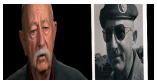

J. Scott Maddox

Lt. Colonel

United States Army

Deputy Commander Special Forces

Salt Lake City, Utah

"Escalation"

Interviewer

We appreciate your coming in today and we appreciate your service. How did you get in the service after high school?

Scott Maddox

I'm graduated from South High School. I went to University of Utah for a year, and I didn't like that. They didn't like me, either. And then I went to Henager Business College. And while I was there, I was recruited by a member of the National Guard to be secretary to General Wyler because I was a stenographer and court reporter trainee. So then I got stuck in the Guard. That was back in '48. And then eventually I went to work full time in the Guard. We thought we were going to be activated for Korea and our unit never was. So I went to work for the Guard, working out of the General's office. And then General Maxwell E. Rich, the adjutant general, at the time they were reorganizing all the army units, had an opportunity to have some Special Forces units in Utah. Some of our units were disbanded and some people were forced into Special Forces. A bunch of us volunteered to become Special Forces. So that's what I did and then I went to all the schools and everything. And then the Vietnam War came along and there I had 20 years of service, highly trained Special Forces operator. And they had a call out for majors. They had so many lieutenant colonels that didn't look good so they wanted to have some majors. And so I volunteered and went to Vietnam. My first assignment was commanding officer of 3rd Battalion 7th Special Forces Group in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. And from there I went to Vietnam where I was deputy commander for 3rd Battalion 5th Special Forces in I Corp in Vietnam.

Interviewer

How many years had you been in the service?

Scott Maddox

Well, I had 20 years before I went to Vietnam.

Interviewer

You're a 20-year veteran before you went to Vietnam?

Scott Maddox

Yes. I was an old man there. You really had to work just to keep up with young kids.

Interviewer

What were your first duties in Vietnam?

Scott Maddox

I need to back up a little bit. In Special Forces we operate different than the regular established Army. Our goal was always to be invited to a place. And you'd go there and help them--help the people to get organized with their infrastructure. All of our Special Forces teams had different specialists on. And we would go and help a village and we would stay there and help them organize their defense force, so on. So we didn't move around; we'd established a base of operation and then expand from there and stay there all the time where the regular forces go through a place, fight their way through and leave and then come back again maybe. But we stay where we're at. My job was deputy commander and operations officer for our unit. And I had a helicopter assigned to me every day and we had nine camps along the border of Vietnam and up to the DMZ. Our job was to make sure they had all the supplies they needed and make sure they were doing what they were supposed to be doing. And then also I would go out on operations with them, make sure I could see how they were functioning, if they were functioning properly, if they needed any help, are we being effective and so on.

Interviewer

Would you fly back into your base?

Scott Maddox

Every day, yeah.

Interviewer

Every day?

Scott Maddox

Well, sometimes I'd stay over at a camp for a week or so.

Interviewer

In these villages they were Special Forces teams?

Scott Maddox

Yeah, each village we had a U.S. Special Forces team, which consisted of two officers and ten enlisted men. And we were paired up with the same in Vietnamese army had the same Special Forces operations. And they were all trained by us, too. So we had two Special Forces teams in every village where we were at. And then they would go out. These teams would go out on operations. They'd take the local people. What we'd do is organize the local people into a self-defense force. We'd have four companies. There'd be one or two working in the camp, then one or two out doing the regular work, farming and whatever they did, mostly farming. Then they'd go out and run around the jungles and see if we could find the bad guys.

Interviewer

What were some of the duties of Special Forces teams versus the regular Army?

Scott Maddox

On each team there's two of everything. So we'd have two medics. Now these guys are highly trained. The training's three years. Well, back up a little bit. In Special Forces the lowest rank is a sergeant to begin with. So they're all regular enlisted people. And the medics would take three years of training and they were really good. For example, one of our medics became the Surgeon General of the United States Army. He was a sergeant in one of our teams. And what was his name, Ruth?

Ruth

Carmona.

Scott Maddox

Carmona, Surgeon General of the United States, came from one of our teams. That's how good our medics were. Then we'd have an engineer, two engineers on each team. They would help with infrastructure in the community; building, working on roads, drainage system, sewer systems, things of that nature, helping to build the defenses. And we have weapons people. We'd have small arms and automatic arms weapons people to train the local people in how to use this equipment. And we'd have intelligence people that work with the local population to try and get a handle on where the bad guys are at and if they're bothering the village and things of that nature. And these people would train counterparts in all the villages.

I think one of the most interesting things-- the medics were probably the most popular part of our element. They would run clinics in these camps and hundreds of people would come to these clinics, mostly the women coming for supplies, medicine and stuff. Another thing we did was distributed a lot of food. For instance, the Catholic Church was our biggest donors in the areas where I was at. But, it was interesting. You know, one of the problems we have going to a foreign country is we try to think everybody is like us or we want them to be like us. And so we would get stuff that wasn't usable. Like they sent us 30,000 baby ducks. Well, these American baby ducks were bigger than a full-grown Vietnamese duck. So our thing is we'd take them out and deliver them to the villages and they probably had them cooked before we got out of town.

