

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

General Louis H. Wilson, Jr.

U.S. Marine Corps (Retired)



Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, USMC (Retired)

Interviewer

HISTORY DIVISION
Marine Corps University
Quantico, Va.

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FOREWORD

This volume is the transcribed memoir of General Louis H. Wilson, USMC (Ret). It results from a series of recorded interviews conducted with him at Headquarters Marine Corps on 15 March; 24 April; 2 May; 19, 25, and 26 June 1979, and at his home in Mississippi on 24 and 25 February 1980 for the Marine Corps Oral History Program. This program obtains, by means of tape recorded interviews, primary source material to augment documentary evidence.

Oral History is essentially spoken history, the oral recall of eyewitness impressions and observations recorded accurately on tape in the course of an interview conducted by a historian or an individual employing historical methodology and, possibly, the techniques of a journalist. The final product is a transcript containing historically valuable personal narratives relating to noteworthy professional experiences and observations from active duty, reserve, and retired Marines.

General Wilson read the transcript and made only minor corrections and emendations. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that he is reading a transcript of the spoken rather than the written word. General Wilson has placed a restriction of OPEN on the use of his interview transcripts. This means that a potential user may read the transcript upon presentation of appropriate credentials.

Transcript preparation was a History Division team effort. Support and encouragement came from HD's leadership. Oral Historian, Dr. Fred Allison oversaw the project, Col Chris G. Wright, USMCR scanned and edited the original, while intern Amanda Babbitt updated the digital version, Lena Kaljot, HD's photo archivist advised and provided appropriate photos while W. Stephen Hill and Peggy Frierson in Editing and Design did the photo and illustration work. Finally Kirsten Arnold, an oral history volunteer did the index.

Copies of this memoir are deposited in the Marine Corps Oral History Collection, Marine Corps University, Quantico, VA and at other selected repositories and commands.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dr. Charles P. Neimeyer".

Dr. Charles P. Neimeyer
Director of Marine Corps History
USMC History Division



GENERAL LOUIS H. WILSON

Louis H. Wilson was born February 11, 1920, in Brandon, Mississippi. He earned a BA degree in 1941 from Millsaps College, Jackson, Mississippi, where he participated in football and track. He enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve in May 1941, and was commissioned a second lieutenant in November of that year. After attending officers' basic training, he was assigned to the 9th Marine Regiment at Marine Corps Base, San Diego, California.

General Wilson went overseas with the 9th Marines in February 1943 making stops at Guadalcanal, Efate, and Bougainville. He was promoted to captain in April 1943.

During the assault on Guam, on 25 and 26 July 1944, while commanding Company F, 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, he earned the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest honor, for heroism in combat when he and his company repelled and destroyed a numerically superior enemy force. Because of wounds received he was evacuated to the U.S. Naval Hospital, San Diego, where he remained until October 16, 1944.

General Wilson returned to duty as Commanding Officer, Company D, Marine Barracks, Camp Pendleton, California. In December 1944, he was transferred to Washington, D.C., where he served as a detachment commander at the Marine Barracks. He was promoted to major in March 1945. From June 1946 until August 1951, General Wilson had consecutive tours as Dean and Assistant Director, Marine Corps Institute; Aide-de-Camp, Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific; and Officer in Charge, District Headquarters Recruiting Station, New York City.

Promoted to lieutenant colonel in November 1951, while stationed at Quantico, Virginia, he served consecutively as Commanding Officer, 1st Training Battalion, The Basic School/Commanding Officer, Camp Barrett, and executive officer of The Basic School. He completed the Officer's Senior Course in August 1954.

After a brief tour as a Senior School instructor, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, he departed for Korea to serve as Assistant G-3, 1st Marine Division. In August 1955, he returned to the United States with 1st Division, and was named as Commanding Officer, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division. In March 1956, General Wilson was assigned to Headquarters Marine Corps, serving two years as Head, Operations Section, G-3 Division. He returned to Quantico, first as Commanding

Officer, Test and Training Regiment, and later as Commanding Officer, The Basic School.

In June 1962, after graduation from the National War College, he was assigned as Joint Plans Coordinator to the Deputy Chief of Staff (Plans and Programs), Headquarters Marine Corps. He transferred to the 1st Marine Division and deployed with the division in August 1965, stopping at Okinawa before going to Vietnam. As Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, 1st Marine Division, he was awarded the Legion of Merit and the Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Gold Star.

Upon return to the United States in August 1966, General Wilson assumed command of the 6th Marine Corps District, Atlanta, Georgia. Promoted to brigadier general in November 1966, he was assigned to Headquarters Marine Corps in January 1967 as Legislative Assistant to the Commandant of the Marine Corps until July 1968. He then served as Chief of Staff, Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific until March 1970, earning a second Legion of Merit.

He was advanced to the grade of major general in March 1970. He assumed command of I Marine Amphibious Force/3d Marine Division on Okinawa and was awarded a third Legion of Merit for his service.

In April 1971, he returned to Quantico for duty as Deputy for Education/Director, Education Center, Marine Corps Development and Education Command. He was promoted to lieutenant general in August 1972 and on September 1, 1972 assumed command of the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. During that tour, General Wilson was presented the Korean Order of National Security Merit, GUK-SEON Medal, 2d Class; and the Philippine Legion of Honor (Degree of Commander) for his service to those countries.

He was promoted to general on July 1, 1975 and assumed the office of Commandant of the Marine Corps the same day. General Wilson retired on July 1, 1979, and was awarded the Defense Distinguished Service Medal (First Oak Leaf Cluster) at that time.

A complete listing of his awards includes the Medal of Honor; the Defense Distinguished Service Medal (First Oak Leaf Cluster); the Legion of Merit with Combat "V" and two gold stars; the Navy Commendation Medal; the Purple Heart Medal with two gold stars; Presidential Unit Citation with one bronze star; the Meritorious Unit Commendation; the American Defense Service Medal; American Campaign Medal; the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with three bronze stars; the World War

II Victory Medal; the National Defense Medal with one bronze star; the Vietnam Service Medal with two bronze stars; the National Order of Vietnam, 4th Class; the Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm and Gold Star; the Korean Order of National Security Merit, GUK-SEON Medal, 2d Class; the Philippine Legion of Honor (Degree of Commander); the Spanish Grand Cross of Merit; the Korean Order of National Security Merit, TONG-IL Medal; the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Meritorious Unit Citation (Gallantry Cross Color); and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

U.S. MARINE CORPS ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Interviewee: General Louis H. Wilson, Jr. Commandant of
Marine Corps

Interviewer: BGen Edwin H. Simmons, USMC (Ret)

Place: Commandant's Office, Navy Annex, Arlington, VA

Session I -- 15 March 1979

Simmons: This is Edwin Simmons, retired Marine brigadier general and Director of Marine Corps History and Museums, it is 1500 on Thursday, 15 March 1979. I am in the office of the 26th Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen Louis H. Wilson, Jr. This room is Room 2004 in the corner of the second floor at the Navy Annex in Arlington, Virginia. The windows look out on Arlington National Cemetery and Henderson Hall, which is the Marine barracks which houses the Headquarters Battalion and other supporting activities for Headquarters Marine Corps.

This has been the office of the Commandant of the Marine Corps since it was first occupied by Gen Alexander A. Vandegrift, the 18th Commandant, in 1944. Thus it has been the office of Gen Cates, Gen Shepherd, Gen Pate, Gen Shoup, Gen Greene, Gen Chapman, Gen Cushman, and for the last almost four years, Gen Wilson. Gen Wilson will leave this office on 30 June 1979. His successor has not yet been announced.

This is the first of a series of oral history interviews which will be held by me with Gen Wilson. It is our intention to cover thoroughly his four years as Commandant and then to go back and retrace our way through his full Marine Corps career. We have at hand his appointment books used these four years while he has been Commandant.

To establish a kind of chronology for these interviews we will

work our way through these books, not necessarily hour by hour, day by day, but as a general sequential guide. We recognize that appointment books are not infallible; sometimes important meetings take place that fail to get entered, sometimes there are scheduled events that fail to take place. Hopefully, we will correct these shortcomings as we go along.

Gen Wilson is seated at his desk, a very ordinary government-issue walnut finished desk. The office is bright and cheerful but not ornate. The chief ornamentation are some good examples of Marine Corps art on the wall, and some personal memorabilia and souvenirs of Gen Wilson.

Gen Wilson is wearing an olive-drab, knitted woolen sweater with shoulder and elbow patches, the so-called "woolly pully." We will have more to say about the woolly-pully later; now for the first question.

The first entry in your appointment book for 1975 is your arrival, along with Mrs. Wilson, in Washington on Saturday, 17 May. By that time, you already knew that you had been selected as Commandant. So let's start a little earlier.

When was it that you first learned that you were under consideration for the office?

Wilson: It was in, oh, March of 1975 when I had a call from Jim McCullen, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy's aide, indicating that I was to come to Washington for an interview. I was then the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, at Hawaii.

Simmons: How did the selection process work? I mean as I recall there were interviews, there were other general officers under consideration and so on. How did that proceed?

Wilson: Yes, was interviewed. I came in for an appointment with

the Secretary of the Navy and with the Secretary of Defense, [James] Schlesinger, in March. I know that there were other interviews with the Assistant Commandant, Gen [Earl E.] Anderson. All of the lieutenant generals, I believe, were interviewed within a period of three or four days by the Secretary of the Navy. I don't think all were interviewed by Secretary Schlesinger; but I'm not sure how many were.

Simmons: In what form did notification come to you that you had been selected?

Wilson: Well-- and this was the first of a series of interviews. There was a second interview that occurred when I was directed to come back to Washington without telling anybody; as a matter of fact, without informing the Commandant. I was specifically directed to do this, which I did at my own expense (later reimbursed) and was to come and notify no one of my appearance in Washington. I did this, for an interview with Secretary Schlesinger, who after the interview called the White House--the President--(although I was not in the room) ... he came back and indicated to me that the President had approved my selection. But this was so tentative; I pretended not to consider this as a final decision. And so I was notified on the morning of the day after the evacuation of Saigon. I remember it very well and an interesting story which I might relate here.

Simmons: Please do.

Wilson: I'd been up all night in the CinCPac command center with Adm [Noel] Gaylor, CinCPac, and as the Marines had conducted the evacuation of Saigon under most difficult circumstances, with Ambassador [Graham] Martin allowing many Vietnamese to enter the

compound and come into the embassy and be evacuated. Then when ordered to leave, left some 100 Marines there which we had to continue to evacuate. I was busy, and about 8:30 that morning I had a call from Secretary Schlesinger who had said to me that I had been selected by the President to be the Commandant. An interesting story unfolded that Secretary Schlesinger, in an effort to call me, had directed his secretary to get in touch with Gen Wilson in the Pacific. There was a Gen Lou Wilson whose name is the same as mine, who was PacAF Commander. At that time, he was in the Philippines at Clark Air Force Base, and it was the middle of the night. The Secretary's secretary got Gen Wilson out of bed and he came to a telephone, very concerned that the Secretary of Defense would be calling him. When he asked if this was Gen Wilson he said, "Yes." He then congratulated him for being named Commandant of the Marine Corps.

Simmons: It must have been a surprise to the other Gen Wilson.

Wilson: Yes. He often has wished that he would have been more clever but he said, "No," that he was sure that he was the wrong one, and they wanted to talk to me in Hawaii. Schlesinger then did call me and when he congratulated me he asked if this was Gen Lou Wilson. I said, "Yes."

He said, "Well, you are the second Lou Wilson I've congratulated today."

Simmons: Well, then you came back and appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee on 6 May in connection with your confirmation as 26th Commandant. What are your recollections of that?

Wilson: I did. In fact, I came back from Honolulu then on another trip for the confirmation hearing. Senator [John C.] Stennis was anxious to have the hearings take place. My recollections are that there were practically no questions; I was given the opportunity to say what I wanted, which was nothing really, except that I would do the best I could. So that was a perfunctory thing.

Simmons: As I said earlier, you and Mrs. Wilson arrived in Washington on Saturday, 17 May. Where did you stay?

Wilson:: We stayed at the Navy Yard in Quarters P-3 for awhile before we moved to the Sheraton Hotel. This was brought about by the fact that while I was back here on my confirmation hearings, Jane had our household effects packed. When I got back to Hawaii, why I left two days later to come back to Washington, stopping by my home in Mississippi for a period of about two days.

Simmons: Your first evening in Washington you had dinner with LtGen and Mrs. William K. Jones at their home on Huntley Place, Alexandria. You and the Joneses would frequently entertain each other in the weeks and the months and years to come. This suggests a close personal friendship and probably a close professional relationship. Would you comment?

Wilson: Very much so. Of course, I have always enjoyed my close association with Bill Jones, who was an outstanding officer and a great favorite of mine; he was an officer whom I admired and respected and looked up to a great deal over the years. I had succeeded him in two different jobs directly, and other jobs indirectly. He was the commanding officer of the Basic School a couple of times before I was the commanding officer, but I

relieved him directly as the commanding general of the 3d Division and III MAF [Marine Amphibious Force] and later as the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. So we have been old friends for many years and he has been a great source of help to me as Commandant--I might say--in the last four years, having served at my request on the Board of Visitors of the Naval War College. Oftentimes, I have sought his advice on items of the Marine Corps interest because he has kept up very closely with the Marine Corps in his retirement, and I never fail to get anything but straightforward (and always good) advice from Bill Jones.

Simmons: The next evening, Sunday, you had dinner with LtGen and Mrs. Sam Jaskilka. Did you know at this point that Gen Jaskilka was going to be your Assistant Commandant?

Wilson: Yes, I had already discussed this with Sam. In fact, when I came to Washington for the confirmation hearing from Hawaii, I had gotten together with Sam (he then being the Director of Personnel) and we stayed up all night in working up a general officers' slate. I had already determined that he was going to be the Assistant Commandant.

Simmons: Very interesting. Next day, Monday the 19th of May, your briefings at Headquarters Marine Corps began a full schedule, hour after hour, probably a necessary evil. Now you have a reputation for becoming impatient with long, formal briefings.

Wilson: Well I suppose I have. I remember those as very informative. It had been several years since I had been at Headquarters Marine Corps. I do find the days very long if I have to listen to briefings all day. I had then determined that I would have more of a contact with the staff than I have, actually had in

my years as Commandant. This is one of my regrets.

In going around the offices to determine where they were and the people involved, I made a pledge to myself that I would get around to these offices more often than I've done. I've been neglectful in this, which I regret. But I did get an overall view from these briefings which I believe is very important.

Simmons: Tuesday morning, 20 May, began with an office call at 0800 with the Secretary of Defense, Dr. Schlesinger whom we have already mentioned. What are your recollections of Dr. Schlesinger, not necessarily at this morning call, but over the years that you have known him.

Wilson: I'm very fond of Jim Schlesinger. He has a reputation for gruffness and being a cold individual and not a "people" man. I could see why that this would be his reputation. Nevertheless he has always impressed me as a deeply thoughtful man and certainly has been very nice to me personally, socially and officially. I am very fond of him and I am deeply impressed with his keen intellect, his ability for analytical thought. I believe that he was, also, a fine Secretary of the Department of Energy, now under very, very difficult circumstances.

Simmons: Most difficult circumstances. At noon on Tuesday, the Secretary of the Navy (that would be Mr. [William] Middendorf) gave you a so-called surprise luncheon. What are your recollections of Mr. Middendorf?

Wilson: Well, I am fond of Bill Middendorf. He has wide talents of music, poetry, art; but in addition, he has a keen interest in the Marine Corps, I think. He has a tendency to drift away from the

subject, and his mind wanders when you discuss things with him unless he is very interested in it. This was a disconcerting thing for me because he had a tendency to do other things like shine his shoes while I am talking. But nevertheless, I think he was a genuine admirer of Marines. Anyone who is a genuine admirer of Marines goes a long way with me.

Simmons: Very good. Wednesday evening you and Jane went to dinner at the home of LtGen and Mrs. Donn Robertson at Falls Church. Then Friday evening you had the Robertsons to dinner at your temporary quarters. Obviously you were close personal friends.

Now this might be a good time for me to ask you to generalize on your social life as Commandant. Obviously the social demands on you and Jane have been very heavy. How do you apportion your social engagements between personal friendships and official requirements?

Wilson: Yes we have known the Robertsons for many years and we have always been appreciative of their invitation. They both entertain beautifully and Donn and I have served together a great many times. Donn was doing a good job when he was the president of the Navy Relief Society, and I couldn't think of a better couple than Donn and Elaine. She did a great deal, too (unpaid, of course), in her visits. I think it has been very prestigious for the Marine Corps to have someone of their capability to head the Navy Relief, of which I am now chairman this year for the first time, by the way, the Commandant is the chairman of the Navy Relief Society.

As for the social events: we determined early that there was a limit to those social events that we could attend, and have generally limited our social life to that which I believe to be something that was required of the Commandant. I think that I have

tried to attend those functions which would enhance the prestige of the Marine Corps in the city, both socially and professionally. We have limited our activities in the diplomatic circuit for which there is no limit to the number of parties that you can attend, to those countries that had marine corps and for those countries where I thought we could advance the image of the Corps or for those countries in which we have exercises, in Europe and Asia, and all where we may have occasion for contingency operations there. We accept and have accepted invitations, based upon that policy, from our own personal friends.

I try to leave at least two nights a week at home just to relax. But other than that why we accept every invitation we get except for those diplomatic functions from embassies for which there is only a peripheral or no interest at all for the Marine Corps.

Simmons: Pursuing the same point: On Saturday 24 May, you had dinner with MajGen and and Mrs. [John R.] Blandford. This was the first of a series of dinners with the Blandfords. Gen Blandford was for many years the counsel for the House Armed Services Committee. Did he in these early weeks and months offer you any advice on the relationship of the Commandant to the Congress?

Wilson: No. Russ and I have been friends for years. We were classmates at the Basic School in Quantico and have kept a very close relationship over the years. He had been a great help to me, particularly when I was the legislative assistant to the Commandant. I think Russ is a very outgoing individual and of course, one to whom the Marine Corps owes a great debt, and in addition all the armed forces owe him a great debt.

Not many people realize that it was Russ Blandford who, as the chief counsel under Mr. [Mendel] Rivers, almost alone was the

one that tied our pay to the cost of living, for which service people for many years have benefited. And this was Russ Blandford's idea; his initiative, his enthusiasm, and his great rapport with Mr. Rivers which allowed it to be done.

No, Russ at that time was generally phasing out of the position as chief counsel, and I can remember no advice that he gave me other than what I asked. And when I asked him he always gave good advice.

Simmons: Next day on Sunday 25 May, you went to a dinner given by Adm Butts in honor of LtGen and Mrs. John McLaughlin. John was about to depart for Hawaii. Was it your decision or General Cushman's that John would leave Headquarters Marine Corps as chief of staff and go to Hawaii as your replacement as the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific?

Wilson: It was mine. I mentioned earlier about the slate. I had known that Gen [Robert E.] Cushman had had a slate, but I felt then, as I feel now, that the next Commandant should make the slate out. So I made my own slate which I pursued and it was perfectly satisfactory with Gen Cushman and he, in fact, endorsed, it with the Secretary of the Navy, although admitting, naturally that it would not necessarily have been his choice. I'm sure that my successor's choice might well not be mine. So I asked John, who of course, was a classmate of mine and a very close friend for many years, if he would like to go out there or stay as the chief of staff with the remaining time that he had before his 35 years of service was up.

He talked to Marilee and they decided to go to Hawaii, for which I was delighted, naturally, having just left there. I had a feeling that I'd like to turn it over to somebody of his capability and her charm and graciousness. He did go out there then and did

a fine job for two years.

John Butts, by the way, was executive assistant to Adm [John S.] McCain [Sr.] when Adm McCain was CinCPac. John Butts and I had been friends for a long time and so was Jane. In fact, Jane held their baby when she was baptized.

Simmons: On Monday evening 26 May, you and Jane went to Severna Park in Maryland to have dinner with LtGen and Mrs. Bill Buse. You had worked under Gen Buse several times. I will guess that you learned a great deal from him; I know I did. Would you care to comment?

Wilson: Oh yes. Of course, at that time we were accepting gracious invitations from very old friends, being here in temporary quarters and not having a home, and so people like the Joneses and the Buses' invitations were welcome. I had worked for Gen Buse a great many times and am a great admirer of his. I considered him to be one of my closest friends. He and Dot have been certainly gracious to us over the years and we're always delighted and appreciative of their invitations.

Simmons: Meanwhile, a heavy schedule of briefings and calls continued unrelentingly. During this particular week there was a sergeants' major symposium. You talked to the sergeants major on Wednesday afternoon, and on Thursday afternoon you attended the ceremony marking the retirement of the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps [Clinton A.] Puckett and the appointment of SgtMaj [Henry H.] Black to that post. The role of the sergeants major in the Marine Corps, particularly the role of the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps is something that seems to be continually argued and debated. Would you give your own views and conclusions on this?

Wilson: I did talk to the sergeants major. That was a great opportunity for me to express to them my views, which I did very frankly and forthrightly, having known several of them in the past. I was not involved in the selection of SgtMaj Black as Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps which had been done earlier. I was perfectly amenable to it, and he did a very good job.

I think the role of the sergeant major is questionable. I think it is a good image for the top enlisted personnel of the Marine Corps. I have never been able to use the sergeant major to his best advantage. This is no fault of the sergeant major but a fault of mine. He accompanies me on trips but he goes his way and I go mine; he then reports to me as to what he finds because I really don't like a large entourage following me around when I go.

He can be a very effective individual but I have not been able to get the maximum out of him, I think, because I haven't had the time or the inclination to lay out to him what I would like to have done. I believe if he were to conduct independent inspections this would be resented by the commanding generals as he went around outside the chain of command. I know I would resent it if I were a commanding general. On the other hand, it is a great opportunity for him to get the feel of what the enlisted personnel are talking about.

The sergeant major's job now is to receive letters and complaints and telephone calls from disenchanted Marines, which serves to shortcut the chain of command and the bureaucratic process to the personnel department. I don't think it is a very good idea; but on the other hand I think that he is not overworked and this is something that will give him a good job, that will give him profitable employment.

Simmons: On Tuesday evening 3 June, you gave a dinner for Congressman Sonny Montgomery of Mississippi. Your relationship with Congressman Montgomery on both a personal and official level throughout your tenure as Commandant appears to have been very close. Would you comment on that?

Wilson: Yes. Sonny Montgomery and I are about the same age. I am a constituent of his in Mississippi; my home and where I grew up is in Brandon, in his district, and I have known him for many years. He is a very close friend and is moving well up in his seniority now on the Armed Services Committee, having been on the Personnel Subcommittee and on the Veteran Affairs Committee. He has certainly been a big help to me in advice and an opportunity to go to him on Marine Corps matters. I feel very free in talking to him and getting the feel of Congress and the committee on many things. And he certainly has been a great supporter of mine and my ideas and views on the Marine Corps.

Simmons: On Wednesday 4 June at 1400, you went to a JCS meeting, apparently for the first time and apparently to meet the chiefs officially. Do you recall who the Chairman of the Chiefs were at that time?

Wilson: Yes. George Brown was the chairman and Dave Jones was the Chief of Staff of the Air Force; Fred Weyand, whom I had known in Hawaii, was the Chief of Staff of the Army; and Jim Holloway, with whom I was a classmate at the National War College, was the Chief of Naval Operations. So I had known them all, but Dave Jones and George Brown. Of course, I got to know them very well in later years before George's untimely death.

Simmons: On Thursday 5 June, you began your calls on Capitol

Hill. BGen Ernie Reid, as the Marine Corps legislative liaison officer, a job that you had once held, was your escort. I won't go into the details of the exact dates and times. I will just list the names of the senators and congressmen you called on in those early weeks: Senator Dewey Bartlett, Congressman Jamie Whitten, Congressman Jack Brooks, Congressman Charlie Bennett, Congressman George H. Mahon, Congressman Robin L. Beard, Senator James O. Eastland, Congressman [Elford A.] Cederberg, Congressman [Robert] Leggett, Congressman [Richard] Ichord, Congressman Tip O'Neill, Senator [John] Young, Congressman Rhodes. There are some interesting and powerful names there.

Later on, you would call on Congressman Charles Wilson, Congresswoman [Marjorie] Holt, Congressman [Floyd] Hicks, Congressman [John] Murtha, Congressman White, Congressman Hinshaw, Congressman Hillis, Congressman Runnels, Senator [John] Glenn, Senator [John C.] Culver, Senator [Gale] McGee. And then there would be more calls as time went on.

Was there a pattern to these calls? Was the objective to call on all members of the four key committees: the House Armed Services Committee, the House Appropriations Committee?

Wilson: Yes, there was. I had chosen this. Having been the legislative assistant to the Commandant, I felt that this was important. This was a self-imposed task on my part to call on them and also, as a policy matter, I also called on all the former Marines that were not on the committees: for instance, Jack Brooks and John Glenn are the two that I can remember that you called off. I thought that it was important to call on these individuals, many of whom were friends of mine and whom I had known for many years. And I called on the Mississippi delegation. You notice that Congressman Whitten is on there, who is, of course, now the chairman of the Appropriations Committee.

Simmons: Were these calls purely protocol and courtesy calls or did they have some substance to them?

Wilson: No, they had no substance to them. They were purely courtesy calls and renewing old friendships in the case of the many that I had known in 1966 when I was legislative assistant. Nor do I remember that there were any substantive issues discussed except that they reconfirmed to me a widespread recognition of the Marine Corps and the respect of the Marine Corps which was held in Congress for many years. This was reinforced by my visits and, I might say, that I believe that it subsequently continued.

Simmons: I'd like to pick out some names and ask for comment; referring of course, not to this brief call but to your continuing relationship with the individual during your term as Commandant. Senator Dewey Bartlett, who just died.

Wilson: Yes. Last week I had the sad duty of going out to Dewey Bartlett's funeral and presenting to Ann, his wife, the colors which had draped his casket. I had not known him before in the Marine Corps, although he was a Marine (lieutenant colonel) aviator. He had been probably one of our greatest supporters in the last four years. It was he who introduced the bill to make the Commandant a full member of the JCS, which we probably will discuss later. In every instance he was supportive, understanding, and one of the finest individuals that I have ever known, suffering in the last two years from lung cancer--suffering a great deal--but nevertheless continuing in his interest in foreign affairs, trip to China and other things of importance dealing in matters of importance not only to the Marine Corps but to all the

armed forces.

Simmons: Congressman George H. Mahon.

Wilson: Yes, I'd known Mr. Mahon for a long time and we've played golf together. He's a great golfer, I believe and certainly a great supporter of the Marine Corps. We certainly will miss him as the chairman of the Defense Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, as well as the chairman of the Appropriations Committee.

Simmons: Congressman Robin L. Beard.

Wilson: Robin is a Marine who has given us great support; a dedicated Marine Reserve officer. He has a great deal of tenacity in pursuing projects and is a tough questioner when it comes to witnesses. But he has, I hope, a great future in the Congress from Tennessee. I hope and believe a great future is in store for him in the Marine Corps as a reserve officer.

Simmons: Senator James O. Eastland.

Wilson: Senator Eastland, from my home state, a very powerful individual as the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, the president pro-tem of the Senate. It was to him that I felt I could turn for major issues although his was not one of the committees that we dealt with regularly.

Simmons: Congressman [Thomas P.] "Tip" O'Neill.

Wilson: I had not known Congressman O'Neill before nor have I had any contact with him except to use his office at his invitation before we'd go into the Congress to listen to the presidential

speeches in the House.

Simmons: I noticed that, and we will get back to that a bit later.
Senator John Glenn.

Wilson: Yes, John. Of course, a very famous Marine and an astronaut. He is a very close friend of Tom Miller's and Les Brown's. They grew up together in Marine Corps aviation. He has continued his interest in aviation, is a great supporter of the Marine Corps, and I think he has a great future in Congress. He is widely respected; does his homework and while not a member of the Armed Services Committee, he is looked upon unquestionably as one of the leaders in aviation. A great many of the senators respect his views on aviation. In fact, I think the AV-8B which we are now continuing to try to get, he has supported vigorously and because of his support we received the support of Senators who are less knowledgeable than he, because he is one whose views and opinions they respect.

Simmons: Did I leave out any Senator or Congressman on whom you would like to comment at this time?

Wilson: No, other than Senator Stennis. Of course, I am very fond of Senator Stennis both personally and officially. There is a little family connection with Jane. I've known him for many, many years. He has been one of my greatest supporters, I believe, and I certainly have been one of his. His value to the services and to the Marine Corps has been invaluable over the years; we're still indebted to him each day for more things that he does and I'm deeply indebted to him for his availability to me. Whenever I want to call him, he will stop anything; even leave the floor to come to respond to a telephone call from me; for which I am deeply

grateful.

Simmons: Going back now to Thursday 12 June, at 1600 you had an appointment with Gen Cushman. Now this is the first time Gen Cushman's name appears on your schedule, but surely you had been seeing and conferring with him during this period.

Wilson: Yes, a little, as a matter of fact, but not that much. He had been on leave after the announcement was made for the next Commandant, and (naturally, since it was rather sudden) he was involved in moving. I really had not a great deal to do with him in here (I maintained an office down the hall about three or four wings down), and he was on leave and Gen Anderson was in the hospital. So I had been appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate as a special assistant to the Commandant. Having left FMFPac, I would have reverted to major general which would have been all right with me for it was just a matter of a few dollars. But the Secretary of Defense insisted that I be maintained in the rank of lieutenant general officially. I was then appointed as the special assistant.

So, for all practical purposes, for the month of June I was really in charge of the Marine Corps, attending the JCS meetings and making all the necessary decisions having to do with the future. This was not bad, because I felt like I had a free hand although I was limited in help. Francine Van Curen, whom I had known for many years, had retired and she had come back to be my secretary. She and I were running things from an office and I was changing uniforms and interviewing people and trying to sign papers; we were a busy duo at that time.

Simmons: I remember that very spartan office. At 11:30 on Friday 13 June, Les Brown was promoted to lieutenant general in the office

of the Commandant, to serve as chief of staff. From what you said earlier he was your choice to succeed General [John N.] McLaughlin. You had worked out your slate. Did you lay down any guidelines to him as to how he was to function as chief of staff?

Wilson: No. Les and I had never worked together that closely before. He was the commanding general of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing when I was CG, FMFPac. I knew his reputation as a very dynamic, imaginative officer; highly energetic and he was a bachelor (unfortunately his wife Jeanie had died the year before). I had not really known him that well. I thought to leave it up to him as to how he ran the staff and he did a great job.

Simmons: The Assistant Commandant has sometimes been an anomalous position with respect to the Commandant and the chief of staff. Were there any discussions held on this point?

Wilson: Yes there were. The Assistant Commandant is an anomalous position and one which is unique among the services. The assistant in other services has much more to do with the running of the service than does the Assistant Commandant.

I believe we are fortunate in having this setup, however, because, having had experience as a commanding general both of a division as well as the Fleet Marine Force, I use the Assistant Commandant very much like an assistant division commander; that is to say, that he is outside the chain of paperwork from the chief of staff to the commander, but available to pinch hit for the Commandant when it is necessary. This has been very, very successful over the years. I know that there are Assistant Commandants who chafe under this condition. I had a discussion with Sam about it. He understood it and was perfectly willing to

do it and did a perfectly marvelous job.

I believe that the availability of the Assistant Commandant to go to meetings if the Commandant cannot go, to make speeches is very good. And the chief of staff, if he's to function simply is not that available. And if he does, then the flow of paperwork stops and it's hard to pick up again because it's like an accordion.

Simmons: On Saturday 14 June at 0915 you had a golf date at Quantico; the foursome was yourself, Gen [Albert C.] Pommerenk, Col Doc Savage and Dennis O'Leary. The only name I don't know is O'Leary. I take it that he is the pro at Quantico?

Wilson: He was the pro at Quantico. Of course, I had known Dennis for many years. This was my first golf game after I got back to Washington. Al Pommerenk and I had played many times over the years, and who else was there?

Simmons: Doc Savage was the chief of staff at the time.

Wilson: Oh, Doc Savage. He was chief of staff at Quantico.

Simmons: Right. It has been said that your proficiency at golf approaches Gen Shoup's proficiency at poker. Any comments?

Wilson: Well, I think that is an overstatement, having heard of Gen Shoup's proficiency at poker. I never participated except when I was a young officer and the aide to the commanding general of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, and Col Shoup was the head of the Service Command back in 1946 a couple of times. But no, I enjoy playing, but I'm not that good a player.

Simmons: Is your handicap classified information?

Wilson: No, I'm a ten. I keep a ten as I have for many years.

Simmons: Well, obviously golf is one of your favorite recreational diversions. Looking ahead through your appointment book, I see numerous Saturday mornings at Quantico, some games at the Army-Navy Club with partners such as Gen Fred Weyand of the Army, Gen Chapman, Col Pete Hahn and others. What else have you done during your years as Commandant to stay fit?

Wilson: I try to jog a couple of miles every morning which I succeeded in doing up until about a year ago when my knees began to bother me and I suspect it is because of running on the concrete. So I haven't really done very much since that time and as a result, I notice that I have gained a few pounds.

Simmons: What did you weigh when you came into the Marine Corps in 1941?

Wilson: Oh, I weighed about 190.

Simmons: And what do you weigh now?

Wilson: About 199.

