

the brigade commander's helicopter, and we were directing operations on the ground much like the Vietnam model. For me, that was my first experience in an airborne command and control helicopter. Now we were using helicopters that cut distances to deliver troops to battle, to leap over obstacles, and for command and control.

Q: Who was the XVIII Airborne Corps engineer then, do you remember?

A: I don't remember who it was when we were in the Dominican Republic my first year. During my second year, Lieutenant Colonel Jack Cox came in. He was relatively junior; before that it had primarily been colonels. I believe Jack Cox came in as the Corps engineer, not the deputy. Then later, about three months before I left the battalion, Jack Waggener left as the battalion commander to become the division G-3 and Jack Cox came down and replaced him as the 307th Engineer Battalion commander.

Command and General Staff College

Q: In 1967, then, at about the right time, I guess, you went to the Command and General Staff College at Leavenworth. Was that when the bulk of your classmates and peers were headed off for Leavenworth?

A: I think so. It was certainly the right time for me because I'd just come out of this tremendous two years with the 82d, where I had both a division perspective, which is the basic thing they taught at Leavenworth, and became well-grounded with troops. So, I went to Leavenworth fresh with understanding of how S-1s and G-1s and S-3s and G-3s and S-4s and G-4s operated. When it came time to role play in each of these tasks, developing orders for divisions in the attack or for divisions in the defense, then I'd had that experience in the 82d. For example, I was part of the division staff on a Strike Command command post exercise as part of a deployed Corps in the Dominican Republic. I had worked with the staff of the division working under the XVIII Airborne Corps and had been a battalion exec seeing how we played engineers in support of theater operations.

So, I was well-grounded by now, having been on the battalion staff, close to the operating battalions and brigades, well-grounded in how U.S. Army troops, doctrine, force structure, and procedures all went together at the division level. So, when I went to Leavenworth, I was in a good position to study and learn what I'd been doing the previous two years.

Q: Did you find it as satisfying as you'd found the advanced course?

A: I found Leavenworth a lot more satisfying. I mean, it was satisfying from all aspects. I thought it was a super course, interesting because they had a lot of variety of things to look at. It had its slower moments when we got into the department of larger unit operations. Some of the instructors weren't the very best, but all in all a very good professional course. Now there were friends from previous assignments, and I got to know a lot more. I had

friends there from the staff of the 82d, fellow majors in the 82d, plus just a whole bunch of others. This was the first year of the doubling of the course from 600 to 1,200. This meant we didn't get housing on the post and lived nearby in the town of Leavenworth. We experienced again the bonding of people going through the same experience, and it was a super course. There was a lot of interaction and a lot of socializing off post because we had so many friends around. It was very professionally done.

Q: Was a lot of material feeding back from Vietnam into the course at this time, a lot of integration of that experience? This was two years, roughly, after the introduction of a lot of the Army forces.

A: Yes.

Q: So, this is looking a little bit ahead, but do you think—you've been in Vietnam, but do you think Leavenworth funneled some of the more current lessons back to you in an effective way for what would come later when you were reassigned?

A: Well, yes. They were still teaching the basic Leavenworth things. We were moving armored divisions across Kansas and doing similar things. They did not depart from the overall general nature of the course. By the same token, they focused certain things on Vietnam, and with more people having been there by then, that was a continual topic of conversation. We always kept up with the papers, and a lot of the speakers that came back would talk current items from Vietnam. They had a very active speakers program. So, we were all very much in tune with Vietnam and what was happening there.

Q: Yes. There were more of your fellows who'd been there by the time you got to Leavenworth.

A: I would say almost everybody had been there once and we were all contemplating our next tour.

Q: Well, why was it doubled from 600 to 1,200?

A: We were increasing the size of the Army, and the thought was that more folks needed that educational experience. Now, before that there had been two courses. There had been a long course, full-year course, and there'd been two half-year courses. So, there existed a distinguishing feature: who were the folks that got selected for the long one and who were the ones that got selected for the two five-month courses? So, the thought was that we really ought to have a single long course. So, to do that, the right size was determined to be about 1,200. Then they did away with the short courses.

Q: Okay. Well, the next assignment was in Vietnam.

A: We ought to talk about how I got assigned to Vietnam because there is an anecdote having to do with that.

First of all, I volunteered to go to Vietnam. I wanted to make sure this time that I went back to Vietnam because, obviously, that's where the action was and you've got to march to the

sound of guns. I still remember a friend coming up and saying, “I wonder why I’m going to Korea when I’ve been to Korea and never Vietnam, and you’re going back to Vietnam and you’ve already been there.” I said, “It’s very simple. I wanted to make sure I went to Vietnam so I sent in a volunteer statement. That’s why.”