Another time they sent us a 600-pound Duroc boar. Now a little Vietnamese pig can curl up like a cat and sleep. And there's no way they could use this boar. I think the same thing. After I delivered him, they put him on a sling under a helicopter and hauled him out and put him down in the village. I think they were having roast pig before I left camp. But they, you know, just didn't understand that they don't think the same way we do, don't live the same way we do.

Interviewer

How about communication with villagers?

Scott Maddox

Well, I had an interpreter assigned to me. But, most of the villages where we were at had French occupation forces, of course, and were French villages. So a lot of the people, the senior people, all spoke French. The kids all went to school and they learned French and English. So, I never had any problem. I mean you would always find somebody that could speak English, it never really was a problem. Now some of the villages, the Montagnard villages, there was very few English-speaking people there. But we hired the interpreters for that purpose.

Interviewer

Did you run into any dangerous situations?

Scott Maddox

Oh, yeah. Yeah, the whole country was enemy territory really. And our camps would be out in the middle of this no man's land. So, getting from our base to the camps was always across enemy territory. Of course it's so swampy and that, in the jungles, so we normally flew in a helicopter to get to the camps. But I personally never had any serious problems. I've had a helicopter, the tail rotor shot off one time. And I didn't know at that time, I was a dummy, I guess. It was along when we were flying about 50 miles an hour, didn't need the rotor. So we had to crash land but that was no big problem. But a lot of times we'd land and the fuel tanks in the helicopters and the airplanes were all designed so that they wouldn't blow up. And we'd land and there were bullet holes in the tanks and gasoline would be spilling out of the fuel tanks in the helicopter or the airplanes. And we didn't even know we'd been hit with machine gun fire or something. It was lucky. I never did get hit.

I'd always make it a point to, as often as I could, I would go out in--in addition to our camps, we had what we called a mobile strike force. It's a battalion-sized Vietnamese force led by their people and our teams, we'd go out and hit hot spots. And an example, I went out with them one time, which takes about five or six days out in the jungle. And trying to intercept Chinese and Vietnamese and regular Vietnamese armies. North Vietnamese armies bringing supplies down. And we're going on the trail and the scout said there's a group of men coming down the trail so we all get off to the side of the trail, let them come down.

First thing we notice, they weren't carrying any weapons but they were carrying heavy loads of rockets and rocket ammunition. So we stopped them when they came along and they just threw up their hands and give up, you know. So we said, "Why aren't you carrying weapons?" And they said, "Well, if we carried a weapon, it'd be one less rocket we could carry." So their leader said he told him he wasn't going to do it again if he couldn't carry a weapon. So I've got pictures of all this stuff. So we captured probably hundreds of rockets, rocket ammunition and things of that nature they were hauling down from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. They didn't even know where they were going. They just hoped they'd run into some more Vietnamese Viet Cong. So that was just an example of some of

the actions we did.

Interviewer

In the years that you were there, were there regulars from the North Vietnamese Army invading at that time?

Scott Maddox

Well, what they would do is the local Communists would try to keep all the intelligence and tell them where they could come. For example, we had a camp that came under siege. We'd caught this one group of rockets; we didn't get them all. And over a year's time they just supplied these caves with rockets and mortars and stuff. And so they'd fire across the valley into this camp under siege. But that happened quite often. But that's our main point, was trying to intercede and keep these rockets and stuff from coming into the South.

And we'd expect the local people to tell us. But one of the things, the Communists had infiltrated everything. You couldn't do anything that they didn't know what you were doing, had spies every place. Like for instance, if you had a target for what you thought would be a good B-52 raid, by the time you got that mission accomplished and done, the target was gone. They knew that it was going to be targeted. So the whole system was infiltrated with bad guys. That was the biggest problem, one of our big problems. They just looked like everybody else. How do you tell, you know?

Interviewer

In those villages, were they always friendly?

Scott Maddox

Well, no, we only went to villages that were friendly.

Interviewer

I see.

Scott Maddox

We only went where we were asked to go. And they would ask us to come and we would go and help them. Now let me give an example of some of the things, there's so much. Their rice fields would go out for a mile out from a village. And the farmers would be out there and they'd get shot or captured by the Communists. Well, they'd get one or two, if they're lucky, two crops of rice a year. And it was a struggle. So we brought in American rice. And they'd get three and four crops of rice a year. And that way we could pull the farms in closer to the village where it was easier to protect 'em. So that was a big comfort to them, they really, really liked that. And our rice is easier to harvest and everything. So, it was a real advantage for them. That's just one of the types of the things that we did to help 'em. And you could go on and on with things like that.

The villages, they varied in size. They were out in the jungle. People asked me what it looked like there. You'd think you were back in Utah, except that instead of brush-covered mountains and a few pine trees, you had triple canopy

jungle every place you go. You'd walk in a tunnel for all the time... and it rained. Oh, boy. One time I remember it rained 29 inches in 24 hours. You go from the South China Sea to the mountains is about 20 miles. And the kids would all have to go to school for about two weeks in boats to get to school because it takes so long for this water to go back out to the ocean. And so it was a big, big problem. You didn't go anyplace except in a boat or in a helicopter.

