

Transcript of Robert Hall Interview
Salt Lake City, Utah



Interviewer

Give us your full name.

Robert Hall

Robert B. Hall.

Interviewer

And you're originally from where?

Robert Hall

Indiana, a little town called Rushville, Indiana, just 40 miles southeast of Indianapolis.

Interviewer

And your rank when you left the war?

Robert Hall

Lieutenant colonel. No, I'm sorry, I left as a major and I made lieutenant colonel when I was at BYU in the ROTC Department.

Interviewer

And when did you get into the military?

Robert Hall

I was drafted in '54, 1954, yeah.

Interviewer

And you became an officer right away?

Robert Hall

No, I was enlisted for about five years and I was getting ready to get out of the service and the battalion commander said what would it take to keep you in the military? And I told him a commission. He said apply for it, and 60 days later he came down and pinned my gold bars on me.

Interviewer

And what year was that?

Robert Hall

Oh, I don't remember.

Interviewer

Prior to Vietnam?

Robert Hall

It was prior to Vietnam, yeah.

Interviewer

When did you first hear about Vietnam when you were in the Army?

Robert Hall

Well, I spent a tour in Germany for a few years and I was back in the States and finished the advanced course at Fort Bliss, Texas, and then went to the commander and Staff College, and shortly after that I was in the Washington, D.C. area, was the S-3 of a Nike missile battalion. And I was visiting one of the batteries one time, came back and stopped at Washington at the Pentagon, went up to my air defense artillery branch and said, "What have you got in store for me?"

And he opened a little book and he says, "Hmm, you're going to Vietnam again." And that's where it started and then of course I had to go to some schooling to learn the Vietnamese language and I had to go to several courses on learning about the Vietnamese people and how they operated and so forth. I already knew something because it was my second tour and I knew something about the Vietnamese.

Interviewer

Tell us about your first tour. When did you get there?

Robert Hall

My first tour was with the Americal Division.

Interviewer

Tell us what the Americal Division is and what year was this?

Robert Hall

I don't remember. My memory is...

Interviewer

'66 or '67?

Robert Hall

Something like that. And I went to the civil affairs school at Fort Gordon, Georgia and then went to Vietnam and was assigned to be the assistant G-5 of the Americal Division.

Interviewer

Tell us what that is.

Robert Hall

The Americal Division was a unit that had another number, but I don't remember what it was, but it was a unit that was formed in World War II and they stuck the Americal Division name on it just shortly after I joined it. And I was there for a year as the assistant G-5, which is civilian personnel, and my main job was to keep track of where the civilians were so that the military didn't overrun 'em and do that sort of thing to 'em.

Interviewer

So you're there about '67, '68. What was it like? What was the fighting like at that time? What did you see?

Robert Hall

Well, I didn't see a lot of fighting because I was on the general staff. We were attacked one time and nobody was really hurt; there were a few minor wounds, we were attacked by the Viet Cong.

I spent a lot of time traveling around to the districts – that's where I learned about the districts because I was the assistant G-5 and I was trying to keep the civilians out of the way of the combat, as I said, and I knew several of the district senior advisors in the area and I spent a lot of time out there with them. And we were out there one time and the unit had been attacked and there was this Viet Cong hanging in the fence and I went over and picked up his hair and looked at his face and it was the barber that we were using on the post.

Interviewer

Tell us more about the Americal Division.

Robert Hall

Yeah, it was a unit that was formed from several different battalions and regiments and then they decided to call it the Americal Division was it was a unit that was formed during World War II and they just gave it the name and that's what we did. And like I say, I was the assistant G-5, and I worked at the headquarters there, and I was more or less responsible trying to keep track of where the civilians were so they wouldn't get caught in the combat operations.

Interviewer

It's a new kind of war for the United States, wasn't it?

Robert Hall

Oh, yes it was. You couldn't tell who the bad guys were because they didn't wear uniforms. So you could be standing next to one of 'em and you wouldn't know he was a bad guy.

Interviewer

And how did you do your job with all of that?

Robert Hall

Very carefully. Like I started to tell you, after the district advisory team had been attacked, and I picked up the head of this Viet Cong and he was our barber on the post and he had cut my hair just the day before. And I picked up his head and I said, "General." And he said, "You go in and you find us an American barber and do it today." So I called around and I finally found an American barber, a kid that was a machine gunner, I believe, and I said, "We want him transferred to division headquarters." So he was a barber from then on. Somebody that we could trust.

