

**General Colin Powell**, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Interviewed by: Joe Galloway

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The Pentagon

*Joe Galloway: We ought to start off with just a tiny bit of biographic information, how you ended up in the Army.*

Colin Powell: Well, I entered college at the age of sixteen and a half; didn't really know what I wanted to do; started out in engineering back in the '50s at that time because my parents said, "That's what you ought to do." And I realized within a few months after entering the City College of New York that engineering was not for me. And then suddenly I found cadets on campus, ROTC cadets. And I liked what I saw. We bonded as a team. And then I joined a fraternity called the Pershing Rifles, which was the elite of the ROTC corps. And I found a new family. I never lost my old family, but now that I was getting a little older I needed another family. This was my college family and was my military family. So I found something that I did well and I loved doing in ROTC. And so that's what I stuck with: Graduated as a Distinguished Military Graduate and head of the Corps of Cadets at the City College of New York; went into the Army and never came out despite my family constantly saying, you know, "You've been to Vietnam twice, you've been hurt twice; isn't it time to come out?" And I said, "Well, you know, I don't think so."

One thing led to another; and I had great people watching over me, and taking care of me, and training me and mentoring me over the years; and I just kept doing the best I could. People often say to me, "You know, well did you ever dream you'd become Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff?" I said, "Yeah, yeah. There I was in the South Bronx section of New York, standing on the street corner, about ten years old, and said to myself, "Sir, you're gonna grow up and become Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.'" But that isn't the way life unfolds. And I've talked to lots of people these days saying, you know, "I didn't join the Army to become a general. I didn't join the Army to get to the top. I joined the Army because I loved it. And success to me came every day that I was successful in the Army—even the bad days, where I learned something. So satisfaction and success in my military career came from every day's satisfaction and success. And that took me—I'm pleased to say and honored to say—up to the top.

*3:09 JG: I'd like to look at each of your tours in Vietnam separately. Let's start with the first one. You-- they're very different tours. Your first one was as an advisor to the South Vietnamese forces. Tell me about that; what your rank was at that time, your age, and what year that was.*

CP: I arrived in Seoul-- wrong country! ... *Wrong country [both laugh].* ... I arrived in Saigon on Christmas Day of 1962. And I'd been a captain for about two and a half months at that point. And I was going to be

an advisor to the 1<sup>st</sup> ARVN Division, a battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> ARVN Division<sup>1</sup>. And I was excited as can be; a young captain, about his fourth year in the Army, and going to the war; going to where the need was, to see action. I was in one of the early groups of advisors that President Kennedy sent to Vietnam to help them fight the evil of Communism, as we saw it. It was an extension of the Cold War. And so I was proud to be a part of that. And after staying in Saigon for a few days, Christmas period, I then went up to Quang Tri where my detachment was located. And after another few days there, I went out into the A Shau Valley where the battalion I was going to be advising was located. And as I say in my first book<sup>2</sup> about that experience of landing in the A Shau Valley, and looking around, and seeing the mountains that went over to Laos, and looking at the jungle or forest that we were in; I asked my counterpart, Captain [Vo Cong] Hieu, I said, "Tell me, what is the airfield here for?" And he said, "Airfield is here to protect the outpost." "Okay. What is the A Shau outpost here for?" "Outpost here to protect the airfield." It never got better [both laugh]. It never got better. It was circular.

And what we did in those days was essentially tromp through the forest looking for the Viet Cong. And they were watching us all the time, and knowing where we were before we knew where they were. And I remember the first day we ever ran into them, we got shot at. And we were ambushed one morning, and the lead soldier in the column was killed<sup>3</sup>. And we all started firing in every direction, not really sure what we were firing at. And it was over in a matter of just a couple of minutes. And it was the first man I had seen die in combat. And we had to wrap him up in a poncho, and carry him for a couple of days until we could find a way to get him out. In those days there were no dust-offs; in those days there were no radios to speak of. You had this hand-powered, wired radio<sup>4</sup> that used some part of the spectrum that I think is not being used anymore. ... *That didn't work very well back then.* ... It didn't, no. It was a push come to shove thing. And so that was my first experience. And we just tromped through that forest for the better part of six or seven months, setting up other little bases and outposts.

