



John J Ypsilantis transcript Utah Vietnam War Stories

Interviewer

Give us your full name.

John Ypsilantis

John J. Ypsilantis

Interviewer

And where did you go to school?

John Ypsilantis

The University of Utah and the University of California at Berkley.

Interviewer

And your degrees are in?

John Ypsilantis

Chemical Engineering.

Interviewer

When did you first go into the military?

John Ypsilantis

The Korean War started in June of 1950 and the American 2nd Infantry division was one of the first to go to Korea and that was in August of 1950.

Interviewer

And you fought with the Second Infantry there?

John Ypsilantis

Ninth Infantry Regiment. People don't care about division. I was in the Ninth Infantry Regiment.

Interviewer

So you saw some combat. Were you wounded in Korea?

John Ypsilantis

No.

Interviewer

I understand you were an advisor in Vietnam. Take us on that journey when you got to Vietnam.

John Ypsilantis

You know how I got to Vietnam? When I went to South High School in 1947 I took French. And of course the U.S. Army being the U.S. Army insisted that I know perfect French, which of course was not true. In those days, 1961, the U.S. Army was taking over from the French army. So basically the first time I got to Saigon and the people you were dealing with were all French speaking - the Vietnamese I dealt with were French speaking. So it's called total immersion.

Interviewer

Were you there as a civilian or in the Army in '61?

John Ypsilantis

When you go there the agreement was for only civilians. For all intents and purposes it was both military and civilians, but they were all called advisors. That was when John Kennedy had just become president.

Interviewer

I want to get something clear. People say civilian contractor and they immediately think CIA.

John Ypsilantis

I got to be good friends with Bill Colby, the guys who's head of the CIA, but it was because we had contracts in part of Saigon which we dealt with on a day to day basis. Basically it was telecommunications, what is called troposcatter, where the information was going out of country and bouncing off the troposphere. So at that time there were probably 9 or 10 large contractors in Vietnam, all under the guise of being quote "advisors".

Interviewer

So you were in country all that time, or did you come back?

John Ypsilantis

Came back. The work, we had to do it out of the Army procurement agency Japan, Tokin Yokohama, so we'd go back and forth. But then when the thing really got heated up in Vietnam, probably June of 1963, there was a guy named Diem who was president of Vietnam and he was overthrown and there was martial law. That was in Saigon

and the environs around there. By then, there were probably 10 or 11 thousand quote "advisors" there and all of them had to do with dealing with the French army. In my case, I had a lot of background in electrical engineering, so a lot of the work we did was with the American Embassy. And that's when I met Henry Cabot Lodge, who was the American ambassador there at that time.

Interviewer

So you were there at the very first in Vietnam, weren't you?

John Ypsilantisk

That's correct. Everyone dates it to when the overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem, and he was overthrown on 1 November, 1963. He had three brothers there that suggested that he was corrupt, which might have been the case.

Interviewer

I want to jump to 1975. You're there at the fall of Saigon. What was your job at that time? You were at the embassy at that time?

John Ypsilantisk

No at that time, right after TET, 1968, a good friend of mine set up a California company called International Training Consultants. And we had contracts with the US military and with USAID. And these all had to do with management trends. We were dealing mostly with Vietnamese officers, and the medium of instruction was both Vietnamese and French and very little English. And this was, as I say, I don't know how familiar you are with USAID, but they spent a lot of money in Vietnam and they did a lot of good work and had to do with developing villages and things like that. But basically it was management training of the Vietnamese officers who were young men at that time.

Interviewer

During the fall of Saigon, where were you and what were you doing?

John Ypsilantisk

It was a very confusing situation for the final 30 days I guess you would say. It had to do with no one would accept anything of the piaster, or the local currency, so you had to deal with people on the basis of French francs or US dollars. So in other words the economy actually stopped. And it caused a great amount of difficulties. By then our military had gone home. They had a small office called the Defense Attache's Office, but for all intents and purposes it was pretty, you know, disorganized. I'll put it that way.

Interviewer

Chaotic?

John Ypsilantisk

Yes, very chaotic.