Interviewer

The whole idea of trying to identify friend from foe...

Robert Hall

It was difficult. Usually the only way you could tell is if they had guns, they were bad guys. If they had weapons, they were bad guys. And if they weren't, then they were more dressed like farmers and things like that. We just watched 'em, but we watched out of both sides of our eyes to make sure they were good guys.

Interviewer

What kind of intelligence were you relying on? How would you discern this?

Robert Hall

Well, we got all kinds of information from other headquarters and we couldn't identify faces, but we could say, okay, there's a Viet Cong unit at a certain place and we'd look them up on the map and that sort of thing.

Interviewer

There's also new technology coming out at that time and you're in an important position. So what are you thinking about this?

Robert Hall

Well, when I got to Vietnam my first inclination was that I'm going to take care of me and my people. None of my people are gonna get killed or hurt and I'm not gonna get killed or hurt, and I was successful. And we did the job the best we could do it and the commanders were apparently happy with it.

Interviewer

How long were you there the first time?

Robert Hall

A year.

Interviewer

And you went home, you went back two years later?

Robert Hall

Let's see, I went back over there in '70, '71? It's on that film the year I was there. And then I was the district senior advisor. But this is after I went to that 18-week course at the State Department in Washington.

Interviewer

And your job was to do what when you came back?

Robert Hall

As district senior advisor? I provided support and all kinds of anything that I could for the district chief and his army: aircraft support, helicopter support, ammunition when they needed it, intelligence when he needed it, fire support when he needed it. We used the Battleship Missouri several times to attack Viet Cong targets in our area. And I just did everything the colonel asked me to do. Do this, do this, and do this, and I got the information for him. And also I provided intelligence that I got through our lines so he could do what we needed to do.

Interviewer

This indigenous fighting force that you're supporting, how effective was it?

Robert Hall

You mean the friendly forces? They were very effective. Colonel Nhiem was a great leader, and we had three platoons right there in the compound, and they'd go out every night and set up ambushes and if they caught a Viet Cong, they usually didn't capture people, they just killed 'em. And almost every night they'd

get somebody. But he had these teams out all the time to make sure that nobody infiltrated the district again.

When I got there the district had very few Viet Cong in it because they had just been chased out, and as a matter of fact, some of those Viet Cong, instead of, "We want you to go back to Trieu Phong." "No, no, I'm not going back there." Because Colonel Nhiem took pretty good care of the forces and like I say, we had three platoons and we'd go on operations for two or three days and I always noticed that Sergeant Shon's platoon was always around me. And one day I said, "How come Sergeant Shon and his platoon are always around me?" He said, "They're here to see that nothing happens to you. Because if I lose an advisor..." And said, "I appreciate that, Colonel Nhiem."

Interviewer

So what did you think of the Vietnamese people? What did you think of our cause over there?

Robert Hall

I thought it was a good cause, but I also didn't think we could win because of the way we were doing it.

Interviewer

Tell us why, what were we doing wrong?

Robert Hall

Well I can't say what we were doing wrong. The biggest problem was you couldn't tell the good guys from the bad guys, because one guy could be standing there and he'd be a bad guy and right next to him was a good guy and you didn't know the difference unless he had a gun and tried to shoot or something. And there was a lot of that.

Interviewer

The cause was just. Explain what the cause was in Vietnam?

Robert Hall

The cause was to free South Vietnam from Communist control. That's what they were trying to do and of course it didn't work. The Communists wound up winning.

Interviewer

Did you make suggestions? Would you alter things in the field? What would you do?

Robert Hall

Colonel Nhiem would ask advice and I would give him the advice that I had picked up in the commander general staff college or in my basic courses and

things like that. And he would usually follow my advice but sometimes he made his own rules and the Vietnamese spoke a different language. And when we were talking if he wanted them to hear what we were saying we'd talk in Vietnamese. If he didn't, we'd talk in English.

Interviewer

And what were some of the things that you would suggest to him to do?

Robert Hall

Well, let's see... keep the highways clear, keep the villages clear so that the people who lived there can plant their crops and raise their animals and have a decent life and make some money so they can survive. And that was my primary course. His troops were to keep the Viet Cong out of the district, and it worked pretty good. I think when we got there, there were 17 A units in the area. It's in the paperwork there, and 75 A and B. No C or D. And when I left it was like almost triple the number of good things and the B section was down to like 30 or something like that. It's in all of that paperwork.