And on one of these places, a place called Be Luong, not far from A Shau-- the closest I ever got to being killed in my military career. And that was when the VC had spotted where we were pretty accurately, on the top of this hill, and started to fire mortars at us. And a lot of excitement on our outpost and the battalion commander wanted to start firing back. And I said, "Well, we don't know where they are; might not be a wise thing to do at this point." And he said, "No, we have to do it." And so we started to shoot back, further identifying our position with greater precision for the Viet Cong. And then suddenly, just standing there outside, there was this huge flash in front of my eyes; an explosion. And I immediately dropped to the ground and ran back to the bunker. After it settled down I went back outside and I saw that about eight or nine of our soldiers had been wounded. Nobody was killed, but a number of folks were wounded. The next morning when I went out to see where we were, I looked up, and there was a tree right in front of where I was standing. And the tree was shattered about twelve,

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<sup>1</sup> 2nd Battalion, 3rd Regiment, 1st Infantry Division

<sup>2</sup> Colin Powell, [My American Journey](#), 1996. p.78-90

<sup>3</sup> This occurred on the 6<sup>th</sup> day (February 13, 1963) of Operation Grasshopper, a long march through the jungle (or perhaps more accurately, tropical forest) that began on February 7, 1963.

<sup>4</sup> Most likely the radio set AN/GRC-9, a low-power radio transmitter and receiver for either ground or vehicular installations. The radio set receives and transmits continuous-wave (cw), amplitude-modulated (am), and modulated continuous-wave (mcw) radio-frequency (rf) signals in the 2 to 12 megacycle (mc) range. Affectionately known as the Angry Nine, it is still a favorite of the Special Forces. Another possibility is the Hand Crank US Army Signal Corps Telephone set TA-312/PT.

fifteen feet up. That's where the round hit. The round hit the tree on its way to my head, and went around me in a cone; the explosion went around me in a cone. And if that tree hadn't have been there, that would have been the end of my military career and my life. ... *Did they call you "Lucky" after that?* ... They didn't have to; I called me lucky after that.

And-- but then finally I did a dumb thing. I stepped into a Punji trap. You remember those, Joe. ... *I remember those.* ... And we were on our way out of the valley. We were walking back to the coast. And we were not too far from a Special Forces camp when I just wasn't paying sufficient attention, and went through the covering, the camouflage, and put a spike through my foot; immediately pulled it out (just normal reaction). I didn't say anything right away because I didn't want to seem even more stupid than I was. But then we started walking toward the camp and within a few minutes my leg was turning purple. The pain was intense. I had to get a stick to walk on.

And I did make it to the camp on my own power, but at that point the Special Forces medic looked at it, realized it was poisoned with buffalo dung on the tip of the bamboo spike. And they got me out of there. And a doctor was waiting for me when we got back to Quang Tri. And he took a look at the wound. It was superficial; it didn't really hit any bones or anything, but it did go through my foot. So my foot was turning purple. So he took something called Iodoform gauze, which is gauze with some treated ointment on it, an antiseptic or antibiotic, like Bacitracin. And he said, "Okay, now just lay down and hang on." And using a probe, he shoved it through the hole, came out the top, and like a shoe rag, you know, like you shine shoes? That's what he did. And then he bandaged it up. And I was okay in a few weeks, but then I became an assistant on the division staff in the operations office. And that's where I spent my last four months.

So I went back home. I went back home the week that President Kennedy was killed in November, 1963. ... *You were very early.* ... This was early. I sometimes think we might have been the first group, but I think we were the second group that went in. ... *General Sullivan was in that group as I recall.* ... He could-- he may well have been; he may well have been. My boss at the time was somebody I know very well, and some of your other guests know very well and that was-- I think you know him as well: [BG] George [B.] Price. ... *Yeah.* ... He was a major then and he was my boss; stayed a lifelong friend to this day. Yeah. But after a year I was ready to go home. And I didn't feel we'd done very much in that year. We spent a lot of time walking through the woods. We were able to ambush the Viet Cong on one occasion, and kill a number of them. But I think that was luck as opposed to smart tactics or correct strategy.

*11:03 JG: How did you feel about the Vietnamese when you first met them and at the end of your tour?*

CP: Very proud of them. I enjoyed serving with them. It was myself, a lieutenant, and a sergeant— American; and this battalion. And these young Vietnamese soldiers were hard-working. They were good fighters when the opportunity presented itself. The officers were reasonably competent, not yet to the American standards, but they were dedicated to what they were doing. They believed in what they were doing. So I very much enjoyed my time with them, particularly when I ate their food. We didn't have any other food. It was rice seven times three: 21 times a week. ... *A little dried pork.* ... Every way you can