Simmons: How tall are you?

Wilson: 6' 3".

Simmons: When did you become interested in running?

Wilson: Oh, really on Hawaii. I had resisted it over the years at Quantico and other places when it was fashionable. But I enjoyed it in the mornings out there when I got up. It was such beautiful weather. There was a crater down below the quarters in which we lived. I enjoyed going down there in the morning when the dew was on the ground, the birds were singing, and take my dog. And so I would jog around the crater which was sort of like an athletic field. Then I felt better.

Golf is not really much of an exercise; it is enjoyable but there is not much exercise in golf. I would have liked to have continued running although I really don't like to do it in cold weather. You get snow on the ground or it is icy, and I am afraid I might slip. It is not as easy to do it here as it is in Hawaii, but I hope to pick it up later.

Simmons: Very good. What kind of schedule do you attempt to follow insofar as bedtime and getting up in the morning?

Wilson: Well, I got up every morning at 6:30, I have an alarm on my watch although I have no trouble waking up; it is a perfunctory thing. I am always awake anyway and I get up, do a little exercise with deep-knee bends and pushups and sit-ups. I have a very light breakfast of a piece of toast, coffee and grapefruit, read the Washington Post, and get off to work about 7:15 or 7:30.

Simmons: And then in the evening, what time do you like to be in bed?

Wilson: Well, I like to be in bed at least by 10:30 which I am always if we are at home. I listen to the 10 o'clock news and get off to bed after that.

Simmons: You don't smoke and you don't like people to smoke in your presence. Has that given you any problems over the years?

Wilson: Yes, I think my reputation of not liking people to smoke in my presence is probably overstated. I have a tendency for my turbinates to close when the smoke gets in my nostrils. It has increased because I have had two lung operations over the years and I have had some limitation in my lung capacity. Smoking, particularly in the morning or particularly if it's a heavy smoke, closes my turbinates to the extent that I'm just simply not able to talk.

It has been very embarrassing over the years because as tall as I am and in low-ceiling rooms when I would get up, often-times I would simply choke and would simply not be able to speak. A little water, and also I usually carry a sniffer in my pocket, or one of my aides does to relieve this.

But I really don't mind it except when I go through all of these gyrations and contortions, and so people have been very kind not to smoke although I don't mind it and recognize this as a fact of life. I'm simply affected this way and it has been very embarrassing, but there is nothing I can do about it.

Simmons: During these two months of May and June 1975 while you were standing by to become Commandant, you made a habit of eating your lunch in very informal fashion in the general officers' dining room. Now you continued this practice after you became Commandant. Was there a purpose behind this practice?

Wilson: Yes. I don't like to eat by myself, that's the main thing I suppose. I enjoy chatting at lunch. I enjoy the camaraderie among the senior officers. I suspect that many times

that they don't like it is because my seeing them reminds me of something, and it certainly gets into a business session.

End Tape 1 Side 1

Begin Tape 1 Side 2

Simmons: Let me repeat that last question. I had said that during these two months of May and June 1975 while you were standing by to become Commandant, you made a habit of eating your lunch in very informal fashion in the general officer's dining room. You continued this practice after you became Commandant. Was there a purpose behind this practice?

Wilson: Yes. I don't like to eat by myself, first, and second, I enjoy the give-and-take while talking with the senior officers. I suspect that they are not always happy that this is the case when they go in to get away from business, and if I see them, it reminds me of something and I ask a question.

I've noticed that many of them leave right quickly when I arrive. I enjoyed this mess and I hope it hasn't been too much of a burden on them. It has certainly been pleasurable for me and I simply do not like to eat all that formally.

We are limited to the number of attendants we have in the mess. If we were to have a mess up here, as was formerly the case the lieutenant generals and the Commandant and the Assistant Commandant ate and it would take more help in the mess than I think we can afford. So all in all, I have enjoyed it and I hope it hasn't been too much of a burden on them.

Simmons: Well, from my limited viewpoint, I think it has served a

great purpose for informal exchange. I know that over the four years you and I had numbers of luncheon conversations which were invaluable to me and things were moved and we were able to do things which I might have had to wait two weeks to get on your schedule to see you about.

Wilson: Yes, I think it sort of makes the Commandant more approachable here if he is willing to talk business about little things that come up rather than the formality of a schedule.

I was about to say that I remember down in New Zealand in our messes in World War II, that we used to be fined a quarter if we mentioned business at the mess during the mealtime. There was a change pot in the center of the table and if business was mentioned we had to pay a quarter. This was to supplement the mess with condiments and other things, but I've gotten away from that now.

Simmons: Well, I have heard of such rules. They might be fine for garrison life and so forth, but I think that for this Headquarters, the procedures you followed are much more useful.

Just for the record: what is meant by a "Wilson burger" or a "Wilson special"?

Wilson: Well, that started out in Hawaii. I like to have at lunch a meat patty with some cottage cheese on lettuce and a tomato, and this was designated a "Wilsonburger" in the CinCPac/CG, FMFPac mess in Hawaii. I now eat a lighter lunch than that, but it is still called that, I understand.

Simmons: You mentioned earlier that for much of the month of June you were the acting Commandant because Gen Cushman was on leave and Gen Anderson was in the hospital. This gave you the opportunity on

Tuesday, 17 June to participate in a state occasion. You attended, along with the Joint Chiefs, a joint session of the Congress to hear an address at 12:30 by the President of the Federal Republic of Germany? There will be a number of similar sessions in the future. Can you tell me something about how events of this sort are handled and the role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in them?

Wilson: It's simply a formality. The invitation comes from the Speaker of the House to each of us and we gather in the Speaker's office along with the cabinet, until the time comes to move in, and the Joint Chiefs file in sit according to rank, and then we wait for the cabinet to come in and then for the Speaker.

Simmons: On Wednesday at 1400, you attended a JCS meeting in your capacity as acting Commandant. This was the first of many such meetings. Can you tell me something about the physical arrangements for the meetings of the Chiefs and of the procedures followed?

Wilson: Yes. It is in the "tank." There is an elongated table with the Chairman sitting in the center. On his right is the Chief of Staff; on his left is the Director of the Joint Staff; across from him is the Chief of Staff of the Army and the CNO. The Commandant sits at the end of the table, at the far end of the table. This has been traditional for many years and I think that the positions do not change irrespective of the rank or the standing in the JCS, the seniority in the JCS.

Simmons: Amongst all the other briefings you were receiving, there was one that I had the privilege of giving that was to you and Jane on Friday morning, 20 June, and the subject was the Commandant's

House. I told you about the program begun by Gen and Mrs. Cushman to enhance the Commandant's House as a historical property and about the special authority that had been secured from the Secretary of the Navy to solicit donations and gifts for the house. You would not be moving into the house until ten days later, but this might be a good time to talk a little bit about the pleasures and problems of living in a historical property.

Wilson: Well, we are most indebted to you, Ed, for the fine and precise way in which you had outlined what had gone in the past and it was very valuable to us; not only that, but I might say here of what you have done for the Commandant's House and indeed the whole museums and the historical reputation of the Marine Corps which has never been higher either in the Marine Corps or in the other services.

The Commandant's House is a very historic place we feel privileged to be there and feel a deep obligation towards the house. In particular, we have an obligation to the Cushmans, who had the idea and did so much work in the initiation of the restoration program and the efforts that Audrey [Cushman] went to in making it such a delightful place to live. We have tried to do our best to continue this.

The house is old and it has many defects which occur in old houses. It has to be continually watched for leaks and noises and other things which, if left alone could be very damaging to the house in the long run. We have added--Jane has added--a personal touch to the house with the things we have collected over the years, which I believe has made it more like home than a museum, but I am prejudiced. But in any case, we have tried to continue, in a small way, to do something for the house or have continual grants to it. In fact, there was a friend of mine, Don Regan (of whom I have talked, the chairman of Merrill-Lynch), who has given

from the Merrill Foundation \$25,000 for the house which we have put in an interest-drawing account. Another friend of mine, Jim Evans, (who is the chairman of the board of the Union Pacific Railroad and has done the same), has given \$5,000.

So we have increased the value of the fund from \$225, when I arrived, to \$30,225 and have not spent any money for the house. I think that probably if, in fact, future Commandants could see fit to spend just the interest, I believe it would be better than dipping into the corpus because it can soon be depleted.

We have recently gotten authority to rewire the house. As a result of having been turned down once, I was able to get the counsel for the committee down to see it and suggested that if he didn't approve it, I would ask Senator Stennis to come down, because, with the open wires, it was really dangerous and it was really a fire hazard.

The house had just been re-roofed and I have also recommended and approved a \$225,000 expenditure to redo all of the double windows in the house and the other structure's upstairs. I am interested in doing this on my watch so that my successor might not be confronted with bad publicity if, during the early part of his tenure, this was approved. I'd rather take the rap on this myself.

Simmons: The house occupies a very special position in the esteem of all Marines, particularly the retired Marine community. We are all very grateful for the stewardship that you extended to the house.

Finally, on Monday 30 June, or rather I should say Monday, 30 June, 1975 arrived. You began the day with the staff meeting with the Secretary of Defense at 0930. At 1100 you were promoted to general by the Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Middendorf, in his office. At 1200 you had lunch with your family in the Commandant's

mess, hosted by Gen and Mrs. Cushman. At 1430 came the change of command ceremony held at the Marine Barracks, followed by a reception at the Commandant's House.

In your remarks at the change of command ceremony, you said, "I call upon all Marines to get in step, and to do it smartly." This injunction was much repeated and variously interpreted. Just what was it that you had in mind?

Wilson: Well, I think that I was laying out in a very short sentence my philosophy about the job. It was the Commandant's responsibility to lay the groundwork and to provide the leadership for the Marine Corps, and as a result of this, I expected all Marines to get in step and to do so smartly. And that was certainly my intention and I might say here that I believe they have done it magnificently.

Simmons: I think this is a good place to end the first session.

End Session I

Session II-- 24 April 1979

Simmons: This is about 1430 on Tuesday, 24 April 1979, and I am again in the office of the Commandant.

General, we had our first session on 15 March, almost six weeks ago. Since that time, a number of important things have happened. You have made a final visit to the Marines in the Pacific and the Far East; the name of your successor, Gen Robert Barrow, presently the Assistant Commandant, has been announced. Before we pick up on the chronological thread of our interview, I

should like to ask you to comment on both of these events; first, your trip to the Western Pacific.

Wilson: I had a delightful trip there. I believe that in my years of going out, that this was the finest trip I have had as relates to quality of personnel readiness, training and standards of conduct which are the criteria by which I try to measure units and individuals.

I had a visit to Korea where I met again my friend General Chun, the Commandant or the Second Vice Chief of Naval Operations for Marine Affairs. Unfortunately, they are making little headway in re-establishing the job of Commandant of the Korean Marine Corps due to opposition from the Korean Army and I think the Navy. Iwakuni looks very good. We have begun now, after ten years of trial, getting some funding for new buildings at Iwakuni.

Wing headquarters, of course, has moved to Okinawa. The buildings are now being constructed and we hope to get some Japanese-funded construction there, of which we have been second-class over the years because the Air Force and the Army have had priority in construction for the Japanese-funded projects in a payment for some of the U.S. airfields--the Naha airport, to be specific, in Okinawa.

In Okinawa itself, I was very pleased with the MAF and the division and wing headquarters. People are interested in their training, having a realistic and imaginative training program. I was very pleased with my final visit there.

In the Philippines, I was given a medal by President [Ferdinand] Marcos, had a nice chat with him, and believe that he is truly dedicated to improving the lot of the Philippine people. He has many problems here and the martial law, for which he is criticized, is still in effect. Nevertheless, he does have hopes of being able to relinquish this in a period of two or three years.

Mrs. Marcos, she is something else again, but that is not relevant to this.

We went by Guam, and participated in the flag-raising ceremony, opening the War in the Pacific Memorial, I believe it is called, and \$15 million has been appropriated by the Congress for this. I made some comments on the landing beaches where we landed in 1944 and up at Fonte Hill (now called Nimitz Hill) where I received my Medal of Honor. This was to be part of the archives in the Pacific Memorial.

From there I went to Wake Island, where on the way there was a phone call in an effort to get me back to have breakfast with the President, along with other members of the JCS. But I can assure you that the most unavailable place in the world is 400 miles west of Wake in a C-118.

So, after that we stopped by Hawaii, where we had a nice visit to the Brigade and Camp Smith; stayed with our very close friend Adm [Maurice F.] Weisner, who is CinCPac, and so that, in a nutshell, was a trip report from my recent Pacific trip.

About Gen Barrow: I was delighted to see him made Commandant. There are, of course, many very capable officers, and I don't think the President could have gone wrong in selecting any of them. But I'm sure that he will make a fine Commandant, and the Marine Corps has never had a brighter future, and sincerely believe it will be enhanced even further under his capable leadership.

Simmons: Now we'll go back to July 1975. You will recall that in our first session we covered the sequence of events from the time of your arrival in Washington on 17 May through the change of command ceremony on 30 June 1975. That brings us to 1 July, your first day as Commandant. It was a Tuesday, and at 1000 you held your first weekly staff meeting. From my own notes of that

meeting you concentrated on the appearance of Headquarters and its personnel. You cited an unfavorable IG report of Headquarters Battalion; you said that the appearance of the Headquarters was deplorable; you said, in fact, that it looked like a rat's nest. You said that you expected the appearance of the Headquarters to improve and to improve quickly. Have you been satisfied with the improvements?

Wilson: (Laughing) Well, I'm sure I know that's a favorite word of mine, "the rat's nest." That's obviously my words. No, I don't think it has improved a great deal. There may have been a few superficial changes, but I suppose I am old enough to know that after thirty-eight years around Headquarters and with the GSA maintenance, (from which we are continuing to suffer despite the valiant efforts of two chiefs of staff--Les Brown and Larry Snowden), I don't think it has improved very much. But I always have hopes for the future.

Simmons: One thing that promoted that question was that the subject came up once again at the last staff meeting you have held.

Wilson: Yes. (Laughs)

Simmons: You also commented back on the 1st of July on the appearance of the Marines here at Headquarters, hitting particularly at obesity, uniforms and haircuts. You charged the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps with the responsibility of doing something about it. Do you think he succeeded?

Wilson: Yes. I think we have been relatively successful in the grooming standards and the weight control at Headquarters Marine Corps, and throughout the Marine Corps. I do believe that there

has been an improvement, and much more improvement than there has been in the appearance of the Headquarters.

Simmons: At 1130 on Tuesday the same day, you promoted MajGen Bob Barrow to lieutenant general. He was coming from Parris Island, where he had been commanding general of the recruit depot. He brought with him some very definite ideas on recruiting and recruit training. Undoubtedly, he had discussed these ideas with you and undoubtedly, they influenced your assigning him as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower. Would you comment on this?

Wilson: Yes, he did have some ideas. I have never been stationed at a recruit depot and so I was very interested on Bob's viewpoints on this matter, as well as his views on many other matters. We had discussed the possibility of combining the recruiting under the commanding generals of the recruit depots, which was done in the later months.

But he had never had experience in manpower before, I don't believe. Nevertheless, he did a fine job.

Simmons: That afternoon at 1400 you called on the Secretary of Defense, Dr. Schlesinger. Would you have any recollection of that call?

Wilson: Yes, I did call on him as a matter of courtesy. I had talked to him at least two times before during the process that he had set up for selection of Commandant. I believe our subjects that day were perfunctory and I don't remember them having anything to do with substantive matters.

Simmons: Subsequent to your meeting with the Secretary of Defense you went at 1430 to your first meeting of the JCS in your new capacity of Commandant. You had sat, of course, with the JCS before. And then that evening, you went to an American Legion

reception honoring the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which was held at the Fort Myers Officer's Club. The American Legion is perhaps the best known and largest of the veterans' organizations. Could you comment on their place or role in the determination of national defense policy? In that, how much weight would you give their influence on congressional actions?

Wilson: I think the American Legion has suffered in recent years from the high repute that it had after World War I. They make a valiant effort to influence defense policy. I think that in some congressional districts they have a considerable amount of weight. I believe that they are expected to follow the hard line. Certainly they have lost prestige in the last forty years.

Simmons: I should like similar comments on the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Wilson: I think the same thing applies to the VFW and they too make a valiant effort but I believe that the young veterans, particularly from Vietnam and--I believe--Korea, are rather turned off by these veterans' organizations and they really are held together by veterans of World War I, who are now aging and getting out of the picture, and those of World War II who have maintained an interest over the years.

Simmons: At 0800 on Wednesday, 2 July, you were briefed on the LHA program. The 40,000 ton LHA's are general purpose amphibious assault ships and are the only new amphibious ships, to my knowledge, to enter the fleet during your tenure. I believe it is a five-ship class, that three LHA's have been commissioned, one has just been recently christened, with one more to be built. Am I right on this?

Wilson: Three have been commissioned and the other two have been christened.

Simmons: Both christened.

Wilson: Jane christened the fourth one and Peggy Hayward christened the fifth one in December.

Simmons: Could you comment on the LHA?

Wilson: Yes. The LHA is of course, a very fine ship of 30 to 40,000 tons. The Tarawa is today on her maiden cruise with a MAU aboard in the East China Sea. The others are better ships than the Tarawa, which suffered rather extensively because it was not only a new type of ship but represented a new way of building ships. And so it has had some problems, but the others I believe, will be better as they shake down. This has, of course, a wet-well as well as a deck carrying 39 CH-46 type aircraft with tradeoffs with your larger aircraft and smaller. It carries about 1800 troops and it can be made into as much as a 300-bed hospital and is a very fine ship and I think that it has a great future and will carry us beyond the year 2000.

Simmons: Would you comment on amphibious shipping in general? Are you satisfied with the quantity as well as the quality of amphibious ships.

Wilson: No, we are not satisfied with that. We of course, for years have had a two-MAF lift requirement. When I became the Commandant, this was still a stated goal. I determined early that this was an impossible goal which could never be carried out. I pointed out to Adm [James L.] Holloway that I would not continue to

harangue him about amphibious ships because a balanced fleet, I think, is important. I agreed to a 1.33 MAF lift, as a goal for the 1970s with 1.50 left for the future. This, too, is really an unrealistic goal without trying to maintain 1.15 as a current MAF lift. Amphibious shipping will go down rather sharply because of block obsolescence, unless the LSD-28's are replaced this year by the LSD-41's. Right now we are involved in POM-81 putting this together. The Secretary of the Navy has indicated that he will have the LSD-41 in the POM-81. We are not sure whether the Secretary of Defense will go along with this or not. We need this ship to be fully funded, of course, as they are during the year in which they are authorized and money appropriated.

It takes three years to build and it would be available in 1984, which is the first year the LSD-28 becomes obsolete. Eight LSD-28's become obsolete in four years, so we hope to have the LSD-41's as a one-to-one replacement. They are not a great deal larger, if any, but they will carry the LCAC (which is a landing craft air cushion) which we hope to get. It will take four of these.

Simmons: At noon on 2 July I had an impromptu lunch with you and General Les Brown, the new chief of staff. You had had me deliver to your office the four historical paintings by John Clymer and Tom Lovell, which are still hanging here. I also delivered to you the first copy of Marines in the Revolution for your presentation to John Warner on the Fourth of July. Mr. Warner was then the head of the Bicentennial Administration. On Friday evening, 4 July, there was a reception at the Commandant's House and a parade in honor of Mr. Warner. This was your first time as host as Commandant at a reception and parade. I remember that Mr. Warner was escorting Barbara Walters of the "Today" Show. Do you have any recollections of that evening?

Wilson: Oh yes, very much. John was late as usual and he had Barbara Walters who, of course, lives by a clock because that is her business. John was apologetic. John wanted her to see the house; when she was told that the parade began in four minutes she was again concerned and said that she'd see the house later. She was also concerned about her daughter who had not yet arrived; she subsequently did and she seemed to enjoy the parade.

Later, she came back and had a drink and a snack at the house and then toured the house. We have seen her many times since then and she has always been very gracious. I am very fond of John Warner and he has subsequently of course, been elected the Senator from Virginia has been a great friend of the Marine Corps. During my recent and last testimony on the Hill he was very gracious and had flattering words to say about me. He has been a great booster of the Marine Corps for many years and I am sure will be for many years to come.

Simmons: I think we can also say that Mr. Warner has proclivity for beautiful and glamorous women.

Wilson: He does have.

Simmons: On Thursday afternoon 3 July, the day before, you had called on the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, then Gen George Brown of the Air Force. Could you sum up your relationship with Gen Brown over the ensuing years?

Wilson: Yes. George and I had not known each other in the past except in passing. He, I don't think, was a great friend of the

Marines per se. I think this was as a result of his job in Vietnam, where he was at the forefront of the controversy having to do with the Marine air support and command and control of Marine air. He was trying to get all the Marine aircraft under the control of the air component commander; this had soured him on Marines and our insistence on having command of our air.

He, like a great many senior officers particularly may say "I like Marines. The best orderly I ever had was a Marine." He superficially said that he was close to the Marines I felt that he probably really considered the Marines as of second-class citizens. But on the other hand, our relationship in the tank was cordial. We often disagreed. He was very conscious of the fact that the Commandant was not a member of the JCS; but rather there to appease Congress. And we'll get into this later but this in one of the things that prompted me to feel that in order to ensure that we had the status which is due the Commandant, and that the law had to be changed to make the Commandant a full member of the JCS.

Simmons: I remember going to a JCS meeting one time when General Maxwell Taylor was the chairman and General [Randolph M.] Pate was the Commandant. In those days, the Commandant sat with the Op-Dep at a small separate table from the chiefs. I think you'd call it a separate but equal facility.

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: At least your position has improved over that.

Wilson: I might say that with George, I had this feeling and I suspect that he would have actively opposed the bill, which subsequently passed, more than Dave Jones did. This is a good

time, I suppose, to put these things in.

Simmons: Absolutely right. On Monday 7 July, you made three more protocol visits. At 1030 you called on the Chief of Naval Operations Adm Holloway. Could you comment on your relationships with Adm Holloway?

Wilson: Yes. Adm Holloway and I have been old friends for many years. We were classmates at the War College. At that time, I suggested a sort of modus operandi for our relationship, pointing out that I felt that ours was a partnership within the Department of the Navy, the Navy being the senior partner and the Marines being a junior, but, nevertheless, a partner I pointed out that certain decisions would have to be made soon about the F-14, about which I had a good many reservations, but I was not ready then to come up with a proposal.

Simmons: Can you recall any gut issues? You have already indicated one, the F-14, which we will be getting into that a little bit later. Any other gut issues in which the Navy and the Marine Corps could not reach an agreement, any tough ones that required a compromise?

Wilson: Not at this time. Later on, we had some that had to do with personnel, particularly when I wanted Larry Snowden to be the J-5. The Marines had never had a joint staff officer. He wanted an officer whose name escapes me right now. We took it to the Secretary of the Navy; the only time in fact we had ever done this. I lost and the Navy admiral was appointed as J-5. I did extract from the Secretary a written promise however, that he would support a Marine for the J-3 when that came available, to which Adm Holloway agreed.

I might say that I did use this piece of paper later. Adm Holloway remembered that he had done this, and although Secretary of the Navy Middendorf was no longer in office, Secretary [W. Graham] Clayton honored it and in fact, Phil Shutler is now the J-3 as a result of this. Much, I might say, to the Navy's dismay because now the Navy has no admiral on the Joint Staff.

Simmons: That admiral who was J-5 was probably VAdm Pat Hannafin.

Wilson: It was Pat Hannifin.

Simmons: Well, I would say that the Joint Staff's loss in Larry Snowden was Headquarters Marine Corps' gain as chief of staff.

Wilson: Yes. I certainly think so too, and like I said, good things happen by accident and Larry was subsequently made chief of staff and has been superb.

Simmons: At 1200 on that same day, 7 July, you called the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, Gen Jones, and presumably had lunch with him. I should like to ask the same questions about Gen Jones that I've asked about Adm Holloway. Any gut issues on which the Air Force and the Marine Corps could not agree and also the personal relationships there?

Wilson: No, our personal relationship has been very fine. We have really little in common, insofar as our services are concerned, but on the Joint Chiefs I have been very fond of Dave. He and I attended fellowship breakfasts in the White House together over the last four years. Both of us were invited to participate by Bert Lance and with the Cabinet, before the Cabinet meets with the President on Monday morning. Both of us have seemed to enjoy this

and certainly I have come to know the Cabinet members much better than I would have in the normal course of events.

Simmons: At 1600 that same day, 7 July, you called on Adm [Owen W.] Siler, the Commandant of the Coast Guard. Now I don't suppose that there has been too much interaction between the Marine Corps and the Coast Guard during your tenure as CMC.

Wilson: No, except socially. We are very fond of the Silers and have seen them many times. They're retired, live in Washington now and we have again, little in common other than the fact that we're both junior services. I can't remember anything of substantive value as a result of this talk.

Simmons: He's a fine fellow and was a classmate of mine at the National war College.

Presumably the Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen Weyand, was out of town as you did not call on him on 7 July. When you got back to your office at 1700 that day, you had a meeting with a few members of your staff on what came to be called the "Wilson Initiatives." Would you discuss these initiatives and how they evolved?

Wilson: Well, I've forgotten the initiatives themselves. I remember that I thought this was a good idea to have a list of them. Les Brown--a great deal of this was his initiative, in fact. We did have a lot; as many as 60 at one time, which I think is too many. But nevertheless they were goals to which we could aspire.

I think some of them have been successful, others have been unsuccessful and others on which I wish I had put more emphasis.

But this is hindsight, and at that time, I don't think I would have done anything differently.

That seems to me the same day or the next day that I had a call from Secretary of Defense Schlesinger to come over and see him.

Simmons: A few days later you did go over to see Dr. Schlesinger.

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: And you did discuss the initiatives with him?

Wilson: Well, I wasn't thinking about that, the initiatives, as much as a personal thing in which he had received an anonymous letter on brigadier general's stationary. This letter indicated that the assignments which I had made of general officers was vindictive and it was a way of punishment for individuals who apparently had not supported me for Commandant. The letter pointed out that he, the Secretary should take steps to ensure that there should be an equitable assignment for everyone in the general officer ranks in the Marine Corps.

I had some idea from whence the letter came, but I believe I was able to convince him that I was trying to make these assignments based on ability and through no vindictiveness on my part.

As a result of a perfunctory investigation I had determined that that letter was typed on a typewriter in this Headquarters.

Simmons: That's very interesting. That is the first I have heard of that.

Wilson: I won't go any further than that here; but as to where the

typewriter was, it was in this Headquarters.

Simmons: Very interesting very interesting. At 0830 on Thursday the 10th of July, you held a meeting with all of the Marine Corps general officers stationed in Washington. From my own notes you stressed the following things, and I will go through the list and I'll repeat them one by one; you may want to comment on them.

You started off with standards of conduct and then you went into expanded use of the general officers mess. You mentioned that the Mount Whitney was being pre-empted by the Second Fleet. You talked about a provisional MAG being the part of every MAU, but that when a fixed-wing squadron joined a MAU it should become a MAB. You talked about the uses of expeditionary versus amphibious in task force titles and you also announced your decision to cancel the general officers' symposium. You said that there would perhaps be a Fleet Marine Force commanders' meeting in the fall and possibly a base and station commanders' meeting later on. Now, some of these things we'll get into a little more detail a little bit later, but I will repeat these items and you might give just a general comment because some of them are sort of a thread throughout the ... (interruption).

We were talking about the items that you had highlighted at your meeting with the general officers on 10 July, and I said that I would go down them again one by one--Standards of conduct?

Wilson: Yes. I have used this term many times in the context as one of the criteria for goals I had set for Marine Corps personnel, and the criteria by which I try to measure units and individuals.

I think that things are not always what they are, but what they seem. I believe that leaders should be like Caesar's wife: particularly generals and commanders at all levels. This was at a time just after the Nixon years in which standards of conduct had a

high visibility and I believe this is very important goal for people in leadership positions to strive towards and I think it is high standards--moral, mental and physical--which I'd like to see the American people believe that the Marines are the epitome.

Simmons: It's too bad that the occasional departures from that make the newspapers and get us the publicity.

Wilson: Yes, they do. On the other hand, I suppose you could rationalize by saying that perhaps hopefully, there are so few that when it does occur, it does make headlines.

Simmons: Of all the housebreakings in Washington last week, the only one that made the national news was that one by the five Marines from the ...

Wilson: You see I'm rationalizing it based on that publicity.

Simmons: Second item was the expanded use of the general officers' mess. Was that a matter of economy or was it a matter of making the mess more useful?

Wilson: No, it was a matter of personal use for me. I prefer that lieutenant generals and the Commandant eat with other general officers. In addition, I felt that--the executive assistants and the aides--could eat there, and this would be able to enhance their professional knowledge and the feeling of camaraderie among people who work together all the time.

Simmons: The pre-emption by the Second Fleet of the use of the Mount Whitney.

Wilson: Yes. This was a concern that Bob Nichols had voiced to me and he had had some disagreement with Ike Kidd on it. Ike did come about. I think that it was a little more emotional than actual but nevertheless, it was something about which the Marines had felt strongly. But it did not hurt the fleet nor did it hurt our amphibious operations; it was a specter that really did not come to pass.

Simmons: You delivered some axioms concerning the organization of embarked units. You said that a provisional Marine aircraft group should be part of every MAU or Marine Amphibious Unit, and you said that when a fixed-wing squadron joined a MAU it should then become a MAB or Marine Amphibious Brigade.

Wilson: Yes. I think the fixed-wing squadrons have no place in the MAU and they are part of the brigade, and I believe the brigade headquarters should always be ready to fly and to take command if a MAU is committed. This is in accordance with a doctrine long established in the Marine Corps, and certainly the MAU could not land and carry the prestige, the flag of the United States without someone coming over behind it right away. I think the fixed-wing squadrons do not normally support a battalion. So I would like to see a general officer head a brigade. This has been subsequently put out as directives and we have not had any problems with this.

Simmons: You also discussed the uses the significance of the two terms: "expeditionary" and "amphibious" in task force titles.

Wilson: Yes, I would have liked to have seen the word "expeditionary" used. You remember that this was changed at the beginning of the Vietnam War because "expeditionary" implied a French use of the word correcting colonialism.

You remember this so well, and therefore the word was changed to "amphibious". I would have liked to have changed it I think, back to "expeditionary" but nevertheless, I was talked out of it and for good reason. "Amphibious" has a Marine flavor, helps us in our use of the "owning" of the word "amphibious" as it were, and particularly with the Navy and the perception of the public.

The other side of the coin is that it implies that amphibious is the only thing we could do. So I think that too, is wrong. "Expeditionary" could imply them both, but it would have required changing orders and other directives and so I decided that it perhaps was not worth the effort although personally I prefer the word "expeditionary."

Simmons: You also announced the cancellation of the general officers symposium and the fact that there would probably be an FMF commanders' meeting later in the fall, perhaps followed by a base and station commanders' meeting. This did, in fact, come about. What prompted you to cancel the general officer's symposium?

Wilson: I thought that there had been a good deal of moves, a good deal of retirements were coming up among the senior generals. I felt that there had been, frankly, a rather acrimonious time when the Commandant was named. People were on different sides, that this was not a time to have the generals together until the wounds healed.

Simmons: At 1300 on Monday 14 July, RAdm John O'Connor, the Chief of Chaplains, called on you. He was a fairly regular and frequent caller these early months. Can you remember why?

Wilson: Well, I'm very fond of John O' Connor-- had known him in the past, never intimately, but I have come to know him during his

four years as the Chief of Chaplains.

I have been very interested in the Chaplains' Corps, particularly in the chaplains assigned to the Marine Corps. They have certainly been supportive of my directives in every way, and some of which I suppose they could have rationalized that it was not the thing to do. I really never found any that have not fully supported me for which I am deeply appreciative, and I attribute a great deal of this to John and to the two fine chaplains that we have had as the chaplains at Headquarters Marine Corps during my tour.

I have subsequently come to know and I am very close to him, and just today I noticed that he has been appointed as the associate bishop to [Terence] Cardinal Cooke and will be confirmed by the Pope in Rome at the end of May.

Simmons: Very good. We all know that John O'Connor is a firm and fine friend of the Marine Corps, and I have also noticed that in later weeks and months that Chaplain McDonald was a frequent visitor to you here.

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: On 15 July you made a very important decision with respect to women Marines. You approved their assignment to all occupational fields except infantry, artillery, armor and flight crews. Now this decision may have come about as one of a progression of decisions regarding women Marines based, I believe on the recommendations of what was called the Snell Board. Perhaps it was an action that Gen Cushman left for your decision, or maybe it was an initiative that you brought with you. Will you comment?

Wilson: I have forgotten exactly what brought this about. I

believe that the women should be integrated as best we can into the Marine Corps except for those fields of flying and fighting

I think that this has been proper. I have tried to do away with the separate women's companies, which has been successful I believe that women have appreciated this, and I think all in all that the integration of women into the Marine Corps is going much more smoothly than I had thought it would. I expect and there have occurred reactions, mostly from the NCO's--the most reactionary group in the military to change-but they are coming around and all in all I think the policy has succeeded.

I was in Dallas yesterday at a news conference and there were some young women reporters there. The whole news conference was taken up with women in combat and they exhibited a rather militant attitude about it, which I resisted.