Interviewer

But we need your story as you tell it. You still thought it couldn't be won?

Robert Hall

No, I didn't, because one of the things that bothered me was anytime we wanted to do something major, like I wanted to call in a bombing raid or something like that, it had to go all the way back to Washington and be approved by President Johnson. One time we caught an NVA brigade in a valley in western Vietnam and it was a Viet Cong brigade and I called the B-52s and they came four days later. Of course they were gone, the Viet Cong were gone. It just took a long time to get this thing going, and that's what bothered me more than anything.

Interviewer

Tell us about some of your other experiences there. You have a great deal of access to information that the common soldier didn't have.

Robert Hall

Well some of those things I can't talk about, of course. I just tried to use my advisory team to do the things that we could do. I had a medic in my advisory team and he would go with us and if anybody got hurt he'd take care of 'em and that sort of thing. And I would provide Colonel Nhiem with information and he'd go out and do what I asked him to do or suggest that he do.

I didn't tell him to do anything. I just suggested certain things and he went out and did these things, and I think they came out of it better at the end of the conflict, but they still lost. I mean when I left, the district was in pretty good shape, but like six or seven months later the Viet Cong just came through, the Americans pulled out, and Viet Cong took over.

Interviewer

Did they have reprisals? Do you know what happened after you left?

Robert Hall

Other than my occasional letters with Colonel Nhiem. And the last time I heard from him, his family had all moved to Saigon and he and the troops were headed south ahead of the advancing North Vietnamese Army. And that's the last I heard from him, they were headed south.

Interviewer

Were you aware of the protests back home? Were you aware of the news?

Robert Hall

Yes, I was.

Interviewer

How did that make you feel? What did you think?

Robert Hall

I felt really bad about it. For example, when I came home from the first time, I came home in uniform and somebody at the airport up in Seattle walked up and called me a baby killer and tried to grab the stuff off of my uniform but a policeman grabbed him and hauled him off before he could do anything to me.

Interviewer

Is that shocking?

Robert Hall

Yeah, it bothered me. What happened to America and why aren't we supporting these people? I didn't object to being over there, but I wanted to be protected too. And I was pretty much protected by Colonel Nhiem and his forces and the use of American forces. There was an Army combat unit nearby and they flew helicopters for us, they provided tanks for us in some of our operations, and the Battleship Missouri fired several rounds for us into places.

And I'd always tell Colonel Nhiem exactly where the round was gonna land and if it was a populated place he had a choice to say, "I don't want to do it." But in most of the cases he said, "Go ahead," because he knew that's where the Viet Cong were. And those shells from that Battleship Missouri weighed about 3500 pounds apiece, they were huge. And we could stand and watch them go through the air and Colonel Nhiem couldn't believe that, a shell that big.

Interviewer

Do you know his feelings about the war? Did he ever talk to you about that?

Robert Hall

No, he didn't. All he thought about was protecting his family and the people in his district. He never said, "We're not gonna win this war," or "we're gonna lose this war." He never said that. He was an amazing individual in my mind. A lot of stuff's in this written stuff that I did there. He'd do anything that I asked him to do normally and provide us with certain support and so forth. And on the other hand, if he needed a helicopter I could call up and the helicopter could be there like that. If he needed artillery support, he got that. And he more or less ran the war, and I just helped him.

Interviewer

So your feelings about the protesters back home at that time, it must have been a topic of conversation amongst the other officers?

Robert Hall

I thought they were out of their minds. I mean, I couldn't believe they were acting that way. They didn't act that way in World War II, they didn't act that way in Korea, so what's the difference?

Interviewer

It was a different war, don't you agree? And it was the first televised war. Did you have the media following you around?

Robert Hall

Everywhere we went, almost everywhere we went. Almost everywhere we went, we had some media people there. And when Colonel Nhiem didn't want 'em there, I'd tell 'em, "You have to leave." He'd show me his ID and everything and I said, "I don't run this place, Colonel Nhiem does." And one guy got really smart with him and Colonel Nhiem snapped his fingers and this guy had an M-16 pointed at his head and he got in his jeep and left.