Interviewer

Would they clear the jungle to make the rice paddies?

Scott Maddox

Well, the rice paddies are just like here, in the valleys where it's pretty flat and, you know, I guess the trees have been carried out for hundreds of years. The rice paddies have been there forever. All the valleys had rice paddies. Most of them weren't very big. Now, when the French were there, they expanded a lot of 'em. The French had beautiful places, beautiful stone homes. It was probably a really ideal lifestyle. They screwed it up, I guess.

The purpose, and one of the things in Special Forces, we studied guerilla warfare and all of the great guerilla warfare leaders. And the thing that happens is that if you have a country where the downtrodden, you might say, are not being treated properly by the government, that leaves a good chance for the Communists to come in and try to take over. And they're going to come in and tell you we're going to do all these great things for you, and so on. But South Vietnam was a republic, it was a democratic form of government, and people had a lot of freedom. And they were living out in these poor villages. They found out the Communists were just coming in and stealing their food. So we didn't want any part of that and that's why we were very popular there to suppress that.

Unfortunately, the politicians got into the act and a war we should've won; should've helped those people. We gave it up. The saddest thing was probably at the end of the war when they called it Vietnamization where we would even allocate it to--each cannon could only have so many rounds of ammunition. If you're in a firefight, you run out of ammunition because somebody said you can't have any more, it doesn't make a lot of sense. But, that's where it went. It was a pretty sad situation.

Interviewer

How long were you there?

Scott Maddox

One year.

Interviewer

Could you relate two or three of the most interesting experiences?

Scott Maddox

Yeah, I'll tell you one. I don't like to tell this, but it's pretty poignant. It upsets me. We were out on a maneuver in a

canyon way out in the jungle and the mountains. And the scouts--the jungle's so thick, you don't march four abreast or anything, it's single file. You had the front--a rifleman out in front and he was followed by a grenade launcher; followed by a machine gunner. The rest of us were ammunition bearers. And the lead man, the scout comes back, and he says there's somebody coming down the trail. So we always just get off to the side of the trail and let 'em come. And we looked up and it was just a lone figure in a black sheath dress coming down, a little girl coming down the trail. So we came out and greeted her. And one of our Vietnamese soldiers could speak some--this girl was a Katu Montagnard.

And this one Vietnamese soldier could speak a little Katu, got her age and found out she was seven years old, that her village had been completely wiped out by the Viet Cong three days before. Her mother had hid her in the jungle and her mother went back to the village. And the Viet Cong came in and took their food, which they did--there was none left. So they slaughtered--they killed everyone in the village, man, woman, and child. This girl waited in the jungle for three days, came out, saw everybody dead. And so she's coming down this trail and that's when we met her.

Well, it just happened that the Germans had hospitals. They had a hospital ship out in the ocean that came in every day. They had a hospital where I was at. We weren't permitted to go there because we were warmongers. But, I knew they had a nurse there who was known as Mary Katu because she had befriended these Katu Montagnards. So, I sent a helicopter down to pick her up and bring her up to talk to this little girl. And she came up and talked to this little girl and we got all this information and then Mary took this girl back to the hospital with her. I don't know what happened to her after that but it's a pretty sad story. But that's very common with what was going on. The Communists were losing, they were being desperate and they were slaughtering people. They'd go into a village, first thing they'd do is kill all the village chiefs so there's no leadership left. That was typical what was going on all the time.

Interviewer

That was just South Vietnamese Communists?

Scott Maddox

Yeah, the Viet Cong were the South Vietnamese Communists. The only Vietnamese soldiers I saw were North Vietnamese soldiers were this group I said where we got all the rocket launchers and stuff, saw very many.

Then another thing is that intelligence was always a problem. It might be the same problem we had with the Iraq thing. The intelligence people want to guard their sources so much, sometimes they would have intelligence and they wouldn't share because they didn't want to lose their sources. If they told what they knew, then their source where they get it from wouldn't tell them anymore.

So we had a camp up on the DMZ that was really--oh, it was muddy and cold up there. We called it Georgia mud because there's red mud, just like down in Georgia. And so I spent three weeks up there, and I was, like, "Boy, we've got to shape this place up."

There was a Montagnard village that's being harassed by the Viet Cong. We moved the whole village. Even their houses, everything, they brought them down to one of our camps and put up a whole new village. But the gate to the village and the gate to the camp was on the opposite side of the village. So these Montagnard didn't like the idea of walking all the way around which was about a mile around so they just cut their own wire, the safety wire, had trails going down into the village. So I started getting all that fixed up and changing it. I was there for three weeks getting the thing shaped back up to where it looked like it should be.