Interviewer

So I want to get to where you're actually making a list of who gets to leave and who gets on those aircraft. What was your position and how did you get that position?

John Ypsilantisk

The latest American ambassador knew that I lived in Vietnam all that time, and I represented both contractors and military. And he asked, it's a long story, but basically many young American soldiers, I won't say they deserved it but they went and lived on the economy with their girlfriends and their wives and their children so you had to identify them. In those days the C130's were coming in pretty regularly there at Tan Son Nhut main. So a guy shows up and he's, for all intents and purposes the last two years, he's really lived on the economy and you had to try to identify him, make sure those were his children, that kind of thing.

Interviewer

But what is your position? What gives you that authority?

John Ypsilantisk

Oh, the American ambassador asked me to do it because I lived there all those years. His name was W. Graham Martin. He asked me to go out to Tan Son Nhut. I was trying to get my employees out of Vietnam, so I had that responsibility and I had a business office downtown, which was looted. So I didn't have to worry about that.

Interviewer

So it's chaos. The North Vietnamese Army is approaching. You're at the Air Force base Tan Son Nhut and you're making a list of people showing up and saying who gets to escape and who doesn't.

John Ypsilantisk

Yeah. Basically, there were two groups of people. The one in the American Embassy downtown on a street called the Thong Nhut, and another group out of Tan Son Nhut. The marines were flying into downtown, it became very, very difficult so they were switching everything to Tan Son Nhut. And that's where you see those things - people see the fall of Saigon, they see the Marines no longer went to the U.S. Embassy. Well, it was really dangerous by then because everyone had a weapon and you didn't know who was firing at you and who wasn't.

Interviewer

Describe in detail those last few days. What's going on at the airport and who's coming?

John Ypsilantisk

The Main Street going to the American Embassy is called Hai Bitron, and I'll never forget it. As I was walking up the street I was going to meet these three people and get them out to Tan Son Nhut. There were pieces of paper on the Hai Bitron street: Top Secret, Top Secret, Top Secret all over the place. Obviously, they had been in the American Embassy and someone had looted probably and threw these papers on the street. There was one hell of a lot of them.

Interviewer

And there are people everywhere in the streets? Are they panicking?

John Ypsilantisk

No, by then the people were hiding in their homes. But people that wanted to get out of Tan Son Nhut were taking the chance of going to the U.S. Embassy, and they were very panicked. It was a very difficult situation because obviously they couldn't get all of the people out of the American Embassy. I think it was a big mistake. They should have forced the people all to go to Tan Son Nhut, but that was after the fact.

Interviewer

What are some of the stories some of these GI's are telling you as they're showing up.

John Ypsilantisk

Boy, I tell you! Amazing! We called them night crawlers. I can't justify the fact that they deserted, that I don't know. They were just people who had been in Vietnam and just stayed there with their girlfriend and had children, and when they came to see me what was left of their American Embassy passport hadn't been renewed for years! They were basically living on the economy! And they were trying to get their kids out. I assume because you know that's one thing the American Ambassador asked me "How do you know if those are the kids?" Well, all you can do is say, "Are those your kids?" And he'd say "Yeah". And the C130 would land and we'd rush the kids in there, push them into the C130 and by then the kids were really panicky and couldn't control their bowels and so you had the C130's just loaded with defecation. At that point there were easily 30 or 40 people in this status, let us say, and they all got out of course.

Interviewer

You approved it?

John Ypsilantisk

Yeah. There was no U.S. government form. What you did was find out when he last renewed his US Embassy passport and just wrote that down. And you see the North Vietnamese divisions were firing artillery not at Tan Son Nhut but quite adjacent to it, and it had a tendency to cause people to get much more panicky.

Interviewer

So you could hear the rumble of the guns?

John Ypsilantisk

Oh definitely. Definitely. And they were the Russian 176 millimeter, which indicated to me that the North Vietnamese army could have occupied Saigon quite easily. Apparently there was some agreement. I was always dead set against this agreement with the North Vietnamese. And having Kissinger there I thought was the absolutely worst thing you could do. But those were not my choices to make.