The day came when the Officer Personnel Directorate was to send their assignment officers out to deliver the assignment envelopes and be available to answer questions. I was a major at that time, on the lieutenant colonels list. Major Ernie Edgar was the assignment guy that flew out with all of the engineer assignment envelopes. I had met him but didn’t know him too well at that time. Anyway, he said, “Well, here’s the good news, but there’s something else.” The good news was that I was being assigned to Vietnam and recommended for command of the 577th Engineer Battalion. So, I mean, that was really neat because I was going back and I was going to get a command.

Then I said, “Well, what’s the something else?” He said, “You’ll receive a letter this afternoon from the Chief of Staff of the Army that nominates you to be one of the first in the Province Senior Advisers Program.” General Harold K. Johnson had been out and talked to us about six weeks before and introduced this new program where they were going to take people who had been to Vietnam before, who had experience as advisers, bring them back and put them in the key job of province senior adviser. They would stay there for two years so we’d have continuity in the program. To sweeten the pot, the wives were going to be given orders to the Philippines. You were going to be able to get flights back and forth and certain extra leave and that sort of thing.

I thought at the time that General Johnson was explaining the program that because I was a major and they were looking for lieutenant colonels I would not be involved. “Wow, that’s really an important job,” I thought. Because of my experience in Vietnam operations, I really thought that this was a very important job and program and we were on the right path. I also thought, “Boy, that’d really be a tough decision.” So, anyway, my letter arrived that afternoon. Now I had two nice jobs: province senior adviser and battalion commander. Everybody at happy hour was in the dialogue of, “What are you doing? What have you got? Where are you going?” The comments to me were, “Wow, you have a tough decision. You cannot turn down province senior adviser since you have been personally selected. You cannot turn down the Chief of Staff of the Army.” Then they also said, “Wow, command, battalion command, that’s really super” because I was one of the first of my year group to be selected for command. I had about two or three weeks to answer with my acceptance of the province senior adviser job. Battalion command was there but, I mean, obviously what the Officer Personnel Directorate wanted to know was whether I was going to take this other job. So, I really warred with myself, thought it over with a lot of deep thought and a lot of advice from a lot of people, and it sort of came down to 50–50 on either side of the question.

Some said, “Well, you know, your career is over if you turn down province senior adviser because the black mark will be in your file forever.” So, I warred with myself and grappled with the decision. I called Major General Bill Gribble, who had been one of my mentors, one night at home and asked, “What do you think?” and he gave me his views.

I finally came down to the fact that I'd always been taught that what you ought to do is command in combat. So, here I'd been selected for battalion command in combat and what am I turning down? If I tell the Chief of Staff I'd rather do that than be a province senior adviser, with all my training—I mean, what's negative about that? Being province senior adviser was awfully important, but so was commanding in combat.

So, I came down to a decision that what I really wanted to do, had always wanted to do, was go command a battalion in combat. I'd already been an adviser. That was okay too. What did I really want to do? So, I wrote a letter to the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Johnson, that I couldn't accept the nomination because I really wanted to go command in combat. I got a nice letter back from the Adjutant General of the United States saying the Chief of Staff understood. So, I went off to Vietnam.

I left Leavenworth a week early so I could go take command because it was becoming available early. Took my family to Green Cove Springs, Florida, south of Jacksonville. A waiting-wives community had been forming in an old Air Force installation there. I missed the graduation ceremony where I would have had the opportunity to be in the picture with such stalwart folks as Gerry Galloway, Colin Powell, and Don Whalen, who were there also at that time. My experience I mentioned while with the 82d had managed somehow to get me past all the exams so that I finished in the top five of the class with those other illustrious folks. So, in the graduation picture of the class of 1968 were four people, and I was on the way to Vietnam.

Q: That's a good story.

Commander, 577th Engineer Battalion (Construction)

Q: In July 1968, I believe it was, you became battalion commander of the 577th Engineer Battalion (Construction) your second tour in Vietnam. Were you familiar with that unit before you went over? Did you have any input into that command assignment?

A: No. As I mentioned, Major Ernie Edgar told me that I was going to command and told me that was the battalion I was slated for. He also advised that many times when people came into the country their assignments were changed, but that I was certainly going over on the command recommended list.

So, I moved my family to Green Cove Springs, Florida, and then reported back into the system. I flew out to Travis Air Force Base, then on to Vietnam and into the replacement depot at Long Binh upon arrival.

I spent a couple of days there, and then I was told I was going to the 20th Engineer Brigade. I tried to intercede and say, "No, I am supposed to go to the 18th Engineer Brigade and battalion command." They said, "No, the 20th it is."