I don't believe that women should go into combat, in the front lines as platoon leaders and riflemen, or machine gunners, but I found a great many of these women reporters who felt that they should be able to do so but none volunteered from among the women reporters to do so.

Simmons: I think we are seeing here that in your first few weeks as Commandant you made a number of very important decisions which sort of set the course and drift for your whole administration as Commandant. On Friday morning 18 July, you had a briefing on armor and anti-armor capabilities. This seemed to be the leading edge of what would be a continuing debate during your tenure as Commandant. What were your initial conceptions on these two matters, opposite sides of the same coin, perhaps conditioned by your experiences as CG, FMFPac?

Wilson: Well, I have forgotten that. This was the introduction of the TOW and the Dragon, and we decided to put the TOW into the tank

battalion, which I do not think is a good idea. This is not it?

Simmons: No, I am agreeing with you. I don't think it's a good idea either.

Wilson: But I believe that. I don't think it is a good idea, but I have not found any better place. They require a lot of vehicles; the infantry battalion or the infantry regiment simply is not able to handle wheeled vehicles. What I would like to have is a tracked vehicle on which the TOW could be mounted. But we hope that this may come about with the mobile protective weapons system which will probably be the subject of another conversation later.

Just this morning, we made a decision to put the Dragons into the infantry battalion weapons company. We are going to have the weapons company and three rifle companies. We're having to make the battalion smaller than I would like to make it because we are going to cut the Marine Corps 10,000 in 1981, to POM 81 levels. But we're going to have one experimental unit which will be in the 2d Division; we'll have a battalion of about 1,047.

The tanks: I believe this was the time when we had to make the decision about going for the--what's the tank?

Simmons: The new tank, MX-1?

Wilson: But I can't think of it right now, or go for the M-60A3 tank which would cost \$250,000. I chose to go for the new tank, and I'm surprised that it was only four years ago. We really haven't gotten any closer to it than we were then; it's having some problems.

Simmons: This is the Chrysler tank.

Wilson: The Chrysler tank, but at the same time, we are fortunate

in the Marine Corps to be able to make these decisions later, after the bugs are out, which we intend to do. I still am not sure that this is the way to go for the long term. It is sixty tons, does have fine armor; nevertheless, we still have oh, at least a year or a year and a half to go before we make the final decision.

Simmons: Later on, we'll get back to the new infantry battalion.

Wilson: I would say, though, by the way, that we have just finished buying out all of our M-60's: 576 of these for the Marine Corps, which also have been part of that series.

Simmons: Later on, we'll get back to the revised organization of infantry battalion. In passing, I might say I was sorry to see the fourth rifle company go, but I was delighted to see the weapons company come back get away from that artificially swollen headquarters and service company that we had.

Wilson: Yes, I think that's right. I certainly would have preferred to have a weapons company and four infantry companies, but we simply cannot afford it at times when our money is shrinking, and we simply are not able to keep the strength of the Marine Corps at 190,000 and being cut each year in O & M [operations and maintenance] and Procurement. So we are going to have to take vertical cuts from now and reduce personnel.

Simmons: It is premature for me to say it, but inasmuch as we've started the discussion, has any more thought been given to having associated reserve units, such as a fourth rifle company, coming from the Reserve?

Wilson: Yes. I have that as a theory, and I think that that is the way that we would probably do it. I am not able to get any

enthusiasm from the Reserve on this or into an affiliation with a company, for instance, with the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines or the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines. Nor do I think it is absolutely necessary, although I think if in fact we could have some enthusiasm, at least a battalion to be associated with a regiment or a division...Reserves feel that this would be a lack of motivation on the part of the Reserve, but frankly I have in mind that if, in fact, we did go to war and we had time and the Reserves were mobilized before the first Marine unit was sent overseas—that this is the way that I would do it.

Simmons: Most interesting. On that same day, at 1100 on Friday, 18 July, you had a briefing on another rather controversial subject: this was the F-18. Can you summarize for me your position with respect to the F-18 and how, having endorsed the F-14, we suddenly found ourselves in the position of endorsing the F-18?

Wilson: Well, it's probably going to take a long time for a summary but I'll do the best I can to summarize. I had been concerned for a long time when I was at FMFPac and watched the evolutions here in Washington and was not privy to the discussions nor was I critical of them publicly because I was not aware of how and when the decisions were made; nor am I now in fact. But I believe the F-14 was purely a fighter with the Phoenix missile, which probably is the world's best fighter. But it was much ...

End Tape 1, Side 1

Begin Tape 1 Side 2

Simmons: And you couldn't envisage...

Wilson: I could not envision the Marine Corps to be in a position where we would use the F-14 with this complicated and sophisticated Phoenix missile and tracking systems just for Marines, because if we had that sophisticated an enemy to fight there would be other services there too. We need a fighter of course, but we need a fighter with an attack capability.

This was opposed by practically all of the senior aviators in the Marine Corps, and I felt very reluctant to put myself in the position of resisting this, because the F-14 represented the latest in techniques and technology, of which, naturally, the Marines want to be a part.

I agonized over this and finally made the decision after talking to Secretary Schlesinger about it. Secretary Middendorf was not interested, was not oriented in that direction, and so I went to see Secretary Schlesinger and told him.

He heartily applauded it, at which I was surprised but delighted. I came back and talked to Jim Holloway, knowing that he wanted the F-14's very badly. He eagerly took the F-14's from the Marine Corps because of their expense and promised me in writing that the Marines would be the first to get the F-18's.

Now the F-18 is a fine fighter. It is a single seat, which many aviators believe—and I am surprised at the number of general officers who feel this way—that a second pair of eyeballs is important. I thought that the technology had passed this. Nevertheless, a majority of the junior aviators believe that this is important. The F-18 had an attack capability as well as a fighter capability.

The Marine Corps initially was going to get the electro-

optical system and the laser-guided system and the Navy was going to have only fighters. The Marine Corps F-18 was going to cost about \$250,000 more to have this capability.

It is interesting that this has just changed 180 degrees now, but that will come later. I talked to the OP-05, I talked to CNO, pointed out, clearly that I would not have the F-18 for the Marine Corps if it were to have any effect on the AV-8B. It's interesting that right now, we're in a struggle with the CNO, having to do with the AV-8B as we have for the last four years. CNO's still find it hard to believe that they cannot finally put pressure on the Commandant and he will give in. I believe that I have disabused them of that idea. Nevertheless, the agreement ended up with the four F-14 squadrons (of which we had over 500 people in training at that time in Miramar) being pulled out of training by the Marines and that the Navy would get the F-14's and we would continue with the F-4's until the F-18's came on. They subsequently have slipped but now the first one is now flying at Pax River.

As a matter of fact, I have not been sorry for this decision. I don't believe that I am being Pollyannish about it. The F-14 has been a great drain on the Navy; it has been enormously expensive and they are-going to have to at least re-engine it, and will have to develop a new engine for it later. The cost is well up over \$30,000,000 apiece. It would have been a drain on the Marine Corps.

I am convinced that, instead of having twelve fighter squadrons now, we would probably not even have had six had we had to bear this expense. I believe that the majority of aviators in the Marine Corps now believe that that was the wise decision.

Simmons: Most interesting. On Wednesday 20 July, you paid your official call on Gen Fred Weyand, Chief of Staff of the Army, a person I particularly admire. I should like to interject a

little story of my own.

In 1970 when he came back out to Vietnam as Deputy COMUSMACV [commander US military assistance command Vietnam] before taking over from Gen[Creighton W.] Abrams, he made the usual orientation tour. I happened to be the acting division commander when he visited the 1st Marine Division. I had the honor of showing him around, and of course we were followed by the inevitable photographer. Some days later, I received a large envelope from Saigon; I thought it would be the usual thank-you note and autographed photo. It was that with one important exception: instead of sending me an autographed photograph he asked me to sign the photo and return it to him. I thought that was a very nice touch. He was certainly less stiff than many U.S. Army generals, possibly because he came from the University of California at Berkeley rather than the Military Academy.

I have noticed that he was a sometime golf partner of yours and I would like to know about your relations with Gen Weyand.

Wilson: Yes. I just played golf with him about two weeks ago in Hawaii and he is vice president of a bank now. He is still the same relaxed, affable, capable person that we have always known. I had known him in Vietnam before; he came here as the Vice Chief of Staff under Gen Abrams and subsequently the Chief of Staff. We had a very good relationship; easy-going, and we saw eye-to-eye on many subjects in the tank.

I might say here it is interesting that when the amendment was made in the law to make me a full member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the old shibboleth was reared again in some quarters that "this gives the Navy two votes." The facts are that the Army and the Air Force had voted together many more times than the Navy and the Marine Corps as the record will show. But Fred and I saw eye-to-eye on a good many matters, as indeed I have with Bernard

Rogers since Fred's departure.

Simmons: On Thursday 14 July, you made a one-day trip to Parris Island. I don't suppose you recall the purpose of that trip.

Wilson: As I said earlier, I had not ever been stationed at a recruit depot, I was in at Parris Island only once before, many years ago when I accompanied Gen Pate there. So, it was a one-day trip to see the training and was also my first trip out of Washington since becoming Commandant.

(interruption)

Simmons: We were talking about your visit to Parris Island on the 24th of July.

Wilson: Other than just that one-day visit, which was my first visit out of Washington to see the recruit depot, that was the extent of it that I remember.

Simmons: The next day was 25 July, and we kind of alluded to this earlier. At 0930 you met with the Secretary of Defense on the Wilson Initiatives, and I think that you indicated that you had no precise recollection of that meeting.

Wilson: No, that could have been the time I talked to him about the F-14's but I have forgotten the exact dates.

Simmons: That evening, July 25th, you hosted a parade and reception for the Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Middendorf. The next Monday, 28 July, BGen Don Hittle called on you at 1245. Gen Hittle has had a number of interesting and important positions in and out of government here in Washington. Can you comment?

Wilson: Indeed he has. Don Hittle, I am sure, is due a majority

of the credit for the Marine Corps being what it is today. That's a very broad statement, but people in whom I have great confidence and whose judgment I value highly, have indicated this to me. Don's father was a state's Attorney General in Michigan and an influential Republican. Don had a great deal of influence on the Hill. He is a very astute and perceptive individual, recognizing in the late 1940's the deep trouble in which the Marine Corps found itself.

He set about to use what influence he had to save it, and he has been singularly successful. So we do owe Don a great debt of gratitude. Many people don't like Don; they feel that he had exaggerated his importance for personal reasons, but I certainly do not think so. I think he has done a fine job and we have maintained a good close relationship over the years. I have called on him several times for advice on particular matters having to do with the Marine Corps on the Hill, and he has always been very good, very astute and very thoughtful.

Simmons: Very interesting. Also on Monday, 28 July, you continued your calls on members of the Senate. You called on Senator [John] Tower, Senator Stennis (about whom you have previously commented), Senator [Stuart] Symington and Senator [Daniel] Inoue. Any comments on Senator Tower?

Wilson: No. I have of course, known Senator Inoue and Senator Stennis; particularly Senator Stennis for many years, being of course, from Mississippi. But I called on Senator Inoue.

He was on the Armed Services Committee when I had the legislative assistant's job this was a renewal of old acquaintances and we talked about Hawaii. Now, of course, he is not on the Armed Services Committee, and I have had very little contact with him since I have been Commandant.

Senator Tower I had not known before, but he has been a great supporter of the Marine Corps, particularly for Marine aviation, and I am very fond of him.

Simmons: How about Senator Symington, certainly one of the best known figures on the Hill.

Wilson: Yes. Senator Symington has been a great supporter of ours, although he had not been in earlier years when he was the Secretary of the Air Force. His son Jim was a Marine and at that time, a Congressman. Jim was subsequently defeated for the senate in Missouri when he tried to take his father's place when Senator Symington retired. I have seen him many times in Washington since then and he is still a rather powerful figure in the Democratic Party, although he is getting old.

Simmons: Yes. On Tuesday and Wednesday, 29 and 30 July, you went to Norfolk. Possibly you called on Adm Ike Kidd. Do you recall?

Wilson: Yes, I did. I called on him but primarily, of course, to see Bob Nichols. It seemed to me it was in this office, in which we are now sitting though, that I had a little set-to with Ike, and it may have had to do with the Mount Whitney. Ike's a very great Marine supporter, but there were a couple of things about which I was concerned, having to do with command relationships. I think I can remember. It had to do with command relationships in the Atlantic as opposed to the Pacific.

When I was FMFPac, I insisted that the MAU (which was deployed)--that there be no jointure of command with the amphibious task force commander, the amphibious group commander--the Navy captain--that there be no jointure of command until a mission had been assigned. In effect, the Marines were under the

command of the commanding general of the Task Force 79.

However, in the Atlantic, whenever there was a MAU in the Caribbean or in the Mediterranean, a jointure of command was established immediately and therefore the Marines were subordinated to the amphibious task force commander or to the amphibious group commander during the whole cruise, although he was not an amphibious task force commander because he had no mission. Only a mission actuates an amphibious task force commander.

I told Ike that I was unhappy with this, that I intended to do something about it, and I wondered that if that was his policy, because I intended to take action. He was surprised, did not know about it; as a matter of fact, within a period of a month he changed this. I was deeply appreciative about not having to go to the mat with him.

Simmons: On Wednesday, 6 August, you promoted Larry Snowden to lieutenant general and made it known that he would be your Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Policies. The incumbent, LtGen Herb Beckington, retired on Thursday, 28 August, after a ceremony at Marine Barracks and a reception at the band hall. The next day, Friday 29 August, there was a ceremony at Quantico at which newly promoted LtGen Joe Fegan relieved LtGen Ed Fris. It was widely rumored at the time that you gave Beckington and Fris the option of retiring or reverting to major general. Would you comment?

Wilson: That is correct; I did. I said that I believed that they had served for a couple of years, that I had officers that I believed were compatible with my way of thinking. I really had not known either of them before and that I certainly thought that an officer who had served and chose to stay in the Marine Corps could do so until his 35th year of service.

I was pleased with their work here and obviously there were

places that we could have used them, but this was a policy that I have maintained for the most part as Commandant, with certain exceptions, and I think that this was the choice although I expected them to do what they did. I would have been perfectly delighted to have them, either one, in major generals' jobs and I am sure that had they chosen to take it, they would have performed most satisfactorily.

Simmons: On Sunday 17 August, and again on the following Sunday, there were tours of the Commandant's House by the Smithsonian Associates. During your four years in the house, it has been much more open to the public than perhaps was ever the case in the past. Would you comment on this?

Wilson: We, Jane and I, feel the house is a heritage for all Marines, in fact the more so because of its position in the nation's capital and particularly since the house has been designated a national landmark. We feel that there is a responsibility that we, as the temporary occupants and the Marine Corps, have to make it available to people who are interested in our nation's heritage. We have tried to do what we could in order to make it a home of graciousness and one in which to welcome people.

Simmons: On Friday evening 29 August, you were the guest of honor and principal speaker at the Grand Banquet of the 52nd National Convention of the Marine Corps League at the Benjamin Franklin Hotel in Philadelphia. SgtMaj Black also attended.

In your remarks that evening, you said (and I quote), "In the last analysis, what the Marine Corps becomes is what we make of it during our respective watches. The watch of each Marine is not confined to the time he spends on active duty. It lasts as long as he is proud to bear the title of United States Marine." Do you

have any specific recollections of that evening?

Wilson: Yes. I remember that because I remember that was before the Legionnaires disease hit the Bellevue Stratford Hotel. I was frankly surprised that it was as nice a party as it was, and the quality of the people that were there. We enjoyed it very much. I have had some bad experiences with the Marine Corps League over the years with local chapters, but as a result of this, I think they are coming along fine now. They have a fine president of the Marine Corps League and I think it is no longer the potential embarrassment for the Marine Corps that it has been in the past.

Simmons: For almost a week, from Tuesday 2 September through Saturday 6 September, much of your time was taken with the visit of the Commandant General of the Royal Marines, LtGen Peter Whiteley and his wife. Some of the events were: Tuesday 2 September, arrival honors and official calls; Wednesday evening 3 September, reception at the British Embassy in honor of LtGen and Mrs. Whiteley; Thursday evening, dinner and theater with LtGen and Mrs. Whiteley; Friday evening, dinner and parade for Gen and Mrs. Whiteley; Saturday morning, see LtGen and Mrs. Whiteley off at Andrews Air Force Base. Is this a fairly standard schedule for a visiting commandant of a foreign Marine Corps?

Wilson: Yes, it is and we followed this almost exactly with all of the commandants; there have been many who visited us. We enjoyed the Whiteleys very much and have since become close friends. We visited them later in England and Norway when he was CincNorth.

Simmons: That anticipated my next question. I was going to ask if you had had any contact with them after he was given this major

command, and I believe he was the first Royal Marine to be so dignified with such a NATO command.

Wilson: He is, and much to the dismay of a good many generals in the British Army. I have had several discussions with him since then. It has been one of my goals to get a U.S. Marine general aviator to be a deputy CinCNorth. I have discussed this with Peter, assuring him that I would not do it while he was still there because it would appear to be "Marineland", with U.S. and Royal Marines. He agreed to this, and said that he would do what he could. This is going to be a very difficult thing with the U.S. Air Force who don't want to give it up, although they have no units there nor any contingency plans to go there.

The reason that I am mentioning this is that this is the type of relationship that we have established, that I could discuss rather delicate matters with him with full confidence that he would be circumspect in his relationship and in his dealings with us in country; not that he would keep this from his own country nor was it necessary, but circumspect in that he could answer questions about it.

Simmons: Well, that is a very, very interesting and potentially useful possibility.

Wilson: Yes, very much so.

Simmons: Could you comment in general, on the relationship between the Royal Marines and the U.S. Marines?

Wilson: Yes. I think they are very good, perhaps not as close a relationship as they probably had under Gen [Lemuel] Shepherd's time as CMC when it was the heyday of the Royal Marines and the U.S. Marines.

The Royal Marines of course, have come down so far in strength now, but I have also known the Commandant, Sir John Richards, the current Commandant. We have occasional correspondence, pass good wishes to each other from time to time, and the Royal Marines from which our heritage came, is, I think, a very important part of our heritage.

We have some contingency plans in which we plan to fight together, particularly northern Norway, we can learn a lot from them and the Netherlands Marines. In fact, plans are that probably they, being so experienced in ski work and in cold climates, would probably be used as the forward element of units that go there while we would take advantage of our technical expertise of better artillery, more helicopters, than this more traditional type of work in defense of northern Norway.

Simmons: That's very interesting and it bears some comparison to the use of the 41st Commando in Korea.

Wilson: Right.

Simmons: On Thursday 4 September, MajGen Arthur Hanson, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, Retired (better known as Tim Hanson) called on you with respect to the Tun Tavern Project. Out of this call came a White Letter you sent to all commanding officers concerning donations for the project. What are your recollections of the Tun Tavern Project?

Wilson: Well, I have been very disappointed in the Tun Tavern project. I told Tim that I was apprehensive about the project. The bicentennial (for which this was going to be the focus) was upon us for all practical purposes: that is, it was an ambitious project and one which, if it were carried to fruition I think would have been a credit to the Marine Corps and to the city of Philadelphia

and indeed to the Marine Corps Reserve Officers Association which was sponsoring and had indicated that they would bear the major part of the effort.

I did indicate that I would not, under any circumstances, go to the regular Marine Corps with the continual duns, as had been the case as I remember for the Iwo Jima statue. I did however, say that I would--and Ed, you remember, you were there, I think, at the time--that I would put out a White Letter, that I certainly would make available to him if he wanted to talk to Marines to tell them what it was for, I would put out a out a White Letter encouraging commanding officers to accept donations. But certainly, there would be no quotas assigned or continual harassment of Marines for donations for the project in Philadelphia. I did suggest to Tim if he would consider making an officer's club at Henderson Hall and call it "Tun Tavern." This would be a useful and utilitarian thing, something the Marine Corps needed badly, and that Philadelphia was really out of the main stream of the Marine Corps.

Time has passed the Marine Corps and Philadelphia by. The Marine Barracks were closing up, Philadelphia Navy Yard was going down, and not unlike San Francisco, which used to be a great port city for Marines, but it has just been passed by.

He would have no part of this, and as a result, frankly, one of my regrets was that I did not pursue this further, that I put my emphasis and prestige behind the Tun Tavern project. I will say now that when I laid the first corner-stone up there a couple of years ago, over \$200,000 had been collected, much of which has been spent in the architectural engineering fees and design to no avail.

It is now truly a rat's nest, with half-completed walls, with many complaints coming from neighbors in downtown Philadelphia as to its appearance. It is languishing now with all the money being spent. I frankly don't know where we are going; Tim is still

enthusiastic about it, optimistic that he is going to be able to complete it. I leave with a great deal of regret that I was not more forthright in opposing this. My better judgment told me to do it, but I was just reluctant to do it, which I now regret.

Simmons: As a postscript, I was in Philadelphia two week-ends ago and I wouldn't call them complaints. I would call them polite inquiries I got from the National Park Service as to how we were doing.

Wilson: We have just received a letter today from the manager of the apartment development right there; one to Tim, a copy to me, and Tim's answer. But frankly at the time I was new in the job and was reluctant to take on any more opposition than I had to start with. So I was timid when I should not have been.

Simmons: On Saturday 12 September, you went to Mexico, returning to Washington on Wednesday, 17 September. What was the purpose of this trip?

Wilson: I was the senior officer present to represent to the United States at El Grito, the Mexican Independence Day. The reason I accepted this is that there had never been a Marine down there before. I accepted it for this reason, and next, I thought that perhaps we might be able to lay the groundwork for future years with a close association with the Mexican Marine Corps; that perhaps we could have joint exercise.

I am aware of the almost pathological concern that the Mexicans have had about any U.S. forces on their soil, brought on by the revolution and other things. But I thought perhaps that we might establish a close rapport with the Mexican Marine Corps that would work out with joint exercises on some of their marvelous

beaches down at Baja California. So this was killing two birds with one stone. We rather enjoyed our brief tour, although, as I have said, it is one of those things you went through once, you wouldn't want to do it again. But I did establish a relationship with the Commandant which has continued. He is now the attaché in England. But I could see then, and subsequent events have proved, that this could never materialize in the goal that I set.

The Mexican Marines are rather small; completely subordinated to the navy, as are most of the Marine Corps throughout the world. They are ships' guards. They have no organized units. They are dominated by the army on land and the navy at sea. So, other than maintaining a relationship which I think is a good idea because they are marines, this would not be a goal that I could foresee that would be materialized to any consequence.

Simmons: On Monday evening 22 September, you and Jane went to a housewarming hosted by Vice President and Mrs. [Nelson] Rockefeller, in what had been the quarters of the Chief of Naval Operations --that is the Admirals' House at the Naval Observatory. Do you have any recollections of that evening or more generally, of Vice President Rockefeller?

Wilson: Oh yes. The Rockefellers never lived there. This was one of nine receptions that they gave.

This was a terrible rainstorm. A tent had been added to the house to accommodate the guests. There was delicious food and dancing which was characteristic of the Rockefeller's entertaining. Everybody wanted to go see the bed with a mink cover which Vice President Rockefeller had bought at a cost of \$40,000, and which was put in the house. I was not particularly impressed, but nevertheless, I did see the bed.

The Vice President was continually apologizing to the Marines

and to the Navy as well (although he had no reason to apologize to us), that it was not his idea to take the Admirals' House for the Vice President, but that it had been thrust upon him. He did not intend to live there; it was a nice place, but he would rather have lived in his own home on Foxhall Road.

We got to know the Rockefellers slightly better later. They have been over to the house and at several briefings. He was a charming man and Happy was a particularly delightful person.

Simmons: While they were surveying the city for an appropriate home for the Vice President, it was rumored that the Commandant's House was under consideration. It has also been rumored at times that the house was under consideration as a home for the Chief Justice. Has Marine Corps occupancy of the Commandant's House ever been seriously threatened?

Wilson: I don't think so, not during my time. I know the Kissingers came to the house one time and Nancy Kissinger looked with avaricious eyes at the house, thinking that it would be a fine place for the Secretary of State, particularly after the Vice President was there. She asked a great deal of questions about the furniture and other things. Nothing ever came of this.

The Chief Justice was at our house for dinner one night and looked around and made a joking comment that this would be a perfect place for him, close walking distance to the Supreme Court and because of the history of the house. I told him that I had great respect for him, but that I really thought that he perhaps did not want to tackle the Marines, or words to this effect. I had a letter later from him, a little bread and butter note, which he had penned in his own handwriting.

By way of background, he had been rather critical of the

lawyers in the United States at that time and had received a lot of publicity by saying that many of them were incompetent as trial lawyers. He said in the P.S. that he had had enough trouble with the lawyers recently after his remarks and this was no time to take on the Marines and therefore, he would drop the idea.

Simmons: On Friday 26 September, you went to New Orleans, returning the next day. Do you recall the reason for this trip?

Wilson: No, I have been in New Orleans several times. It may well have been to the Navy League or a visit to the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing. This was before the 4th Division came down.

However, it does seem to me that on this trip is where I got the idea that perhaps this might be a good place to have the 4th Division. Just about this time I had a talk with Mr. Hebert, when the Secretary of the Navy had asked me to go over and talk to him. The Navy had built the Hebert complex in New Orleans and a million dollar BOQ with the idea of moving BUPERS [Bureau of Personnel] down to New Orleans.

The Secretary of the Navy was very concerned and did not want this to come to pass, but they were all afraid to tell Mr. Hebert about it. He asked me to go over with him, which I did, having known Mr. Hebert for many years. I then made a deal with Middendorf telling him that we would be glad to take the building for the 4th Division headquarters if we could get the million dollar BOQ for Marines. This delighted Middendorf, so he was very grateful when I went over and proposed this. Mr. Hebert was also a great friend of the Marines in the past and was glad that this came about after making a few remarks about the Navy not knowing what the left hand was doing to the right hand.

So it worked out very amiably and as a matter of fact, I am delighted that the 4th Division is there. I think they are working

closely with the Wing. They are fine facilities, much better than the old buildings at Camp Pendleton, where they were for many years.

Simmons: Thursday afternoon, 2 October, you met with the Board of Governors of the Marine Corps Association. This may have been about the time that the amalgamation of the Marine Corps Association and the Leatherneck Association came up once again. Such a consolidation had been considered several times in the past without results. Can you summarize what has happened with respect to the Marine Corps Association while you have been Commandant?

Wilson: Yes. I had felt that the Marine Corps Association should be the umbrella organization for the Gazette and Leatherneck. I had been the secretary-treasurer and the editor-in-chief of the Gazette when I was the director of the Education Center by virtue of that job. I had gotten involved when the insurance program became a shambles and frankly we were in a (I don't want to get into any libel here) where we had had some trouble with the administrator. And I had determined at that time that there was a need for someone with management expertise who knew the Marine Corps. I was instrumental in getting Bev Cass to come to take over the job as the executive director of the Association, not only is he a fine individual but has done a fine job.

I did not believe the Commandant should be the president of the Marine Corps Association. I thought that was a conflict of interest because he also was president and had to approve it. I believe the Assistant Commandant, who was the president of the Leatherneck Association, should have the job as the president of the Association and have it as an umbrella organization

Besides, the Leatherneck and the Gazette were now beginning to

compete with each other in selling books, in selling novelty items and even considering an insurance program. So I felt that I had to bring this together, which I did. I suggested that the Commandant should not be the president, but the Assistant Commandant should and to get on with it. Knowing full well that any time there is an amalgamation, why it is treading on somebody's toes. And I was not disappointed. Leatherneck was upset. However, Leatherneck was in much worse financial condition than I had known and I believe that we saved, if because had we not done so, it probably would have gone under.

Simmons: I think the Marine Corps Association has been one of the great success stories these past three or four years.

Wilson: Yes, I hope so.

Simmons: On Friday 3 October, you went to Dallas, Texas, to give a luncheon speech to the Navy League. On 10 September, you had spoken to the Navy League here in Washington. In Washington, you had told the Navy League (and I am quoting), "At various times in my career, I have been told to do things because "they" said so, now I am 'they'." I don't have a copy of your Dallas speech but perhaps you can generalize for me on the Marine Corps and the Navy League.

Wilson: Yes. As a matter of fact, I was just down in the Navy League National Convention again last week here, which was my final talk to them. I think that they enjoy the affiliation with Marines; they enjoy including the Marines in the Navy League. Other than perfunctory, I don't think they have given us all that much attention although Charlie Duchein was at one time president of the Navy League—he is a Reserve Marine Corps major general.

Suddenly, there has been a falling out with him, I think, in the League and he doesn't participate any more.

But I think the League feels that perhaps I have not given them all the attention they deserve. I regret this, but I have attended a couple of conventions. It is not deliberate; lack of attention, it is just the fact that I had other priorities. They have the feeling, and I know Jim Holloway felt this way, that whenever they call for something they get very upset if the service chiefs do not drop everything and attend it. I simply have never done that. If I accept something, that's final and I go and don't wait around for a better offer. I think this has passed now, but we get something out of it, but not all that much. But I think we should continue the affiliation in any case.

Simmons: I may be asking for a comparison of apples and avocados, but would you make a comparison for me of the Navy League with the Marine Corps League?

Wilson: Yes. I think there is no comparison really. In fact, the Navy League is politically organized, has political goals and they have prestigious people in the United States, perhaps a little less now than in the past, but I think it probably comes and goes. The Marine Corps League is more of an enlisted man's organization, which I don't think is bad. I think there is a place for this and so long as it can be guided, that it is not an embarrassment to the Marine Corps, that it has a place and should be continued.

Simmons: On your way back from Dallas, you stopped off on Monday and Tuesday, 6 and 7 October, for a visit to Cherry Point and New River. On Wednesday 8 October, at 8:00 o'clock in the morning, you held a discussion with the Deputy Chief of Staff Aviation, Deputy Chief of Staff Requirements and Programs, and the Chief of Staff,

and some people from the office of the Deputy Chief of Staff Aviation on the F-18. At 10 o'clock you met with CNO and VAdm Houser and at 1400 you appeared before the Tactical Air Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Now I did not check the record. I did not go back and read the proceedings of that hearing but presumably you were questioned on the Marine Corps' desire for the F-18.

Wilson: Yes. I think that it was at that time that I had finally made the decision for the F-18 then had gone forward with our requirements for this to be the fighter and a replacement for the F-4.

Simmons: Next day, you spoke to a luncheon meeting of the Marine Retired Officers' Association at Fort McNair. This group, which now meets at the Sheraton National, holds three luncheon meetings a year. Do you have any comments, either specifically about talks you have given the group, or about that group in general?

Wilson: No, it has certainly been supportive of me personally, and I am delighted that many people come. In fact, it is, I gather a sort of highlight for Marine retired officers in the community.

It has increased in number and scope largely due to the enthusiasm Jeff Fields has given to it. Jeff took over when Gen [Gerald] Thomas felt that he was no longer physically able to do it. Jeff is an enthusiastic type individual who has interesting speakers and feels a dedication to it. I cannot help but also mention the cooperation and the support given it by the Sheraton National. Not only do they do it either as a loss certainly with no profit, but they also make available one of the very nicest rooms. It was formerly down at the Navy Yard or at the Officers' Club at Fort McNair, where there was no parking, prices were high, and generally in an atmosphere which was not conducive to (as at the

Sheraton National) large crowds and speakers' platforms, meals, availability, etc.

Simmons: I certainly agree with that. Going to the Sheraton National removed the ceiling of 200 on a luncheon and now upwards of four hundred officers attend. One thing, that as a member of the audience that I like is that everyone who is there is happy with the Marine Corps. The ones who are sour or bitter don't come. So I say it is a nice occasion.

Wilson: Yes, it is. And I think it is not too often, too.

Simmons: I think three times a year is about right.

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: On Wednesday 22 October, in accordance with what you said earlier, a three-day Fleet Marine Force commanders' conference was convened. Apparently you found it useful during your tenure to have these smaller, lower profile commanders' conferences than the full-fledged general officers' symposium which had become a custom and which had grown increasingly elaborate. I have a copy of the green letter issued after the conference which enclosed a summary of decisions and policy statements coming out of the conference. I will read you some extracts; essentially the topic sentences and ask for your comments.

Personnel quality: 75 percent of all accessions to be high school graduates by Fiscal Year '77 is a requirement.

Wilson: Yes. I set that as a goal at that time and have never changed this. I believe that this is one of the better decisions

that I have made. This has been largely....

End Tape 1, Side 2

Begin Tape 2, Side 1

Simmons: We were talking about personnel quality and the requirement that 75 percent of all accessions be high school graduates.

Wilson: Yes. I think that this has been very, very good and I am still dedicated to that proposition.

Simmons: The next policy statement is personal appearance.

"It is evident that there are too many Marines who do not measure up to the existing physical fitness and weight control policies."

Wilson: We have been able to stick to this. The Inspector General has been the one who has been charged with determining that this has been carried out; in addition to my own eyeballs, and those, hopefully, of many others. We have a few fat Marines now, but I don't believe too many and we have continued to maintain the grooming standards.

Simmons: Next item was readiness reporting, the "plan to equally staff all FMF units, coupled with a stringent fore-stat reporting, and should result in true C-2 or better readiness rating. Structure changes will be made if necessary to reach the goal for all units by fiscal year '77."