think it, pork in ammunition cans—you know, the ones that say: Do not use as a food container. ... *Right.* ... Hey man, [laughs] it's all we had. And we would carry a little bit of livestock with us, but after-- after a week or so, the livestock was gone; the vegetables were turning on us; and all we had was rice. Glutinous rice, brown rice, fried rice, boiled rice; and I loved it. ... *Yeah.* ... And then on Day 13, when we ran out of rice, the war was over 'cause they couldn't go any further without rice. And we'd have to wait for the Marine helicopters (American Marine helicopters) to bring us our resupply. And that was always the-- almost a sexual experience to hear the H-34s coming in, making all that noise. I'll never get the name of the Marine commander who was always leading the flight, but we became buddies. And he would bring me the cigarettes (we smoked constantly in those days, as you recall, Joe). He'd bring me some pocket books, just cheap trash mystery comic-- pocket books. And he'd bring me a few little American things to eat. But it was his big smile and kind of that-- that knowing smile that if you ever need us, we'll be here. And they were; whenever we needed them. ... *Yeah.* ... *Yeah.* ... *They were good guys.* ... They were good guys. They were good guys. Except the day they thought they spotted some VC in our area and returned fire and hit about four of my Vietnamese soldiers. That was not a pleasant evening. ... *Not a pleasant evening.* ... No. ... *Well, thank God they couldn't shoot any better.* ... *Yeah.*

*13:34 JG: What was your-- well, it was early days. When you came back from this war nobody knew about in 1963 or 4, what was your reception at home?*

CP: It was fine. I-- people were interested to hear my experiences. I was stationed at Fort Benning and went-- the first thing I did when I got back they-- they were going to put me in the [Captains] Career Course, but I had a few months before it started, so they sent me to Pathfinder School<sup>5</sup>. And what I found was that so many officers, you know-- I was a rarity at that point; somebody who just came back from a year in Vietnam. ... *Yeah.* ... And so I had a lot of experience to share with those who were going over. And I did. And we were all still pretty high then. We all were pretty committed to what we were doing. We thought it was the right thing to do and we were sold on it.

But I have to say that when I came back after that first year while I was still a believer in this mission, I was having trouble coming to grips with how we actually prevail, because it's, you know, it's a disappearing enemy. It was mostly VC then, no NVA yet. And it wasn't clear to me; how do you defeat these guys? Do we put in lots and lots of folks all over the countryside that they can slip away from, go across the border into Laos? So even though I was still just a junior captain (I was only a year in grade), I was starting to think, "Well, this is the right thing to do;" and that's what we were told.

And we believed in our leaders, and we believed in our President. Counterinsurgency, as we then called it then I guess, and Green Berets, and all of that imagery that was out there said this is the right thing to do. You know, John Wayne running around and-- so it was good. And that feeling lasted for the next several years as I taught at the Infantry School, taught young second lieutenants about to graduate from OCS and send them over there. And then by 1965 or 6, when the buildup began and the ramp up began;

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<sup>5</sup> The mission of the HHC/1-507 PIR (United States Army Pathfinder School) provides a three week course in which the student navigates dismounted, establishes and operates a day/night helicopter landing zones, establishes and operates a day/night Air Force CARP, Army GMRS & VIRS Drop Zones, conducts sling load operations, provides air traffic control and navigational assistance to Rotary Wing and Fixed Wing Aircraft.

and then as you got into '67 when I was going to the Command and General Staff School; you started to sense the American people saying, "Well, you know, look. This is now 5, 6 years. What's going on?" And the casualties started to rise. And that will always get the American people's attention. And so by the time my second tour came around after I finished the Command and General Staff College ... *This was now about--* ... 1968. ... '68. ... '68, and I'm going back for my next tour, my second tour ('68 to '69). You could sense the disillusionment creeping in; the antiwar demonstrations. A number of the people in leadership positions who were coming back, some of them were saying, "This isn't happening. It's not working." And we started to lose our connection with the American people with respect to the cause. And with any cause, what is the price of pursuing that cause?

And so when I went back the second time, this time to be a battalion executive officer for a few months and then got pulled up to division headquarters to be the G3 and the Deputy G3 of the Americal Division; we were running large operations; we were putting out B-52 Arc Light zones every night. We were doing all kinds of things; shooting artillery all through the night. You just couldn't tell if it was having an effect. And it was also during that period where we were looking at metrics that seemed to have no real bearing on success or lack of success. The body counts-- ... *Just counting.* ... Just counting. We were counting things. And you know, as a young major now, and my other young major colleagues, we started to realize, you know, their birthrate and their determination will beat us. And we're looking at a buildup that's not going to get any bigger. Kennedy's gone, so the sort of magic Camelot spirit behind all of this was gone. Johnson's in deep political trouble and decides he will not run again. The country-- ... *There's McNamara* ... McNamara, who-- *who knew the cost of everything and the worth of nothing.* ... Right. And we also had some senior military leaders who also did not seem to understand the nature of the conflict they'd gotten themselves into.