Interviewer

So what did you think of all that press there? Do you think it helped, do you think it hurt?

Robert Hall

I think it hurt, because you never knew what they were gonna say. For example, one time we were out – this was in my first tour over there – I was out in a unit and we did some things and a few months later a reporter came to division headquarters and was talking to the commanding general and he said, "Major Hall said this, and Major Hall said that."

So the division commander called me over and said, "This guy said this." And I said, "Can I call my two lieutenants over here?" So they came over there and this guy would say something and those lieutenants would go, "Major Hall didn't say that." And he'd say something else. "Major Hall didn't say that." So that's

why I always took those lieutenants with me because I didn't like the press and I didn't want 'em there, but they were there and I couldn't get rid of 'em. Colonel Nhiem could get rid of 'em.

Interviewer

And you didn't like the press because you felt like they were in favor of ending the war?

Robert Hall

I felt like they were in our way, keeping us from doing what we needed and wanted to do. They were there. And when I came home the second time there wasn't nearly as much problems when I came through the airport. Nobody accosted me or anything like that, but the first time this one guy came up and said, "You're a baby killer," and on, and on, and on. So they hauled him off, and that was it.

Interviewer

What did you think of our GI's over there, what did you think of them and what they had to do?

Robert Hall

Well, the only ones I was really involved with was my team because I didn't do a lot with the other troops. They would do combat stuff for us but that was more or less for Colonel Nhiem. Colonel Nhiem would say, "Okay, I want them to do this," and I'd tell 'em, "Colonel Nhiem wants this bridge taken out. Colonel Nhiem wants this so-and-so," and they would do it. But I didn't have a lot of contact with them. The ones I did have contact with were the ones that were in my team and they were great. They were great; always there for me when I needed 'em and do whatever I told 'em without question.

Interviewer

Do you remember the last time you saw Vietnam when you came home? Do you remember that?

Robert Hall

Yes, I do. I got my orders to leave the country and I was the last district senior advisor in that district, they decided that the district was so well protected now and so well run, that they didn't need an advisor team any more. So I left and came back a few days later, and Colonel Nhiem invited us out and they had a big party for us and he gave me a pistol as a gift for my service with them and everything. And so the next night I invited him into the officer's club for dinner and we had dinner. And he came back out of the club and started getting in his jeep and he turned around and he did something I never saw a Vietnamese do, he threw his arms around me and hugged me and I hugged him back. And he said, "Thank you. I really appreciate what you've done for us," and some of the things that I've got in the writings there, but he was grateful. And I turned around

and left and that's the last I saw of him except I did write to him a couple of times and I sent Christmas packages for a while and to his family and that sort of thing. And I sent them through the State Department and they made sure he got 'em. I know he got 'em because he told me about it.

Interviewer

So when you left Vietnam what were your feelings about what was going to happen?

Robert Hall

I didn't want to go. I wanted to stay because I wanted to stay with Colonel Nhiem and his people. But in Washington they told me, "You've done your duty, you need to get out of there." So I left.

Interviewer

And how'd you leave, by airline?

Robert Hall

Well, I flew from Trieu Phong District to Da Nang by helicopter, and from Da Nang to Saigon by an Army aircraft. And then from Saigon to the United States by commercial airliner and it was full of people coming home. And when we got to the coast that we were landing in, in Seattle, I think it was, and the pilot said if you look out the right window of the aircraft you'll see the United States. And we looked out and there was all those shining lights and everything and I just sort of looked around and I saw a lot of tears. And when we landed I saw soldiers get out and kiss the runway, that they were home. And then I came on down to California where my wife and children were and we came home and continued my military career.

Interviewer

When you're in a war zone and you're a high-ranking officer, what are the responsibilities you have that others may not know about?

Robert Hall

Like I told you before, my first responsibility, I felt, was for the safety of my troops. And I didn't want any of them to hurt or killed and none of them did get hurt or killed, and that was my main responsibility, I think, for my troops.

Interviewer

You have to set an example, don't you?

Robert Hall

I can't think of anything right now. Let's see... I can't think of anything right now as an example except they just did what I told them to do and none of them got hurt or killed.

Interviewer

When you came home, how had America changed?

Robert Hall

I didn't notice any big changes. Of course I met my wife in California. My son was there so we went to Disneyland and that sort of thing and then I went to my next assignment, which, as I remember, was Fort Bliss, Texas, where I was a department chief down there. Just Vietnam back to America and it went pretty smooth.