Wilson: Yes, we did that. I continue to insist that no unit in the Marine Corps should be more ready than any other unit. I have

really not been successful; this is a state of mind, and I have not been successful in getting this across. My recent trip to the western Pacific, again, emphasized to me that people somehow believe that they should receive a higher quality, better-trained people, and better equipment than those people "back in the States." I continued to insist there, as I do now, that every unit is subject to call and none should be more ready than the others, because if one is more ready, then there is another that is going to be less ready.

And the syndrome in the 2d Division, where the Mediterranean MAU (a simple little organization composed of not over 1600 people) is driving the 2d Marine Division, 2d Marine Aircraft Wing, of about 40,000 people, looking forward and getting ready for this deployment months and even years in advance. I was appalled. But frankly, I still find that there is this syndrome that somehow it should be better than the ones at home. But apparently they may have made some inroads but not nearly as much as I would like to see.

Simmons: Twenty-nine Palms Air/Ground Training Center: "The Marine Corps Air/Ground Training Center at Twenty-nine Palms is commencing operation."

Wilson: Yes, we have moved in this direction, moved a battalion there, an infantry battalion from Okinawa there; have built an airfield. I still think it is the world's best training ground, where we can move and shoot and have combined arms training (which we will divorce from environmental considerations which have plagued us at all other bases) and we have moved along quite satisfactorily there. It takes a long time for our military construction, but we have it in the POMs and I believe it is a very important place and given enough money, I would like to have every

unit go there. All the money we can spare for our O&M budget is designed to send a battalion and both artillery and infantry to Twenty-nine Palms. [See Appendix F]

Simmons: As I recall, one of the things that caused you to make this change in the mission of Twenty-nine Palms was dissatisfaction with the air/ground cooperation, you thought that, in some cases, we were perhaps paying lip service to cooperation that did not exist; particularly in the area of photo reconnaissance and the feedback, etc.

Wilson: Yes. I think we are still lacking in that training, though we have the opportunity here. And the lip service that we have paid to air/ground training for units that are stationed close together but who never train together. Certainly this is true at El Toro and Camp Pendleton and Cherry Point and Camp Lejeune. It looks good on paper that they are together, but if they never speak or never see each other, it is not worth a thing.

Simmons: Amphibious operation: "The Marine Corps has a vested interest in the word 'amphibious' and continues to be alert to ensure adherence to approved doctrine. The amphibious role is reaffirmed as the primary role of the Marine Corps."

Wilson: Yes, that is true. I certainly believe that our amphibious role is a part of the umbrella of the naval service. We do, and I think we own half the word "amphibious." Not long ago, we had occasion to find that some movement was made into our amphibious fields and new terms are being used by the fleet commander. This was concurred in by one of our commanders and I made a rather sharp rebuke to him, that when the word "amphibious"

is used we insist that as Marines, we are involved and that only at this Headquarters will a determination be made as to what can be allowed when it comes to use of the word "amphibious." That is not clearly documented in the war plans publications.

Simmons: Aviation: "Aviation assets must be jealously guarded and judiciously used to ensure maximum readiness."

Wilson: Yes. In other words, our helicopters aboard ships are simply not taxis nor are they vertical on-board delivery for Navy supplies. We simply cannot have them used for that. The commander is charged with that responsibility and he has the direct instructions that if in fact, he does not believe that he can afford to use helicopters; he is to send me a message.

Simmons: Some other items, but I think that those were the highlights of the decisions and policies coming out of that FMF commanders' conference.

Wilson: That was a very good conference. I think these conferences are useful from time to time. I do think that the general officers' conferences with the wives are also useful from time to time. Nevertheless, while one has more of a social connotation than the other, I think it is very important and so this is the policy that I have tried to adhere to.

Simmons: On Sunday 26 October, you attended a birthday luncheon in honor of Gen Gerald C. Thomas given by LtGen and Mrs. W. K. Jones. These luncheons have become an annual event. Certainly Gen Thomas is one of the most admired and enduring of Marine Corps leaders. Can you comment on Gen Thomas, particularly as to how his leadership and example may have affected you?

Wilson: Yes. I have never served directly under Gen Thomas, he was the Director of Personnel when I was at the barracks at 8th and I and then later on, I was the aide for CG, FMFPac when he commanded the brigade at Tsingtao. Although having known and admired him over the years, I never worked for him directly. About that time, he came to Quantico. I left for Korea, and our service has never really crossed.

Simmons: In point of time, we are now beginning to get into the round of festivities celebrating the Marine Corps' 200th birthday. On Wednesday 29 October, you and Jane went to the west coast. On Saturday 1 November, you attended the Bicentennial Ball in Los Angeles, a very big affair. Now what are your recollections of that evening?

Wilson: It was a big affair: crowded, disorganized--a shambles when it came to organization. However, it was motivated by the best of intentions. At least, there were a great many people there. Hopefully, they knew what they were there for. So it was the start of a series of parties, of celebrations which are well-intentioned by highly dedicated Marines established throughout the nation.

Simmons: I understand that there were a number of Hollywood personalities there who may or may not have known what the Marine Corps was.

Wilson: Yes, there were. I am glad that I didn't have to go to another one. I am glad I will not have to go to the 300th birthday party.

Simmons: On Monday evening, 3 November, you attended the rehearsal for the upcoming birthday ball pageant and left your personal imprint on what the program would be. On Wednesday 5 November, at 1730, the so-called "Congressional Marines" held a birthday celebration. What are the "Congressional Marines"?

Wilson: It is a group which continues largely through the efforts of Joe Bartlett. It was established by Congressman Clark Thompson from Texas when he was a Congressman years ago. Joe Bartlett has been the driving force on it for many years. Joe has just recently left the Hill, but the Congressional Marines are the members of Congress or staff and everyone on Capitol Hill who is involved in the Marine Corps. This included the guards and janitors and everyone, and it is amazing that such a wide diversity of people have been able to continue to have the Marine Corps as a common interest over the years. This is a breakfast group which still meets from time to time. In fact, since Joe left, it looks as if now they are continuing it under some very dedicated Congressmen and going to continue it. Frankly, I think they may be meeting a little too often, but that is for someone else to determine.

Simmons: On Thursday 6 November, in the morning, you presented copies of Marines in the Revolution to the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations. That evening, there was a concert in the John Philip Sousa Band Hall, at which time the Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Middendorf, presented a Gideon Welles letter complimenting the Marine Band. Welles, of course, was the Secretary of the Navy during the Civil War. We then moved to Building 198 in the Washington Navy Yard where we celebrated the 121st birthday of John Phillip Sousa. On Sunday 9 November, at 1500, you attended the traditional Marine Band brass choir concert

at the National Cathedral. Next day was Monday 10 November, the 200th birthday of the Corps. It was a very full day, and I will take the events one by one. Incidentally, you will recall that reserve MajGen Dick Mulberry and his wife were your house guests during this period.

You started off the day with an 8:00 a.m. appearance on the "Today" show. Now this was filmed at the Iwo Jima Monument. Any recollections of that you wish to share with us?

Wilson: Yes. It was in a driving rainstorm and we were under umbrellas sitting out in front of the monument, looking over the city. I remember it very well. I had not as much experience then as I have now, and being on national television was unnerving, nor do I indicate that I am a personality now. I was less comfortable then than I am now. It went off very well and I have forgotten who was the host, other than that it was raining and the host apologized for the rain as the interview ended. I remember saying "Well, that's all right, because the Marines are used to rain."

Simmons: At 1100, there was the traditional birthday ceremony at the Iwo Jima Memorial, made special because it was the 200th birthday; any recollection of that or the ceremony?

Wilson: No, except the rain had stopped. I have forgotten who the guest of honor was. I know the President was there next year, but I have forgotten who the Guest of Honor was. It may have been the Secretary of the Navy.

Simmons: I think it was but I'm not positive.

Wilson: In any case, the rain had stopped. This is a time of year when the weather has a lot to do with the ceremony and whether it

is enjoyable or whether it can be a chore. I guess we've seen them all; last year was the most delightful.

Simmons: 1978?

Wilson: Yes. 1978 was simply a beautiful day and everything was perfect.

Simmons: Unrelated to the birthday, at 1400 there were departure ceremonies at the Pentagon which you attended for James Schlesinger, who was leaving the office of the Secretary of Defense. That evening, there was the dinner, ball and pageant at the Washington Hilton, with Dr. Schlesinger as the honored guest. I remember that he wore a red Marine Corps cummerbund that evening. What are your recollections of the evening?

Wilson: It was a very interesting time. Secretary Schlesinger had just been fired by President Ford. He was leaving. I attended his departure honors at the Pentagon. There was considerable discussion both at the White House and in the Department of Defense as to whether or not his being the guest of honor would leave a feeling that President Ford would resent, that the Marine Corps was in effect, siding with Schlesinger.

I was insistent that he had been invited and I had no intention of dis-inviting him because he was the former Secretary of Defense. He got a standing ovation at the birthday ball from the point of view of the sympathy that I think went to him at the time, because his dismissal was caused by asking publicly for a larger defense budget than he had received. This, of course, was popular with the Marines there.

In any case, he received a tumultuous ovation and he made some flattering remarks about the Marine Corps. When he departed,

it was with a certain note of sadness for me because he was leaving and after all, he had appointed me as Commandant, for which I was appreciative. Also, when I saw him to the door, his secret service man (his bodyguard) said goodbye to him because it was exactly midnight and his tour of duty guarding Schlesinger ended at midnight, so they had a farewell also, along with us. Schlesinger drove home alone then, with Rachel of course, no longer Secretary of Defense, no longer attended by a bodyguard.

Simmons: I think that midnight, 10 November 1975, is probably a good place to end this session.

Wilson: OK.

Simmons: Do you have any remarks that you might want to make that might have occurred to you?

Wilson: No, I don't think so. I think we are moving along fine.

End Session II

Session III-- 2 May 1979

Simmons: It is Wednesday, 2 May, and we are again in the Commandant's office. I might say this is a particularly bright and beautiful day. If the Commandant looks out the window, he can see a beautiful view of Arlington Cemetery and the flowering trees.

In our second session, held Tuesday afternoon 24 April, we covered the events that occurred from 1 July 1975, your first day

as Commandant, through 10 November 1975, the 200th birthday of the Corps. We will pick up today at that point in time.

At 1100 on Tuesday, 11 November 1975, you attended the funeral of LtGen Julian Smith, who had commanded the 2d Marine Division at Tarawa. Did you know Gen Smith well?

Wilson: Not well. I never served with Gen Smith. I had known him and visited him in the hospital when he had that accident and shot his toe off while he was hunting at Quantico and was in the hospital a long time there. I had seen him a couple times then, but since then I have included Happy, his wife, with the affairs of the house, for which she was very appreciative. They were married rather late in Gen Smith's life. She is a delightful person. Of course, his is a very famous name in the Marine Corps.

Simmons: Considering your busy schedule as a service chief, the matter of attending funerals must cause problems sometimes. Did you work out any rules of thumb for such occasions?

Wilson: No, for general officers and for close friends of mine over the years that have died, I have made a particular effort to go. When I could not go, Jane tried to go alone if she knew the individuals; indeed she knew as many as I. But we always worked it that the Assistant Commandant went if I was not able to go.

Simmons: On Thursday 13 November, you went to Chicago where you spoke to the Illinois Manufacturer's Association at the Conrad Hilton. Do you have any recollections of that occasion?

Wilson: Yes I did; this was at the request of Orville Bergren, a very close friend of mine over the years and with whom I am still very close. I spoke that evening to the Marine Corps birthday ball in

Chicago; excuse me, it was the Illinois Manufacturer's Association to whom I talked. I also talked to a select group of the Manufacturer's Association Board at lunch. Since I have been to Chicago several times, I was confused.

But I particularly remember the luncheon. The audience was comprised of the board of directors and officers of the association, and I had answered questions. I have done this many times since then, but this was the first time that I had an occasion to answer questions very directly and frankly.

I remember very well that the subject of the Panama Canal came up. It was the first time that I had publicly stated that I was in favor of the signing of the Panama Canal Treaty. This met with a mixed reaction on the part of the individuals: I have many times since then found groups hostile to this position. But the individuals were very nice. I spoke to the entire group that evening; the Drum and Bugle Corps was there also and they seemed to appreciate that very much.

Simmons: The Panama Canal as an issue or as an item appeared quite regularly on the JCS agenda during that period of time. Could you sort of give a generalized summary of what the issues were and how the chiefs approached this?

Wilson: Yes I can. We were accused (both individually and collectively) of being pressured by our seniors (both civilian) and in the Department of Defense and indeed the President) on the Panama Canal. This was absolutely not true.

I arrived at my opinion independently, as did, I think, all the other service chiefs. I would have felt perfectly free to have opposed it, although reluctantly. Nevertheless, had I disagreed with it, I certainly would have had no compunction in

doing so to the Congress. I believe that the use of the Canal is more important than the ownership of it. From the military point of view, the Marines could go back in and ensure the safety of the Canal if it was necessary. I did believe then and believe now that the occasion for sabotage was so great for the Canal and the nationalistic spirit of the Panamanians (reinforced by at least one visit there) was such that we simply would not be able to have the use of the Canal if we had continued to maintain our right to use and own it in perpetuity.

Simmons: At 1100 Thursday 20 November, you attended the swearing-in ceremonies for Mr. Donald Rumsfeld as the new Secretary of Defense. What are your recollections of Mr. Rumsfeld? In particular, how would you compare his style with that of Dr. Schlesinger?

Wilson: Well, quite different. Dr. Schlesinger (of whom I am very fond) was an entirely different personality than Don Rumsfeld.

Schlesinger was a slow, easy-going, pipe smoking, and philosophical individual. Don came from the White House as the White House chief of staff. Schlesinger of course, was fired by President Ford for not supporting the President's defense program and for advocating more money for defense programs than the President thought should be done.

Don came in with the idea of getting the military "in line" and he was very concerned about the civilian control of the Defense Department; somehow he had gotten the mistaken impression that the general perception among the military was that the national command authority was not the President, but the Secretary of Defense.

He continued efforts to ensure that the Joint Chiefs of Staff and indeed, the chairman, were always aware that they had civilian

superiors. No one had ever doubted this. Don asked penetrating questions. I personally believe that the Defense Department has had better Secretaries.

Simmons: At noon on that day, 8 November, you hosted a luncheon in honor of LtGen Victor Krulak. Gen Krulak has certainly been one of the strongest and most influential Marine officers of our time. How well have you known him through the years and have you had reason to consult with him since becoming Commandant?

Wilson: Yes. Over his career, Gen Krulak has probably had as much influence on the Marine Corps as anyone. He began as a bright, young officer in 1934, having finished the Naval Academy in that year. He obviously has had much more influence than many Commandants on the Marine Corps. I've known him for a long time. We have had our differences, but we've continued to maintain a close friendship and in almost every incident as I look back, his gut feelings and his perspective was right on, he had great feelings for the future. As I say, I have consulted with him several times. He's been very kind to keep me informed about trends, his perception of the Marine Corps, through his continual contacts with the great many officers that he has known over the years. His suggestions have always been very forthright and very honest. He has certainly not tried to push himself or tried to push any of his suggestions beyond those for which I ask, for which I am deeply appreciative.

Simmons: On 4 November, I was appointed as the president of the Permanent Marine Corps Uniform Board. On 20 November at 1600, a meeting was held here in your office, attended by the Assistant Commandant, the chief of staff, and a number of other key officers of your staff. They gathered to hear your philosophy on uniforms

and to determine the objectives you wished to accomplish with respect to uniforms. It was a lengthy and rather involved meeting, but at the end of it, you summarized your thoughts with a set of tentative objectives. From these objectives have come some significant changes to the Marine Corps' uniform, both male and female.

I should like to mention some of these objectives and changes, and ask for your personal recollection of what subsequently took place. First, you wished to eliminate the raincoat and overcoat and replace it with a combination coat. How is that objective coming along?

Wilson: I have often said that we had a raincoat that didn't turn water and an overcoat that didn't keep you warm. The objective was to have a single coat that did both. It is a light grey coat with a liner, but it is overwhelmingly popular with the troops (as opposed to the traditional green color) with a belt.

This decision has been held up a couple of years when it was determined that the preferences were overwhelming from Marines; indeed the material was going to be satisfactory. I believe that this is the way, although it will be several years before the troops are all in this overcoat and raincoat.

Simmons: You wanted to eliminate the barracks cap in the basic clothing issue, maintaining it as an item for supplemental issue. This was done rather easily. But there was another head cover problem that became quite controversial, that was the search for testing of a number of different caps and berets. What are your recollections of these tests and how did you come to your final decision?

Wilson: The test really came right down to the cap which not

unlike the current cap, except it had a stiffened front which would eliminate the starching, which was an objective of mine. There is no requirement to starch the utility uniform. We had tried several covers. There was another little cap that I usually use as we had sort of a golfer's cap with floppy visor that pulled down; the good thing about it was that a Marine couldn't make it look any worse. I always believed this got a laugh out of the troops. But we have settled on the cap with the visor and I believe that will be quite satisfactory.

Simmons: Do you have any comments on the test of the green beret?

Wilson: Yes. We did test the green beret, and I frankly think that that may have been a good thing in past years.

I remember hearing the story as it was repeated to me that Gen Shepherd had suggested it and Gen [Graves] Erskine's comment was that Marines had better be ready to fight if they wore it; of course, the beret was considered effeminate and too much like the French in earlier years. This of course, was many years ago.

I think that probably if we had adopted the beret at that time, it would have been distinctively Marine and it would have been very good. But I believe since the Army had adopted the beret, we had passed the stage of distinctiveness which I think is an important criterion for the Marine uniform and so I did not adopt it for that reason.

Simmons: You wished to substitute the camouflage uniform for the cotton-sateen utility uniform. This was eventually done, but not without some considerable problems. First, why did you want to make this substitution? Second, what were some of the problems? And third, now that we have it as our basic utility uniform, are you satisfied with the so-called "cammies"?

Wilson: Yes. I did want to have the utility uniform. I personally liked it from the years when I had worn it, starting in World War II and particularly in Vietnam. I thought it was comfortable. It was distinctively Marine, which is a requirement as far as I am concerned. It did not require starching; in fact, I prohibited starching because it is very expensive for the troops to pay for after each wearing. It can look relatively neat with pressing (no utility uniform looks very neat anyway). It is cooler when the shirttail is out; you can wear a sweater under it, which we will discuss later I am sure; the woolly-pully. So all in all, I thought it had a utilitarian value. In addition, we had a half a million sets in the pre-positioned war reserve, which were available immediately. We were able to buy those out and sell them at relatively cheap price to the troops, some \$14 for a uniform.

We did have some problems in getting approval from OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] and several bureaucratic problems that you run into whenever uniform changes are made. We finally had to put considerable pressure on the part of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, I&L [installations and logistics] and with the threat to go to the Secretary of Defense unless some decision was made. I felt that there was some bureaucratic foot-dragging in it. We did finally get approval and I was heartened by the-immediate-approval of the troops, overwhelming in fact, and almost everywhere I go there is more than 95 percent approval of the camouflage utility, and those that have complaints about it some legitimate that they wear out or some of them were a little rotten, having been in pre-positioned war reserve for a long time. The material is not all that good; it tears easily from briars. But the life-cycle cost of the uniform is compatible with and in fact superior to that of the sateen, because they don't have to be starched. We are searching now for a better material. But while

there are some complaints about it, there has been vote-taking among assembled troops: "Would you like to go back to the sateen in lieu of this?" There is almost no one who would like to go back to it.

Simmons: There were at least two other significant uniform changes: one was the introduction of the windbreaker or so-called golf jacket; the other was the introduction of the service sweater which you have already mentioned, the so-called "woolly-pully." Can you comment on how these came about?

Wilson: Yes. I was visiting the Commandant of the Royal Marines, expressed an interest in the sweater, and in fact, was presented one by the Commandant which I now have and which I suppose might be considered the original of the U.S. Marines sweaters.

I liked it, came back and determined that this should be an item of optional uniform for the Marines, since we obviously could not put it in the required "bag." We searched around; found that no one in the United States would make a comparable sweater for less than \$60. This one costs \$6.00, as a matter of fact, and we searched for other materials, the man-made fibers, which were unsatisfactory. We then went and determined that they could be made in Great Britain, imported to the United States, and paying the customs for roughly around \$21.00 a sweater. Therefore, I authorized it as an optional item of uniform. It immediately became very popular, and I think it is probably one of the most popular decisions that I have ever made.

Frankly, I really never liked the jacket. I resisted too many optional items of the uniform because I think we begin to look like Coxie's Army. At the same time, I did not want to deprive Marines in certain climates of having a jacket, particularly in places where we are around the water and dampness in the mornings,

in California and Camp Lejeune and other places, that jackets are comfortable, I authorized it reluctantly because there was an overwhelming support of the jacket from the troops, from votes.

I have come to believe now however, that the troops will vote for anything when it comes to optional items of uniform. I would not authorize it if I had to do it over again. But nevertheless, it is here. I see a lot of people wearing them and particularly in the spring. Perhaps I am wrong, but I am just reflecting on this now. But the woolly-pully has been very popular, and I daresay that 90 percent of all Marines of active duty now own a woolly-pully.

Simmons: A great deal of effort went into developing equivalent uniforms for women Marines, but in many cases, it was found that they would rather wear the male uniform, as in the case of the camouflage utilities, than an equivalent uniform. A number of new items were adopted such as the beret and a new shirtwaist. Do you have any comments with respect to uniforms for women Marines?

Wilson: No. I agree that I think that I would like to have the women Marines uniform resemble the male as closely as possible; not from a unisex point of view, but to cut down the proliferation of uniforms. The beret has been popular with the women Marines and I don't feel about that like I do the beret for the men. We did adopt the camouflage utility for the women. I do like the khaki shirtwaist here and that has also proved very popular.

Simmons: Anything else you would like to say about uniforms?

Wilson: From the general officers' point of view, there was a suggestion earlier to do away with the red vest, which was adopted

three or four years before I became Commandant. I like the red vest; it is quite distinctive and should be continued.

Despite what changes we seemed to have made, I really tried not to change the uniform too much or adopt too many optional items. But I was not as successful as I might have been, as I indicated in the case of the jacket. I must say that I am pleased with the camouflage utilities and the woolly-pully in particular.

Simmons: On Friday 21 November, you had Gen Wallace Greene in to luncheon. I will ask the same questions I have asked you concerning other strong Marine leaders: How well did you know Gen Greene? What influence might he have had on your career? Have you consulted with him during your tenure as Commandant?

Wilson: Oh, very much so. I have known Gen Greene for many years; worked for him for a short time when he came out to be the G-3 at FMFPac when I was aide to Gen Watson. I knew him at that time (this was in 1947). I have known him all through the years, working at Headquarters, particularly when he was here and I made brigadier general and when he was Commandant and I was his legislative assistant for a year.

Gen Greene is indeed a strong leader, had a great influence on the Marine Corps during the very early war years of Vietnam under the Johnson administration, and was a real rock in the JCS.

I have consulted with him several times on important subjects and have always found his advice to be very down to earth, well thought-out. He is indeed, a very remarkable individual who keeps informed to a pre-eminent degree on military, national and Marine Corps' matters. He is a prodigious reader and on almost any subject about the military he is an expert, which is certainly rare to find among retired officers of his age and who have been retired so long.

Simmons: That evening, Friday 21 November, you went to a cocktail buffet hosted by Col and Mrs. William Burgoyne for members of the 6th ROC. Looking through your appointment book, I am impressed by the way the 6th Reserve Officers Class, all retired now except for yourself, gets together periodically for social events. It undoubtedly was a very strong class. Can you comment on this?

Wilson: Yes. We have had a very close association over the years. I suppose our class, more than any other of the early classes in the ROC, rode the crest of the wave in promotions during the war. We all made major before the war was over and none of our class reverted back to captain, as was the case of other classes. As a result of this, why probably an inordinately high number stayed in, 75 to 80 I suppose. We had a very close relationship over the years, and we still do. They personally have been very supportive of me as the one who has attained the highest rank in our class. I detect no jealousy whatever.

Bill Burgoyne, of course, died less than six months ago from Lou Gehrig's disease. We were old friends, had been in the same regiment during the war, a lot of us (thirty-five in fact) joined the 9th Marines the day it was formed. We had gone with Gen Shepherd from Quantico to California. Not only did we know each other then, but we served most of the war together. We made captains at the same time and were all in the 3d Division together.

Simmons: At the risk of leaving somebody out, who were some of the other members of the 6th ROC?

Wilson: John McLaughlin was probably the next highest ranking officer in the class. There is Pete Hahn and Bob Grider and B.B.

Mitchell and Lou Berghman are some that I can remember right now. In fact, we are having a class reunion here in about two weeks, which I am not I not going to be able to attend unfortunately. But we have always had one in the third week in May for almost 35 years. They are nice enough to have a party planned in my honor, which is going to be in June before I retire.

Simmons: On Wednesday evening 3 December, you went to Quantico as the guest of honor at a mess night at the Basic School. You have had two tours of duty yourself at the Basic School. From August 1951 until September of 1953, you served successively as weapons instructor, training battalion commander and as executive officer of the school.

You returned again in June 1960 to serve as commanding officer until July 1961. We'll be getting to the details of those assignments later. However, I would like to hear your overall assessment of the Basic School; how it has changed over the years, if of indeed it has changed, and how well it is doing its job.

Wilson: Yes. I have had a lot of experience at the Basic School. I believe that it really has not changed much over the years, nor do I think it should. It is designed to provide a basic education for officers who come from diverse backgrounds. We have some five programs from which Marine officers come: NROTC, the service academy (all academies in the past, now almost all entirely the Naval Academy), the officer candidate classes, the meritorious NCO's and of course, we have the women officers. So as a result, I believe that it should serve as a common basis for a common beginning.

I was instrumental in getting all of our naval aviators, those who are to go to Pensacola later, to go to The Basic School. That was when I had the Education Center at Quantico. This was resisted

a great deal by the aviation people but I believe now that they believe that this is a good thing. We are having no trouble getting aviators despite the fact that they have to serve a year and a half longer than the ground contemporaries, because their obligated services begin after get their wings.

I had some experience in the classes we called the Special Indoctrination classes, which were for aviators brought back to the Basic School for periods of three to four weeks, when I was the commanding officer of the Basic School. This really did not work out to well. It interfered with their flying after they had been to their first duty station for two or three years, and so I thought that they should begin early in their ground indoctrination. The Basic School has had a succession of changes in time. I believe it is now about 21 weeks; I think this is proper. Too long makes it a boring class, but long enough to learn basics. It does not give an opportunity for wide experience in many MOSs. Far too many commanders in the field expect too much from the Basic School officers, just as they expect too much from the young recruits from the recruit depots. After all, the officers are not given their MOSs until toward the end of their class, which is proper, because they would ignore all those things that are being taught and concentrate on what their MOS is going to be.

Commanding officers should not expect them to be experts in infantry or artillery or engineers, intelligence, motor transport; but having as a basis from which they can learn, both in their subsequent schools as well as on-the-job training. I think this is the mission of the Basic School and I believe it should be continued. Certainly we have a basis for much more common beginnings than any other service, both air and ground.

Simmons: There have been two fundamental changes which you have

sort of touched on in passing, but I would like to explore a little bit more. One is the recent integration of women Marine officers into the student companies, right into the platoons. How well is this working out?

Wilson: I believe it is working out very well although this is controversial and I think....

End Tape 1, Side 1

Begin Tape 1, Side 2

Simmons... occurred in the Basic School and the Commandant was discussing the integration of women Marines into the student companies.

Wilson: I was instrumental in getting the women Marines moved from the Women Marines' Company, which was at the main side at Quantico, out to the Basic School as a company when I had the Education Center. This was quite revolutionary at the time. Later on, after coming back to be the Commandant, it was suggested that they be integrated right into each of the student companies to include the Three Day War. I approved this and this was indeed revolutionary also.

There was a great deal of publicity given this in the early stages, but I believe it is working out quite satisfactorily. There is still not a full acceptance by the men or will there be for a long time. It could be that women are taking up the place of men in the Basic School learning something which they will not do. Nor do I think they should be in combat, in the front lines. But I believe that the experience that they get knowing what the

men go through, will motivate them for the support activities in which they will be involved later. There are some criticisms about this and it could be that some changes need to be made, but I will leave that to my successor.

Simmons: Another fundamental change is that in former times, the Basic School had the objective of training every officer as a rifle platoon leader and his specialty training came later. We have backed away from that a little bit. We are training Marine officers in the basics, but they get their specialty training, including infantry, after they graduate. This sort of contradicts the old tradition of Marine being a rifleman, every Marine officer being an infantry officer. Would you comment on that?

Wilson: Yes. I think this is the best way to do it give a basic training which is a common beginning for everybody, and then the specialist training later. It's worked out very well and it's my impression that the officers are much more acceptable in the Fleet Marine Force, particularly infantry, after having gone through the three weeks infantry school following Basic School. This is really the only change, because everybody went to their other MOS training anyway.

Simmons: As you got into December, you were at that point in the budget cycle where the President's budget for the forthcoming fiscal year was being put into its final form before submission to the Congress. Your appointment book at this period is studded with appointments at various levels in the Navy and the Defense Department on budget issues. The budget formulation and defense process, and in this I include the establishment of program objectives, is very time-consuming. It also consumes a great deal of the talent present at Headquarters. Do you think the ends

justify the means, or do you think there might be a better way of arriving at a budget?

Wilson: Oh, there is no question that there should be a better way of arriving at it through all the process. But I certainly have not given any thought as to how I would do it were I the Secretary of Defense, which I am not. I would try to keep playing within the rules of the game. It does take a long time. We are talking about the 1977 budget, I suppose...

Simmons: Yes, sir.

Wilson:... at this stage. Frankly, I have been through so many budget drills that I can't remember what the '77 budget was now, because I am involved now deeply in the 1981 budget. But it does take a long time.

Of course, in the Marine Corps we have our differences with the to Navy adjudicate first before we can then go into the Secretary of the Navy. We have one more process than do other services. The Navy really doesn't have this because they formulate theirs pretty much irrespective of the Marine Corps. We have to, as I say, adjudicate our differences, particularly in our blue dollars for aviation.

But there must be a better way. It is taking an increased amount of time each year and particularly when there are changes of administration, which occurred, of course, two years ago; always with the prospective change of an administration every four years. Like the 1981 budget apprehensive as to how it will fit if there is a change in administration. And the Assistant Secretaries of Defense are having more and more authority, the secretaries of the services having less and less authority, and this, I think, is a disturbing trend.

Simmons: I will be coming back to the budget later, for a little more detail.

On Sunday 7 December, you and Jane went to a hunt breakfast hosted by Deputy Secretary of Defense and Mrs. William Clements at Wexford in Middleburg, Virginia. What are your recollections of Mr. Clements as Deputy Secretary of Defense?

Wilson: I am very fond of Bill Clements. He has always been very nice to me. He is an outspoken, rambunctious Texan and is now the governor of Texas. He is never without an opinion and always can be expected to take a position which is aggressive, which is his nature. He would have made an excellent Marine.

We had known the Clements, in fact, when we were in Hawaii. They were married and came out there. We had met them, in fact saw them in church the morning after they were married and had made a flight out to Hawaii, and he was going out to the Pacific. They bought the house, "Wexford," the home which was built for President Kennedy and built by a friend of mine, as a matter of fact, with whom I was in World War II. We had seen the place earlier, but the Clements had made some additions and put in a swimming pool; it was a delightful day, about 300 people. He had brought up Texas quail and other things which he had cooked to his recipes.

Simmons: We are now getting into the Christmas season, your first Christmas in the Commandant's house. I note a number of traditional events. On Tuesday evening, 23 December, the women Marine Company from Henderson Hall came to sing carols at the house. The next evening you had stopped in for a cup of cheer with the barracks' officers at the quarters of the commanding officer, Col Rice. Earlier that day on Wednesday 24 December, you had promoted the Deputy Chief of Staff for Aviation, Tom Miller,

to lieutenant general, which was a nice Christmas present for him. I don't think his promotion became official until 1 January so I guess you moved it up for the Christmas season.

Wilson: Yes I did. I have always felt the DC/S Aviation should be a lieutenant general. He had not been before. We were able to have a lieutenant general's job when there was a vacancy, which I established. I think this has worked out very well in his relations with the Navy, and put him on a parallel with OP-05.

I always made a habit, starting there on the 24th of December, to call all the former Commandants to wish them a Merry Christmas. It also happened to be Bob Cushman's birthday (my predecessor) and I have continued that tradition since that time. Unfortunately, General Shoup is not in good health now, but he was at that time; in any case, I called them all.

Simmons: Thursday 25 December, was Christmas itself.

On 1 January you observed one of the oldest traditions in the Commandant's House by allowing yourself to be "surprised" by a Marine Band concert. You made no preparations except those that go with preparing for a reception for several hundred guests. What are your recollections of that first New Years' Day reception, or maybe you would like to lump all four New Years' Day Receptions together?

Wilson: Yes. They, of course, are very traditional and one which we looked forward to. We have increased the reception I think, serving drinks and a sort of a brunch for the day, as has not been done in the past. We have had as many as 500 people in the house for the receptions, concentrating more on the Marine Corps family than we have at other receptions during the summer months for the parades, where we take a cross section of the guest list. There

are some 3,000 people on the guest list. The Marine Corps family is composed mostly of our regulars and retirees and some of the more senior officers at Headquarters.