But what made '68 a particularly unique year and turned it all—from a strategic and political level—against what we were doing: the assassination of Martin Luther King on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April, 1968, and then Bobby Kennedy a few months later in California. And people started saying, "The country's coming apart. Why are we fighting this war?" And then Nixon came in on the basis of: "I'm going to end this war." But he didn't say that right away. And to end it he thought he had to fight it for a longer period of time, and prepare the Vietnamese to take it over, the South Vietnamese. And so that is the period in which I was over there.

And we saw the body counts going up. You may remember, Joe (I'm sure you will): those Friday figures, when they came out they were now in the hundreds. And the American people said, "This has got to be brought to some kind of resolution." And we also found that the political situation in Saigon was so turbulent, with, you know, these generals-- they don't really look like they know how to fight a war. Are they fighting a war? They dress beautifully, and they strut a lot, but do they really know what they're doing? And we weren't sure about our own strategy: Search & Clear; Search & Hold; this, that, and the other. Arc Light boxes<sup>6</sup> going into the middle of the woods, late at night and we hadn't a real clue as to who was actually in those boxes. ... *Battalion commanders who commanded from fifteen hundred feet in*

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<sup>6</sup> [The target of the first Arc Light](#) (June 1965) was in [a] small one-mile by two-mile "box" located within the Bón Cát District of South Vietnam, just 40 miles to the north of Saigon.

*the air in a Huey.* ... We had a lot of those. And they were guaranteed a certain box of medals when they stopped being a battalion commander, regardless of how well they did or didn't do. So there was-- there was-- there was a malai-- not a malaise. I'm sorry, there was a corruption creeping into the system; a corruption in counting, some corruption in leadership. And then we also found that the troops were starting to leave us to some extent, with the use of drugs, fragging. All of that created an environment that was not conducive to fighting a successful-- ... *Did you see all those things in your division?* ... Yeah. Yeah. As a battalion commander we-- I had to be careful where I slept at night. I don't think I was in any great danger, but you couldn't be sure. And we had some racial tension in all the units, and my unit as well. And you had to deal with that. And as a black officer I had it all come my way. But we got through all of that.

But what I realized after it was over, and watching it from the standpoint of being the G3 or the Deputy G3 of what was the largest division in Vietnam at that time, the Americal Division, and watching what we were doing every day with our brigades, and the artillery, and the airstrikes and everything else, is that you couldn't measure progress. And then My Lai was tucked in there, which came out later in '69 or '70. It happened about four months before I got to the Americal Division, and I knew nothing about it until after I left. But when that hit in '69 I guess, or whenever the story broke, that also was a big-- a big hit on our strategy. ... *It was a terrible thing.* ...

But what I think most of us were realizing as we became majors and lieutenant colonels is that this is-- this really isn't a fight of Communism versus Democracy; it's a fight of nationalism. And in this fight of nationalism, the North Vietnamese, now in force (the NVA in force in the country of South Vietnam), the North not only were the stronger nationalists, they knew what they were fighting for, and they were prepared to sacrifice everything. We couldn't bomb them into submission, we didn't have enough troops to defeat them on the battlefield, and it became clear that this has to be brought to an end because we weren't going to be able to prevail. ... *Not in the best year we had did we kill more North Vietnamese than their birthrate increased that year. And you can't win by simple bloodshed.* ... Not if they're willing-- not if they are willing to also sacrifice the next generation, which they were perfectly willing to. ... *Yeah.* ... And as Ho Chi Minh and [General Vo Nguyen] Giap (their leaders) said: "We have the time and we will fight for this. We fought the French. We beat the French. And we're not going to stop now. We want the whole country. That's Vietnam." And the fact of the matter is, it is one country, artificially divided, and they were prepared to fight for it. And you know, mine the harbors, we can drop the bombs, we can do this, that and the other, but it wasn't going to stop them. And then finally along came 1973 and then 1975, and agreements were made.

And then-- many people will say that the coup de grace that finished the whole thing off was when Congress would not provide any more money or resources to the South Vietnamese. I don't know how you prove that one way or the other. My own personal judgment is that that might have sustained it longer, that might have given the South Vietnamese a better shot, but in the long term I don't see how they would have won. ... *You know, when they went down, there was still a year and a half worth of stuff in the pipeline, the aid pipeline.* ... *Yeah.* ... *But once the Congress voted to end it at some future point, the soul went out of it; whatever soul they had in the fight they lost.* ... They lost. And they didn't have

the-- frankly the competence of the NVA, the strategic vision of a Giap. And so I think we all knew what the outcome would be.