But unknown to me at the time, this camp had been under surveillance by a North Vietnamese regimen for over a year. Well, I guess they knew that I had some power and I was able to get all these supplies in to build this camp up. The night I left, they attacked this camp. And the interesting thing is that we have so many radios in the United States Army. Communication's not much of a problem. But this whole Vietnamese regimen had one radio with the regimental commander. As luck would have it, the regimental commander and his radio operator got killed in the first action. So they had a whole regimen of North Vietnamese waiting to attack this village and they never got the word to come and do it and then we called in the help from the 5th Mechanized Division came in and helped them. And just this horrible slaughter all these North Vietnamese soldiers. Now we lost about 15 Americans, by the way, in that fight and it took forever to get the morale back up in that camp, and it did. But that was the worst camp we had hit while I was there. Now our camps, the Special Forces camps are not prepared to fight off a regular unit movement. That's why they had the strike force. And they also had a brigade of the 5th Mechanized Division up on the DMZ to help in case of regular unit action; they could come in and help us out and that's what they did.

Interviewer

What are those medals that you have on your jacket?

Scott Maddox

Well, I don't have any medals on me. I do have a few. This is a Special Forces crest. The next one up is a Master Parachute wings. And then that one's a Combat Infantry badge. Master Parachute means you've made a whole bunch of parachute jumps and, like, 65 or so or more. I've got well over a hundred jumps. The Combat Infantry badge means you were in actual combat with an armed enemy.

Interviewer

Can you think of any other unique experiences you had?

Scott Maddox

Well, I don't know. Our relationship, mine--and I'd like to particularly think was really good with our counterparts, the Vietnamese. And particularly with the Montagnard and the Nung Chinese, we had a force of Nung Chinese in our group. These people are all born fighters. And the women fought right along with the men. They had one little girl called (Tee-tee-kol? 24:30), accredited with killing, on her own hand, killing 50 North Vietnamese soldiers in a combat skirmish.

But they invited me to a dinner and of course in Special Forces we try to study the people we're going to work with, we want to learn all you can about 'em before you get there. You don't want to look stupid. And so I knew exactly what the situation was. So I went to this dinner and I'm the only American there and there's a big banquet table set up. And I'm at the head of the table and a village chief is at the other end and the assistant chief, who was a lady, was also at the other end of the table, had this big feast set up. Right in front of me was a chicken, a cooked chicken. It still had the head on it. And so everybody's sitting there and nobody moved. Everybody's just staring at me. And I picked up the chicken and put his head in my mouth and sucked the brains out of the chicken, put it back on the table. Well, that's what I was supposed to do. And they just cheered forever. And then I had to lock arms with the leader and have a drink of whiskey. That's what kind of relationship we had.

Interviewer

That was a custom?

Scott Maddox

Yeah, that was a ceremony but they didn't know that I knew that that was what I was supposed to do.

Interviewer

What is a Montagnard?

Scott Maddox

The Montagnards are exactly the same as our American Indians. They're not Vietnamese. They're mountain Indians, mountain people. That's what Montagnard means, mountain people. And even when I was there they lived pretty much like our American Indians used to live; live off the land. They lived in stilt houses, very self-sufficient.

Interviewer

A little more primitive?

Scott Maddox

Very, very primitive, very primitive, yeah. They never had anything, any modern devices whatsoever, nothing. But see, there, in Vietnam, they couldn't be drafted in the army. The Vietnamese could be drafted. The Montagnards couldn't even be drafted into the army. So we hired 'em to be their own army. And we hired 'em and paid 'em. We had a training camp where we would take them down to--we'd take a platoon, about 50 people at a time down to our training camp and train 'em to use arms and weapons and stuff. The only weapons they had was machetes and

spears. They used spears and stuff. One of the problems, too, was that because of the Vietnamese guerillas and stuff living off the land is that most of the wildlife was pretty much decimated; there was very little wildlife. There was no wild pigs or anything; they were all gone. The domesticated chickens we have came from Vietnam originally and I never heard a single chicken in Vietnam while I was there. One of our teams was out and had their tape recorder going, and they tape recorded some chickens crowing. But that was the extent of it all. All the wildlife pretty much decimated, eaten up.

Interviewer

Why were the Viet Cong so vicious in these villages?

Scott Maddox

Intimidation. Intimidation, it's that simple. They were losing, and they did whatever they could to gain power. Another sideline I should mention, talking about this, in a Communist situation, even if you have a military force, the actual leader of that force is a Communist person, a Communist leader and most of them were women.

On one of our operations they captured one of these lady Communists. And she had a little black book with her. It had the names of all the leaders that they took that they were going to kill. And I'm listed on that book. To this day I wish I could've had some way to keep that book because with my name in it, they were going to be executed as soon as they took over. But what we would do--now you heard stories about some of the prisons that they had put the Communists in and stuff. I saw none of that. All the prisoners we captured--this lady, they brought her down to me and I saw the book. And I give it back to the intelligence people and I talk to her through an interpreter. And they said, "Well, what kind of--," I said we don't need to ask her any questions. She really doesn't know anything, we got her book; we know what her goal was. And so we just didn't do anything with her, just put her in prison.