We have made an effort, and I believe have been successful, in having every officer who is stationed at Headquarters Marine Corps at the house at some time for an affair. Since there are about 2,000 people, why it makes it very difficult to do it, but over his or her of a three-year tour of duty.

Simmons: On 19 January the Congress reconvened and at 9:00 that evening, you went with the other chiefs to the Capitol to hear the President's States of the Union message. The reconvening of the Congress also signaled for you the beginnings of intensive preparations for the hearings on the fiscal 1977 budget which we mentioned earlier.

These hearings would occupy a good deal of your time and attention for the next several months. Your previous experience as legislative assistant undoubtedly helped you a great deal in this respect. In your own words, how do you prepare for these hearings and how do they proceed?

Wilson: As I have often said, one of the things that I think has aided me the most is having been legislative assistant, having known a great many of the congressmen then, and those who are still there obviously becoming more senior all the time. I chose to use a system which Gen Greene used, was first not to have too many people accompany me, but to have a card system where the officer who was handling the cards was so familiar with the subject matter, that based upon the question, I could begin to talk familiarizing myself with all the subjects so that at any question, I could begin to have a smattering of knowledge about it. While talking, I hold my hand down; the officer assisting looks for the card and puts it

in my hand. This enabled me to continue the conversation with an outline. This was basically what Gen Greene did when I was the legislative assistant, and I felt comfortable with it. I think every Commandant should have any system which he feels comfortable with; at least, he needs more detailed information than I believe that he could keep in his mind.

Simmons: We have summaries of your posture statements for each of these four years and that will make appendices to this memoir. You presented these posture statements in more or less the same form to four different committees. Would you outline for us what these four committees are, who some of the key figures might be?

Wilson: Yes, that is the case; however, in the last two years we have also had two more committees--the budget committees have been added for a total amount of six. But in the first two years, the authorization committees of course, were normally done first; the appropriation committee is last. The authorization committees with Mr. [Melvin] Price in the House and Senator Stennis.

Senator Stennis has been an old and close friend of mine over the years and has been particularly gracious to me; as indeed he is gracious to everyone in his courtly southern manner. I think he was dominating the committees, although Senator [Sam] Nunn particularly, (whom I have gotten to know very well) has moved along in the Armed Services Committee and of course, he has a great future there.

In the Appropriations Committee of the Senate there was Senator [John] McClellan in the early years. He died two years ago. Senator [Milton] Young, had been the ranking Republican for many years, and he always attended the committee hearings and has been a big help to us through Col Pete Browne, who you remember was an outstanding Marine aviator. The other members that I remember are

Senator Hillins and now Senator [Dale] Bumpers on the Appropriations Committee of the Senate.

As for the House, I had made several trips when I was the legislative assistant with a good many of the congressmen. There is Bob Wilson who was a Marine and who has been a great supporter of the Marine Corps and one about whom I cannot say too much for his support of me personally as well as the Marine Corps, particularly the bill which put the Commandant as a full member of the JCS.

There is Bill Dickenson, whom I know very well; Bill Nichols; there is of course Mr. Price. There is Sam Stratton with whom I made several trips, and Mr. [Charles] Bennett from Florida. Sonny Montgomery is a very old and close friend of mine from Mississippi. I can remember so many, all of whom have been supportive.

I suppose we will get into some of the hearings having to do with the events at Parris Island and San Diego, which I will discuss later, but now this is just having to do with committee hearings.

In the Appropriations Committee of the House is Mr. Mahon of course, who has dominated the committee for many years, but who is now retired. But frankly, as to my appearances in the Congress-- I looked forward to them; I never was nervous about them, and really, I can't say too much for the reception which they have given to the Marine Corps, which I represent.

Simmons: As you mentioned earlier, one budget year tends to blur into another and it is difficult to remember just what the major budget issues were each year. Can you give a

general statement as to major budget issues affecting the Marine Corps, and did the same issues come up year after year or were there new issues roughly about \$5 billion a year for the Marine Corps; 3.1 for green and 2.6 for blue. In other words, green dollars are direct Marine Corps appropriations and blue dollars are appropriations we share with the Navy.

Wilson: Yes, that is a good way to put it.

Simmons: You have mentioned a figure there. About how much does the Marine Corps cost the American public and what do they get for that expenditure?

Wilson: I like to use the figures that the Marine Corps really gets; four percent of the budget. For this, we furnish the American people with nine percent of the personnel, 12 percent of the tactical air forces, and 15 percent of the general purpose forces for our country. We provide a good bargain for the American people and I think they recognize this.

Simmons: On Wednesday 21 January, you spoke at the National Defense University. This would be the combined student bodies of the National War College and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. By custom and practice, each service chief is obligated to speak at each of the senior level schools. Was it your style to deliver a prepared speech, or did you tend to speak extemporaneously?

Wilson: I started out with a prepared speech, but over the years, I've given basically the same speech, told the same old jokes. I started out this way. I had often wondered how

this would be. Having been a student at the National War College, I found it relatively easy to give these addresses. I particularly liked the question and answer periods.

However, there are at least eight speeches per year at the war colleges and this is a real chore. We were chatting about it the other day in the JCS. When you have eight speeches a year, including your travel time, this is almost three weeks of a year which is devoted to this. This is a lot. As I say, including your travel time when you have two at the Armed Forces Staff College each year, it amounts up. So it does take up a lot of time and whether or not it is worth it I really don't know.

I can remember the Commandant coming to-- the National War College therefore, each student probably remembers his own service chief coming when he is a student at the War College. It gets to be a matter of, I believe, a source of either pride or dismay as to how your service chief performs in relation to the others.

Simmons: As you have mentioned, you yourself were at a National War College graduate. Do you have any comments on the value of the senior level schools, to yourself and also in general?

Wilson: Yes. I think the senior level schools are good. When I was at the War College, it was a real "gentleman's" school, we only attended classes in the morning. We made interesting trips.

I believe that the school provides an opportunity for companionship and knowledge of people of other services that

you would not get elsewhere. This may be an expensive association; in my own case, I feel that it was worth it. We had a very high quality of people there: two CNO's came from my class--Jim Holloway and Bud Zumwalt. Bill Moore, who is the commander of MAC [military airlift command], is the last of my class in addition to myself on active duty, and we are both retiring on the 30th of June, 1979.

A good many ambassadors came from that class, whom I have had occasion to know and have dealings with in the past, Ambassador Herman Isles, who is in Egypt and Dick Schneider, who was in Japan are among them. Dick was in charge of the reversion of Okinawa to Japan from the U.S. point of view. Because of our association, I believe we were able to get a great many things for the Marine Corps which we would not have gotten otherwise because of our close association. He was later the Ambassador to Korea, and so there is a relationship there that simply could not be gotten elsewhere, even if you have worked together with the individual under other circumstances.

I know Gen Greene criticizes the War College very much because he believes there should be examinations and should be at least a 25 percent attrition from the War College class each year. I disagree with him on this because I [????].

This has moved now to the east coast, which I think is a very good idea. There were 28 retired and active duty generals there. Had it been a rainy day it would have been a briefing about Marine Corps' matters. There is every indication that this is going to be continued.

My trip to Camp Lejeune and Cherry Point was largely a matter of saying goodbye to the troops, the enlisted

personnel; staff NCO's, officers of all commands. I visited each of the groups, presented some medals, talked to them and answered questions. I made nine speeches in one day at Camp Lejeune, and eight in one day at Cherry Point, with a reception each night for the officers in the club. I was very pleased with the spirit of the troops, their morale, their enthusiasm, and all in all, I feel that the Corps is in relatively good shape. Everyone was certainly very hospitable to Jane and me.

After returning home on Sunday, we left Monday morning at 5:30 for the west coast, stopping by Fort Leavenworth to make my final (my fourth and final talk) to the Command and General Staff School. We proceeded from there to Camp Pendleton, where we did approximately the same thing on the west coast as we did on the east coast, at Camp Pendleton and El Toro.

Again, I found the morale high, the spirits good. I was particularly delighted to talk to the 2d Battalion, 9th Marines, the unit in which I had been a member during World War II; they were the ones who had just returned as part of the first rotational unit from Okinawa. I think the rotation of infantry units, by the way, seems to be going very well.

Simmons: There was one particularly nice thing that happened in the fall of 1975 that I failed to bring out. On 10 November, as one of his last official acts as Secretary of Defense, Dr. Schlesinger wrote you a note telling you that he was awarding you the Defense Distinguished Service Medal. Presentation of the medal itself was a little later, being given to you by Mr. Middendorf, the Secretary of the Navy on 17 December. I am sure you recall the occasion.

Wilson: Yes I do. I appreciated this very much. I think I mentioned that I was very fond of Secretary Schlesinger and his last night on active duty was the night where he was a guest of honor at the birthday ball.

Simmons: During our last session, we talked about your attendance at Marine Corps funerals. I suppose there was a degree of prediction in that discussion because since that time we have had the sudden death of Col Bob Heinl. You and I both attended the very beautiful memorial service that was held for Bob at the National Cathedral. In his own unique way, Bob was one of the most influential Marines of our times. Do you have any thoughts on this?

Wilson: I certainly agree. Bob was a sort of iconoclast; he enjoyed being different. I always remember when we were together in what is now Plans & Programs: Bob, instead of going to lunch like the rest of the colonels (I was a lieutenant colonel at the time) would break out a sandwich and a can of warm beer and eat at his desk. Unheard of in the Marine Corps around Headquarters Marine Corps, I expect, for anyone but Bob Heinl. But he certainly was an influential, dedicated Marine, quick to observe and to write about events in his own articulate way; particularly those events which he felt were a violation of the traditions or the best interests of the Marine Corps.

Simmons: Something else that has transpired since our last interview is the apparently successful completion of the negotiation of SALT II, the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty with the Russians.

From 1976 on, SALT was one of the most frequently scheduled items on the Joint Chiefs' agenda. Although a great deal has appeared in the newspapers about SALT, most of us have only a fuzzy idea or opinion of SALT other than our own innate distrust of any agreement made with the Russians. Without getting into any classified or privileged information, perhaps you could summarize for us what SALT II is all about, how it has evolved these last few years, and what the major issues are or were.

Wilson: Obviously everyone is for strategic arrays limitation. Also, we are all for peace, patriotism, and motherhood. The idea of SALT is the hope of mankind. I have spent more time on that one subject in the JCS than any other subject in the last four years. I must say I spend at least an hour or two a day now on it. But I am very apprehensive about SALT II. I have stated publicly that I would withhold any judgment on it until after the SALT II treaty is signed, which now is scheduled for the 15th of June, but I don't believe that at the moment, I support the treaty. It does not meet the criteria that I have established in my own mind for equitability, verifiability and transfer of technology to our allies.

The JCS will probably be split on this; however, on most things we are generally together. But I suppose when we have to make the final decision, you have to go one way or the other. I think SALT II is neither as good as many people say nor probably as bad as many people say. So it is a fine line, but in my considered opinion at the moment I am against the treaty as it now stands.

Simmons: There were a number of other continuing major issues addressed by the JCS during your years as Commandant. I propose that we deal with each of them more or less chronologically as we come to them.

On 27 January, apropos of our earlier conversation on senior level schools, you went to speak at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

On 2 February, you appeared before the House Armed Services Committee. Next day, 3 February, MajGen Fred Haynes, who was then the Deputy Chief of Staff for Research, Development, and Studies, called on you. This may have been in connection with one or both of the two major studies that you had assigned him: one had to do with manpower and one had to do with force structure. Do you recall the main outlines of these two studies?

Wilson: Yes. It was the time in which I discussed with Fred my desire that he head a board which would look into the future of the Marine Corps, having to do with the manpower and force structure. He agreed to do this. Fred has a wide background as a staff officer and a commander, having served in the Middle East and in the Far East. He was particularly well qualified for this.

The subject of his study came out later (a year later), in which many of the recommendations which he made have been adopted and others are in process. Two of the most important recommendations that strike me right now, were the recommendation of a Marine assault regiment in each division. We were testing this now with a battalion at Twenty-nine Palms in California. We just finished the third phase of

this. It has been very successful and I think that probably in the future we might have a regiment which is designated as having primary cognizance over armored matters or perhaps mechanized matter? Is a better term.

In fact, I would like to see one regiment in each division emphasizing on cold weather operations, another for tropical operations and another for mechanized operations. I don't know whether or not we will be able to continue this but I think it is a good idea for emphasis. But the idea of having a designated Marine assault regiment in each division I think is too ambitious.

The other and very controversial issue, which I did not approve but which frankly I believe is coming about, is the elimination of three fighter squadrons. This was a recommendation by the board but I disapproved it at the time. We were in the process of determining what we were going to do about F-18's and F-4's, in recent weeks, the Secretary of the Navy has approved a proposal whereby we would be reduced from 12 to nine fighter squadrons within the next four years. All in all, Fred did a good job on the board and like any recommendation for change, it is controversial but I was very pleased with the results of the board.

Simmons: Do you foresee that the three infantry regiments in the division would be organized under different Tables of Organization or do you foresee that they would be task organized for the missions you described?

Wilson: No. I think they would be task organized.

Simmons: Is the matter of the reduction of from 12 to nine

fighter squadrons primarily one of economics?

Wilson: Yes, it is primarily one of economics, due to the high cost of aircraft. We are going to have to reduce these squadrons to help pay for amphibious ships, anti-aircraft artillery and other expensive but necessary items. I believe that with the increased capability that we have with the F-18 that we can afford to do this, and in any ease, we are going to have to bear some of the burden for the high cost of the aircraft.

Simmons: Coincidentally, although I did not tell him that I would be interviewing you this afternoon; Fred was in my office this morning. We were having a discussion, and he was saying that he thought that inevitably--first he said he thought that the Marine Corps was in for some difficult times; second, he said he thought that inevitably the Marine Corps would have to become smaller because personnel costs were so high and so little money was left over from procurement that in order to bring weapons systems into balance with personnel, he foresaw a smaller Marine Corps. Would you comment on that?

Wilson: I don't think there is any question about it given the Carter Budget. As a matter of fact, I have already approved for the fiscal year 1981 a reduction of 10,000 Marines, with Bob Barrow's approval, since he would be the one who will be testifying for this. The submission goes in before I go out of office.

We calculate \$10,000 per Marine per year which, for 10,000 Marines, is nearly a hundred thousand dollars, and

this will not nearly take up what we think we need now, which is in the neighborhood of three to four million dollars for procurement and O&M. Mind you this is just for one year. We are now being promised the opportunity of using the funds from personnel savings, to use for O&M and procurement; I think this is the first time that we ever had this opportunity, which can result from good management. I think that inevitably, the Marine Corps will be smaller as indeed will all the services if we continue in this direction and would conditions remain the same.

Simmons: On Monday afternoon, 9 February, you appeared before the House Appropriations Committee. You went back again the next day and that evening you left for Natchez, Mississippi. That night you spoke to the State Conference of the Daughters of the American Revolution. In that talk you posed a question, and I am quoting, "In the realm of international affairs, can we Americans achieve a realistic balance between the goals we pursue as a nation and our power as a nation to pursue those objectives?"

In your remarks, you confined yourself primarily to our external goals and objectives in our relations with other nations. I am sure that you were also thinking of internal domestic goals and objectives. It is now three years later; some would say that in those three years we have lost ground, both domestically and abroad. Would you comment?

Wilson: Yes. It is very difficult to judge. We have had a change in administrations. I believe that we are giving overemphasis on human rights abroad. I think we have alienated a lot of our friends in Latin America and I doubt if we have gained much by our over-insistence on these noble

but unachievable goals.

But, now, at home we are confronted now with rapid and galloping inflation, which is hurting all service people both personally and professionally. One of the major things that the troops have constantly on their mind, as a result of the questions that I have had from my recent trip, is the pay cap which the President has imposed (5.5 percent pay cap for personnel in the Armed Forces, as well as government employees).

We are confronted with inflation which is now around 10 percent. This is the reason that we are having to reduce personnel, because our O&M cost and our procurement cost is so high. We simply cannot outstrip ourselves in personnel or we will be drilling with broomsticks very much like the Army was doing when we came into the Marine Corps in 1941.

Simmons: Right.

Wilson: So the inflation at home is the big problem. As I say, the problem of both the oil energy shortage, the fall of Iran, and the Shah--have all compounded to make now, in May of 1979, indeed a time that gives us pause to think where we are going in the future.

Simmons: I note that during your visit to Natchez you were also made an honorary citizen of that city by Mayor Tony Burns. Are there any particular perquisites attached to that honor?

Wilson: No, not even the opportunity to go to Natchez Under-the-Hill, which was a place of poor repute in the days when

Natchez was the biggest cotton exporting port in the United States.

Simmons: Next day, Wednesday, 11 February, you were back in Washington. It was your birthday and also the first day of a three-day activities conference. As I recall, this was a conference for base commanders comparable to the FMF Commanders' Conference that had been held earlier. You had a stag dinner that evening at the Commandant's House for the conferencees. Do you have any specific recollections of this conference?

Wilson: No. I had tried to have the FMF Conference earlier and the base commanders later where we could get together with commanders who have had a common interest. I did this to try to save having a General Officers' Conference each year. I don't believe that was too good an idea however and have since abandoned the idea. I believe a General Officers' Conference is more productive because the constant shifting of officers from base to the FMF doesn't give too long an opportunity for them to concentrate on their current tour. I did not pursue this further after this year.

Simmons: On Wednesday 18 February, you made a one day trip to Atlanta. Your appointment book does not indicate the purpose. Do you recall this trip?

Wilson: Yes. I went to make a speech for some occasion. It was the Marine Corps Reserve Officers' Association, I believe. I remember meeting a lot of friends that I had not seen since I had the 6th District there. I'm wrong. This was a luncheon speech in which I talked to a luncheon group,

a Rotary or Kiwanis; I can't remember the exact nature of it.

Simmons: Atlanta seems to continue to be a strong Marine Corps town through the years.

Wilson: Yes it is. It certainly is, and of course, Atlanta has continued to grow and be the hub of the South.

Simmons: Next day, Thursday 19 February, you appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee. The following morning, at your office, LtGen Jim Masters paid you a visit. Gen Masters is another of those strong Marine Corps personalities. Could you sum up your relationship with him over the years?

Wilson: Yes. I have never worked directly for Gen Masters. We have been closely associated over the years, but you are right, he is a very strong individual and has contributed a great deal to the Marine Corps. Of course he and his brother Bud were well known in earlier years as the tiger and the snake. I visited them one time in Okinawa where Gen Jim was the commanding general of the division and Bud was ADC. This was only for a short time before Gen Bill Buse went out to take the position as CG, 3rd MarDiv.

Simmons: One of my fondest memories of Gen Masters is when he was G-2 of the Marine Corps and I was the Naval Attaché in the Dominican Republic. I had a family crisis and he was very, very supportive of me. He used a phrase that I have never forgotten: "The Marine Corps doesn't eat its young."

Wilson: Yes. As a matter of fact, I was here during that

time and I remember your problem.

Simmons: Mississippi figures very large in your activities in February and March 1976. On Sunday, you went to a reception hosted by Governor [Cliff] Finch at Prospect House in Arlington. How well did you know or do you know Governor Finch?

Wilson: I did not know him before he was elected governor. He became governor shortly after I became Commandant and his term of office ends six months after mine does. He has had few successes and mostly failures in Mississippi. He was defeated when he ran for the Democratic nomination for the Senate, and since in Mississippi the governor cannot succeed himself, he will be going out of office soon.

Simmons: On Thursday 6 February, you left for Jackson, Mississippi. Next day, you visited your alma mater, Millsaps College, and were initiated into Omicron Delta Kappa, which makes us fraternity brothers. What are your recollections of the occasion?

Wilson: This was an honor for me to accept this from Millsaps. I was not qualified to be an ODK when I was an undergraduate, as you were; my daughter was an ODK later at Auburn and she never fails to point out that she earned hers and I got mine as an honorary degree. But that was a very nice affair and I met many old friends and which I had not seen for many years. I expect to see more of them, however, when I retire in Jackson.

Simmons: You returned from Jackson on Sunday evening; next

day was Monday, 1 March. You went to Newport to speak to the Naval War College. More Marines go to Newport than to any other top level school. However, very few U.S. Navy officers seem to come to Quantico to our schools. Would you comment on this?

Wilson: Yes. It is a source of concern to me. However, I don't think that the Navy is discriminating against the Marine Corps. They don't send many students to any school.

We have had a fine record of our officers who went to Newport making general officer; this is indicative of the quality of the people that we send there. We have been very supportive of the school, as all of the Commandants of the school have spoken to me about. Unfortunately, when Stan Turner was the Commandant of the War College, he de-emphasized amphibious operations, rather heavily, a condition from which we are just now recovering. This is particularly so since Jim Stockdale's arrival, who is leaving now to go to The Citadel. But Stan regrettably chose another route in the emphasis on naval warfare, a wrong one in my opinion.

I have often threatened to reduce the Marine Corps students there until the Navy was more supportive by sending their own students to Quantico. I haven't really followed through on this, but it is a source of frustration to me. I now wish I had taken them to the mat.

I was talking to Gen [probably John R.] Thurman at the Command and General Staff School on my way to Leavenworth just two weeks ago and he is suffering from the same shortage of qualified Navy officers to go to the Command and General Staff School. It is a very good idea for officers from all the services to go to other service schools. They present a

wide background particularly in the seminars. Officers are able to provide a measure of expertise from their own services which is not generally available. And I think that it enlarges the background of the students to have as wide a variety as possible.

Simmons: On Wednesday morning, 0800 3 March, you were called on by Gen Lew Walt, one of our more legendary modern Marine Corps generals. He would call on you again at intervals. By coincidence, he also visited you, I believe, about two days ago. What can you tell us about your relationship with Gen Walt over the years?

Wilson: I have had a very fine relationship with Gen Walt for many, many years. He was an instructor when I was at Quantico at the Basic School, He was a captain, and of course left shortly thereafter for Guadalcanal and the 1st Marine Division where he distinguished himself, as he has in every operation and in every war the Marine Corps has participated in since that time.

We were next together at Quantico when I was a battalion commander at the Basic School. He was the G-3 under Gen Shoup. He is retired now and has interested himself in national affairs. He is very concerned about the Russian threat--overly so I believe--but nevertheless, he has done a great deal for the Marine Corps and I would-- (Interruption)

Simmons: From Thursday 4 March, through Saturday 6 March, you visited at Parris Island and Beaufort. Do you have any specific recollections of this visit?

Wilson: No, I had been down earlier to Parris Island right

after I had become Commandant and this was just another trip. This was just about the time of the traumatic experiences we had in recruiting training. I had had indications that the shooting incident was coming up in Congress and I wanted to get a feel for the DI-recruit relationship before what was to be many hearings in Congress.

Simmons: You have anticipated my next question and it is a very serious question.

On 12 March 1976, Private Lynn E. McClure died from injuries received in a blow to his head during pugil stick training at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego. This came hard on the heels of other cases of real or alleged brutality in recruit training at both San Diego and Parris Island. Certainly the McClure case must have been one of the most painful and difficult problems to confront you while you have been Commandant. Would you comment on the case, the circumstances surrounding it, the actions taken subsequent to McClure's death, and finally the long-range effect, if any, of McClure's death on Marine recruit training methods?

Wilson: Yes, I think it was. It was a terrible thing that happened. It was, in my opinion, entirely unnecessary, unsupervised, and a training incident, clearly illegal; something which I had no knowledge was occurring in the Marine Corps Recruit Depots.

I made rather extensive investigations, objective I believe, and was appalled to learn that there was a general consensus of feeling among the drill instructors that senior officers somehow expected the drill instructors to take

harsh, severe action for minor infractions of regulations but "they" don't want to hear about it.

So I set about in a measured but very firm way to make it perfectly clear to the drill instructors that not only did I not expect to hear about it, but it was not going to happen and their career rested on this simple demand.

Any time there is a change in a recruit depot, it is a traumatic experience; even minor changes, because it is such a structured place. I fully expected the drill instructors to rise up en masse against these changes but I was prepared to stand firm. This did not occur, for which I am grateful, particularly to the senior NCO's at the recruit depots and elsewhere who rallied to support the Commandant.

We transferred many drill instructors; we disciplined many. While there was a discontent probably among the majority (who felt that their authority was being taken away, as indeed it was), I was fully prepared to carry out my objectives in the long term, even if we had had to transfer or move as many drill instructors as would not comply with the letter and spirit of this directive.

We had moved young officers into recruit training to ensure this was accomplished. I believe this has helped our training considerably. While I can foresee that in the long term there is going to be dissatisfaction by the young officers who feel that the drill instructors can do the job and that they can be more productively employed in the Fleet Marine Force, on my watch I would never agree to have their number decreased because I had made a commitment to the Congress that I would keep them in as supervisors of instruction.

I believe Gen Barrow, who was involved deeply with me in this as Director of Personnel, feels the same way. So, I think, at least, for the next four years, there will not be many changes made during recruit training at the Depots. The American public remembrance of Marine training is very long and the Ribbon Creek affair, which happened twenty years earlier, was constantly brought up as if it happened yesterday.

The Congress was fully prepared to take over Marine Corps training, which I believe, would have been disastrous, and I had to make some immediate changes in order to ensure that this did not occur. We have a high visibility now at the recruit training centers, but this is not to say that there are not and will not be continued incidents where NCO's are given such vast authority over the training that they will step beyond the legitimate bounds. We must be constantly vigilant about this in the future.

Simmons: Thank you very much.

Wilson: I might say also that I am firmly convinced that the American people cannot, must not, and should not put up with any kind of abusive treatment of the young men who volunteer for an armed service, to be treated in a manner that we would not permit a common criminal to be treated. So we simply have to watch very carefully this alibi which takes place under the guise of "preparing a man to go to war."

Simmons: I think that might be a good note to end this session.

End Session III

Session IV-- 19 June 1979

Simmons: Today is the 19th of June; this is our fifth session and again, we are in the Commandant's office. At the time of our last session, you were busy packing up your household effects and getting ready to move out of the Commandant's house. Then you took some leave so as to be in Jackson when your furnishings arrived there at your new home. How did the move go?

Wilson: It went very well, thank you, except that I lifted too much furniture which caused a hernia. I have subsequently had this repaired and am now in my fourth day of recuperation.

Simmons: Well, I am sorry to hear that and you hardly needed that at this particular point.

Getting back to our last session, we ended on a rather somber note: the McClure case and the effects it has had on Marine recruit training. I would like now to move to happier events.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, 16 and 17 March 1976, you visited Fort Leavenworth in Kansas City. I presume you spoke to the Army Staff and Command College as well as visiting with the Marine Corps Finance Center and other Marine Activities in Kansas City?

Wilson: I did; this was my first visit to the Command and Staff College at Fort Leavenworth (I just finished my fourth visit two or three weeks ago). I enjoyed talking to the

Leavenworth class very much. It was composed of over 1000 students, by far the largest class that the service chiefs speak to. We have a fine group of Marines there and have had for a long time; it has served us very well.

I was very pleased with Kansas City, then and now. The Finance Center has done a fine job. Col George Long has been there almost the entire time that I have been Commandant. He is retiring this year and I have been very pleased with his work.

Simmons: We now come to a time that you and Jane must remember most fondly: I'm speaking of your trip to Mississippi from Thursday, 25 March to Sunday, 28 March. I will touch on the highlights of this visit and ask you to expand upon them.

Governor Cliff Finch had proclaimed 26 March to be General Louis H. Wilson Day. There had been a concurrent resolution by the state legislature that you address the joint session of the legislature at 1600 on 25 March. You gave this speech in the chamber in the House of Representatives.

Wilson: I did.

Simmons: On the 26th in Brandon, your birthplace, and a suburb of Jackson, there was a parade in your honor culminating in ceremonies in front of the courthouse in the town square.

Wilson: Yes, I remember that very well.

Simmons: And you were presented with an oil portrait of yourself painted by Mississippi artist Marshall Boldien?

Wilson: Yes. It was a very poignant occasion for me, having

grown up in the small town or Brandon. There was a parade in the town where most of the townspeople turned out. As a matter of fact, I will also say that there was a street named in my honor, the street on which I was born.

Simmons: Shelton Street.

Wilson: That was Shelton Street, now Louis Wilson Drive.

Simmons: And your sister still lives there?

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: Same house as your birthplace?

Wilson: Well, it's a house that has been built since that time but on the same site. But I was very pleased with the portrait by Marshall Boldien; it has received a great many compliments when it hung in the Commandant's house for four years. We are very appreciative, again, to Governor Finch and to the people who attended: Senator Stennis, Congressman Montgomery attended and all of whom had some flattering words to say.

Simmons: There were special editions of the Rankin County News and the Pearl Press, and there was a dance on Saturday night. The next day on Sunday, you were awarded the Mississippi Magnolia Cross by Governor Finch and Adjutant General Glenn D. Walker of the National Guard for "exceptionally

meritorious service in positions of great responsibility." Have I left anything out?

Wilson: No.

Simmons: You came back from Mississippi and at 1730 on Monday evening, in the Band Hall at 8th and I, you presided over the promotion of Sam Jaskilka, the Assistant Commandant, to four-star rank. What was the background on the legislation leading to four-star rank for the Assistant Commandant?

Wilson: The Assistant Commandant's four-star rank was based on the legislation which was passed after I had been the legislative assistant, but in which I had been involved when on a trip back to Washington from Honolulu when I was out at FMFPac as chief of staff.

I was asked by the Commandant to go over and check with Senator Stennis about legislation for the Assistant Commandant (Gen Walt) to be promoted to four-stars. Senator Stennis indicated to me that he would not (this was for Gen Walt) do this for Gen Walt personally (as an individual) because he thought it was setting a bad precedent. However, he would sponsor legislation for the Assistant Commandant (as a billet) to be four stars. I said that I was sure this would meet with the approval of Gen Chapman; I came back and reported this to him. He indicated that it would be quite satisfactory. I departed for Hawaii.

Subsequent to that time (and I was never exactly sure how this happened) the legislation passed, but it passed with a proviso that the Marine Corps would have to be at a strength

of 200,000 in order for the Commandant to be four stars. I talked to Russ Blandford about this recently and Russ indicated that he believed that at the time the only way the legislation could be passed was to put on the restrictive figure. It is my impression that Russ put this in the legislation. This may very well have been the case and Russ of course, is very astute in legislative matters and I am sure that this was his best judgment.

When I became the Commandant, the Marine Corps was teetering on 200,000 and in fact, slightly less than 200,000. There had been some discussion and some charges, of which I have no knowledge whether they were true or not, about the manipulation (such as adding officer candidates and certain Reserves on active duty for training) on the part of Marine Corps strength in the past in order for the Assistant Commandant keep four stars. However, I would not participate in anything like this and the Marine Corps was then a legitimate 198,000 and Sam was a lieutenant general. I talked to Senator Stennis and told him that I believe that this was not a good legislation; that we should amend the legislation so that the Assistant Commandant should be four stars irrespective of the strength of the Marine Corps. All the other service vice chiefs were four stars. The Assistant Commandant, when he served in the Commandant's stead on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was then junior to the Director of the Joint Staff (who was a senior three-star admiral).

Senator Stennis agreed with me. I talked to Bob Wilson and Mr. Price in the House, and they agreed that if the Senate would hold hearings, they would sponsor the legislation in the House. I discussed this with Senator Nunn, and he agreed to hold hearings on it, which he did and

at which I testified. There were present Senator Nunn, Senator Culver and Senator Stennis, as I remember; I have forgotten the other members at that time. It was a rather long session, for about two hours. It was not restricted to the Assistant Commandant by any means; rather, it was a wide ranging session of my opinion about many subjects, particularly having to do with the armed forces morale and JCS matters.

Nevertheless, the legislation was reported out favorably and it was passed. The President signed it and so we were able then to put into law for the first time that the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps would be four stars and no strings attached.

Simmons: You can't please everyone. I remember that there were some persons who didn't like the idea of having two four-star generals in the Marine Corps. They preferred the Commandant to be the one and only four-star. Have you ever heard of that?

Wilson: I never have. No, I have never heard it except I would have suspected that there may have been a few people in non-responsible positions in the other services who said this, but I have never heard this. Are these Marines?

Simmons: I have heard at the time ... well, really going back to Gen Lew Walt's time, there were comments, "It's nice to have one four-star general and he is it." I don't know how wide it was but....

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: I hear it from time to time.

Wilson: Yes sir and they felt that there was any competition. ...

Simmons: On the other hand, on the basis of sheer numbers that is, the strength of each of the four armed services, we still don't have our proportionate share of four-star generals or even three-star generals. Would you comment on this apparent inequity?

Wilson: We do now. The law was subsequently changed. As a matter of fact, I had two parts to the legislation which I had requested about the Assistant Commandant. First was that the Assistant Commandant would be four-stars and that the Marine Corps be authorized eight three-star generals. There is a law for the Army and Air Force which says that 15 percent of their general officers may be three and four-star generals.

This was not true of the Navy and Marine Corps. And as a matter of fact, the Navy and Marine Corps were working under the War Powers Act which gave us the numbers that we then had and in effect, if the War Powers Act were to end as has subsequently been done, the Marine Corps would have been reduced to two three-star generals and one four-star general, the Commandant. The Navy would have been reduced proportionately. Senator Nunn was unwilling to give us the eighth lieutenant general because of the DOPMA [Defense Officer Personnel Management Act] legislation, but said that he would, in the next year, include the Marine Corps and presumably the Navy into the law which gives the 15 percent.