24:38 JG: *In your tours, how much contact did you have with your family back home?*

CP: None the first time. ... *None?! ...* No, the first time none. We would get letters occasionally; usually dropped out of an L-19<sup>7</sup>, you know the 19. ... *Yeah. ...* And that was it. There were no telephones, there was no Internet. And in fact, when I left my wife (and she was a brand new wife; we'd only been married a few months); but she was pregnant. And in fact we got married because she wouldn't write me letters if I didn't marry her for a year. And she was pregnant with our son (I didn't know he was a son at that time). But one day in the forest, an L-19 comes over and drops some mail out. And in the mail package is a letter from my mother. And mother says, "Blah, blah, blah, Aunt this, Uncle that, this is what's going on at the house, everybody in the family's fine. Love, Mother. PS—We're so delighted about the baby!" Huh?! What baby?!? And so I immediately cranked up that funny machine we had. And we managed to get a call back to Quang Tri where I had left instructions that when the baby came my wife would send me a letter, and in the bottom it would say, "Baby letter." And the clerks back in Quang Tri were free to open that letter and send me electronically that my wife had the baby, and what the baby was, and was she okay? And so when I said, "What happened?" And they said, "Well, let's look. Oh yeah, here it is. We've had it about three weeks. We didn't get-- [both laugh]." So Michael was about three weeks old when I learned he was born.

And the other thing we had (and I still have them, but I don't listen to them) in those days, those little brown tapes, those little Kodachrome tapes ... *Yeah. ...* you remember those, Joe? ... *Yeah. ...* And I recorded letters to Alma, my wife. And she sent them back; took a long time for them to go back and forth. But I still have those in my home, in a secure place. And after-- oh, about five or ten years ago I actually found one of these-- something that would play it. You know those little thin tapes. And so I said, "This thing has got-- these gotta be ruined by now. My gosh, it's forty years, fifty years almost." And I put one of them on, and turned it on, and it's as clear as the day. ... *Yeah. ...* it was made. ... *Get somebody to transfer it to DVD. ...* Yeah, I should do that. I haven't done it yet because it's still not brittle or anything. But once I started listening to it it was very, you know, moving. And I just put it away again. I didn't want to hear them. I don't know why. Let the kids here them someday.

27:36 JG: *How did you get any news about the war, or--*

CP: Almost non-existent. The first tour? ... *Yeah. ...* Nah, we didn't get anything. No. ... *Stars and Stripes, the next tour?* ... I don't think we even-- we might have seen Stars and Stripes every now and again. But you know it was a house organ. We didn't pay that much attention to it. ... *Just didn't pay any attention to it. ...* No. No. And the only contact we had with the outside was-- Armed Forces Radio would occasionally on the right time of the night, with the wire antenna stretched between the right trees, we could sometimes pick up on a Saturday night, Armed Forces Network coming out of Saigon, or wherever it came out of. And the joke I tell, and I've used it a little bit, is that they would play this Marty Robbins song that was so popular at the time: El Paso? ... *El Paso. ...* [Sings]: "Down in the West Texas town of El

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<sup>7</sup> Cessna L-19 Bird Dog

Paso, I fell in love with ... *a Mexican maid*<sup>8</sup> ... You got it. And so the Vietnamese would huddle around the radio to listen to this. And they didn't understand many of the words of course, but there was a refrain: [sings] "Out where the horses are ti-i-i-i-ed." Whenever we got to that, 300 Vietnamese in the middle of the-- [sings] "ti-i-i-i-ed [both laugh], I picked a good one, that looked like it could run" [both laugh]. And so I've memorized that.

And then-- I have to fast forward thirty or forty years to being Secretary of State. And at one of these Asian conferences with Asian nations<sup>9</sup>, we used to have a skit on the closing night of the conference. And every country was supposed to put on a skit. And my staff—I'm Secretary of State now—my staff and I always had trouble. Foreign Service Officers are not known for their musical ability or their skittish ability. And the Russians would always come prepared. So one I picked-- we were going to sing Marty Robbins. And the reason I picked it is because the conference was being held in Hanoi. And so I said, "Okay, I've got a story to tell about this song. And so I was going to tell the story of how it came to be that the Vietnamese and I would listen to this, and that I would actually sing the song. And then I needed somebody to play the role of the don- of the Mexican lady who is with the soldier-- or the cowboy when he's dying. And none of my staff volunteered for this role.