Interviewer

So, you get these people on the aircraft. Are there crowds outside Tan Son Nhut still?

John Ypsilantisk

Yes.

Interviewer

Describe those crowds.

John Ypsilantisk

They were really panicky, simply because they didn't understand what was going on and there were all kinds of rumors. "The American fleet's gonna come in here and blah, blah, blah, blah." They were holding out little pieces of paper to show that they had worked for the Americans or something like that. It's pretty sad. I now know that the North Vietnamese army could have occupied Tan Son Nhut itself. So obviously there was some agreement that they wouldn't do that until I think it was around the 29th or 30th of April of '75.

Interviewer

What about your own safety? What about your own escape out of there?

John Ypsilantisk

Well I was concerned with my employees. Some of them were long-term employees, and trying to round them,

come back and forth and I would only take young people. I said I won't take any old people. And that's tough. That's tough to do.

Interviewer

Why?

John Ypsilantisk

I thought the old people once they come to the states, they would die simply because they're not used to life in America. And that's what I'd tell my employees. I said I just won't take old people. The best thing you can do is come to the United States, get yourself a job. In all of that the French banks operated so you could - the French always make arrangements for their own interests which I think is very good. So I said once you get to the states you can transmit your hard currency to the French bank Banc Nationale de Paris, and your parents can come and get that money. Which in this case would be French francs because no one was dealing with.... oh and then everyone had a little oee eighth of an ounce of gold. You know the word tael, t-a-e-l, so that's what people were dealing with. Because the local Piaster was dead. And that was for 20, 30 days before.

Interviewer

So did you get your employees out? Did you get them all out? Were you satisfied?

John Ypsilantisk

I got six out of the nine and then ultimately a year later we got the other three out. It was very, very difficult because part of them ended up on an aircraft carrier in the south pacific- the South China Sea. Part of them ended up in the Philippines in Heartfield. Part of them ended up in Wake Islands. So I was flyin' around trying to find them. But the fact that I'd gotten out of Vietnam - obviously by then the Marines had flown out I think the last group, but even that you're not sure because when you get on the aircraft carrier things were really screwed up. That is you had this massive aircraft carrier but all these civilians on top of the landing zones there. That was pretty difficult.

Interviewer

Tell us about your own flight out.

John Ypsilantisk

I took a helicopter to Voon Tao, and then I had to go back to the Tan Son Nhut again. So I made two helicopter trips that way. And then the third trip I ended up on the aircraft carrier. Coral Sea I think was the name of it but I'm not sure. And then the aircraft carrier moving - the Vietnamese weren't used to it and so there were people throwing up and things like that.

Interviewer

When you finally left, you're in the air and your heading toward the carrier, could you see the North Vietnamese Army?

John Ypsilantisk

Yes I did. Yes.

Interviewer

Can you describe that for us?

John Ypsilantisk

I saw as I say their howitzers at a place called Xuan Loc, which is about 12 or 13 kilometers from Tan Son Nhut. So they could have fired. I know the U.S. military had the Ninth Field Hospital just outside the gate of Tan Son Nhut. And they were hit by rounds of artillery but I think it was accidental because from what I could see the South Vietnamese Army had decamped from the highlands and they were all headed to Saigon. So the war in effect was over with.

Interviewer

Were you frightened, personally?

John Ypsilantisk

No because when I was in Korea I was very frightened all the time. In the case of Saigon, you had periodic cases that you were frightened or you were threatened, and then cases of nothing happening. There were boats that were being loaded up at Saigon port, and no one had any control over that. That is, a Vietnamese can get on it or an American can get on it, and they ended up in the South China Sea of course. Those were about the last 8 days. Out at Tan Son Nhut I was really concerned because I was convinced the North Vietnamese would occupy Tan Son Nhut airport. There was no one to stop them. You can't blame the ARVN because they were called upon to do all these things too late, and I think it's one of the great unfairnesses of the thing is that ARVN is blamed for this and they shouldn't be.

Interviewer

Why?