He was true to his word. He did this and the next year the Marine Corps and the Navy in the Defense Authorization Act, were given 15 percent, the same law that the other services had. Now, that means that 15 percent of the Marine Corps generals may be three and four-stars. As an example: today, we have 66 Marine Corps generals. Fifteen percent of 66 comes out to 9.9. Nevertheless, since it can not be over the 15 percent, we only have nine three and four-star generals.

Now, however, it looks as if by the end of 1980, there will be a reduction, a proportionate reduction for all the services. The Marine Corps will lose three. Now we will lose three brigadier generals. We'll still be allowed to have nine because we have not yet gone below the 15 percent. It's the same for all the services. I might point out, however, that when you have 63 generals and when you lose three, you lose two major generals and one brigadier general because, if it's an odd number, you lose more major generals than you do brigadiers. It's complicated, but an interesting fact particularly since we have so few generals as compared to the other services.

Simmons: Well, that was a very comprehensive answer to a much-misunderstood situation.

On Friday April 2, you went to New York to visit with the 1st District Marines and also in the evening, to attend Leatherneck Ball, which is held each year to benefit the National Marine Corps Scholarship Fund. Next evening, Saturday, you went to a second Leatherneck Ball, this one in Philadelphia. Could you tell me a little bit more about these

Leatherneck Balls and the National Marine Corps Scholarship Fund?

Wilson: Yes. I think the scholarship fund is doing a splendid job for dependents of Marines. They have practically no day-to-day expenses. A great amount of the money which is collected, an abnormal amount in organizations of this type, go to scholarships, of which there have been over a thousand Marine juniors benefiting some way through this. We took Connie Erskine up with us on the aircraft, the widow of Gen Graves B. Erskine, who has given some scholarships in Gen Erskine's name.

The Leatherneck Ball in New York has been going on for a long time. The one in Philadelphia had just started. This was their first ball--naturally small but, nevertheless, very successful. And we drove down from New York to Philadelphia and then flew home on Sunday morning. The scholarship balls subsequent to that time have been opened in Chicago, in Houston, and in Dallas. It is a high type of ball, patronized by very influential people who have kept it a very prestigious affair.

Simmons: You got back, as you say, on Sunday, presumably repacked your suitcase with fresh uniforms, and left on Monday for Maxwell Air Force Base where you addressed the Air War College, another of the senior level schools. On Friday, 9 April, you went to Norfolk to speak to the Armed Forces Staff College. As you said earlier, "These appearances before the senior level schools do take a great deal of the service chief's time, but I do think they are worth it, not

only in what is said, but in the opportunity for the student to size up the service chief as a person."

Wilson: I agree.

Simmons: On 19 April, you departed on a trip that would take you to the west coast and to the western Pacific. You would return on 5 May 1976. In effect, you were visiting the troops and installations, which, a year before you had commanded as Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. What are your recollections of that trip; particularly were there any special problems or issues that required your personal attention?

Wilson: No. I was very pleased with the way that John McLaughlin, who was my relief, had done; in fact, had made some very good, innovative changes which I wish I had thought of when I had been the Commanding General of FMFPac. The trip was for me, very productive. The troops were doing very well and I have no specific remembrances of the trip other than that they were in good shape.

Simmons: Back in Washington, it was time for a new parade season at the Marine Barracks. The season began on Friday, 7 May, and Gen and Mrs. Shepherd were your honored guests. Just before leaving for the western Pacific, you had torn up the parade schedule prepared for you by the Special Project Division based on previous years' practice and issued new guidance on whom the honored guest would be and whom the reviewing officers would be. Do you recall this action? And if so, what were your reasons for doing this?

Wilson: No, I don't remember that. I remember that I was not particularly pleased with the honored guest list, but I can't remember what were the circumstances connected with it at that time.

Simmons: I think your move was towards more centralized control of the two parades at Iwo and at the Barracks and less farming out to the subordinates in the Headquarters.

Wilson: Oh yes, I suppose that's right. In other words, I wanted to maintain control in the Commandant's office of the guests of honor. I would welcome suggestions, but I was not really willing to decentralize to the extent that the divisions would invite their own guests at their own discretion.

Simmons: I think that was the thrust of it.

Wilson: I remember now that that was it.

Simmons: On Tuesday 11 May, you went to New York, where you were hosted at a New York Times luncheon by the publisher, "Punch" Sulzberger, who himself was once a Marine. To be hosted at one of these luncheons is quite an honor in itself. What are your recollections of that occasion?

Wilson: Yes. I was very pleased and honored to do this there. Meg Greenfield was there as I remember, and Steve Rosenfeld. There was a prestigious group of about six people. Frankly, this was a follow-on of the McClure incident, and an effort on my part to convince the editorial staff of the New

York Times and "Punch" that we were serious about conducting our training with firmness, fairness, and dignity.

I hopefully did not convey the impression that the press had been unfair to us in their extensive reporting, which I do not think they have been but it was a very enjoyable session for about two hours. We promised to get together both for luncheons and for him to come to a parade in Washington. He has never been able to do so, although I have sent several nice communications to him. The timing has never been such that it has been convenient for him to come.

Simmons: On Thursday 13 May, you went to New Orleans,

Wilson: It is interesting, that he, David Suizhenner, wrote a pamphlet, a book that was published--you may remember this Ed, when he was on active duty, which had to do with the position of the Marine Corps in the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Simmons: I know that vaguely. I'll have to look that up.

Wilson: I have it, but I don't know where it is right now. He is very knowledgeable about this subject and still remembers it. I knew then that I had plans for the Commandant to become a full member of the JCS, before I left Washington, and I made a mental note that I may have to call on him when the time came, but fortunately, I didn't have to do it since the legislation went through very smoothly when it was brought up two years later.

Simmons: I know about this paper vaguely. I will check and see if we have a copy. If we don't have a copy, we'll write

and ask him to provide one for our Personal Papers Collection.

Wilson: Yes. I'm sure we have it. In fact, I know we do but it might be a good idea to write him though just to reestablish the relationship.

Simmons: Robert Sherrod maintains a close relationship with him and he frequently speaks of him.

On Thursday 13 May, you went to New Orleans and spoke at an Armed Forces Day luncheon. You were given the International Order of Merit by Mayor Moon Landrieu of New Orleans and I am quoting, "In recognition of your outstanding service and dedication to the cause of international understanding among the peoples of the world." I believe that retired Col James Moreau, Councilman-at-Large in New Orleans, was instrumental in bringing this award about.

Wilson: Yes, he was. I have been in New Orleans several times since then, and always enjoyed going there. New Orleanians are very hospitable. They have been particularly hospitable to the Marine Corps. Of course, subsequent to this time, the 4th Division has moved to New Orleans, and the 4th Wing has established its headquarters in the Hebert Building in downtown New Orleans.

Simmons: From New Orleans, you went on leave to Mississippi and to receive more honors. On Sunday 16 May, you received an honorary doctorate of law from your alma mater, Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi.

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: You came back to Washington on Sunday evening, 16 May, and again turned around quickly for another trip. I'm a little confused by your appointment book. It shows you leaving at 1400 on Tuesday for a Commander-in-Chiefs' Conference in Florida. It also shows a joint meeting of the Congress at 1430 to hear an address by the President of the French Republic. Do you recall what really happened that day?

Wilson: I don't remember that, but I do know that we went to Florida for the first meeting of the CinCs at McDill Air Force Base, and it seems to me that I also went to hear the President of the French Republic.

Simmons: Maybe you adjusted your time schedule to do both.

Wilson: All of the Joint Chiefs would have done the same thing, so it might have been a....

Simmons: You went to McDill. Would this visit of the CinCs to McDill have had anything to do with the RedCom or Readiness Command exercises which were being....?

Wilson: No, this was a yearly conference only hosted by the CinCs in turn; the JCS together with the Secretary for a period of three days discussed mutual problems.

Simmons: May was really your month for traveling. On 20 May you went to Harlingen, Texas, for a two-day visit at the Marine Military Academy. MajGen George Bowman would have

been the superintendent at that time I believe. Was this your first visit to the academy?

Wilson: It was and I was very delighted to be there. This was the graduation day, at which time I made the address at the chapel. I was impressed with the fresh-faced youngsters and a fine group of young individuals, practically all of whom go to college and get scholarships. I just can't say too much for the Marine Military Academy or for George Bowman, who has done so much to bring it around. Of course, [Ralph] "Smoke" Spanjer is there now, and doing a good job. I met the members of the Board of Trustees, Gen [Vernon] Megee, and an old friend of mine, Al Gentleman, whom I had known for so many years, and all the Board of Trustees have done so much for the college as have the townspeople of Harlingen.

Simmons: I believe that retired reserve BGen Walter McIlhenny, President of the Academy's board of directors, was also present.

Wilson: He was and I should have mentioned Walter McIlhenny, who has also done much for the Marine Corps and so much for the Marine Military Academy. A fine Marine and we are all indebted to him.

Simmons: We spoke earlier of the close bonds that have held the members of the 6th Reserve Officers' Course together. You came back from Texas in time for the reunion of the 6th ROC. On Saturday, there was a golf match at Quantico and later on, cocktails and dinner at the Washington Navy Yard Officers' Club. On Sunday, you and Jane hosted a brunch for the class at the Commandant's House.

Wilson: We did.

Simmons: The following Friday, 28 May, you were off on another extended trip. This one was to Paris, Belleau Wood, and Brussels. Jane went with you. Was this your first trip to Europe?

Wilson: It was my first trip to Europe and we had a very pleasant visit. We enjoyed visiting the cemetery and making the speech at Belleau Wood. I might say that subsequent to this time, I have been appointed and am now a member of the American Battlefield Monuments' Commission, which supervises all of the battlefield monuments overseas. This is chaired by Gen Mark Clark, and just today, I received an invitation to make a trip after I retire, which will be in September. We have chosen to visit the battlefield monuments in Italy.

Simmons: That should be very interesting. In addition to visiting Belleau Wood and presiding over the ceremonies there, you had another perhaps more substantial, if less sentimental, reason for being in Europe and that was a NATO Commanders' Conference in Brussels. Was this more or less your introduction to NATO affairs?

Wilson: It was, and we stayed with the [Alexander] Haigs in Brussels. I was able to be oriented more towards Europe; whereas my orientation before had been almost entirely Pacific.

Simmons: I have never been to Brussels. What are the physical arrangements for a NATO military conference there?

Wilson: The Commanders' Conference is very much like a conference that you find anywhere.

Simmons: I remember the Palais Chaillot in Fontainebleau of preceding years which was quite impressive.

Wilson: Yes, it still is.

Simmons: Brussels doesn't have....

Wilson: Brussels doesn't have things like this, but of course, Al and Pat Haig have a very lovely place to live.

Simmons: Do these NATO conferences occur each year in June?

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: This might be a good time to talk about the Marines in NATO. First, how well are we represented on the various NATO planning staffs?

Wilson: We are represented better now that we have been in the past, although we still should have more representation. We have a brigadier general there who is the Deputy J-3 at CinCEur. Dolph Schwenk was the J-3 for a while because of a desire by the Navy not to fill that billet. We did fill it, which turned out to be a great break for us and I think that Dolph did a marvelous job and enhanced the Marine reputation there considerably.

We have now gone back to having a brigadier general as the Deputy J-3. We have Marine officers in various ranks on

practically all the staffs, mostly lieutenant colonels and majors. I would like to see us have more representation in CinCNorth because I believe that there is where the most probability of Marine commitment will be. In fact, I would very much like to see the Deputy Commander of CinCNorth be a Marine major general aviator. I have broached this subject to CinCNorth, who is currently Sir Peter Whiteley, the former Commandant of the Royal Marines, who looked with favor on it. However, we both agreed that it should not occur when he was there because it would look like too much Marine flavor. He seemed to think that it would be better to have a rotational job. He was not willing to involve himself within United States' matters because he was aware, as I am that this would not be a very popular thing with the U.S. Air Force. But I have mentioned this to my successor, Bob Barrow, and I believe it should be pushed. As a matter of fact, I think that we probably might have a good chance of getting it within the next two or three years if we play our cards right.

Simmons: This might be a good time to talk about the numerous discussions that have been held since you have been Commandant, on how Marines might be used in Europe; some discussions or suggestions from outside the Marine Corps and some from within. Within the obvious limits of security, would you summarize the several options on the use of Marines in Europe?

Wilson: We don't shrink at all from being employed on the central front. I believe we have the capability of performing successfully by virtue of our building-block concept, where we could add tanks and artillery as are

necessary.

We could probably only put one MAF there initially because we have to use all of our heavy resources from the other MAF's in order to build the one up to be heavy enough. I believe that the best use of Marines would probably be on the northern flank. Perhaps if we were given an advanced warning, we could send a MAF to Denmark with one brigade to Norway. We would then be able to protect the Baltic approaches. We could fly our aircraft to support the obvious threat via Iceland.

There are just forty miles between the North Sea and the Baltic, along the Kiel Canal. We could have a defensive position there in case there was a Russian movement across the North German plain. We would then be able to attack from the flank in case they penetrated into West Germany. We could be a threat to their exposed flank from the Baltic, providing some 200 aircraft for support of the forces defending the North German plain, and then in a position to launch attacks, as I said, from the ground and from the air. This would be a great place to have Marines in the early stages, if we were able to anticipate the threat. Two MAFs are committed to NATO, since we only have one MAF left, and we still have the opportunity for an amphibious operation along the 8,000 mile coastline between the North Cape and Greece.

I have discussed this with Al Haig and I understand his position, which is that if he commits his reserves, (the two MAFs are his reserves), then he has no reserve to commit. If one MAF were to be committed in the north, this would be of concern to the Greeks and the Turks, because they would feel that they were being slighted. Therefore he had preferred

not to make the commitment or even earmark a MAF for the north. I believe, however, that the Commandant should (and I believe he has) discussed this with Bernard Rogers, who is going over to be Al Haig's relief. I have discussed this with Bernie before, in principal, not in the context of his going to be SACEur, which of course I did not know before he was ordered there. He mentioned to Bob, that I had discussed it with him and he seems to think it has some merit. So I think that this also is something where the seeds may have been sown.

Insofar as pre-positioning of supplies in Norway is concerned, it is a splendid idea. I would not be willing to preposition supplies unless they were over and above those which Marines normally carry with them. Our 90 (which is now the 60) days' supply has been reduced enough. I think that this concept is the best use of Marines in NATO. Frankly, I do not see much of an opportunity to use Marines in the Mediterranean. There is little opportunity to use any combat troops for amphibious operations even in the case of a massive attack by the Russians to the west.

Simmons: And you think that either presently or in due time, these options will be adequately reflected in NATO plans?

Wilson: I hope so. But these views are a start and I think we now have a sympathetic ear. If, in fact, we could make a good enough case, I have every reason to believe that Bernie Rogers would certainly take it into consideration. I don't believe that there is any prejudice against Marines because we're Marines now among responsible people such as in Eisenhower's day.

Simmons: You have observed several NATO exercises in which Marines have participated. Could you name some of these exercises and summarize the impressions you gained from them?

Wilson: I really have only seen one, and it was in Norway. I went there and witnessed the Marines landing in the fjords. I was impressed with their mobility, their equipment, and their aggressiveness. I believe that we can give a very good account of ourselves in Norway because of the technology which we have, particularly with our helicopters and moving antitank weapons to cover the tank approaches to the south. We can deny the canalization which the Russians must have if they move from north to south, since it would be impossible for them to come from east to west because of the cross compartments.

Therefore, I believe that a brigade in Norway, perhaps around the Trondheim area, would give a good account of itself and be successful. I am apprehensive about fighting in the intense cold of northern Norway, not only because of the limited training of our troops, but because our equipment is simply not satisfactory and would not allow us to be able to maintain an effective force during the winter in the intense cold.

Simmons: Because of the relatively rapid turnover of our troop personnel, particularly in the FMF and in the lower enlisted ranks, it is almost impossible to build up an extensive expertise in operations in extreme climatic conditions, such as in the north and in the desert. Would you comment on that?

Wilson: You are absolutely right. I believe that we simply

cannot spend too much money for special operational equipment and clothing because money is very tight now. We also must husband our resources by not having cold weather exercises, as desirable as they are, to the exclusion of other exercises.

We should have selected individuals--professionals, officers and staff NCO's--who train with troops in other countries in the intense cold. This training should be reflected in their records and with our computers, why, we're able to recall this training and use their expertise. It's not like the old days where it was written into a service record book and we never could find it and Marine's often had it removed upon re-enlistment.

The cost of conducting amphibious exercises and air-lifted exercises in the extreme cold is enormous, we do it at the expense of other training, and then because of the big turnover, the expertise decays rapidly and then we are back to where we started. Of course, if we could know that we were pointing toward some mission, and that we were going at a certain time, this would be desirable and necessary. But in the long term, I think we must select individuals to be experts, keep them current, have them on call and use their expertise if necessary.

Simmons: You returned to Washington I'm going back to your trip to Paris and Brussels--you returned to Washington on 14 June; on Wednesday, 16 June you went to Aberdeen. Do you recall why? Would it have had anything to do with the selection of the main battle tank? As I recall, the contest between the German tank and the Chrysler tank was going on at

Aberdeen about that time.

Wilson: Yes I did see some classified armor there; it was not the selection of the XM-1 but more to view the captured weapons which they have at Aberdeen, the Israelis have made available to us as a result of the 1973 war. I saw the Russian equipment, which is very sophisticated, particularly in chemical, biological, and nuclear defense, much more advanced than ours, but mostly, this was to view the captured Russian weapons as opposed to those of our own.

Simmons: This might be a good time to get your thoughts, philosophically, on the general problem of the place of armor, tracked vehicles, etc, in the Marine Corps as opposed to air-transportable, helicopter-capable weapons. Some people think that the tracked vehicle is in the category of the dinosaur; he is obsolete, made obsolete by new weapons. Other people obviously don't think so.

Wilson: I believe that in the long turn, the tank is a thing of the past. I think as more sophisticated weapons become available which can disable the tank, then the tank will rapidly disappear as the shock weapon that it is now. But until that time, we simply cannot do without tanks. On the other hand, I don't believe that we should try to match the Russians tank for tank. I'm talking about the XM-1, which today is going to cost \$1.4 million and we're having a lot of trouble with it. The production is limited this year until many of the bugs can be eliminated.

On the other hand, tracked vehicles are the means whereby Marines are still going to have to come from ship to shore. We have not discussed a ship-to-shore vehicle with high speed

on water and high maneuverability on the ground. There is the usual tradeoff. In fact, I've just done away with the LVA [landing vehicle assault], which had become a monstrosity 11 feet tall and 33 feet long, in order to get it up to 25 miles an hour. We had to have it this size but it was virtually a sitting duck on land.

We have to have some means to transport troops rapidly over bridges, across country and particularly in an area which may be contaminated with nuclear or chemical fallout. You must get troops quickly to the scene of the battle. We must not forget that wars are won on land. They are not won in vehicles going from ship to shore nor are they won in troops riding vehicles down the road. This is very important. So somewhere in between, I think is the right answer. (We might stop here just a minute.)

Simmons: On the morning of Friday, 18 June, you spoke to the National Defense Strategy Seminar at the National Defense University. That evening you went to a reception hosted by Secretary and Mrs. Middendorf, in the John Philip Sousa Band Hall, followed by a parade in honor of the Secretary. I understand that the Secretary first asked to use the Commandant's House for that reception. Is that right?

Wilson: Yes. I felt badly about having to turn him down for that, but I believe that the Commandant's House is the personal residence of the Commandant, that it is simply not available for parties for outsiders, not even for the Secretary of the Navy. And it would soon lose its status as a Commandant's house if it were made available to anyone else. I tried to tell the Secretary that as diplomatically

as possible. I don't know that he concurred, but at least he was not resentful of my decision.

End Tape 1, Side 1

Begin Tape 1, Side 2

Simmons: It's a very good policy decision, a good policy to follow and the Commandant's House should not be equated to the Truxton-Decatur House which is available for...

Wilson: Yes, that's right.

Simmons...exactly that kind of thing.

Wilson: And the garden of course is part of the house

Simmons: From 24-26 June, you were on leave. This included a stopover in Camp Lejeune to observe the retirement of MajGen Bill Joslyn and the turnover of command of the 2d Marine Division.

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: On Wednesday evening, 30 June, you and Jane went to Fort McHenry in Baltimore for the tattoo ceremony put on by the Drum and Bugle Corps Detachment from NSA, Fort Meade.

This tattoo ceremony had grown into an attraction

rivaling the Friday night parades at the Marine Barracks in Washington. Regrettably, it is no longer conducted because we no longer have a Marine Detachment at Fort Meade.

During your time as Commandant, we have given up a number of security missions, including the closing of a great number of Marine barracks at Navy yards and stations. We have had these security missions since the Marine Corps was reformed in 1798. In fact, I think the law still reads and I am quoting, "In addition, the Marine Corps shall provide detachments and organizations for service on armed vessels of the Navy, shall provide security detachments for the protection of naval property, at naval stations and bases, and shall perform such other duties as the President may direct."

With fewer and fewer opportunities to serve at sea, and with fewer and fewer Marine Barracks at Navy yards, we seem to be getting further and further away from the Navy. I know it must have been a difficult decision for you to close these Marine Barracks and I would like you to comment.

Wilson: It was, of course, not only in the tradition of Marines with our close association with the Navy, but it provided an opportunity for Marines to have a welcome respite from the Fleet Marine Force in jobs which, for the most part, were ceremonial and in which the hours were regular and provided an opportunity for family life.

Nevertheless, since the days of the law which you quoted, times have changed. There is not much, if any, need for Marines on the ships, to man the secondary guns, or certainly to man the fighting tops, and therefore Marines

must be put in the best, most productive job; which is, the Fleet Marine Force. Furthermore, the Congress had decreed that they were going to reduce us, as much as 10,000 people, and decreed that we must stop using Marines for ceremonial jobs which civilians could do at much less expense.

So with this guidance, I set about with the CNO trying to find out those jobs in which Marines were required at Navy yards and in ammunition depots, particularly relating to nuclear weapons security. We have closed a lot of Marine barracks and reduced others much to the dismay of the Navy people who continue to talk of the old days which never were and never will be.

I believe that this is the way to go, that we have to adjust to the times and have the best possible utilization of our Marines for the defense of our country. This does not include Marines being in a set of dress blues at a naval station, saluting people as they come through just because it was a tradition. Marines have a different mission now and it's time the Navy learned this, either the hard way or the easy way.

Simmons: By now, we are very much into the nation's celebration of its bicentennial. On 2 July, you hosted a reception and parade in honor of Vice President Nelson Rockefeller. Do you have any special recollections of that evening, and what general recollections might you have of Nelson Rockefeller?

Wilson: Yes we did. The Rockefellers were absolutely charming. Jane and Happy seemed to strike up a mutual friendship right away. They were very interested in the

house. She toured the house completely.

We had some pictures made; an interesting little vignette of this was that the pictures were sent to the Guest of Honor, as I always do several days after the parade, with their two handsome youngsters and they happened to be sitting with the Vice President and me. I sent the pictures to the Vice President with a little note. Almost immediately, I received a call from someone in the Vice President's office with an official tone, "How dare you take pictures of Vice President's children? Don't you know that the Rockefeller children never have pictures made?" My response was, "They have pictures made if they pose before the camera in my home." I heard nothing more from him.

After the Vice President left office, and it was, in fact, during, the signing of the Panama Canal Treaty, I had a chance to chat with Happy and she remarked that the pictures were so good that they were in her son's rooms and she saw them every day because she reflected back on her delightful visit to the Commandant's House. As a matter of fact, the Vice President had to leave the parade to meet the President at Andrews Field and returned to see the completion of the parade.

Simmons: That is very interesting. On Saturday 3 July, you and Jane went to the gala at the Concert Hall in Kennedy Center honoring the American Bicentennial. Do you have any recollection of that evening?

Wilson: Yes. It was a very nice affair and we enjoyed it. We have enjoyed going to the Kennedy Center many times since we have been here. I can't remember, was the Marine Band...?

Simmons: They may have taken part. That was a big evening that was televised and then shown nationally.

Wilson: But the Marine Band did participate. I remember the gala.

Simmons: Next day, you went to Fort Worth to join in the Tarrant County Fourth of July celebration. How did it come about that you went to Texas to celebrate the Fourth?

Wilson: I had accepted this invitation six or eight months before. I had been to Texas once on the Fourth of July when I was a colonel and had been asked to go and participate in their celebration. There had been a 100, 150,000 people then and there was a little nostalgia for us to go back later.

We had no part in the Bicentennial here in Washington, and so we had enjoyed going down although I was involved in one of the heaviest thunderstorms that I think that I have ever encountered while I was making my speech. Only in Texas can sudden thunderstorms appear, as indeed they did that day on the Fourth of July where there were at least 200,000 people soaked to the skin as I was.

Simmons: 200,000 people! Elaborate social affairs connected with the Bicentennial continued throughout this period. On 8 July, you went to a reception at the British Embassy in honor of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. Was this the first time you had met the Queen and her consort?

Wilson: Yes. I guess it was the first time, although we did

meet the Queen and Prince Philip later when I made a visit to England. Later Prince Philip stayed at the house, which we will probably come to subsequently. But this was the first time that we had met the Queen and Prince Philip.

Simmons: Next day, 9 July, you attended a retirement ceremony for MajGen Russ Blandford, whose contributions we have discussed earlier. That evening, you gave a parade and reception in honor of the U.S. Army. Next evening, Saturday 10 July, you took the salute of the Scots Guard Tattoo at Wolf Trap.

Wilson: Yes, that was very enjoyable. I might say that we did have Gen Free Weyand, the Chief of Staff, and Marty... Secretary of the Army, who...but there were.....,

Simmons: Is it Hoffmann?

Wilson: Marty Hoffmann. But we are very fond of both of them and we had a dinner party in their honor, which they seemed to appreciate.

Simmons: I noticed on the appointment calendar it said, "In honor of the U.S. Army" instead of "In honor of the Secretary of the Army" or "Chief of Staff of the Army" and I wondered how that came about.

Wilson: Yes, I gave it as sort of a dual honor for both of them representing the U.S. Army.

Simmons: Interspersed with all these ceremonies you were still keeping regular office hours. On your calendar for

1530 on Monday 12 July, appears the topic "expandable shelters." What is meant by expandable shelters and what is the Marine Corps' interest in this development?

Wilson: Expandable shelters are those in which you can add on the number of shelters necessary to take care of CP's or maintenance tents. In fact, the chap with whom I talked was also one who I had seen earlier in Texas who has been involved for a long time as a vendor of expandable shelters. We have used some of these in the desert. They have a fine application and are quite easy to erect. They are not as sturdy as we would like, but of course, that's the tradeoff that you have being easy to erect, but not sturdy. We have purchased some of these, but we have a long way to go in our shelter program. We have tents really no better, or not as good as they were in World War II. We have numerous tents in the desert in storage which are rotting, because we are not able to decide, along with the Army, on what we are looking for.

Unfortunately, the military specifications of shelters are such that we are asking for the impossible: a tent that keeps you warm in zero temperature, and one which keeps you cool when it is 100 degrees--there is no such thing. These days at Sears and Roebuck or any sporting goods store, L.L. Bean or whatever, you can find tents that keep one dry and warm and which is really what we need. But we are unable to come up with the military specification necessary to get on with it. One of our great defects.

Simmons: Does this in some way fit into the overall program of standardized packages, modular constructions, and containerized packages for the ship-to-shore movement?

Wilson: No, this expandable tent program doesn't. The overall problem is that we would prefer things containerized, or shelters that can go aboard say the roll-on, roll-off ships, lift them by helicopter, lift them ashore and use them ashore. This is all part of it, but I was thinking more about tents for the creature comforts for the troops.

Simmons: On Thursday evening, 15 July, you and Jane went to the White House for dinner hosted by President and Mrs. Gerald Ford in honor of His Excellency, the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Mrs. Helmut Schmidt. Any recollections of that evening?

Wilson: Oh yes, it's always a great thing to go to the White House, particularly for Jane, who always enjoys the White House and its pageantry.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had always, up until the Carter administration, been included in the White House dinners; that is, one chief for each dinner. It was a rotating "assignment". This was discontinued by the Carters. And insofar as I know, no chief has been there, with the exception of when the Panama Canal Treaty was signed, without his wife by the way.

Simmons: Interesting. Next day, Friday 16 July, you were off for a visit to Pascagoula, presumably in connection with the LHA program.

Wilson: Yes. It was to view a LHA for the first time.

Simmons: The following day, you delivered the keynote speech at a luncheon of the annual convention of the Mississippi Association of Supervisors in Jackson, Mississippi. Moving along a bit more rapidly, on Thursday afternoon 22 July, you met with the Board of Governors of the Marine Corps' Association. I believe at that time, you were still President of the Association. It was about this time, that the merger of the Marine Corps Association and the Leatherneck Association was under active consideration. Do you recall the events that led up to this merger, and do you think it has achieved its objectives?

Wilson: Yes I do. I think I mentioned this earlier, but since I am not sure and I will repeat it. I believe that the Commandant should not have been the President of the Association; it is a conflict of interest. In fact, the Association did merge under the Assistant Commandant. I am very pleased with it. I believe it saved the Leatherneck

I think that it has worked very well and I could not have asked for it to be done smoother. There were some ruffled feelings here, as of course, there are with any merger. There was a feeling of moving into one's turf. But all in all, I think it was done very well and the people involved have performed quite satisfactorily.

Simmons: On Saturday evening, you attended a reception and dinner at Stouffer's National Center Inn in Arlington, marking the conclusion of the annual reunion of the 3d Marine Division Association. We seem to have so many Marine-linked

organizations, each with its own personality. Would you care to comment?

Wilson: That is a real problem for any Commandant. I would very much like to see an association which would merge all of the associations together. But we are all a part of our background. I was a member of the 3d Division in World War II and have been an officer in the 1st Marine Division Association. But I don't believe that this is a feasible thing to do, because of the emotions involved. If you merge these organizations into a larger one, then you are going to lose all sense of identity with the individual organizations.

For the most part, the division associations are a gathering of World War II individuals, and as the years go by, they will become less and less active. We accept their making massive drives for younger members, mostly ineffective I might say.

The 3d Division Association here has had its ups and downs. Right now, it is at the highest point it has been in years under Ed Danowitz, who has done a splendid job. Ed is an enthusiastic, hardworking, capable individual, to whom I am most appreciative for what he had done. But the association effectiveness is largely dependent upon the enthusiasm and initiative of its leader. But again, we are not having any of the younger Marines coming into the association. So I think that over the year the associations are going to sort of play out. No other war since that time has ever had the occasion to bring people together in such close relationship.

Simmons: On Wednesday 4 August, you had another session

devoted to the Haynes Board recommendations which we discussed earlier, and then on Friday evening, 6 August, you hosted a reception and parade in honor of Congressman F. Edward Hebert. It was on the eve of his retirement in the House of Representatives. What are your recollections of Eddy Hebert?

Wilson: I am extremely fond of Mr. Hebert; we have been old friends from many years since I was a legislative assistant in Washington. He has always been a great friend of the Marines and continues to be. I felt that the least we could do is to have a parade in his honor, which he seemed to appreciate. I always go to see him when I go to New Orleans. His health has deteriorated. In fact, two years ago he was not expected to live through the night, but he rallied and is now in relatively good health. Of course, in his later years, he has a tendency to reflect on other days, which all of us do and which I am apparently doing now. But he has been a great friend of the Marine Corps and we owe him a great debt of gratitude and I would certainly like to see the Marines in New Orleans continue to give him every honor that he is able and willing to receive here during the remainder of his years.

Simmons: I think this might be a good place to end this session.

End Session IV

Session V--25 June 1979

Simmons: Today is the 25th of June, this is our fifth session. To put this session into the context of the times, I might say that the President returned last week from Vienna after signing the SALT II Treaty with Brezhnev. He, President Carter, arrived yesterday in Tokyo for the seven nation talks on the international energy situation. Here in the United States, the homosexuals in San Francisco, New York and elsewhere have begun a week-long celebration of what they consider to be the tenth anniversary of Gay Liberation, and that is the way it is. We will pick up where we left off. The last half of August 1976 was filled with travel. On Friday, 12 August you went to Boston; do you recall the purpose of that visit?

Wilson: Yes. I went to the Women Marines' Convention. You may know which I did not until then, that the Women Marines of World War I resent being called "Marinettes". (I did not make such a mistake having found out earlier not to make such a mistake.) They were a very spry group of ladies, all of whom were in their late 70s or 80s, having been at least 18 when they joined the Marine Corps in 1918. They have remarkable longevity. Out of the 400 women Marines of World War I, there are about 300 still living and over 200 were at the convention.

Simmons: One of them might have been Ginger Rogers' mother, who was very active. She just died a year or so ago and was very active right up to the end and acted as her daughter's business agent.

From Sunday 15 August through Wednesday 18 August, you were in the Caribbean, what was your itinerary there?

Wilson: We went to Guantanamo Bay, Roosevelt Roads and to Vieques. I was delighted to see Vieques again, not having ever been stationed on the east coast in the Fleet Marine Force, but I had visited it several times. I discovered that we had a detachment down there simply taking care of itself. We only use Vieques about six weeks out of the year which is not worth the manpower for a year-round detachment. The detachment consisted of about 200 Marines, mostly engineers, high-ranking NCO's, whose business it was to maintain roads (which we should not use anyway in an amphibious exercise), maintaining ranges, which we should not be using because we should confine our firing to field firing.