Now, those prisons are a stockade with nice American-built houses--huts, they don't need a house, huts, compound--with hundreds of volleyball nets. And I'd fly over this prison every day, practically. And they'd wave at me. They're down there playing volleyball. The war was over for them. They had three meals a day and all they could eat, play volleyball all day long. So it was a whole different world than what you'd read about.

Interviewer

How did that compare with the North Vietnamese prison camps?

Scott Maddox

Well, one of the big differences--now Billy Rowe, who was the only American to escape from Vietnam--I met him several times at Fort Bragg. He was captured for four or five years before he escaped. And the biggest problem was food. They'd just about starve to death. They were starving, too. They weren't going to feed you more than they got.

We didn't have that problem; our prisoners got all they could eat. But that was the biggest thing. Now Billy was

never way up in the North in one of the regular prisons, he was always with a moving group, mostly. So he didn't get treated as bad as those that were in, like, Senator McCain in the prisons where they were tortured severely, so he didn't have that problem. So it varied even among their people how their prisoners were treated. I'm sure a lot of them probably just passed away from hunger, fatigue, and so on.

Interviewer

When were you there?

Scott Maddox

'69 and '70.

Interviewer

They didn't have the withdrawal for a few years after that.

Scott Maddox

Well, the withdrawal actually started while I was still--in fact, the reason I didn't stay in Vietnam is because they were doing away with the Special Forces camps and they wanted to make us into Rangers. And I told them no, I'm not a Ranger. I can do all those things but I'm not a Ranger, and I don't do it. So I didn't follow through and when my orders came up I came home. But it went downhill from there. For example, it used to be that if the Vietnamese needed some help some place, I could get on the radio and call some fighters in to help 'em. They changed the rules where I couldn't do that. They had to call in and get their own fighters to go in to a place. And it just wouldn't work because they didn't have any fuel or helicopters or not as good as ours. And it just started falling apart, slowly fell apart. Korea and Vietnam War were fought with ammunition that come from Tooele Army Depot and they still got enough out there to fight another war and yet we had to limit the amount of ammunition they could have for their artillery pieces. You know, you say, well, you can fire five rounds, and then you can't have any more. That was the Vietnamization. So everything started moving to the coast, abandoned all the villages, moved to the coast and eventually down to Saigon and that was the end of trying to get them out of Saigon.

Interviewer

When they took over the cities, were they brutal to the citizens of Hue?

Scott Maddox

Yeah. Of course I wasn't there when the end was coming. But, now Hue was a different story. See, Hue is way out--it's pretty far north. And there's not as many people up there. And when I was up there, you didn't see very many people. So, at the end of the war, Hue, I don't think was a real factor. It was all more down south. Hue is too close. See North Vietnam is a cold, miserable place, they can't even hardly grow rice, they're starving to death up there. That's the reason they wanted to move south because South Vietnam could probably grow enough rice to feed the whole world with rice if it was run as a democracy or a republic instead of a Communist organization. But that's why they wanted to move down, where they could get the food supplies. So it was all down in the south where most of the rice was grown and stuff. So everything just kept moving south to push us right on out. We just let it happen,

political decision.

Interviewer

Yeah.

Scott Maddox

See, the American public were sold a bill of goods by the TV. And my family, and even after I come back you'd see every day they'd show you something blown up and it wasn't true, it didn't happen that way. I had congressmen say, "We want to go out and see some action." I said, "I can't show you any action. We don't know when it's going to happen. It's not happening every day like you see on TV. That isn't the way it is." So the American people got a wrong idea of what was going on. We should've stayed there. We should've won. The people had a democracy. They were free. They could go and come as they pleased. Now they can't do that. When they came in, they executed--they still have prison camps with political prisoners in them, relocation camps they call 'em.

Interviewer

Was the decision from Congress or was it a Presidential Defense Department decision to have ammunition that you can't shoot?

Scott Maddox

See, I don't know at what level that particular decision was made. It was a combination of the President deciding we got to get out of there and Congress saying we're going to get out. Who made the individual decisions about the shuttage of ammunition, things of that nature, I haven't any idea. I don't know.

Interviewer

When you were there Nixon was president, I think he was elected in '68.

Scott Maddox

Yeah.

Interviewer

He came in to wind down the war.

Scott Maddox

Well, Nixon wanted to--see, this will remind you a lot of Korea and the problem with Truman and MacArthur. MacArthur said we're going to fight a war, we've got to fight it with no hands, no holds on us. And it was the same in Vietnam. See, they had a sanctuary just across the border; we couldn't go across the border. So they had three million Chinese troops lined up on the border through Tet in '67. And we couldn't do anything about it. Well, Nixon came in; he let us go into those places to try and expand and to try to cut the supplies down from the north. The Ho Chi Minh Trail is not like State Street out there. The Ho Chi Minh Trail is a hundred miles wide. It's a series of hundreds of trails that go between all these little countries and villages. So, they had all this area to maneuver in and Nixon wanted to cut that supply route off. But he was thwarted in his attempt to do all that and it didn't work. So we lost.

Interviewer

I'm surprised that you compared Vietnam to Utah.