Interviewer

Did you guys write a lot?

Robert Hall

We corresponded by audio tapes. And I had a daughter born while I was there and when I came home Marjean had played the tapes for the kids and we got home and just as we walked in the room where we were staying in with her brother-in-law, Shirley started crying and said, "Shirley?" And she shut up just like that because she recognized my voice and I think that was tremendous.

Interviewer

What would you say on your tapes?

Robert Hall

I'd pretty much tell them what was going on without giving away military secrets, and how much I loved them and, "Take care and do the things you mother says" – because they were listening to the tape too – and pretty much that way.

Interviewer

And what would you hear from home?

Robert Hall

What was going on at home, and how the kids were doing and how the kids were doing in school, how they were doing with everything that they were doing and how they were growing up, and how their birthdays went and how Christmas went and that sort of thing.

Interviewer

When Saigon fell in 1975, it was on television. Did you watch it? And what did you think?

Robert Hall

I felt sad. This shouldn't have happened. But it did, and there was pretty much nothing you could do about it because we had pulled out of there.

Interviewer

Were you thinking of your friend, the colonel?

Robert Hall

Oh, yes, yes. As a matter of fact I cried quite a bit wondering what happened to him. And of course I have no clue what happened to him. I think he's probably either dead or he's still in there resisting 'em, I don't know. Because I haven't heard from him since then.

Interviewer

Have you tried to find him?

Robert Hall

No, not really. But if he'd had made it out of there, he knew enough about how the United States Army operated that he would've called the Pentagon and asked where I was and they would've told him. Or he would've called somebody and he could've found me because he knew enough about how the U.S. Army operated. He could've found me if he had made it out of there. He may still be there fighting 'em, I don't know.

Interviewer

You probably thought he went to re-education camp, is that right? You were probably very worried about him?

Robert Hall

I talked a lot about Colonel Nhiem to my fellow soldiers, about what a great guy he was. And some of my friends didn't have those kind of district leaders that they worked for, but Colonel Nhiem was an exceptional individual. He spoke perfect English and we got along great.

Interviewer

How old was he?

Robert Hall

He was my age, he was born in 1933, just like I was.

Interviewer

When the French were there, was he fighting the French?

Robert Hall

I don't know. We never talked about that. He was from North Vietnam and he came south when the split happened and went to school with one of the military units down there and got his commission and then moved on from there. When he was on his way south, the last time I heard from him, he had made full colonel and he was on his way south with all of his troops and pulling 'em out of there.

Interviewer

Can you talk about the Vietnamese people? Describe the districts, the district chief, and their culture.

Robert Hall

The district chief was the boss. And the civilian leaders in the districts or in the villages and hamlets and so forth, they had some authority that they could do, but they pretty much did what Colonel Nhiem wanted them to do.

And they were hard workers, they worked their tails off to provide food and stuff for their families. And one of the things we did while I was there, we built a 900-meter irrigation ditch and I provided a generator from one of the U.S. units there – I talked them out of it – so that we could have those generators and they could raise two rice crops in a year which before it had only been one rice crop.

And we did a vegetable garden thing, the district had a circle around it and it was a kill zone, is what it was, in case we got attacked, but we plowed it up and planted vegetables there. My wife sent vegetables to us, the vegetable seeds and we planted vegetables there. And pretty soon there were vegetable gardens in almost every hamlet and every village in the district. And they made a lot of money selling those vegetables and so forth. But Colonel Nhiem decided how much they could sell 'em for, not what the people in the stores wanted, but less than that so that people could afford 'em.

Interviewer

Talk about building the schools.

Robert Hall

There were some schools there but they weren't really effective so we built some new ones and Colonel Nhiem arranged for the teachers, and they didn't have desks so one of the artillery units would provide us the artillery boxes the artillery shells came in and he had some people that could take three of those boxes and build two desks and two benches out of three of those ammunition boxes and that provided the furniture for the schools.

And we sent Bhin to school and he learned a lot, he loved the school and he learned a lot in there about the history of Vietnam and mathematics and other things. And I wanted to bring Bhin home with me but it's impossible.

Interviewer

Tell us the story of Bhin.