John Ypsilantisk

We had a great American ambassador named Henry Cabot Lodge. Great man. He was correct back in '63 of

saying "We've got to train ARVN now, we've got to put ARVN with American military right now". And our, military for all intents and purposes they were guys who came over there, I'm talking about Senior Officers now, and did their one year tour. They didn't want to change anything. It's my view that Henry Cabot Lodge was correct - we should have been trying ARVN I'm talkin' '63, '64 but they weren't doing anything. Well, what General Westmoreland's people wanted to do was just, they thought they could quote "win the war". It's hard for me to understand that because how to win the war was the Ho Chi Minh trail and to this day I don't understand it. I know that I've talked with Bill Colby twice before he died about this. We should have concentrated on interdicting the Ho Chi Minh trail. We had this American Secretary of Defense named McNamara. He was a massive ego but a very smart guy. What an ego! Wow! But he was correct. We had attempted to...there's a village in Cambodia called Techì Pon, and were you to occupy that village which is 23 kilometers into Laos, you could have really affected the whole Ho Chi Minh trail.

Well if you did that, the Chinese who of course were the ones supplying the... without the Chinese and the Russians the Ho Chi Minh trail couldn't carry anything. But we didn't do that and mostly I'd come to realize Nixon really wanted... in 1970 the US Army went to a place called Snoul in Cambodia, and they captured all this equipment that belonged of course to the Russians and Chinese. And it was the termination of the Ho Chi Minh trail. That was 1970, and 1971 we should have gone to this place called Techì Pon. We had a highly publicized thing called the Lam Son 719. I thought the ARVN officers were very good. Yes they were corrupt but they were very good and they were not given a chance to... so I realized at that point that Nixon was not interested in helping South Vietnam, he was interested in going to China to visit Mao and get recognition, so that's what happened.

Interviewer

You were one of the very first Americans in Vietnam and you know personalities, you know people from the beginning, and you know the ambassadors and you know generals and you know everybody. You're one of those guys that just happens to be one of those people that know everybody. And now you're on one of those last aircraft out, and you're seeing it all go up in smoke. What are your personal thoughts?

John Ypsilantisk

I'd come to admire the Vietnamese a lot. South Vietnamese. They're terrific people, good workers. In other words very good employees. And that was, emotionally, it was pretty tough. I got to know all these guys who are reporters like Dan Rather, they'd come to my office, but they didn't really know anything about Vietnam. They new the sensationalistic thing, but they really didn't know what was going on. The Tet Offensive, it bothered some people living in Saigon, but it didn't affect anything to speak of, but the reporters went out of their way to say the American military is defeated, blah, blah, blah, blah, which I don't think was the case. As a matter of fact, the Vietnamese colonels I knew would tell me now what we ought to do is go up to Techì Pon and if we occupy Techì Pon, we would terminate the Ho Chi Minh trail, and in effect they could no longer get things from the north to the south. But I think it was the senior US military officers in Vietnam - they were there for a year tour at the most and they just wanted to do their one-year and then get out.

Interviewer

Do you have any personal anecdotes about the press and people you knew?

John Ypsilantisk

They used to come to me and I'd tell them, give me \$200 US dollars, because I was spending all my time with ARVN officers. I wasn't in business with them. I happen to agree with Henry Cabot Lodge. We should have helped ARVN long before we did.

Interviewer

But the press, what are some of those personal stories that you knew?

John Ypsilantisk

They'd all come to my office, all of them with the same thing. They wanted me to give them information. There's a section of Saigon called Cholon, the Chinese section. See Saigon is really two cities, and in Cholon everyone speaks Kwandong Chinese but of course they're all Vietnamese citizens. But I used to tell the guys like Rather go out to the French clubs out there, you can get all this information, It's all available in the bars and what have you. And it all had to do with I think the ARVN officers correctly perceived the Americans as just pushing them aside, which I agree with. The one thing I'll say about General Abrams when he took over in '68, the Vietnamese really liked him. He's a very good guy, personable person, and also a good general. Westmoreland surrounded himself with some of the West Pointers. I'm not sure they understood very much about Vietnam. I know one thing they sure didn't understand about the Ho Chi Minh trail. In this case McNamara put - they had these sensors on the trail, supposedly on the trail, and those sensors would supposedly pick up sounds. Well I think it was very poorly done and I think from what I'm able to understand, and I've talked twice to McNamara but not about this thing, I think they should have done a hell of a lot more scientific work to stop the Ho Chi Minh trail. But I was not in a position to give people advice about that.