Scott Maddox

The looks-- how it looks. If you stand out in the valley and look up at the mountains it looks the same, except for there it's covered with jungle instead of pine trees. It looks exactly the same. You'd think you was back home.

Interviewer

But it's very humid?

Scott Maddox

Oh, it's really humid. It rains all the time. See, there's two rainy seasons, there's a rainy season and then the monsoons. The rainy season is worse than the monsoons. Like I said, I saw it rain 29 inches in 24 hours one time.

Interviewer

Can you take us through a day in the life of being at a camp and talk about the people there?

Scott Maddox

Well our training was such that we became part of them. We never tried to change what they were doing. We just tried to help 'em do what they were doing. Most of the people in the villages, particularly the larger villages were Catholic, the schools were Catholic schools. The kids went to school. Even while I was there, even as a war going on, the boys are wearing white shirts and black pants going to school every day.

And most of the village activity was the women. The younger women were planting the rice. The men were plowing and getting it ready for the women to plant the rice. And then at harvest time, everybody would go out and cut and harvest the rice. They'd cut it by hand and then pack it up and plow it in the middle of a field. And then they would haul it with an ox cart into the village. They would pound the rice off. This is going on every day all year round. Then they have these large baskets, they're about six feet across, three inches deep. And they'd pour the rice out on these, set them out in the sun. If the rain was raining, they'd move 'em inside.

The kids are going to school and the grandmas and the older women are all taking care of the kids; extended families is the way of life. And they were preparing all the food and gathering the food, preparing it, cooking it. Every village is on a river, the rivers are full of fish. They ate a lot of fish and eel. They eat eels just by the tons. And the women would spend all their time preparing this food. They'd cook the eels and stuff in oil, nuoc mam they'd call it, which they used by the gallon. And it was very pleasant in most of the villages.

Every village, if you saw a house with a tin roof on it, that meant that house had been blown up by the Viet Cong at one time or another, and we replaced the roof with an American-made tin roof. So you could tell how much a village had been hit. If 90 percent of the houses in the village were tin roofs, you know they had a lot of trouble. If 90 percent had thatched roofs, you know they didn't have much trouble. So, that's what you looked for when you went

anyplace.

Interviewer

Were you ever in a village when it got attacked?

Scott Maddox

Oh, yeah. Most of the attacks were by rocket launchers. And so they just rained 'em in all day long. Fortunately, the ones that these people had to haul down by hand were not very effective. If one landed on a rock or something, it just looked like a firecracker went off. The biggest damage is if they hit a shack made out of reeds or something, then it would burn very easily. But their rockets were not very effective; they were very small. But they would just rain them down all day long. You'd go in and be flying in a helicopter, I'd jump out and the helicopter would leave. Then I'd tell them when to come back and get me. Then I'd jump in, and we'd take off and go to the next camp. That happened usually for a week or two at a time.

Interviewer

How long would a team stay in a village to do training?

Scott Maddox

Forever, we were there forever. Our teams stayed there. They didn't leave at all.

Interviewer

So, the Special Forces teams in each--

Scott Maddox

They'd be there for years. It'd be a different team. They'd rotate people in. But there would be Americans there all the time, forever. No, we stayed there.

Interviewer

I imagine you created some bonding relationships with some of the people?

Scott Maddox

Yes, but unfortunately they're all dead now, except for one guy. Out Fort Riley--after the war, after I came back--

Interviewer

What about while you were there?

Scott Maddox

Well, we just lived right with 'em, we were just friends just like you and neighbors here. You're just part of the organization. And it's what you did. You lived together all the time, particularly out in the villages. And just for example, I had four maids, for instance. Didn't need four maids, but we hired 'em. They only got ten dollars a month. And we had hundreds of people working in each of our camps. Our money was flowed like water, you know, we could really take care of the people. And we took care of their health problems. Food, made sure they all had something to eat, all taken care of. We had the Nung Chinese, that whole group lived right in our compound with us. Most of the others were out in their own villages, but this was their village, right at our headquarters camp.

Interviewer

How many Special Forces were in each village generally?

Scott Maddox

Well, each village had an American team of 12 people and a Vietnamese team of 12 people.

Interviewer

They were both Special Forces?

Scott Maddox

They were all Special Forces. Now, we would have, for example, if we needed some special construction, the army would send us some engineers to do construction work. In fact, at this one camp there was over 11 of 'em. We had 11 engineers, and they're helping me get this camp rebuilt. And 11 of 'em were killed; all of 'em were killed.

Interviewer

When we pulled out of Vietnam, what happened to these villages you spent years protecting?

Scott Maddox

Well, most of the people--a lot of 'em would come down to the coast to try to be evacuated, which didn't happen. But the villagers were just simply overrun by the North Vietnamese.

Interviewer

Would they come in there and kill the leaders?

Scott Maddox

Usually, that's the case, yeah. Yeah. Some of them they would capture and put in these relocation camps to try to teach 'em they ought to be Communists. But most of 'em were executed. We have a large Vietnamese population here in Salt Lake. In fact, my pedicurist is a Vietnamese lady; she came from South Vietnam out in the islands. And south, it's below Saigon, places like that. We have a large Vietnamese population here.