All in all, I came back convinced that we could save 200 people by getting rid of the Vieques detachment, which I proceeded to do. This was not easy, working through the CinCLant Fleet. All the Navy would like the Marines to stay there to protect the Navy installations which I was delighted to do as an ancillary thing. But it really wasn't worth the effort of a whole Marine company which it would amount to.

Subsequent to that time, we have closed up Vieques. We're still having the problems with the local vandals there, but, nevertheless, we have put 200 men back in the Fleet Marine Force.

I visited the Marine Barracks at Roosevelt Roads. I was quite unhappy with the commanding officer there, who had retired on active duty and has subsequently retired. I was delighted with Guantanamo Bay. Marine Col Mark Fennessy is

the CO. Mark has a tendency toward obesity, but he is a fine, dedicated officer and he and his wife give sort of a grandfatherly and grandmotherly approval to the Marines at Guantanamo, which is a very difficult post. They are near the United States, but far away in point of remoteness. They still have to maintain listening posts and guard the perimeter.

It takes a CO with the great leadership ability, which Mark has. He has been down there the full four years that I have been the Commandant, and I think longer than I have left anyone in one post. Mark will be retired this year.

Simmons: Speaking of the Vieques and Culebra, they were in the news this past weekend also--the mayor of Culebra expressing his discontent with the arrangements with the Navy. What do you see as the future use of Vieques, Culebra and possibly what do you see as the future of Guantanamo?

Wilson: Culebra, of course, is gone. Vieques is gone, for all practical purposes. Once the local people smell blood by moving out the Navy, they are most likely to generate enough sympathetic publicity in the U.S. which will require the residents to abandon the area.

I think that Vieques, for the Marine Corps is a thing of the past and in fact, I think this is also true for the Navy too. As for Guantanamo Bay, we are maintaining it, not for any real useful purpose. It does provide an opportunity for our P-3's to check on the submarines which might come through the Wind-ward passage. Nevertheless, it is an irritant to Castro which is its main purpose. The lease expires in the 1990's. It could be that we would continue to maintain a presence there until that time, depending upon Castro's

action. I am inclined to believe that if he would be more amenable we might leave it earlier than that. We will probably continue to keep it, but I certainly would not like to see any more Marines down there. It's a waste of manpower. The Navy, with their insatiable appetite for Marines naturally want more.

Simmons: In the last ten or fifteen years, we have seen a radical shift in the Caribbean. Up until perhaps 1965 and the Dominican Intervention, the Caribbean was pretty much an American lake in which the Marines had a particular and special interest. More or less since that time, we have seen the Greater Antilles and the Lesser Antilles breached, islands which were once English are now independent and generally leftist. We have had the Panama Canal Treaty which we have discussed earlier. Even before that--1959--we had Castro taking over Cuba. We now have a most critical situation in Nicaragua with the fall of Somoza. Whatever his sins might be, he certainly has always been friendly towards the United States. It seems that we may have an increasingly critical strategic situation in the Caribbean with long-range implications, particularly in the protection of oil moving up from the Venezuelan and Aruba fields to New Orleans, in a future conflict.

Wilson: I couldn't agree more. I think it is distressing that the whole of Latin America has been alienated--much of Latin America, Brazil and others--with Carter's disastrous human rights policy. I was down in Brazil and believe that they feel we have begun to alienate them more than ever. I agree that the Sandinistas, who are causing the problems in Nicaragua, are purely and simply Marxist-Leninist supported

by Cuba. To go back to Guantanamo, I suspect that so long as this continues, we will continue to maintain a presence in Guantanamo, as I say, as an irritant to Castro. But as far as our military needs, it is a great question in my mind as to whether or not we need to stay.

Simmons: On Friday evening, 20 August 1976, you hosted a dinner and parade for Deputy Secretary of Defense Clements, whom we discussed earlier. On Wednesday 25 August, you went to Louisville, Kentucky for a two-day stay. Do you recall that occasion?

Wilson: Yes. The dinner for Mr. Clements was also the night of the tree-cutting incident in Korea. We were all late for dinner. This was the incident where the tree-cutting took place in the DMZ and we had gathered in the Command Center because we did not know what further actions the North Koreans might take. They did not react and we all came to dinner rather late. Louisville was the next question?

Simmons: Several days later....

Wilson: We went there to visit the recruiting station and I went also to Fort Knox, Kentucky. I went there to visit the Marines and to see the tank training conducted by the Army for our Marines. We did visit some Marine reserve officers in Kentucky who have subsequently become very close friends of ours. Ronald Van Stockum, whom we have known for many years, is retired there. Frank Hower is a bank president and Ed Middleton is in insurance; both widely respected individuals. The publisher of the Louisville Courier-Journal, whose name escapes me right now, his son was a

Marine, I talked to him. The Louisville Courier-Journal is a rather liberal newspaper by Kentucky standards. I had an interview for the paper while there.

Simmons: I remember that Col Weldon James who was...

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons... principal editor of the Kentucky-rather the Louisville-...

Wilson: Journal.

Simmons... James left the paper during the Vietnam War...

Wilson: Right.

Simmons... because of a difference of opinion regarding editorial policy. I also note that you were commissioned a Kentucky Colonel by Governor Julian Carroll during that trip.

Wilson: Yes I was; subsequently I have been given another commission on my most recent trip to Kentucky. Their records are not necessarily up to date.

Simmons: On Thursday 2 September, you went to Quantico and addressed the combined classes of the Command and Staff School, Amphibious Warfare School, and the Communication Officers' School. You were home in time to officiate at a reception and parade in honor of the Secretary of Defense, whom, I believe at this time, was still Donald Rumsfeld. Any further recollections of Mr. Rumsfeld?

Wilson: The Rumsfelds came for the parade and seemed to enjoy it, brought their family and it was an enjoyable evening. In fact, we have been very, very fortunate not having to cancel a single reception during my four years as Commandant because of rain. We have had many threatening nights but never once have we had to cancel one because of rain.

Simmons: Very good. On Wednesday 8 September, MajGen Auriaga, Commandant of the Spanish Marine Corps, arrived for an official visit. His visit followed the pattern we discussed earlier: arrival honors, official calls, a reception at the Spanish embassy, an awards ceremony here, and luncheon with the general officers, and then a dinner and a parade in his honor on Friday evening, 10 September. Do you have any special recollections of this visit of Gen Auriaga?

Wilson: Gen Auriaga spoke English very well, but she did not speak English at all. We saw them later in Spain where they were our host, following the usual pattern you outlined. We have joint exercises with the Spanish Marine Corps, which gives us the opportunity to have our battalion exercises in Rota. They are a small organization, completely subordinated to the Spanish navy. I did, in this instance however, give permission for the Spanish navy pilots to train at Cherry Point. They have the AV-8A, the Harrier aircraft. I had originally turned down this request because we needed the spaces for training our pilots. However, Gen Auriaga specifically requested that I do this so that it would give him a little prestige with the Spanish navy. I did so, and

later on it turned out to be very beneficial for the Spanish Marine Corps for them to have some prestige with the Spanish navy.

Simmons: That's a good example of how much more is accomplished during these official visits than just parades and ceremonies. On Thursday, 16 September, you went to New York City for your first sitting for your two portraits by Albert K. Murray. One of these portraits was to be your official portrait to join the other official portraits of the Commandants in the Commandant's House. The other was the U.S. Naval Institute portrait. I went along with you on this trip. I'm sure you remember Cdr Murray's studio and apartment at 33 West 67th Street, and I know that as the several sittings for the portraits progressed, you and Jane became fast friends of Albert Murray and his sister.

Wilson: We did. We became very fond of Al and Louise Murray; they are charming individuals. I have had them both to the House as guests for a weekend. We haven't seen as much of him in the last year that we would have liked, but he has been busy. I know he has since done the Oppenheimer portrait in South Africa. He is a very talented, capable and charming man. In fact, I was very pleased with the portraits.

Simmons: However, that first trip to New York was rather rushed because the next day 17 September, y
ou were off to Trondelaga, Norway, for a four day visit. Any special recollections of that trip?

Wilson: Well yes, several recollections. I must give a little vignette about this visit. I was very pleased with the troops; their morale and appearance, the landing exercise went well, and the Norwegians seemed to appreciate us coming. The vignette that I was going to tell was that I had been invited to dinner with King Olaf up at Trondheim at a farmhouse where he was staying with a friend.

I had not done my homework. I had not looked at my briefing books regarding the background of the King or even glanced at his picture. I changed my uniform from utilities to greens in the helicopter and landed at the farm. I went to the door and this very distinguished looking man who obviously (to me) must be King answered. I bowed to him and he indicated that I should go into the room to the left, which I did. There were a few people that gathered along the wall. I gravitated towards this Norwegian general.

He spoke English very well. We talked about the weather and the exercise and other small talk. I felt a little uneasy but I wasn't quite sure why; people were avoiding us and going to the other room. I said something to a man who came to the room, trying to get him to join the conversation and he indicated that he did not speak English. I asked the general if he would interpret for us so he said, "I'll be glad to." Later a lady came in, came up to the general and curtsied.

Simmons: And you got the message.

Wilson: I got the message quite clearly that he was the King. I told this story to the Norwegian ambassador, Sonenfelt, and he was amused by it. But the King made no

indication that he resented my familiarity and was very cooperative.

Simmons: I think we have some photographs in the file of you with the King during the course of the exercise.

Wilson: Many were taken.

Simmons: I will make sure that they are included in the transcript.

Wilson: Good.

Simmons: From Wednesday 29 September until Friday 8 October, you were visiting the Marine Corps units on the west coast. During this visit, you made what I consider to be a major speech to the Navy League in San Diego. Any other recollections of that trip?

Wilson: No, I don't think so, This was a visit which I made periodically, about once a year, to the west coast. I have spent a great deal of time there at Camp Pendleton, having marched up there as a member of the 9th Marines when it was first purchased. I have a very close association and affection for Camp Pendleton and San Diego. So many retired Marines are there who are friends of ours.

I did make a speech in San Diego. Pete Wilson, the mayor, was a Marine, as is Bob Wilson, who is a very influential Congressman, the ranking minority member of the House Armed Services Committee and a very close friend of the Marine Corps and has done a great deal for us over the years.

Simmons: We have spoken a good deal of your travels but we haven't gotten into the mechanics of these trips. How were the arrangements made? Who are the members of your official family who go with you? What modes of transportation are used, and so forth?

Wilson: Well, we were and still are using as of this year (when it may well be the last) the old C-118's. We have two of these aircraft, the latest of which was transferred from the Commander-in-chief of the Pacific Fleet who changed to a P-3. The 118s are very slow. They are the old DC-6s, but very comfortable.

Jane enjoyed traveling in it, as did I. It has a bedroom in the back and we slept well. Going to the west coast, we could sleep overnight; arriving at 0800 for a day of work. Returning, we could also sleep overnight. So we prefer that to the T-39, the jet, since we can take a staff with us.

We have made many trips across the Pacific in the C-118; both when I was CG FMFPac as well as Commandant. I would usually take a staff officer from logistics, one from personnel, two aides, and one of the food techs at the House, Sgt Powers, who has been going with us for a long time. A steward is necessary since my uniform requirements are numerous and coming in early as I do, starting out with breakfast with the NCO's at 6:00, it is a full, full day--something about every 15 minutes changing clothes for a reception of up to 1000 people, then to a dinner party after that. Normally, I am in bed at 11:00. It is a very tiring day and so many uniform requirements and I simply have to have someone who can keep up with them and have them ready for a quick change.

Simmons: You didn't mention the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps. Was it customary to take him or not?

Wilson: Oh, by all means, the Sergeant Major always went.

Simmons: On Tuesday 12 October, LtGen Lee Dong Yong, the Commandant of the Korean Marines, arrived as your official guest. Once again, the visit followed the established pattern. I knew Gen Lee when he commanded the Blue Dragon Brigade in Vietnam. He impressed me then as a much more, outgoing person than most Korean officers. I have seen him several times since. What are your recollections of Gen Lee?

Wilson: Well, Gen Lee's major concern was then that the Commandant of the Korean Marine Corps' job had been abolished. He had become the Vice Chief of Naval Operations for Marine Affairs. This was quite a comedown, in prestige and otherwise, for the Korean Marines. This has not been changed nor do I suggest that it will. The rumor was that the Korean Army had felt the Marines were moving too fast, and becoming too much a favorite with President Park. Whether this is the case or not, I don't know. The Korean Marines have about 24,000 Marines; they were not reduced in number.

I do believe however, that Gen Lee's headquarters had become too large. When I was out there earlier, I found that the headquarters had as many as 800 people in it; this of course, should be a lesson to us all. Any headquarters has a way of proliferating to the extent that that they become too visible and then get cut off. I have often thought about

that since there are constant efforts to proliferate our own headquarters. It could happen to anyone. Gen Lee was very concerned about it, asked me to intercede. I had no way of doing it gracefully. In a later visit to Korea, I did mention it to President Park, but I got a cool reaction from him and so I let it drop. The fact is, Gen Lee was rather vociferous in his efforts to reestablish the Commandant's job and in fact, after he was retired, I understand that he waited about six months before he was given a job (a lesson to people who complained about the action of the President).

Simmons: That sort of bears out my impression that he is much more outgoing and outspoken than you ordinarily think.

Wilson: Right.

Simmons: On Tuesday and Wednesday, 26 and 27 October, there was a Commanders' Conference here. From my own notes, I remember that Gen Jaskilka brought back from Britain some 15 berets and woolly-pullies he had gotten from the Royal Marines. The berets looked pretty sorry. I got the impression that either all Royal Marines had head size 6 5/8 or they thought that all Americans had head size 6 5/8. You suggested at the Commanders' Conference that the generals have their aides wear these berets. We also got some U.S. Army green berets, which incidentally were made in Canada for testing. We have discussed both the beret and the sweater earlier, but I thought it well to record this important milestone in their respective rejection and acceptance.

Wilson: We have talked about the woolly-pully earlier and I

think that was the way to go. The berets were not all that popular and so we dropped the idea.

Simmons: On Thursday 28 October you went to New York to speak to the Calvin Bullock Forum. Can you tell me something about the Bullock forum?

Wilson: The Calvin Bullock Forum is a forum established by Mr. Calvin Bullock, who was a very famous financier on Wall Street, and his son is continuing this tradition. His son is a great admirer of Napoleon, having some of Napoleon's personal articles among which are his saddle, sword, a blanket, a tent—in his adjacent office in Wall Street. Obviously very, very valuable and something which I understand the French government would very much like to have. This is a rather prestigious forum which Mr. Bullock was able to organize mostly because of his prestige. I talked about 15 minutes on the Marine Corps and answered questions. They were a very sympathetic audience, particularly since we had come out of the Parris Island and the San Diego tragedies, which put me on the defensive immediately. I had a very nice letter from Mr. Bullock. I was given a replica of Napoleon's sword, which is customary to present to each speaker. It is a letter opener, which is a replica of Napoleon's sword in sterling silver from Tiffany's.

Simmons: You joined a very distinguished line of lecturers and speakers. I think it was a miniature of Lord Nelson's sword, however.

Wilson: Yes, you are right; it was Lord Nelson's sword.

Simmons: We have to give the British equal time.

Wilson: Naturally.

Simmons: That evening, you went to a Navy League dinner in your honor. The next morning, you continued your portrait sittings with Albert Murray. On Thursday 4 November, you went once again to speak at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, and returned by way of New York, where you again continued your sittings. On Sunday 7 November, you and Jane attended the traditional Marine Corps' worship service at the National Cathedral. This is always very impressive.

Wilson: I participated by reading the lesson which is traditional for the Commandant. It is well attended by Marines, especially retired Marines. The National Cathedral is very cooperative. The Marine Band brass section is particularly effective in the Cathedral.

Simmons: On Wednesday 10 November, the Marine Corps' 201st birthday, you had a very full day of ceremonies. There was the regular observance and parade at the Iwo Jima Monument. You left from there for Philadelphia and the laying of the corner stone for the Tun Tavern replica, and then of course, you were back in time for the ball at the Washington Hilton. My own recollections of that evening are a little hazy, as I left early by way of ambulance to Walter Reed and the suspected heart attack, I believe Donald Rumsfeld was the honored guest; or was he?

Wilson: He might have been, but I don't remember.

Simmons: I can check on that.

Wilson: I can check. Of course, there was Schlesinger.

Simmons: The year before.

Wilson: The year before. Mr. Duncan was there last year. I do remember laying the cornerstone at Tun Tavern. It is not much further along now than it was when the cornerstone was laid. I am distressed about this whole thing and I frankly don't know what we are going to do about it.

Simmons: After this very busy day and evening, you were off the next morning for Meridian, Mississippi, where you attended a Veteran's Day ceremony and luncheon in company with Congressman Sonny Montgomery.

Wilson: Yes. Congressman Montgomery and I have been friends for many years. He had asked me to come down to be the reviewing officer for the Meridian Veteran's Day parade, which I was glad to do, although it was the morning after the Birthday Ball. I might say that we Marines particularly in the general officer ranks and all those in highly visible positions are always confronted with Veteran's Day commitments after the Marine Corps' Birthday Ball the night before. For junior officers and for people who do not have to participate in Veteran's Day affairs it's a welcome relief to have Veteran's Day back again as a holiday after the 10th of November.

I have been laughingly told how foresighted the Marines must have been to have had their birthday followed by

Veteran's Day which is a holiday.

Simmons: There is one story that the Marines made so much noise celebrating the 10th of November in 1918 that the Germans hurriedly concluded that they should strike an Armistice, but there is no historical truth in that. Six days later, on 17 November, you again went south, this time to Birmingham, Alabama, for a Rotary Club luncheon. Next day Thursday, 18 November, at 1400, you received a very important briefing from MajGen John Miller, then the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Training, on the infantry battalion structure and the mobile assault regiment. This was an outgrowth of the Haynes Board recommendations that we discussed earlier.

Wilson: I remember.

Simmons: The briefing and discussions divided themselves into two parts, the infantry battalion and the mobile assault regiment. From my own notes, I remember that the two major issues with respect to the infantry battalion were on whether there should be a weapons company, and whether a fourth rifle company should be retained in the structure. I think there was general agreement that the battalion H&S Company had grown much too large; again, although earlier you were speaking of an administrative headquarters, this was an example of a tactical head quarters that had grown much too large, and was no place for the battalion weapons platoons. I know that, I for one missed having a weapons company in the battalions in Vietnam, and felt that the performance of our crew-served weapons suffered accordingly. Of course, having

been a weapons company commander in the Korean War, I was prejudiced.

Wilson: I was in a weapons company in the World War II, having had a weapons platoon as a lieutenant that is, before I became an infantry company commander, I feel the way you do. At that time we did continue the four-company battalion in the 2d Division and reduced the 1st and 3d Divisions to three company battalions, waiting to find out how the recruiting would fare. Subsequent to that time, we have reestablished the weapons company in all the battalions, which I think is the way to go.

We decided to have a test of the mobile assault regiment which was recommended by the Haynes Report, which has now been finished. It was a three-phase test at Twenty-nine Palms taking a period of about a year. We moved the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, from Okinawa, when the unit rotation system began, to Twenty-nine Palms, and moved a company of LVT's there as well as a company of tanks, a battalion of tanks, that is. So this was a fine test for the mobile assault regiment.

I do not believe we should have such a regiment in each division. However, we ought to have units which are particularly trained in mobile assault, and this is I believe, the way that we are going to go, although the final decision has not been completely made and will be made by the next Commandant.

Simmons: Going back to the fourth rifle company, this was a more debatable item than the weapons company. The fourth rifle company was the result of the Korean War experience

when it was found that battalions operating at some distance from parent or adjacent units needed a fourth rifle element. These findings were reflected in the Hogaboom Report which restructured the FMF after the Korean War. Both at the briefing we just mentioned and since then, there have been several alternate courses of action discussed. You have indicated what the final results were. At one point, it was suggested that there be an affiliated fourth company in the Marine Corps Reserve. Apparently that is almost...

Wilson: I considered this and as a matter of fact, think that that may be the way to go in the future. I have been persuaded although I am not fully convinced, that if we had an affiliated company from the Reserve with each battalion that this would somehow affect the morale of the Marine Corps Reserve, and give them the feeling that they were not part of the 4th Division. This is specious reasoning. No thinking person can really believe the 4th Marine Division is going to mobilize and sail off into the sunset to war. They necessarily will be used as replacements, individually or by companies, batteries, or battalions. This will be done as required, with the 4th Division units being rebuilt by Marines from post and stations. But nevertheless, this was too complicated, as we were just beginning the unit rotation system and I decided not to do it. I believe that it would be a good way to go, and if we were to get further cuts (which I think is inevitable because of the high cost of personnel), that this may be a solution. But this is down the line and there is no need to make this decision now.

Simmons: When the results of these studies were finally implemented just this year with a new Table of Organization

for the infantry battalion, I, of course, was pleased to see that the weapons company, along the lines of Korean practice, was back in the structure with the company commander to act as the supporting arms coordinator...

Wilson: I agree.

Simmons: ... for the battalion. I am disappointed that the fourth rifle company has disappeared, frankly not so much for the high intensity NATO operation where we can expect to fight more or less shoulder to shoulder, but in lower intensity combat when battalions can be expected to operate at considerable distance from each other.

Wilson: I don't disagree. I think that ideally, we should have it and as a matter of fact, we did approve this. However, we simply are not able to maintain it in the force structure this year or in 1981. We are going to have to go down about 10,000 Marines from 189,000 to 180,000 and we cannot maintain a Fleet Marine Force of battalions which are roughly about 1100 people and continue to maintain our base structure. Now, we may have to close some bases, and if we do, then we can always add another rifle company, which is the easiest thing to add. But at the moment, I am just not prepared to close any bases or stations.

Simmons: Again, going back to our Korean war experience, when I commanded the peacetime-structured weapons company in the 2d Division, which became a company in the 1st Division, and we doubled our size by integrating primarily individual reserves and this was done so easily and so well, that within a week or ten days you couldn't tell the reserves from the

regulars as far as how well they...

Wilson: I think that is absolutely right. I think that it would be an easy thing to do at any time.

Simmons: You raised the point at this 18 November meeting, as you have on several other occasions that the status of the Mediterranean battalion was not to drive the 2d Marine Division. Could you elaborate on this, and why does the practice seem to vary so much from the policy?

Wilson: It is very difficult for me to understand. When I first went to visit the 2d Division, I found that the plans for the Mediterranean battalion were set months, even years, in advance. People began to train and begin receiving personnel and concentrate fully on this deployment eighteen months in advance. I thought this was ridiculous. I gave instructions that it was not to be done. This is no one who has deliberately violated this, but it has become so engrained, that it is very difficult to change.

The wing was the same. I found that at the last minute, they would put an abnormally high number of people in the battalion and then take out the people who, for various reasons, were considered risks for going AWOL. The response given was that "the admirals didn't like people going AWOL in the Mediterranean. Well, my answer was "to hell with the admirals."

I didn't like people going AWOL at Camp Lejeune either. But if a man thought that he was second class or had been told that he was, then we know that he will have a tendency to be second class.

I had given specific instructions that these battalions were to be formed and go as they were constituted. Those people who go AWOL, those who are sick, lame and lazy, who don't make the move with the battalion, then we send them out there as C-5s. Only recently have I directed that the 8th Marines be the sole regiment from which the Med Battalion is taken. The battalions are to remain intact. How well this is being carried out, I don't know. We simply have got to get away from the instability which goes with movement. If a Marine moves from one squad to another, that is instability to him. But it is very difficult to change, and I am using the infantry for example. It is no different in aviation. That is, once a unit knows it is going overseas, that future mission drives that unit and all the personnel in it.

Simmons: Moving on now, the 30th of November you were invited by the National Park service to serve as consultant for the proposed National Historic Park on Guam. This appointment culminates your recent trip to Guam. We will be talking about that later. 1976 was coming to a close. On 4 December you went to the White House along with the other service chiefs, the service secretaries and Mr. Rumsfeld to discuss the defense budget with President Ford. Any recollections of that meeting?

Wilson: I had only a word or two to say about the defense budget, how it affected the Marine Corps and it was sort of a routine session; not very much discussion back and forth, more form than substance. The President was given a briefing and he asked a few questions and there was not much of a dialogue that went on. It was a public relations affair so

that he could report that he had met with the JCS.

Simmons: From Sunday 5 December through Tuesday 7 December, you were again in New York, I believe, in connection with your two portraits and you would go again the following weekend.

Painting of portraits is a time-consuming matter for the subject, but in my mind, certainly worthwhile. I certainly treasure the collection of portraits of the Commandants in the Commandant's House. I am afraid that I am not in agreement with President Carter's injunction the federal funds can no longer be used for painting portraits that color photographs are an adequate substitute.

Wilson: I agree; it is a chore. I told Jane that it was sort of like being sentenced to jail on weekends for not taking care of your family and working during the week. I tried to have my portrait painted on Saturday and Sunday because it was so time-consuming, but it would have been even more difficult were it not for the pleasant personality of Al Murray, to whom I enjoy talking and who is very considerate of the subject. I really don't know whether or not the President's injunction applies to the Marine Corps or not. Ours is, I believe, the only service that has a specific authorization by Congress. Do you know?

Simmons: Well, our authorization stems from Franklin D. Roosevelt when he was Acting Secretary of the Navy in 1916. We got a comptroller's ruling that it was acceptable to spend government money for these purposes. We'll be putting it to

the test here.

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: It did cut off at the knees of the program I had started of having a reserve combat artist or portrait artist do portraits of other ranking officers. We've got one painted of Gen Jaskilka but our plans to have the FMFPac and FMFLant commanders painted. . . .

Wilson: I know that we talked about this.

Simmons: On Saturday 11 December, you went to dinner at the White House in honor of the Joint Chiefs, the Unified Commanders and the service secretaries. I suppose this was President Ford's way of saying as Commander-in-Chief, farewell to his troops, and his principal military subordinates. Would you want to tackle the question of comparing President Ford's relations with the services and the Chiefs, and President Carter's mode of operations?

Wilson: Yes. The Ford dinner at the White House was a delightful affair. Of course, as I mentioned earlier, the Joint Chiefs had been included by the Fords, one each time at a state dinner. This has not been continued by the Carters, nor has any Joint Chief been to dinner at the White House during his administration. I think it is a downgrading of the Chiefs, and Jane has made a comment to Jack Watson about it. The Ford dinner was an intimate affair in the family dining room. The President, in a rather nostalgic mood from just having been defeated, was going out of office. I think there were 24 guests. The CinCs came from all over the

world. The Marine Band played. After dinner, there was dancing in the hall just as you enter Pennsylvania Avenue. Both President and Mrs. Ford like to dance and he made a particular effort to dance with all the ladies; it was a very delightful affair, one which we shall remember for a long time.

President Ford had an easy-going manner. We did not have many official meetings with President Ford nor was there any give and take, as there has been with President Carter. President Carter had us over for lunch and a full day of briefings prior to his assuming office. I must have been with him for 12 or 15 luncheons and breakfasts.

End Tape 1, Side 1

Begin Tape 1, Side 2

Wilson: I will say it was unprecedented, as I am told, insofar as anyone can ever remember that the President would meet regularly with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. As for the social affairs, they have not included the Joint Chiefs of Staff, although they have not had many social affairs at the White House. In addition, we have made many recommendations to the President; we're free to talk, but I must say that most of our recommendations have not been accepted.

Simmons: We'll get to some of the specifics on those, I hope

a bit later. On Sunday 12 December, Deputy Secretary Clements had another hunt breakfast at Wexford in Middleburg, and I suppose this also was a farewell to troops or was it simply a Christmas party?

Wilson: No, I think it was a Christmas party; this was the second one that he had had. He still owns Wexford, which is the former home of President Kennedy. He brings quail up from Texas. Mr. Clements is a very wealthy and hospitable individual. We became very fast friends and we still keep contact with each other since he has been elected the governor of Texas.

Simmons: On Friday 17 December, you went to Norfolk once again to speak at the Armed Forces Staff College. On Tuesday 21 December, you had LtGen [Victor] Krulak in to lunch, and on Thursday 30 December, you presided over two retirements here in this office; one was MajGen Haynes and the other Col Ross Mulford, your military secretary.

Wilson: Yes. Gen Haynes had retired after having a long and distinguished career. He is here in Washington now as a consultant for several firms, and subsequently has married a former woman Marine. She is a counsel on the House Armed Services Committee. Ross Mulford and Diane are close friends whom we have known for many years. Ross was military secretary for Bob Cushman and agreed to stay on with me, which I appreciated. He is a very loyal and dedicated person and has a good job with National Geographic now.

Simmons: On Saturday 1 January 1977, you opened the year with the traditional band serenade and the reception. We

have discussed these earlier. On Thursday 13 January, you and the other chiefs spent the morning with President-elect Carter in Blair House. Was this the first time you had met President Carter?

Wilson: This was the first time that I had met him. We were scheduled for the morning, but a hurried lunch was prepared and we remained for the rest of the day.

Simmons: Next day was Friday, 14 January, and you hosted a dinner in honor of the outgoing Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Middendorf, and his wife. This was one of a series of farewell dinners that you attended for the various outgoing secretaries. On Tuesday 18 January, you attended Secretary Middendorf's retirement ceremony in the Washington Navy Yard. Have you seen much of Mr. Middendorf since his retirement?

Wilson: No, not too much. We see him off and on. He is now involved in banking, art and music. I think he looks with great nostalgia on his days as the Secretary of the Navy and he is a very unusual man, apparently very capable in many fields but Secretary of the Navy was not one of them.

Simmons: Well, he certainly continues to be active on the Washington scene. Most recently, he was featured on the first or the front page of the Washington Post for having a 3000-gallon gasoline tank in his front yard.

Wilson: I understand that. I was on a trip when the article appeared, but I was told that he said that he fully justified it because of business and social commitments.

Simmons: And political commitments.

Wilson: Right.

Simmons: That didn't help him. Thursday 20 January, was Inauguration Day. What are your recollections of that day?

Wilson: The day was bitterly cold. We went to the Capitol, listened to his address. We, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the service chiefs, sat under the cover during the parade in what was billed as a solar heated building, although it was not very warm. The ladies were not seated there—they sat out in a group in the stands and almost froze. When the service band passed and the marching units passed by, each Service chief stood alongside the President to review the parade when his troops passed by. I thought it was very well done. Of course, we rode in cars to the review. At that time we did not know the President was going to walk over from the Capitol to the White House, in a publicity stunt which politicians revel in.

Simmons: As a Medal of Honor recipient, you have attended a number of inaugurations, have you not?

Wilson: Yes, many times.

Simmons: Did you go to the Inaugural Ball on this specific occasion or any of the Inaugural Balls?

Wilson: No, I did not go to the Inaugural Ball. I have been to many Inaugural Balls and they are a real chore. The

traffic is terrible, and we decided to forego that this year because I have been to many before and do not miss them at all.

Simmons: On Saturday 22 January, President Carter gave a reception in honor of the Armed Services. You attended and so did I. President Carter reached back to the days of Andrew Jackson and invited all ranks.

Wilson: Yes. It was a long line and you have to give credit to the Carters for standing in line and shaking hands for so long. I believe this too was, at least, a first insofar as recognition of the Armed Forces is concerned.

Simmons: I know that my wife and I were much impressed by Carter's clear, direct blue eyes and how for the few seconds each of us met with him, we seemed to have his full attention. We were also impressed by the apparent strength of the personality of Rosalyn Carter.

You were now well into the new budget cycle. The Carter administration had to accept a budget formulated by the Ford administration. There was a great deal of talk about simplifying government: reducing overhead, eliminating agencies and other economies. I don't think it came to much.

There were a number of meetings within the Navy Department, and these culminated in a meeting on major budget issues with Dr. Harold Brown, the new Secretary of Defense, on Friday 28 January 1977. I would not expect you to remember the specific issues but what have been the general areas of debate or contention between Dr. Brown and the Service Chiefs, and more specifically, between Dr. Brown and

yourself?

Wilson: Now might be a good time to talk about our differences, which have been rather few but major, insofar as I am concerned. We really didn't get much of a cut in the budget that year. It was still too early for them to have gotten hold of what they wanted to do.

Our biggest problem with the Carter Administration, with Dr. Brown and specifically with Russ Murray (who I believe is the one who has consistently made an effort to downgrade the Marine Corps), is in two areas: the LSD 41's (the amphibious shipping) and the AV-8B's.

The AV-8B, of course, was the follow-on of the AV-8A. The Marine Corps is fully committed to the AV-8B. It is a fine, close air support aircraft for the Marine Corps. Russ Murray was against the AV-8A, and over his objection this was procured and he has continued to be against the AV-8B. He has a great deal of influence over Harold Brown.

The Congress has continued to support the AV-8B, providing the Marine Corps the funds which we have requested for it. There is foot-dragging on the part of the Department of Defense and whenever they can use specious rationale for delaying the work on it, they do, of course at a very great cost for later procurement. We are still in the middle of this well into 1980. Congress has just authorized the \$180 million for 1980. I have every reason to believe the Appropriations Committee will appropriate the money despite Carter, Brown, Murray et al.