And so I asked the Japanese Foreign Minister [Makiko Tanaka] if she would play a Mexican prostitute [all laugh]. And once-- once my staff translated this and explained it to the Japanese staff, they thought I was crazy. But when they took it to the minister-- she's fun-loving. And she said, "Of course! I'll do it." And so, comes the evening and I sing the song and we get to the last part [sings]: "One little kiss and Salina<sup>10</sup>, goodbye." And at that point she's supposed to come out and kneel over me, and whisper sweet things as I'm dying. And I'm laying on the floor and-- Secretary of State Powell. And she comes running out. And she not only leans over me, she hugs me. And that's the picture that appeared in the New York Times the next morning. And I started getting calls from, first Alma [laughs], but my-- the staff was terrified. What's gonna happen? The New York-- somebody snuck a camera. And so-- the New York Times, page 1<sup>11</sup>. And they were worried not about the reaction in the United States, which would be comical, but in Japan. And I said, "Relax. Relax. Her husband's alright." And then I reminded my staff: "They love karaoke! No problem." ... *No problem!* ... That's a diversion you don't need, but I had to throw it in.

But by the time I got home in '69, I'd asked to go to graduate school. They first said, "No, your undergraduate grades were too low." And then I said, "Well, you're gonna have to turn me down." And I sent it in officially and they-- my military grades were pretty good, so they let me go to graduate school—George Washington University in Washington, DC—to study business, data processing. And I was on that campus for two years as the student riots were breaking out; as the Congress was in turmoil; the whole country was in turmoil. And there were many a day when I would be on campus at George Washington University, right here in-- just outside of Georgetown, and there'd be tear gas

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<sup>8</sup> "Out in the West Texas town of El Paso I fell in love with a Mexican girl"

<sup>9</sup> Foreign ministers' conference of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (July 26, 2001)

<sup>10</sup> Actually, Felina...

<sup>11</sup> "Powell, in Hanoi, Pauses To Put the Past to Rest" by Jane Perlez, New York Times, July 27, 2001, p.A10

wafting through the campus. And the students—you know, we were not in uniform, but we would have to talk to the students and explain to students what we were trying to do. And it got harder and harder over time. And I think we realized, certainly by the time I graduated in '71, that this had to come to an end as fast as possible. Not only were we not prevailing in Vietnam, it was hurting our country badly: the morale of the country; the resources being spent in this conflict that seems to have no end; and the number of wonderful young men (and some women) who had been killed and were being killed. You know, four of my classmates from City College in New York were killed. And so it was just a matter of time in my judgment. I didn't go back there. I got sent to Korea to command a battalion. I didn't get back to Vietnam.

*33:31 JG: Is there any memory or experience from your service in Vietnam that has stayed with you through the years and had a lasting impact on your life or changed you in some way? Either tour.*

CP: When I finished my second tour and then finished graduate school, then I had a White House Fellowship, and then went to Korea for a year. By now I'm no longer a naïve young captain. I've been through the best schools the Army can put me through. And then they were sending me through after I finished my time in Korea I was gonna go to the National War College. And so by then I was thinking through what I had been through. And I think that's when I started to say, "You know, we owe it to the American people and we owe it to the people we send into battle to make sure we know exactly what it is we're sending them in to do. And do we have a clear political objective that's been well thought out, and is not just, you know, hortatory? And then how do you win? And you win by putting in all the force you can. And you will also win quicker and be out of it quicker if you do it that way." It was the thinking that was going through my mind from my Vietnam experience.

And then when I progressed a little further and in the early '80s frankly, when I was working for Cap Weinberger, the Secretary of Defense, and we had the whole of Vietnam behind us, Weinberger put out the famous six principles<sup>12</sup>. And it was not just his six principles that influenced me but as a result of the War College and Command and General Staff College, you know, this street kid from New York got an education that I hadn't gotten at CCNY about war and military matters. And I started studying and I realized that what Weinberger talks about and what I'm thinking about is not new found wisdom. I could

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<sup>12</sup> On November 28, 1984, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger delivered a speech before the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. on "The Uses of Military Power." In this speech, he laid out the following six principles:  
FIRST: The United States should not commit forces to combat overseas unless the particular engagement or occasion is deemed vital to our national interest, or that of our allies.  
SECOND: If we decide it is necessary to put combat troops overseas, we should do so wholeheartedly and with the clear intention of winning.  
THIRD: If we do decide to commit forces to combat overseas, we should have clearly defined political and military objectives. And we should know precisely how our force can accomplish those clearly defined objectives. And we should have and send the forces to do just that.  
FOURTH: The relationship between our objectives and the forces we have committed—their size, composition, and disposition—must be continually reassessed and adjusted if necessary.  
FIFTH: Before the U.S. commits combat forces abroad, there must be some reasonable assurance we will have the support of the American people and their elected representatives in Congress. We cannot fight a battle with the Congress at home while asking our troops to win a war overseas or, as in the case of Vietnam, in effect asking our troops not to win but just to be there.  
SIXTH: The commitment of U.S. forces to combat should be a last resort.

find all of this in Sun Tzu; I could find all of this in Clausewitz; I could find this in the ancients and the way they fought wars.