Interviewer

Did you run into any problems in America when you got back?

Scott Maddox

No, I didn't have any of those problems. We all came back as individuals in those days, came back through San Francisco and then came home, had no problems whatsoever. Most of those problems, I don't know even where they were, probably back East, maybe down in California. But, we didn't have that problem here. In fact, after I came back I made many, many speeches around the city. People had asked me to come to Lion's Clubs and places like that and they were all interested in knowing what was going on, what really was it like there and why we were there. So I did that.

Not too long after I came back, I was reassigned to advise a National Guard unit in Kansas and I did the same thing there, I was always invited to make talks about the Vietnam War and what was going on. But I had never had any

problem at all; everybody was very supportive. I don't know where all these problems were, I was not involved in it in any way... very receptive return.

It's hard for me in a short interview like this to try to really explain what the Special Forces tries to do when they go someplace. I have secondhand information because I didn't go to Afghanistan, but the first people into Afghanistan with the current situation were Utah Special Forces, 19th Special Forces group. And they did exactly what you're supposed to. They went in and they joined up with the Afghan people, dressed like them, rode horses, grew beards and wore headbands and the whole works, became part of the Afghan people. And as far as I'm concerned, the Afghan War was over, and the Special Forces won it.

Then the active army comes in, and they decide they've got to get part of the act. And our guys had come down to the headquarters. And the colonel in charge of their camp made 'em shave off their beards and all that kind of stuff and just had no concept whatsoever how you're supposed to deal with people. You're there to help 'em, not to change 'em. And that's a big mistake. We're making it today, still making it. How are you going to take a country where its village is the main occupation? That's it. Each village is its own entity. We try to make it something else. That doesn't work and try to change their religion or don't like their religion and stuff. It doesn't work. It's no way to do it, no way to do it. But that's the Special Forces mission, to try to help people to take care of themselves. With all our resources, we can do it if they'd let us. Any other questions?

Interviewer

In the early '60s when the war was starting to ramp up, what were your thoughts back in the United States of this war effort?

Scott Maddox

Well, of course, like I said earlier, we study all these areas of the world where these problems might come about. And so we were quite familiar with what was going on and what was gonna happen. And here in Utah in the Special Forces units, we just knew that we were gonna be activated any day and they never activated the National Guard for Vietnam, which was probably a big mistake because they lost the community support. But we knew what was gonna happen and we just kept thinking we were gonna be activated and we never did. So that's why I volunteered to go. I'd spent 20 years training to do it, why not go. I knew it was a mission we needed to perform. Now I spent quite a bit of time in Washington, D.C. writing regulations. I spent time at Fort Bragg in training. I knew all these people--the first person killed in a Vietnam situation was Warren Moon, who was tortured and drug through the streets in Laos and drug to death. And he worked here. He came here in Utah in 1961 or 1962, I think it was, to do some training. And then we all got to meet him and all these people. Most of those early guys, he had that misfortune. He was captured and drug to death. So we were very familiar with what was going on really early in the whole war.

Interviewer

That's interesting. When I think of Special Forces I thought they were troops that were snipers or I think of a SWAT team.

Scott Maddox

We have all of that capability. We can do anything. We have that capability but that's not our mission. We would train other troops how to do that thing. In other words, my goal as a commander was I never would expect a troop to do something I couldn't do myself. So I wanted to be trained to be able to train anybody else how to do all of these things; but our mission is to help indigenous force--indigenous people to regain their autonomy. All these other things are missions we can do if we have to. Unfortunately, that's what Special Force is not being used in their trained mission right now. All they take units and try to make them something they're not. And that's, you know, they're desperate.

Interviewer

We appreciate your service, Scott, and we appreciate you coming in to be interviewed. I think we've all learned a lot about Special Forces today that we didn't know before.

Scott Maddox

Well, that was what I was hoping to be able to portray. It's difficult in a situation like this to really do it. I've got thousands of pictures and videotapes. I carried a camera with me all the time, I've got hundreds of pictures; I've got thousands of feet of movie film. One of my maids had a movie camera that one of the soldiers--she wanted a camera, and he gave her a movie camera. Well, she made ten dollars a month, and the film is five dollars for a short little reel. So she couldn't use it so she gives it to me. And I took hundreds of feet of movie film in Vietnam. I've got thousands of pictures out in the villages and all this stuff, and I got pictures of camps and how they looked and how they worked and so on. So it's a message I try to get out whenever I can and let people know about Special Forces. Special Forces war in Vietnam was not the same as the regular war. I met General Westmoreland several times; he was a wonderful general. He was an artillery officer. And that's all he knew was blowing things up. You go through an area and leave it. To win war you've got to go to a place, you've got to stay there. You've got to keep control of the land or you can't win. It's like the old saying, you stick your finger in a glass of water, you pull it out, it fills right back in the hole. And that's unfortunately the way the regular military functions. Our goal is to get there, stay there, and help the people until that time they're on their own.