Interviewer

I understand that when a celebrity came to Vietnam you often escorted them. Is that true?

John Ypsilantisk

Yeah.

Interviewer

Who were some of those people?

John Ypsilantisk

Well I had control of these aircraft, and the Miss America's of 1972 they came there and I flew them up to Ple Ku in my aircraft. And this guy Steve McQueen, the actor, I knew him in Vietnam. There were quite a few of them. They would come to my office simply because they knew who I was and I'd lived there a long time. Another thing is the French could have made a great deal of support for the Americans but they never did. And mostly it was because a main part of the military in France, you know after they were out of Vietnam they had this thing in Algeria, and that's when de Gaulle came to power and that was after Vietnam.

Interviewer

So they just had a general resentment toward us?

John Ypsilantisk

Very much so, particularly French officers. They resented number one they'd been booted out of Vietnam. Number two they had to deal with the Americans.

Interviewer

So looking back at Vietnam, and if you had to tell people today your wisdom about all this, you witnessed it all, what would you tell them?

John Ypsilantisk

I see it every day on this thing in Afghanistan. People fly over there and the most important thing is language. Very few Americans who go to Afghanistan speak the Pashto, the local language. Later on I spent a number of years in the Middle East, so I had a pretty good knowledge of Arabic and if you speak Arabic you can communicate in Afghanistan. I see the same thing. Secretary of Defense X flies to Afghanistan. They have a meeting. Make all this- Jesus it just makes me sick to my - it's the same old shit. I mean it's just ridiculous. They did it in Iraq in a certain way, but at least in Iraq there was the argument there were weapons of mass destruction.

Interviewer

So your philosophy on Vietnam, regardless of Afghanistan, what would you say today about it? If you were going to tell someone younger who'd never heard of Vietnam what would you tell them about it?

John Ypsilantisk

I would say that, well, when I was in Korea we had a great General, his name was Matthew Ridgeway. In Korea during that period of time we, the American 8th army, I was just a soldier at that time. We killed a million Chinese on that peninsula. And that really affected Mao. The guy I really admired was Henry Cabot Lodge because he told me it's the Chinese army that's doing all this whether it's in North Vietnam or whether it's equipment or what have you and the only thing we've been able to do with the Chinese was in Korea 1950, '51, when we killed a million of 'em. And I think that's what the Chinese, for some reason I think it was Lyndon Johnson, he didn't want to disturb the Chinese. But they were the ones - I don't know how many Arvin officers would say to me, why is it you Americans keep a secret? The secret is why don't you talk about - everyone knows the people who are supplying the Ho Chi Minh trail, it's all Chinese equipment! And I was in Snoul, the Cambodian plane; it was all Chinese equipment 'cause it looked like the Chinese equipment I saw in Korea.

Interviewer

So if you had to tell one of your nieces or nephews or children, and they've never heard of Vietnam, and you wanted to tell them just a short statement about Vietnam and what it was really all about what would that be?

John Ypsilantisk

It would be that the Chinese invaded South Vietnam, and we should have stopped the Chinese. But on the other hand, Nixon particularly, I don't know about Lyndon Johnson, but Nixon he had just convincingly beat - oh by the way I met George - who's the democratic nominee for the guy who ran against Nixon?

Interviewer

McGovern.

John Ypsilantisk

McGovern, yeah I met him. Great story. I don't know if you know Saigon well but they wanted me to meet him at the hotel, it's called the Continental Palace hotel in downtown Saigon. And I went there and I could see he was completely detached about Vietnam. In other words, he didn't really know much. But I did meet a very intelligent guy who was hooked up with Hollywood. And he was part of McGovern's entourage.

Interviewer

Was that Jack Pawlenty?