And so as I then reached the highest positions in the United States Armed Forces, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and had to actually fight new wars (the two that were most significant in my time as chairman was the Invasion of Panama<sup>13</sup> and the Gulf War; first one, Desert Storm). And a reporter came to me while these things were happening and said, “You know, I want to write a story about the Powell Doctrine.” I said, “Hey, that’s terrific. What is it?” I didn’t know Powell Doctrine. He said, “Yeah. Well, I’m gonna write one about it; I’m gonna write a story about it.” And he did. The next day he wrote the Powell Doctrine. And it’s been misinterpreted in many different ways. But, you know, people say: “Powell always wants to put an overwhelming force.” And I stopped using that term after using it maybe using it once, but from then on in the press would not go away from it. Decisive. You have to act in a decisive way if you’re gonna achieve your objective and if you’re not gonna waste the lives of our young men and women, and if you’re going to keep the support of the American people. And so the way I always characterize it, not as Weinberger’s six principles, but:

- 1) Have a clear political objective—political objective—and bring all the forces to bear (economic sanctions, diplomacy, whatever you need), and you have the military force getting ready so that if all those things fail, then you go in and you go in to resolve the issue decisively. ... *Decisively*. ...

When Panama got impossible to manage, and [General Manuel Antonio] Noriega<sup>14</sup> killed one of our men on a Saturday night<sup>15</sup>, Max Thurman<sup>16</sup> (who you knew well)-- we had been working on a plan<sup>17</sup>. He was now the commander in Panama<sup>18</sup>; I was the chairman<sup>19</sup>. And the original plan was to go snatch Noriega. And Max and I thought, “Nah. If we have to do this at any time, if they ever provoke us to the point where the President wants us to do something, take it all out.” And so the morning-- the Sunday morning after the problem at night where they killed the young man and abused some other people<sup>20</sup>, Max and I talked on the phone. I was ready. I brought the chiefs to my quarters at Fort Meyer and briefed them on what I was gonna brief the President. And then Mr. Cheney, my boss, Secretary of

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<sup>13</sup> Operation JUST CAUSE

<sup>14</sup> [According to Chris Scudder of the 9th PSYOP Battalion](#) based in Ft. Gulick, Panama (1970-71), then-Major Manuel Noriega—a student in his PSYOP class—was known by his nickname, “Pineapple Face.”

<sup>15</sup> On December 16, 1989, United States Marine First Lieutenant Robert Paz was killed at a roadblock by Panama Defense Forces (PDF) soldiers. Paz and three other Southern Command officers were traveling in a private automobile off duty in civilian clothes and unarmed.

<sup>16</sup> General Maxwell R. “Mad Max” (sometimes “Maxatollah”) Thurman was Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army and before that commander of United States Army Training and Doctrine Command. Thurman was the architect of the U.S. Army’s “Be All That You Can Be” recruiting campaign.

<sup>17</sup> President George Bush ordered the Joint Chiefs of Staff to prepare for a Panama invasion in February 1988. This operation plan for offensive operations (plus defense of the Canal Zone and evacuation of civilians), OPLAN BLUE SPOON (OPLAN 90-1), was completed in September 1989. In October, following the failed coup attempt, the plan was revised to OPLAN 90-2 by GEN Powell (now CJCS) and GEN Thurman, which replaced elements of the 7th Infantry Division with the 82d Airborne Division as the dominant lead assault force in order to achieve maximum speed in the event of an invasion.

<sup>18</sup> In September 1989, General Thurman was named commander of U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), based at Quarry Heights, Panama. He delayed his retirement and accepted the position at the request of the Bush Administration.

<sup>19</sup> General Powell became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Oct. 1, 1989.

<sup>20</sup> A Navy lieutenant and his wife, who had witnessed the murder of Robert Paz, were seized by the PDF and taken to *La Comandancia*, where the lieutenant was interrogated and beaten and his wife was threatened with sexual assault.