Interviewer

Is there anything in that footage that you remember?

Scott Maddox

Ruth has got the whole tape.

Interviewer

Is there an event or a story or somebody in that film that is poignant that stands out to you?

Scott Maddox

Oh, I'll tell you the truth. When things were hot, you didn't have time to do any filming. You had to do what you had to do. So most of it's static stuff, just pictures of people doing stuff, things. There are some really interesting pictures. I got hundreds of them, really.

Interviewer

I'm always hearing that Communists-- the North, were so vicious and horrible and mean and I'm sure they were. But I've read equally that the South Vietnamese Army were just as vicious. Do you know anything about that?

Scott Maddox

Yeah, there was some of that, yeah, certainly. Certainly there was. But I never had any direct contact. All of the Vietnamese that we had to work with and where I was at were Special Forces, Vietnamese Special Forces.

Now I'll have to back up a little, we did have a couple of commanders. Each village had--in Vietnam--has a village chief, who is actually a lieutenant colonel in the Vietnamese army. He may have had a small staff with him, but he ran the village. We did not run the villages. He ran the village. We provided the people with security and so on. But his job was to maintain a presence with the Vietnamese government. And the areas I was at, we had two of them that would probably, like for instance, we would bring in tons of rice and we would give it to the village chief. Then he would hire the people to do jobs and he would pay 'em with his rice and stuff. Some of 'em would take the rice and try to sell it, which was against the rules. Some of them were, you know, just like any place else, just like our own politicians, lookin' out for themselves. But by and large, up in I Corp where we were at, we really didn't have that problem.

Up in the north, we don't have a lot of people up there. All that stuff you read about is mostly down around Saigon and the delta country, which is wide open, millions of people. I doubt there's a million people in the whole north of South Vietnam. It's a whole different world up there, different place altogether. But, yeah it's true. Now most of the senior Vietnamese officers, the oldest ones were all trained in France. My counterpart, the lieutenant colonel that I worked with, was a graduate of the Vietnamese or the French like our commanding general staff college. Most of the officers, the older ones my age and so on, were all trained by the French. Now the young officers, most of them were trained in the United States, all trained in the United States at Fort Benning, Fort Bragg, places like Fort Riley and places like that. Most of the officers are American trained. All the helicopter pilots are American trained.

Interviewer

Who appointed these chiefs of the villages? Were they elected?

Scott Maddox

No, they were appointed.

Interviewer

Appointed by the army guys in South Vietnam?

Scott Maddox

Yeah. Mm-hmm. Well, they each individually had an appointment from the President of South Vietnam. But they had draft just like we have here. They had draft. People were drafted into the army and so on.

Interviewer

Was there a name for the village that you…

Scott Maddox

Well, I can think of some of them, Thuong Duc.

Interviewer

The one that you stayed at the longest?

Scott Maddox

Tien Phuoc and Bato.

Interviewer

How do you spell these?

Scott Maddox

I haven't the faintest idea. Bato is B-A-T-O. Tien Phuoc, I have no idea how to spell it. I never learned to speak Vietnamese. In Vietnam, the letter "A" has seventeen sounds. I couldn't recognize more than two of them. I can look on a map and pick 'em all out.

Interviewer

When I went to Vietnam with a friend of mine, we had guides that showed us young kids that could speak perfect English that worked with Americans.

Scott Maddox

Yeah, they only let you go where they want you to go. They don't take you to the relocation camps.

Interviewer

They took us to hospitals where they keep people that had birth defects; a lot of propaganda going on about that.

Scott Maddox

Well, I'd mentioned about the Germans had a lot of health hospitals. Down in Saigon, the Germans had a ship, the Helgaland, pure white ship, where our doctors could get on but we weren't permitted on this ship. And every night before dark, it'd go out in the ocean where it couldn't be hit by a rocket and then every morning they'd come back in 365 days a year.

And they had several hospitals in Vietnam where they treated anybody that was wounded or injured. A lot of civilians would get injured with the rockets. One of the big problems in the villages, the Viet Cong would put mines in and booby trap and stuff in the trails. And so a lot of civilians were getting legs blown off and stuff, things like that. Another thing they did several times it happened but I can think of one case in particular. I got a call and asked if I

can help the Vietnamese patrol. One of the five houses around had been tripped as a booby trap and killed five people. And so that was a common occurrence. And the biggest cause of death in our area while I was there was probably booby traps. Someone would accidentally get blown up.

Interviewer

Did you stay in the service when you got back?

Scott Maddox

Well, just two years.

Interviewer

And then you retired?

Scott Maddox

And then I retired, yeah.

Interviewer

We honor and admire the Vietnam War soldiers who didn't get the same respect as World War II.

Scott Maddox

Well, I think from the standpoint of a soldier's standpoint, there's a lot of people don't like what the army does. But, it's a career. It's what we do. It has to be. The United States is the powerful country it is because of the military. Without the military, you don't have any power. United States has never had the mind to occupy somebody else's territory. We go to help them to be free but we do not take over their country. We don't want it.