John Ypsilantisk

No it's a Jewish name, and he had to do with writing the screenplay of *Gone with the Wind* or something like that. He and I were downstairs. In those days they had concertina wire on all the hotels. He asked me would you support McGovern? The guy is out of it completely; I don't know whether it was alcohol or what it was. Just as we were talking, about 50 yards away someone threw - it's nothing about Vietnam, everyone had a grenade and they'd throw it at you or whomever - someone threw this grenade and we of course, the concertina wire turned over on us and caught he and I so we were covered with it. And I said, "That's the day of Vietnam!" I was in the Brinks hotel when it got blown up.

Interviewer

Let me ask you, were you there during Tet Offensive?

John Ypsilantisk

Absolutely.

Interviewer

Where were you and what were you doing?

John Ypsilantisk

The most important thing in Vietnam and Saigon was a place called Phu Lam, and Phu Lam was telecommunications going out of country on troposcatter. So I was there most of the time.

Interviewer

What were you seeing during Tet? What was going on? Describe the activities.

John Ypsilantisk

The North Vietnamese trained these young soldiers to be sappers to throw themselves onto concertina wire and this kind of stuff and they did it, and of course they were laying there dead at the time. So there were a lot of those. What they did they'd go to the villages in the delta, take the 14 year old kids, move them all the way up the Ho Chi Minh trail to Hanoi and even China and train them to become a real commie grenade thrower. And you know those kids had no chance at all at anything.

Interviewer

Give me your wisdom about Vietnam. You were there for the whole show. Give me a conclusion in your own mind.

John Ypsilantisk

There was always a lot of animosity between the North Vietnamese and the South Vietnamese. As a matter of fact the South Vietnamese would call the North Vietnamese "No qua", which in Vietnamese means, "you're not too swift". I think the American people would have been better off staying in South Vietnam. They could bring most of the troops home because I'm convinced and so was Mr. Cabot Lodge that ARVN could fight if you gave them the equipment. Admittedly their officers are corrupt but I mean compared to Pakistan, the Pakistanis are the most corrupt people I've seen on the earth. They're awful!

Interviewer

Well that's a good point. Isn't most all of Southeast Asia corrupt? Isn't it all corrupt?

John Ypsilantisk

No, believe it or not a young Vietnamese officer named Do Cao Tri, very big hero for the South Vietnamese and from what I could see finally at the end of the war he left and went to live in Paris. He's not living in the 16th there on Disamo as a rich man, he just - in other words they had good people. Unfortunately they had this reputation but a lot of it was frustration because the Americans would never let them do anything and I blame Westmoreland more than anything for that. In his book he blames Lyndon Johnson but I don't believe it. I think had General Abrams been there the earlier two or three years it would have made some difference because the Vietnamese could go to Abrams, talk with him, know that when he says he'd do something he'd do something for them. That is, let them put their units right with the American army.

Interviewer

When these people outside of Tan Son Nhut, how many got to stay and how many got to go? How many did you leave behind on the tarmac?

John Ypsilantisk

Easily 50%.

Interviewer

You left at least half the people behind?

John Ypsilantisk

Oh yeah, because see the people at the American embassy when they realized they weren't going to be able to get

over the fence to even get to the helicopter, they all just went home and said you know the Americans have screwed us again. They were very bitter.

Interviewer

How many people were there? Give me a number?

John Ypsilantisk

At the American Embassy on top of the thing you were talkin' maybe 600 people. Maybe 5, easily 6,000.

Interviewer

And at Tan Son Nhut how many?

John Ypsilantisk

Oh at Tan Son Nhut because the C130's were coming in so regularly, you could control flow. And that's why I was worried that the North Vietnamese...

Interviewer

How many were left behind at Tan Son Nhut?