Defense Cheney and I went over to see the President. He'd never heard of this plan, he'd never seen it before; he didn't know the concept we had been working on. And I laid it out to him. I said, "Mr. President, we're going to go in with 26,000 troops." "What?" "We're just gonna-- we've already got 13,000 there in Panama waiting. We'll throw in another-- throw in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne and we'll get the 7<sup>th</sup> Division from [Fort Ord] California, and we'll take it out. We'll get it done quickly." And that's exactly what we did. And Panama, at least in my education, was a warm up for Desert Storm.

And it was a reflection of the way I don't think we did it correctly in Vietnam. Vietnam might have been something we should never have gotten into in the first place. Maybe advising. And some people suggest Kennedy would not have done what Johnson did. He would have seen that the advisory thing continues, but he would not have stepped over the line thinking that this is a war we should be in. ... *There's no way to know that.* ... No way to know that now. So I'm not criticizing Johnson or Kennedy. Each man did what he thought was right at the time. But it taught me the lesson.

And so we learned in Panama to do it quickly. It was over in a couple of days. We also ran a Special Forces operation to rescue one of our spies. And we put a new president in on day two He was already there; elected, but hiding under a bed. We brought him out; "You're the president. Go." And we rebuilt the Panamanian defense force in a matter of a few weeks. And it was [Lieutenant] General Carmen Cavezza who was running the 7<sup>th</sup> Division. I brought it in on top of the 82<sup>nd</sup>. I said, "Carmen, you go clear the rest of the country." And he just drove through the countryside. And every time he came to a village they'd get a bullhorn and say, "Anybody in there want to fight?" [all laugh] And the answer was "No!" And we took the whole country in a matter of a week or two.

Now it was a warm up, but it wasn't quite Desert Storm. But Desert Storm-- remember who was there: [General H. Norman "Stormin' Norman"] Schwarzkopf [Jr.], Vietnam veteran; [General Charles A.] "Chuck" Horner, Air commander, Vietnam veteran, all of them. ... *All those guys.* ... We all were--half--many of the senior commanders were my War College classmates, so we knew each other. And we all were of that same view: If you're gonna do it; do it. And so when it happened, and the invasion took place, Norm and I briefed the President that weekend. And both of us tempered by Vietnam, we showed him what we would do to protect Saudi Arabia (Part One of the mission); and Two, if he told us to, to kick the Iraqi Army out of Kuwait.

And so four days after that invasion by the Iraqis into Kuwait, we had given the President the concept that we'd be executing six and eight months later; almost to the minute, almost to the single unit. And I told the President then that at some point I will come to you and ask for a significant increase in the number of troops. Some of my colleagues in the Administration thought that Norm and I were doing this to keep the President from doing that, so that he would, you know, back away from making such a commitment. But President Bush had told us: "You'll get what you need."

So in early November of that year, I came back from a briefing with Norm. Saudi Arabia was secure. I laid out a map showing the President how we were defending Saudi Arabia. And then I dropped a flip (remember the old days when we actually had flips?); I dropped an acetate overlay. I said, "This is what we want to do to kick 'em out if that's what you want to do." And we're still trying to get a political

solution, remember, sanctions and all that. And I said, "This is what it will take. And we want another 250,000 men, troops." And the President-- you know there was a few sighs in the room; myself, Cheney, the President, a few others. And after I explained to him what we were going to do with them, and why, he said, "Do it." And that was it. We did it. ... *That was it.* ... That was it. And we did it. And we also had a clear political objective. It was not to go to Bagdad. You'll recall, Joe, everybody was saying, "We're gonna lose 10,000, 15,000, 20,000 guys. We lost a couple of hundred, every one a tragedy. But then suddenly, "Oh, if it's so easy, go to Bagdad." ... *No.* ... But that was not the mission. For ten years I had to listen to people saying, "You should have gone to Bagdad;" until 2003 ... *Yeah.* ... when suddenly they went to Bagdad and it didn't turn out to be that nice a place to go to. ... *Not so nice a place.* ... Yeah.

But to summarize this, when people ask me about the so-called Powell Doctrine, I said "It's in traditional United States military theory. It's the principles of war. And there are two principles that the Powell Doctrine and the Weinberger Doctrine reflects, and I think should always be reflected: 1) The principle of the objective, political objective. And the second principle is the principle of mass. There are seven or eight others, but those are the two that condition my thinking. And I have to say that's drawn I think ultimately from my experience as a captain and major in Vietnam.

43:41 JG: Thank you, Sir.

CP: Thank you, Sir!