "How does this story end?" [Southworth laughs] Your last tour is at Fort Benning, or where do you go from there?

Southworth: Oh no, no. I went to Alaska.

Gould: Okay.

Southworth: Remember, way back I mentioned that I took a provisional company to Alaska?

Gould: Sure.

Southworth: Fell in love with the country—with the area, and with the, the facility, which was a Northern Warfare Training Center. So, I applied for that, that particular assignment, because they had—the assignment had about six captains: you had an S-3, and we had—the rest were instructors and a senior instructor at the Northern Warfare Training Center: one artillery, one armor, one ordinance, and one infantry, and maybe one, maybe one artillery too, but basically all the different arms branches, and we taught at the Northern Warfare Training Center, and worked with the, the Army test center there—the Arctic Test Center at Fort Greely, Alaska. [I] spent three years there, and just had a wonderful time with the family there. We were out on operations a lot. A lot of operations—our team actually climbed Mt. McKinley. I wasn't on that particular team, class, I was what do you call—the backup. But, part of that was because my wife had some health issues, and so she was in the hospital, just prior to the climb taking place, and so I wasn't allowed to go. I had also climbed Mt. Sanford, and several of the other mountains there, and just loved it up there. Did some fishing a little off-and-on. Finally, I got one—actually, one—leave while I was up there during the three years. And I did some salmon fishing, but we were close to the, you know, the Brooks Range, which [was] only just a few miles to the south of us, and we had our own training site there, and so I—the first year, I was just one of the instructors, and then, was the senior instructor for the last year. And I met a lot of friends there, too. And I still contact a number of them. And that assignment—then I still had two years left, then I went to Fort Devens, Massachusetts. And

went back to Special Forces, 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces; we're now located—they had one company in Germany, and then the other company—or, actually, one battalion in Germany, and the other two battalions at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Right after I left, they actually, they went to Fort Carson, Colorado. But I, I became the, the assistant S-3 there. So, I have a lot of S-3 years of experience. I enjoyed the operations very, very much. [I] became a ski instructor there too—at Fort Devens. We went to Fort Drum [NY]—set up the training there, to train the whole, the whole unit there at Fort Drum. They had to go there—because they didn't have enough snow in Massachusetts and New Hampshire that particular year, so we went there for training. It was a good experience for many, many things. We worked a lot with it—again, when we went out on operations in Maine, and in New Hampshire, we would have volunteer civilians who would operate with us, as guerrillas, and use unconventional warfare tactics and things, you know, we wouldn't actually blow, —in our demolitions, we wouldn't interdict the actual targets—but we would set the fake explosives on site, or for example, the electric lines—[we] set them, and then they would have—we would report by, by radio, where these were set. And we had a Target Assessment Analysis group who would go out, check it. If they were set correctly, if they were all—if everything was set correctly, they'd get credit for it, and then of course they would be graded on that basically, too.

Gould: So, your final duty station is—

Southworth: Fort Devens, Fort Devens, Massachusetts—

Gould: Massa—and that's where you take your retirement—

Southworth: Yes.

Gould: Okay, talk about, just an overall view as you're looking back, as you're walking through your retirement parade [Southworth laughs] and everyone is shaking your hand—

Southworth: [claps hands once]

Gould: —What are you thinking about when that's happening?

Southworth: [Sighs] Well, it was a—what do you call it—it was a, it was a good experience, and yet it was bittersweet, too, in the sense that, being a reserve officer, I wasn't allowed to stay on after twenty. I was—twenty years, one month and ten days, but that was allowed—once I got beyond the eighteen years, then I was locked in. And, we went through several reductions in forces, and the last one was at Alaska,

where I become the only captain left, in Fort Greely, Alaska. All the rest of them were reduced, they were—got their pink slips. And so, that was—it felt good, and yet sad at the same time that some people weren't—well, if they had enlisted time, they could revert back to enlisted status. If not, they were out of the military, period. They weren't allowed to come—stay in. And it was a reduction in force, over the years that different things took place. At my retirement the—it was a small ceremony on the parade grounds. They did it once a month. My kids were still in school, had a fourth-grader, I had a kindergarten, and a fifth and a sixth-grader in Ayer, Massachusetts school. One of—the kindergarten was there at Fort Devens. And, they asked me then—a week before I got out, they said, "We found a way that you can stay in." And I said, "I'm sorry, but if I had known six months ahead, you know—before this—it would have been fine, but now I'm already enrolled at Stevens Point University and I'm going to become a teacher. "Oh, okay," they said, "fine." So that's what I did, after I got out and came back here—went back to school for almost three years, and then I started teaching school at Stratford, and taught sixth grade there for twenty years and retired in 1999 from teaching.