Robert Hall

Yeah, there is a photo of Bhin in that stack that I gave you. He was a young man, he had lost his family, the Viet Cong had killed 'em, his father was a school teacher and the Viet Cong would kill school teachers because they didn't want

them to teach 'em anything. And so my district team took him in and we provided food for him and Marjean sent clothes to him.

And I remember she sent him some underwear and he said, "What's this for?" He spoke a little bit of English and so we explained it to him and she sent other clothes and he'd wear those. And we sent him to school and then he'd also help us. He'd see somebody and say, "You can't trust him," or something like that. He knew pretty much who the bad guys were and the good guys. And we loved him, all of us did. And we took him to a lot of the places with us, but not every place. And when I left, I had a friend that was just in the district north and we made arrangements for us to take Bhin up there and he took care of him and then I don't know what happened to him after that.

Interviewer

No idea?

Robert Hall

No idea what happened to him. But Bhin was smart. I think he probably survived. He was a smart kid. And he just was one of those kind of – like I told ya, I wanted to bring him home with me but Colonel Nhiem said, "You can't do that." And I said, "Why not?" And he said, "Well, he has some relatives here, not his parents but they're distant relatives and if you took him home with you they would rob you blind making you pay for the fact that you took him out of the country." So we couldn't do that. And Colonel Nhiem said, "I wouldn't do that if I were you. I just wouldn't."

One of the funny things that Colonel Nhiem did, one morning he knocked on the door, we had separate billings, his was here and mine was here – and he said, "Come on, go with me." So we got in his jeep and we drove about 30 miles, came to the end of the road and there was two motorcycles with Vietnamese troops on 'em. I got on the back of one, he got on the back of the other one and we road for about another 30 minutes, we came to this big clearing, there was a huge tent set up there.

And I walked inside and there was tables and all kinds of silverware and plates and all that kind of stuff and he said, "We're gonna have a party." And then helicopters started arriving, including the President of Vietnam, and several American 4-star generals and we had this big meal.

And at every one of these plates was a bottle of beer. Well I didn't drink mine, and on the way back to the compound Colonel Nhiem says, "You didn't drink your beer." And I said, "I don't drink alcohol." So he said, "Why?" So we spent the rest me talking about Mormonism and him talking about Buddhism. And about four weeks later we did the same thing and I walked in the tent and there was all those bottles of beer and one orange drink. So I knew that's exactly where I was supposed to be. That's the kind of guy Colonel Nhiem was.

Interviewer

Was there ever a situation where you experienced Nhiem's misjudgment where maybe artillery hit a village that wasn't VC and what would happen in that case?

Robert Hall

Okay, every time Colonel Nhiem asked for an artillery barrage from American forces, I would say, "The artillery's going to land right here in this place. There are people there. Do you still want us to fire it?" "Yes." And I'd turn to my two lieutenants and I'd say, "Did you hear that?" "Yes." "Did you hear that?" "Yes." "Fire." I let him make those decisions.

Interviewer

Does that make sense then, that survivors from that would turn on Americans?

Robert Hall

Colonel Nhiem knew where the bad guys were. And once he'd call the thing, his troops were fighting them out there and they needed some help and that's why we fired the artillery, because his troops were engaged in combat and the troops needed help so I told him it's going to land right here, he said go ahead and fire. So we did. And I made sure those two lieutenants heard him say, "Yes, go ahead and fire."

Interviewer

Do you think of Vietnam often now in your life?

Robert Hall

Not really often. When I've got some time on my hands I'm just thinking about what I did in my career and so forth. I think about Vietnam, mostly about Colonel Nhiem and his family, wondering where they are and what they're doing, if they're still alive and so forth. Because Colonel Nhiem's 77 years old, just like I am. And I just still wonder sometimes what happened to him. And he sent some things home to my family, my wife, a couple of things and we just look at those, they're hanging on the wall and every time I look at them I think of Colonel Nhiem and what a great person he was. And like I say, if he'd made it out I think he would've found me because he knew enough about the American Army and so forth, he would've found me one way or the other.

Interviewer

How would you have won this war if you were the president?

Robert Hall

I don't really know because I didn't have all the intelligence. I don't know what I would've done. When I was there, my job was to see that we got as many of the Viet Cong as we could, we protected the South Vietnamese people and I didn't lose any of my troops. I didn't get hurt, they didn't get hurt, and as few

Vietnamese people got hurt as possible and killed as many Viet Cong as we could. That was the total score.