John Ypsilantisk

I don't think anyone at Tan Son Nhut that was there got out, I'm pretty sure of that. Simply because when the C130 would land everybody would run, jump into it and take off. And they were coming' in every 12 or 13 minutes. I know that the 9th Hospital which was just outside Tan Son Nhut, it was being looted so whoever was there they determined that looting the Americans was - well as a matter of fact I remember the day the US Air force, Tan Son Nhut U.S. Air force base where the guys would pull up in their truck, the GI truck., leave the keys in the thing, get on the plane and fly away. And the Vietnamese, it was like the Keystone Cops, they went running in these Air force - what do you call them....Beau Coup, and were takin' everything and you can't blam 'em. They were in the refrigerators, carrying - it was pretty comic. This was January or February of '73 I would think. The U.S. Military once they decided it was over with they just wanted to get out. They had an office called the Defense Attache's office but it had no power to do anything. You see I was very fortunate I had General Ridgeway as a general I really admired. Westmoreland had a very good record as a soldier in WWII.

Interviewer

Is there any personal story you have about that time, the fall, something about you personally? Not about the big picture, just you personally what happened. Like somebody you knew, or wondered about since?

John Ypsilantisk

During Tet, George E. Suarez a very good friend of mine whose father was French, mother was Cubana so he was not only good in French but Spanish. He and I were in a helicopter in a very dangerous place. Georgie and I, when the helicopter gets the word "dust off, dust off" it means if you've got someone who's low priority, in this case me and Georgie, they drop us down right in the middle of a rice patty and say "We gotta go pick up somebody that's just been wounded". And I thought it was very good. I told you that a French General told me the helicopter will change everything. If we would have had the helicopter in Korea (you see the helicopter in Korea on these MASH things, but I never saw one) but they would have been wonderful for getting people who were wounded to the hospital so quickly. I thought it was just terrific.

Interviewer

If you could a little detail about, OK, this General calls and tells you "Go to Tan Son Nhut Airport", how do you get there and organize that? That's not the sort of thing where you sit down with a pad of paper is it and say, "I'm here! Everyone get in a line".

John Ypsilantisk

You know the little putt-putts? I had one of those little putt-putts there, two cycle engine, and you could convince someone to take you out to Tan Son Nhut and of course no one would accept piasters, so I had a lot of these military payment certificates. So they'd haggle with you because they knew, the taxi drivers knew, it's all over! These Americans are getting out!

Interviewer

Anything we haven't talked about that you wanted to mention?

John Ypsilantisk

Later on I worked in Russia--and old USSR. So these Russians came to the United States and I had to take them around. Until you go to Russia you don't know what the word drinking means. I had a very good friend a young helicopter pilot in Vietnam. He and I became very good friends and he would insist on taking me - he was the best helicopter pilot I ever saw. He was really good. And we'd fly north of Saigon; he'd fly right in the forest. His name was Ackerman. And I say, "Ackerman you want to die in the war, but I don't want to die with you". So he did 14 months, came to see me and he was still alive which was amazing. And I said "You know Ackerman you're gonna come back because you" - I don't know that he was a war lover; I remember I gave him the book Leo Tolstoy's Sebastopol Sketches. Anyway to make a long story short, he came back after 3 months, he flew again, he went

down, he's finished. He's dead. So years later when I was with the Russians they insisted - they were all KGB guys of course, they wanted me to go to the Vietnam memorial and point out all the people I knew who were dead. I pointed out Ackerman's name. So we spent - I don't know if you've dealt with Russians, but what you do right at the Vietnam memorial, we're drinking vodka and I'm pointing out these things. It's incongruous I'll put it that way.

Interviewer

How many people did you know on the wall?

John Ypsilantisk

Quite a few.

Interviewer

Can you give me a number?

John Ypsilantisk

Boy that's tough to do. I know the 114th had been long. Every officer in the 114th I knew. We're talkin' 8 or 9 people they were all killed. So that can give you a standard. There were quite a few. Many of them because they genuinely loved the army. I know my view about the army particularly in Korea was I didn't want to have anything to do with it after I got out and that's when I went to Berkeley.

Interviewer

I want to thank you for coming in.

John Ypsilantisk

My pleasure.

Interviewer

We wanted to hear about Saigon and the fall and you were there.

John Ypsilantisk

Well I got my employees out and all of them are just terrific. I mean they've gotten educations. I just think the world of the South Vietnamese, including their officers.

Interviewer

Well, thank you. Thank you.