Gould: Did you join any veterans' organizations?

Southworth: Yes, I'm a very strong supporter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. That's the organization in our particular community that is active. There was an American Legion there, for many, many years, and apparently after World War Two, they weren't real—this particular group wasn't real receptive to some of the World War Two veterans, if you can believe that! But, what—whatever took place, they formed the VFW, and that's the organization that survived. The American Legion actually closed down about 1999. It was only down to about four members, and, and they were quite old—elderly—and not able to keep [inaudible]. Our surrounding area has both—the American Legion is very strong in some of the areas. In Wisconsin it's actually very strong, but we have basically the same mission. Our membership requirements are different, so we actually had to have served in an area of operation that had a conflict, we couldn't just serve during that conflict, so it's quite—

[tape cuts out at 01:34:47.05, resumes at 01:35:02.08]

Gould: This concludes our interview session. Thank you, Major Southworth, and I'll just turn it over to you for any final thoughts on your military—or your Army experience with Special Forces, or with your life up to this point.

Southworth: Thank you, Pat. [claps hands once] I would just indicate that this was a life-changing experience over the whole the years that still means a lot to me. I feel there

was a building of character, it was a very important experience. Had I to do it over again, I think I wouldn't do anything differently. I have no regrets, following the military I went to school there, for almost three years, and taught school at Stratford Public School, again—sixth grade. Those kids were just outstanding, we have bright students today, we have fine families. I'm not going to say that every day was perfect—it wasn't. But, overall, the families were supportive, and I think we just graduate great kids today in our public schools and also parochial schools. Our kids went to parochial school up through eighth grade at St. Joe's, and after retirement, I substituted at the high school, the elementary school. I also discovered that high school was a lot easier to teach than elementary school, because you didn't have as many preps. And since I knew the same kids, I called them by name so they knew they couldn't get away with things, so it was a very good experience in subbing. I later, I subbed also St. Joe's, and that would have been the hardest experiences, probably—subbing for two weeks, long-term sub at first grade. My goodness, these kids are very, very demanding. I have the utmost respect for all first-grade teachers, and smaller— and younger. But, overall, very good—I went back after, that's six years—no, three years—and I actually became a member of the school board for six years, too. And that was quite a good experience, so—I only retired from teaching because I needed to know my family, my grandkids—'cause they were spread out, in—out of the four families, three of them were military, one reserve Air Force—he served twelve years, active—and then served the rest in reserve, called up to operation Desert Storm, and also Iraqi Freedom. My son went back to—he went into Special Forces. He has twenty-four years in, and he's gone to Afghanistan three times, and is a master sergeant on the sergeant majors list. One of my daughters went to West Point, so she met her husband there. After five years, he gave her a choice of either staying in and he'd get out, take care of the kids, or she could get out and she decided for her to get out. He's still in, and twenty-five years in, and he just made brigadier [general] here, a year ago. So, he's doing—they're—doing very well. And we enjoy visiting all of the grandkids—we have eleven grandkids—one grandson, out of eleven. And, they all seem to be doing very well. We're very proud of all of them, our families. We now have the time, and so far, the health to go visit them and spend time with them and just enjoy their growing up. And we think the military experience was a good experience for us. It isn't for everybody, but through the good and the bad you stick it out and you make a good—the old story of making a lemonade out of a sour thing—so, we just do the best we can and continue on and support the VFW at this point, and support our families and our community. We're very involved with our community.

Gould: Thank you, Major Southworth.

Southworth: [Laughs] Thank you.

**[END OF INTERVIEW]**