Interviewer

But the policy of having to wait for Washington to approve something that needs approval now, and having to wait four days. You couldn't have thought that was a good policy?

Robert Hall

No, that wasn't. But they were gone when we got there, but that's the way it happened. And now that may be some intelligence stuff. I'm not sure.

Interviewer

If you were talking to some junior high school kids about the war, finish this statement: Vietnam was...

Robert Hall

Vietnam was a victim of the Communist attempt to take over the world out there, and in this case they won, they did take over South Vietnam; changed the name of the cities and all of that kind of stuff. And a lot of Vietnamese people died along with a lot of Viet Cong.

Interviewer

When you were there earlier with the Americal Division, and then you went back, it was a whole new president, new administration. Had the policies changed in the way to fight the war?

Robert Hall

At my level I didn't see any changes. I was down pretty low on the pecking list and I didn't notice any changes in the two times I was there. Of course, for me it was a totally different war because I was just a staff officer and the next time I was right in the middle of it with myself and Colonel Nhiem.

Interviewer

Thank you so much.

Robert Hall

You've got a bunch of civilians here, you've got to watch out for 'em. And the Vietnamese would try to get them out of there if the U.S. Army was going to go through there, they would try to move 'em out and that sort of thing. But they were a hard-working people. I don't know how religious they were, but they were a hard-working people. The women did most of the work, actually, as you'll see on that film, I think, the women were planting the rice and the men sort of just...

Interviewer

You were an active Mormon when you were there?

Robert Hall

Yes.

Interviewer

Was there Mormon chaplains in Vietnam?

Robert Hall

Well, the second time we didn't have too much of that because I was out in that district, but the first time in the Americal Division, we set up a group and the troops could come in once a month for church services. So we had fast and testimony meetings every week. And I was the assistant group leader and we had a lot of people come in for those things, but just once a week. And fast and testimony meeting every week because they could only come once a month. And we had a lot of people come in.

And the longer it went on, the more people came. I think a lot of them were non-members because they just wanted to get out of the field and they could come to church with their buddies. And we baptized a few people.

Interviewer

U.S. soldiers?

Robert Hall

Yeah. In the biggest baptismal font in the world, the South China Sea.

Interviewer

Were you in Saigon much?

Robert Hall

No, the only time I ever went to Saigon was on business to pick up funds for my unit or pick up funds for the district or something like that. And I didn't really like Saigon.

Interviewer

Why?

Robert Hall

You don't know who's there. You could be walking down the street and the guy walking beside you could be a bad guy and all of the sudden he sticks a bayonet in your gut or something like that. I didn't like Saigon. Colonel Nhiem always told me: be careful down there. And I did go to church one time down there and I was trying to find the ward and I looked up and saw this jeep coming down the road and it had "Mahonri Moriancumer" painted across the front of it, right under the windshield, and it turned out to be he was a chaplain's assistant so he did take me to church that one time down there in Saigon.

Interviewer

What was the church like in Saigon?

Robert Hall

Well, the only time I was there, it was just like ours, but it was of course nobody but military people there. And we had a chaplain named Colcock and he'd come around once in a while and give his message for us.

Interviewer

Tell us that story of the woman planting the rice.

Robert Hall

I was out with Colonel Nhiem one time and they were planting rice and I wanted to get some pictures of them planting rice and then watching the rice grow and I wanted sort of a series: Plant it, let it grow, and harvest it. And there's a woman doing it.

So in my very best Vietnamese I asked her if I could take a picture of her and she said something – and I didn't understand – in Vietnamese, and Colonel Nhiem started laughing and I said, "What is going on?" He said, "She said you were a dirty old man." And so he asked her if I could take a picture and I wanted her planting rice but she just stood at attention. So I took a picture of her anyway, but I wanted to get her bent over planting rice but she said I was a dirty old man. I don't know what I said to her, he wouldn't tell me. But the Vietnamese language is tonal. You can say one thing just in a one tone and you change the tone and it's something entirely different.

Interviewer

For example?

Robert Hall

(in Vietnamese) "Toi la mot nguoi My" means "I'm an American." *(in Vietnamese)* "Toi lot mot nguoi My" means "I'm a Chinese noodle." At least that's what Colonel Nhiem told me.

Interviewer

Thank you very much.