We are now working on the 1981 budget. There is now active opposition on the part of the CNO for the first time,

when we are talking procurement money. He and I have had a rather acrimonious exchange of letters on this. I have reported this fully to the Secretary of the Navy who, fortunately, has supported us fully. I believe that if we can get the funds in the 1981 budget from Congress (I am sure we will not get them from the President's budget) for the first of the procurement, I think we will be home free and the AV-8B will be a reality. [See pp 214A - 214B for further discussion.]

As for the amphibious shipping, the President's budget has continued to reduce from a one and two-thirds MAF lift to one and a third MAF lift, now to 1.15 MAF lift. Now we will be lucky if we get a one-for-one replacement. It is going to come to a head in 1981, when the LSD-27's must begin to be replaced. They are coming into block obsolescence, from the LSD-41 period 1984-1987. We must begin to rebuild in 1981.

On the plus side: for the first time, the Carter administration and Dr. Brown have given us the opportunity to reduce people and still accrue to ourselves the savings for what amounts to good management, more like corporations are able to do. As an example, we voluntarily cut back 1500 people in 1979 and as a result, we were able to use the money for O&M and other necessary items. What we plan to do in 1981 is to [?????]

I have mentioned several times my dismay at the duplicity of the Navy (the CNO and OPM) about their lip service to the AV-8B but in fact working behind the scenes and trying to undermine the policy of the Secretary of the Navy in his support of the aircraft. Early in May, 1979, I became aware of a memorandum which the Chief of Naval

Operations had sent to the Secretary a few days after the POM submission to OSD.

This memo was a distorted, inaccurate, and emotional document which was widely circulated within the OP staff (as a guidance for their future actions) and within OSD as an undercover document which "revealed the real facts about the Marines and their efforts of increasing autonomy within the Navy." These are not my words but the essence of the document.

I was furious, almost uncontrollably so. I called on the Chief of Naval Operations, confronted him personally, in which he made some half-hearted statement about the document being prepared earlier but just had not been dated until after the POM was submitted. I returned to Headquarters Marine Corps, gathered my staff (who were involved), and directed that the strongest letter possible be prepared to the Chief of Naval Operations and the Secretary of the Navy. The letter to the Chief of Naval Operations (a similar one was prepared for the Secretary of the Navy) is included in this document. I requested the Commandant, General P. X. Kelley, to have my letter declassified for the purposes of this Oral History document. He has done so and it is included in Appendix E. I understand the Secretary had it put in his confidential files and heard nothing from the Chief of Naval Operations. As far as I know the Navy dropped the undercover operations.

I suggested to Bob Barrow that he make every effort to cooperate with the Navy after I left. I was perfectly willing to be the "heavy," and had so established myself within the eyes of most of the admirals. It was time to stop

the bloodletting but my credibility had already been too diminished to have any effect, if in fact. I wanted to which I did not at this stage reduce 10,000 people, which would give us \$100 million for O&M and for procurement. This is something which had not been done in the past, personnel were a separate entity. You got the personnel; you were then given the money for their pay, but O&M and procurement were something else again. We simply cannot have, a great number of people and still be cut back in O&M and procurement. Otherwise, we will be confronted with drilling with broomsticks. I have mentioned this before.

These are the biggest problems that we have had with the administration. However, the LSD-41 is in the 1981 budget now for lead ship procurement, and I hope that it stays. I am sure that Russ Murray will take out the AV-8B. But fortunately there is the Congress which has always been our friend in time of need. "Murray's" come and go.

It is my understanding that Mr. [Charles] Duncan and Dr. Perry are very much for the AV-8B. Murray has convinced Brown that while it may be a good aircraft, nevertheless it simply is not affordable. And this is a problem that we always have with the Navy, who when they run into funding problems, they naturally recommend diminishing Marine Corps aircraft when they are not compatible with Navy aircraft. Frankly, I believe the Navy considers the AV-8B a threat to the big carriers, and I think that is the motivation behind it.

We have had great support from Secretary Claytor and from Jim Woolsey, the Under Secretary, and this has been the only way that we have been able to push as far as we have on

it within the Navy, although I believe in it so strongly I would have gone over their heads if necessary. The Marine Corps will get the AV-8B.

Simmons: We have talked about the styles of Dr. Schlesinger and Mr. Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense. How would you compare their style of operating with the style of Dr. Brown?

Wilson: He is a scientist, an intellectual, not given to small talk, but can be a very charming individual. He has been generally supportive of the Marine Corps, as I say, other than the AV-8B into which we have a basic disagreement. I have no reason to believe whatever that he has any designs on reducing the Marine Corps or its missions. I think he understands our combat capabilities, and so I have nothing but high praise for Harold Brown.

Simmons: On Saturday evening 29 January, you went to the Alfalfa Club dinner at the Statler-Hilton. On the following Saturday morning, you attended a similar function of the 77th Annual Wallow of the Military Order of the Carabao at the Sheraton Park Hotel.

This kind of affair (and I would include the Gridiron Club in this category) is very much a part of the Washington scene. Would you classify them as pure fun, or do you think that they have a more substantial use and purpose?

Wilson: I think they are pure fun. The Carabao Wallow is mostly military. It was started by Philippine veterans and has continued since that time.

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he Alfalfa is nothing more than the gathering of very prestigious people, with the clever idea of nominating a president to run on the Alfalfa ticket, which now claims 65 losses and no wins. It is a clever evening in which corporation chief executive officers and others come from all over the United States and it is a high honor to be invited, almost no one turns down an invitation.

The Gridiron is run by the newspaper reporters. It is sort of a spoof of the administration and the people of high rank in Washington. This was the last year I went to the Gridiron. I was not able to go after that because of prior commitments.

Simmons: On Tuesday 8 February, you had lunch with John Chaffee of Rhode Island, one of the new senators. He is a former Marine, a former governor of his state and a former Secretary of the Navy. How long have you known Senator Chaffee?

Wilson: Only since he was the Secretary of the Navy. He has certainly been a great supporter of the Marine Corps since he has been in office, although he is not on the armed services committee. I think he has a good future in the Senate, and naturally we gain prestige by having a senator of his stature having been a Marine.

Simmons: On Wednesday 9 February, you were briefed on the reserve 4th Marine Division by its commanding officer at that time, MajGen Edward J. Miller. In an earlier session, you told me how we came to move the 4th Division headquarters from Camp Pendleton to New Orleans. E. J. Miller has a flair

for publicity and he publicized the move by having his colors marched by a series of reserve units from Camp Pendleton in California to New Orleans. I should like to hear your views on the readiness of the 4th Marine Division, and do you think that this readiness has been increased in your four years as Commandant?

Wilson: I think it has, but I can claim no credit. I haven't given the reserves the attention that I really should have. E. J. Miller is due the credit. Our recruiting has recently picked up in the reserve, and Marc Moore is continuing E. J's good beginning in New Orleans.

I believe it was a good move for the Division to go to New Orleans to get it away from Camp Pendleton and its association with the 1st Division. It is now more centrally located. We have some dedicated, hard-working, industrious Marines in the Reserve. No question about it.

Largely, like every other command, how well the organized units do is a reflection of the imagination and the resourcefulness of the commanding officer, as well as the I&I. We have some units that are good and some units that are not so good. But all in all, I am very well pleased with the 33,500 Marines we now have in the Reserve.

The aviation units are in better shape than the ground, because they have a mission. Our reserve aviators are comprised of about 65 percent airline pilots. I am not sure that this really gives us the readiness that we want, although I am aware that they sign a statement and the airlines sign a statement, that they recognize that if they are mobilized the Marine Corps has first priority. However

when the time comes and the number of airplanes that we are going to need to move troops using our civil reserve air fleet, that they are simply not going to be available to be mobilized.

Simmons: In recent years, as aircraft have gotten more and more expensive and fewer and fewer in number, there has been a great contraction in the number of squadrons in reserve Marine aviation, fewer units and fewer opportunities for a reserve aviator to affiliate with a unit, and maintain his flying proficiency or if he does want to affiliate with a unit, more and more distance to commute. Would you comment on this trend?

Wilson: The distance to commute is of no consequence for the most part, since the aviators who, for the most part are airline pilots, can travel free anywhere they want to. We are continuing to lose regular aviators to the airlines. The third pilot, of course, is not able to put his hand on the controls for the first six years. So he enjoys being a member of a reserve unit, no matter whether it is helicopter or fixed-wing, in order to continue his proficiency in flying. This is while he is waiting his time to move up to second officer and first officer and then chief pilot. This is the reason that they are in such great demand, because to maintain their proficiency while they are moving up in seniority in the airlines. While it is true that we have reduced our numbers of fixed-wing squadrons, we have also increased our numbers of helicopter squadrons. I think that we are doing quite well in our reserve aviation units.

Simmons: Getting back to the ground reserve, in the extent

of partial or general mobilization, how would you envisage the use of the 4th Marine Division?

Wilson: I would envision the 4th Marine Division being mobilized by battalions. Those battalions would go to the mobilization base or the station of initial employment and there, if the regular unit had not departed, that unit would be broken up and individuals used as fillers for the shortages in skills and ranks for the regular units. If the regular unit had departed, they would then deploy, probably by battalions or companies or individual replacements, as required. The battalion head quarters and regimental headquarters would be used as cadres to be filled by Marines who were being ordered in from posts and stations, their billets would be filled up by individual reserves. The supply centers are a good example where individual reserves can be used to excellent advantage.

I do not believe that we ought to have Reserve units, battalions or companies, go together to war, because of the likelihood of high casualties from one locality. The Army had that problem in World War II and Korea. This was very bad for morale and particularly, it would receive wide publicity from which we could only suffer. So I am not one for having the reserve units go to fight the war as they are now organized.

On the other hand, I can see why commanding officers would indicate that this would probably be the way it would be done, because they need incentives for unit cohesiveness. So I am willing to continue the 4th Division only because it is a good administrative organization for training reserves.

We have done away with the reserve districts and their responsibility for reserves. I have never believed a man should serve two masters. I was a district director in the 6th District. I found that I was reporting on some people whom the commanding officers of reserve units were also reporting on. So when I became Commandant, I set about to make the districts purely and simply involved with recruiting, and get away from anything to do with the reserve training centers, and give that responsibility to the 4th Division. This did not meet with very wide acceptance initially, although I must say that I believe it has now. So, now the six Marine Corps districts have the mission of recruiting and act as the Commandant's representative in the district for whatever is necessary to promote Marine Corps affairs. The Reserve division handles all reserve affairs and the wing handles all wing affairs, to include their training centers. I think it is being done with fewer Marines and I believe it is working better.

Simmons: Did you foresee the same use for the reserve squadrons as you perceive for the reserve battalions?

Wilson: Yes, I do. I can see why the reserve squadrons probably will stay together longer—probably have more opportunity to stay together because of the type of aircraft in which they are flying. But if the wing itself has not deployed, I foresee the reserve squadron integrating into the regular squadrons flying the same type of aircraft. If the wing had deployed, then I could see the squadron staying together much more likely than the ground unit staying together.

Simmons: There is an element of morale or esprit here. I remember in World War II I went overseas with a replacement battalion. We knew in our heart of hearts that we weren't going to stay together but there was an illusion of staying together.

Wilson: I think it is a feeling of all commanders that they have to use this as an incentive for togetherness and I can understand this. But I think it should be understood by more senior people that this probably would not be the case.

Simmons: We are now into February 1977, and you were involved in budget hearings. I will not repeat them as we covered them well in 1976, nor will I repeat all of your repeated visits to the various senior level schools as we have covered this in considerable detail. That is, unless there is, something you would like to add on to either of these subjects.

Wilson: No, 1977 was a routine year. The beginning of a new administration and the shaking down for what was to come. The 1979 budget was to be the first of the Carter budgets.

Simmons: On Monday 14 February, you went to the dining room of the Secretary of Defense for the swearing in of the new Secretary of the Army and Navy. It was Clifford Alexander in the case of the Army and Graham Claytor in the case of the Navy. Both Mr. Middendorf and Mr. Claytor came to the office of the Secretary of the Navy from the business world, in which they had both been very successful. I would guess that any similarity between the two men ended at that point.

Wilson: Yes. They were quite different personalities. Mr. Claytor had been a successful chairman of the board of Southern Railway. He is 65 years old, had made his mark in the business world, and had come at the behest of the President and the Secretary of Defense to bring his expertise to the Navy.

The Navy was concerned with cost overruns. They were in the middle of their problems with Litton and Newport News Shipbuilding. He straightened this out. At the moment, there is not a single claim against the Navy. He has done this through persuasion, through ability and the wide prestige that he has in Congress. I can't say too much for Graham Claytor as the Secretary of the Navy, and his support for the Marine Corps and for me personally has been outstanding. I am devoted to him.

Simmons: On Tuesday evening 15 February, you went to the Mexican Embassy for a reception being given by the President of Mexico for the President of the United States. Two days later, you went to Houston, Texas, where you made a luncheon talk to the Rotary Club. As we have noted as we have gone through these sessions, you have had a very heavy schedule of speaking to groups such as the Rotary Club. What has been the burden of your message to these civic groups and what have been the main points you have tried to establish in their minds?

Wilson: Mainly those principals that I had established earlier, and from which I have not changed, at the risk of boring many audiences I am sure: the principles of readiness, training, quality, and standards of conduct for

all Marines are the four points that I have tried to make for these last four years. That, essentially, has been the main theme and then answering questions, depending on the questions of the day, and those things which are on the minds of the individuals. For the most part, earlier they were the incidents at Parris Island and San Diego, which received wide publicity and have been the highlight of the questions that were asked by individuals who like provocative questions. I think this is very important that they should do it and not just offer bland questions where they fear embarrassing, the speaker. Certainly I was not embarrassed, and enjoyed answering the provocative questions because I think it gets our points across easier. I hope I was successful.

Simmons: On Tuesday 22 February, you and the other chiefs attended a joint meeting of the Congress at which Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada spoke. On Monday 7 March, you went to a White House breakfast hosted by Mr. Bert Lance of Georgia. This had to do, I suppose, with the President's budget?

Wilson: No. This was the beginning of a series of White House breakfasts which I have attended since that time. Bert started a little fellowship breakfast in which the Cabinet gathered for a reading of the Scriptures and a general discussion about life. This was also attended by Mr. Doug Coe of the Fellowship House, who was a friend of Bert's. The Cabinet for the most part was there and I might say that every two weeks or thereabouts, I have attended these breakfasts, continued even after Bert had his problems and had left the White House. This was since taken over by Cecil Andrus, the Secretary of the Interior, and Bob Bergland, the

Secretary of Agriculture, Fay Marshall, the Secretary of Labor and Brock Adams, the Secretary of Transportation. Dave Jones and myself are the only JCS members who have attended at Bert's invitation.

I have enjoyed them very much; have become fast friends with many of the individuals. We would have various guests; Bill Webster from the FBI attended from time to time as did the head of the Veteran's Administration, Max Cleland.

Simmons: I have noticed that they come up on your schedule with great frequency. In total, about how many people come to these things?

Wilson: About six or seven. We have breakfast at eight and the Cabinet meets with the President at nine.

Simmons: What is usually served at the breakfast?

Wilson: Normally just scrambled eggs and bacon and there is general discussion of the affairs of the day and the things that are important to the Cabinet.

Simmons: At the risk of seeming facetious, are grits served at these breakfasts?

Wilson: No, no grits served. The only grits served are those when I host a breakfast.

Simmons: On Thursday morning 10 March, SgtMaj Black and SgtMaj Massaro called on you. This incident was when SgtMaj [John E.] Massaro relieved SgtMaj Black as Sergeant Major of

the Marine Corps. You officiated at the actual relief which took place later on 31 March in the Band Hall at the Marine Barracks. In an earlier session, we went into the functions of a sergeant major, particularly the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps. I don't believe we went into the selection process. How is the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps chosen?

Wilson: It is up to the Commandant. What I am about to say has nothing that had to do with SgtMaj Massaro, of whom I am very fond. I would not follow the same process again and have recommended to Bob Barrow that he do something different.

It was recommended by Les Brown, that a board be established to select the Sergeant Major, which I reluctantly agreed to. There had been a sergeant major with whom I had served that I would have liked to have had. He was one of the three finalists but for some reason which is not clear to me now, allegations, about some insignificant thing which later proved false, had been made and he was not selected. Since I had committed myself to leaving it up to a board, I felt that I should accept the results. I would not do this again. I think it is more of a personal thing and compatibility is important. I believe the selection should be made by the Commandant personally when the time comes for a selection of sergeant major. This is one of the regrets that I have had, although I hasten to say that it has nothing to do with SgtMaj Massaro.

Simmons: There was more traveling for you at the last half of March. You went to New York on 12 and 13 March; to Maxwell

Air Force Base on 16 and 17 March; to Norfolk on 21 March. On Wednesday the 23rd of March, you and the Joint Chiefs had lunch with President Carter at the White House. This was about the first of these rather frequent luncheons you spoke about earlier. How did these luncheons proceed?

Wilson: The luncheons went very well. We had the normal businessman's lunch. The President spoke what was on his mind. I can't remember exactly what it was on this occasion. We all were given, as we always have been, an opportunity to speak about anything we had in mind. The President has consistently said that he would like our opinion, that if we felt that we needed to talk with him, he would make the time available, and we could or could not inform the Secretary of Defense about the subject matter. Of course none of us would have talked to the President without informing the Secretary of Defense, but nevertheless, he was very gracious in his statements and these luncheons have really gone off well although looking back, little was accomplished.

Simmons: That evening 23 March, you hosted a dinner at the Commandant's House for the new Secretary of the Navy, Mr. and Mrs. Claytor. The next day, you spoke at the National Defense University and were hosted at a luncheon by the president of the university, LtGen Bob Gard, a very impressive Army general.

The next day, Friday 25 March, you went to Fort Leavenworth and then on Saturday, proceeded to Jackson, Mississippi. On Monday, you received the Distinguished American Award at the 15th Annual Mississippi Sports Hall of Fame and Awards banquet in Jackson.

Wilson: Yes. This was an honor that they had bestowed upon me not really because of any great ability that I had as a football player, but as one who had achieved some recognition in another field.

Simmons: On Tuesday 5 April, you hosted a lunch for the new Under Secretary of the Navy, James Woolsey, whom you mentioned earlier as a staunch supporter of Marine Corps programs; and the Special Assistant for NATO Affairs Ambassador Robert Komer. This is the first time these two names appear on your appointments calendar, and what can you tell me about these two individuals?

Wilson: I suppose that Jim Woolsey was born after I joined the Marine Corps (you might say it's high time I left). This is not to say that he doesn't have great ability or a fine background. He was a Rhodes Scholar, worked in the Department of Defense, and was counsel for the Senate Armed Services Committee. His wife is a delightful and intelligent girl who manages the HEW account in the Bureau of the Budget. Jim Woolsey has been a great friend of the Marine Corps and of mine personally.

Bob Komer is a former ambassador, well-known during the Vietnam days. Bob is an outspoken, opinionated individual who is never without a few thousand well-chosen words. He is now the Special Assistant for NATO Affairs for the Secretary, parochially NATO, although he would probably not agree with that evaluation. He thinks he looks at things with a worldwide perspective, but actually is almost entirely focused on NATO. He believes that there is a place for Marines; although I am not quite sure just exactly what his

view is for deployment for Marines. He thinks that we are hidebound, in tradition and reluctant to rush out to do other than amphibious operations.

I think he is wrong in this, but I am not willing to give up our amphibious capability or amphibious mission for something which people like Bob, who have a parochial interest, would have us go into. Assistant Secretaries come and go but the Marine Corps must stay on forever. I have a responsibility for long-range thinking and a requirement for the Marine Corps to continue its worldwide mission, as indeed our nation has worldwide responsibilities. He too shall pass.

Simmons: I might interject an opinion of my own here. When counter-insurgency was fashionable, Bob Komer was the world's greatest expert on counter-insurgency. Now that NATO is fashionable, he is the world's greatest expert on NATO.

Wilson: And I would think that at that time if he was in that position of responsibility, he would have had the Marine Corps being the counter-insurgent experts of the world to the exclusion of all else.

I remember very well one time Gen [Allen] Turnage, for whom I was aide, told me that while as a colonel here at Plans and Policies, [William J.] "Wild Bill" Donovan had convinced President Roosevelt that the mission of the Marine Corps should be the OSS mission, and that President Roosevelt had made the decision in the affirmative. At Headquarters Marine Corps, the senior officers here spent all night coming up with reasons why this should not be done. Naturally, they

had no support from the Navy. They convinced President Roosevelt that the Marine Corps should not be directed at becoming an OSS outfit.

When you think about the times in which we have been right on the verge of a move into a field which may have had some appeal for the moment, but for the long terra, would have been disastrous; we owe a great debt of gratitude to many people for their foresight in keeping us in the main stream.

Simmons: It provokes two recollections on my part. The first is that I knew nothing about the Donovan-Roosevelt conversations on the Marine Corps and the OSS until very recently. Maj [Robert E.] Mattingly (who is at Quantico) has been doing some research in this area and for the first time, I have become aware of it; there will be a paper at the Naval History Symposium this fall in Annapolis on this subject.

Wilson: Isn't that interesting. I thought I was the only one who now knew this. It was one of the many things I learned from Gen Turnage.

Simmons: Well, I am very glad that we brought that point up because I, in fact, chided the program chairman. I said that the particular panel will consist of one person speaking on Holland M. Smith, BGen Jimmy Roosevelt speaking on [Evans H.] Carlson, and Maj Mattingly speaking on Donovan. I did not see the connection here until it was explained to me.

Wilson: This just came to memory as you mentioned it. President Roosevelt obviously had been President so long that he

brook no opposition from within the Naval Service, over which he was an absolute monarch when it came to selecting admirals and generals, firing them and retiring them at the snap of a finger. I don't know the circumstances, but it must have been a very persuasive paper that made him change his mind because he was not given to doing this.

Simmons: I am also reminded that Gen Shoup, when he occupied this desk in this room, up to 1964 very stubbornly resisted any restructuring of the Marine Corps to meet counter-insurgency conditions. I was a principal assistant in that area to him at the time, and in a characteristic way he said, "We don't have to run around wearing funny looking hats in order to ..."

Wilson: Right. I remember that very well. As you remember, we were here together and while I deplored Gen Shoup's public campaign against the Vietnam War, after he was Commandant, I do know that he felt very strongly that we should never have become involved. I remember once having to come in this office to discuss a detail with him during the fall of Diem. I was a planner when he was murdered. But I do feel his stature for his anti-Vietnam statements was based on his being the former Commandant, and his public campaign was unseemly.

Simmons: Yes. I might find myself (and you probably do too) saying "Yes, but...." when Gen Shoup is criticized. I always say "Yes, he was much too outspoken as a former chief and Commandant afterwards, but he had not changed his mind."

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Simmons: It was consistent with that view.

Wilson: Absolutely. I know very well his feelings. If he had been called to testify, that is one thing, but again a public campaign is something else again.

Simmons: On Wednesday 6 April, you spoke to a luncheon of Headquarters Marine Corps officers and staff NCO's at the Fort Myers Officer's Club. I think this was the first and only such luncheon held. Why weren't they continued?

Wilson: I don't know. I had been told that while the Marines throughout the world have an opportunity to question the Commandant at various luncheons and meetings where I visited, but Headquarters Marine Corps personnel were the ones who did not have an opportunity to ask the Commandant questions. That is true, and I suggested that we have a luncheon where we could all get together.

It was suggested that there be a luncheon. I certainly felt that no one had to pay for food to hear me talk and ask me questions, but I acquiesced to a luncheon. I went there, did it, but it was not popular and they were never continued. This was not through any reluctance on my part but I could see that a luncheon is a little too formal.

Simmons: I remember it as a very modest luncheon at a very modest price. It would be no more than a person would ordinarily spend for a luncheon.

Wilson: Yes. I suppose that, had I taken the initiative it might have gone off better in the theater...

End Tape 1, Side 2

Begin Tape 2, Side 1

Wilson: at Henderson Hall. As I look back on it, I wish I had continued it, but it fell apart and I never did start it again.

Simmons: I remember you asked for a vote on the woolly-pully and everyone seemed to think it was a great idea, except for one six-striped sergeant who was sitting there at the head table talking to you.

Wilson: Yes. He seemed to think it was not military looking and as a matter of fact, that is the only criticism that I have had on the woolly-pully. I had a letter from SgtMaj [Herbert J.] Sweet, the former Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, who said it looked like hell. But I think it has been very popular.

Simmons: Obviously. At 1630 on Tuesday 12 April, you attended a briefing on VSTOL aircraft given the LtCol Bob O'Dare, a Marine aviator with OP-05. In addition to Mr. Claytor, Mr. Woolsey was there; so was the CNO, VCNO, Dr. [David] Mann, Mr. Hidlago and several others of equal importance. I would guess that this briefing had, as its purpose, the acquainting of the newly appointed Secretary and his assistants with the issues surrounding the AV-8B, the advanced Harrier. We previously discussed the F-14 and the

F-18 issue, and you have given the background on the AV-8B and where we now stand with it.

At noon on Wednesday 20 April, Adm Holloway, as President of the U.S. Naval Institute, presented you with the Naval Institute portrait of yourself as painted by Albert Murray. This was one of the two portraits we discussed earlier.

Wilson: Right.

Simmons: I hope you are pleased with it.

Wilson: I have been very pleased with it.

Simmons: That evening, you went to another joint session of Congress at which the President spoke on energy policy. Regrettably, this did not forestall the present gasoline shortage.

Wilson: That was his moral equivalent of war, I guess.

Simmons: I guess so. You were in Parris Island on Thursday and Friday, 21 and 22 April 1977 I don't see much that is unusual for the next week or so, until Friday 29 April, when there was a visit by MajGen Ephrams, if I have his name correct, of the Royal Marines and a presentation of "Mountain and Arctic Warfare" by the British Commandos.

We were speaking earlier about the two theories or practices in training: one which attempts to train the whole unit in the short shelf life that they have; and the other which attempts to train designated specialists who will

continue in service. Have we learned anything in these matters from the British?

Wilson: I think so. I think the British are very proficient in mountain and arctic warfare and have fine equipment; Gen Ephrams brought over examples of the type that they have. We have learned much from them. I frankly believe that were we to be involved in say Norway, the proper use of the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps, the Royal Marines and the Norwegian Marines should be for those missions which require skiing, snow shoeing, and those capabilities which are very difficult to teach the average American who has not had this experience in his youth.

We should use them out in front and on the flanks. We simply have not the time nor the facilities to teach Americans to ski and snow shoe with any expertise to be effective in a war in Norway. We must use the technology we have--helicopters, lasers, and other things--and leave this to the experts who grew up doing this as children.

Simmons: Do we have any exchange officers or NCO's serving actually in the respective two Marine Corps now?

Wilson: Yes. We have an exchange officer and an exchange NCO with the Royal Marines and also with the Royal Netherlands Marines.

Simmons: On Wednesday, 11 May, there was a fire power demonstration at Quantico of the AV-8A, for Deputy Secretary of Defense [Charles] Duncan, Secretary of the Navy Claytor and others. I suppose this was another ingredient in the debate over the future of the AV-8B. I would think that anyone who

saw the plane fly, let alone deliver ordinance, would be convinced of its potential.

Wilson: As a matter of fact, they both were. I believe that that demonstration probably served to make them (both Duncan and Claytor) more aware of its capabilities. I am only sorry that we were never able to get Dr. Brown down. He planned to go twice, both times to Camp Lejeune, where we had a demonstration for him; he canceled both times. I don't think that we would have gained anything by Ross Murray seeing it because he is so prejudiced against it until he is beyond salvation. He may have been instrumental in having Brown cancel.

Simmons: There's something about seeing that plane—it's not even conveyed by the films—when you see it stop in mid-air and. . .

Wilson: It is very impressive.

Simmons: On Friday evening, 12 May, you hastened the official opening of the Marine Corps Historical Center in the Washington Navy Yard. Gen Greene presided over those ceremonies.

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: On Friday and Saturday, 13 and 14 May, you were in New Orleans...

Wilson: I might say here that the Historical Center, for which you deserve the credit Ed, has been a tremendous asset

to the Marine Corps. You really deserve all the credit both from its formulation, its conception and fruition. It is a real tribute to you and your dedication to the Marine Corps. I'd like to say here and now that it really is a great thing and you deserve all the credit both now and in the future for what you've done.

Simmons: Thank you very much. I might say I have had great support and help, not only from yourself and Gen Cushman, but also from Gen Greene, who is honorary chairman of our Marine Corps Historical Foundation which is moving along very well and he typically is spending a good deal of time on that effort for us.

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: On Friday and Saturday, 13 and 14 May, you were in New Orleans. You were back in time to attend a reception at the Army-Navy Club in honor of J. Robert Moskin and his new book The U.S. Marine Corps Story, the first major history of the Corps to be written by a non-Marine.

Wilson: I have the book.

Simmons: On Tuesday, 17 May, Lieutenant General Bob Nichols, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower, briefed you on the proposed WestPac unit deployment plan [UDP] and on PREPAS, which stands for precise personnel assignment system. Now let's take up the WestPac Unit Deployment Plan first. We have returned to the unit replacement system essentially that was abandoned in the early days of the Vietnam War. Why did

we return to this system, and how does it differ from the pre-Vietnam system?

Wilson: Well, it differs a great deal from the pre-Vietnam system in that the 1st Division, of which I was the G-3 at the time, was nothing more than a training ground for the six battalions in the 3d Division. The 1st Division had no combat capability whatsoever, and again, as I have said before, these deployments drove the 1st Marine Division because we knew when the units were leaving.

I suppose that experience there had caused me to be so conscious of the 2nd Division battalions. I had been in the forefront of pushing the unit deployment. I believe that it would provide continuity for both units. And today we are well into it. The 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines has already moved in to Okinawa. I have talked to many of the battalions both in Okinawa and at Camp Pendleton. They are accepting it enthusiastically. When the unit returns to Camp Pendleton it is combat ready.

It costs us now a million dollars to fly the battalion out there, but we save almost that much in PCS costs. Only the infantry battalions can be rotated now because the PREPAS, which is a precise assignment system, must be done at this Headquarters, and we cannot allow anyone lower than this Headquarters to move people in and out of the units but computers may solve this in the future.

As of now we cannot manage units smaller than a battalion. So therefore, the artillery batteries and smaller units cannot be handled in this way. But this will give more continuity to the infantry, it will provide stability; it

gives an opportunity for a Marine to be with his unit for three years, six month deployments overseas. We are gradually moving along and we will have every unit in the Marine Corps involved, except the 8th Marines which will be the parent unit that moves the Mediterranean battalions and the 3d Marines, the parent unit that moves the shipboard based unit in the western Pacific. And we're doing the aviation units the same way.

I'm very enthusiastic about it. I don't know that it has received such wide enthusiasm throughout the Marine Corps yet. There have been several proposals made to me to "improve the system" and I'm sure that the system can be improved. I am unwilling however, to change the system before we at least try what has now been approved. I have insisted that we follow our program and then improve upon it as necessary.

Simmons: Can you elaborate a little more on PREPAS and just what it is and how it works?

Wilson: Well, it's essentially a precise assignment of Marines from this Headquarters, taking advantage of the current state of the art in computers, which we were never able to do in the past. It's going to take us a long time to do it. I believe however, that it will be more advantageous.

It does take away some of the prerogatives of commanding officers to move Marines at will. I am sure that this would not meet with their approval. Nevertheless, I have seen too many instances and have been involved myself in too many mis-assignments of people, because they happened to be convenient or available. For instance, the O-1 field is always in great demand for almost anyone--persons who can type--for instance we

are always short of people in O-1 fields. There is tendency to make an O-1 your runner or a driver when really, he might be a better engineer or an armorer or some other field. We've got to be able to manage people better if we are to maintain our strength and the readiness of the Marine Corps. I think PREPAS is designed to do the job.

Simmons: This may or may not be relevant to PREPAS but I think it is in the same philosophy of centralized management of personnel. The Navy makes selections of commanding officers of ships; the Army makes selections of commanding officers of regiments and battalions.

Wilson: Right.

Simmons: Do you see us moving in that direction or are we already there?

Wilson: No, I am opposed to selecting prospective commanding officers. I think the Marine Corps is small enough that we can leave to the commanding generals the opportunity to select their own commanders.

However, I think we've got to do better in ensuring that they have longer opportunities for command. Don't let them remain for such short times (ticket-punching it's called), it demoralizes the troops. The numbers of colonels and lieutenant colonels that we now are able to move through our units are sufficiently capable officers to be in command,

Now remember, we have such a large number of people who go overseas as compared with the other services. Fourteen percent of the entire Marine Corps is overseas at any one

time. And we have to, in the interests of fairness, ensure that Marines go overseas along with their contemporaries. And for instance, if we begin to select individuals to be in command, we would disrupt the system and we'd be open to the charge of unfairness and discrimination with our overseas deployments and I think this would be worse than it would be for the selection of commands by this Headquarters or by a board. Board is the best way to do it. But I have not been able to get across to the unselected officers that if they were not on the list that they were not a candidate for psssover at the next promotion. I've been told that some officers have resigned or retired because of this. Whether or not this is true, I don't know. Many times I hear that people retire or resign because of personal slights but I have never believed that this was a real reason. But nevertheless, it is a bad thing and that's the reason that I think commanding officers should not be selected for command assignments by boards.

Simmons: No. I think it's all part of the same business of central management, and I do think or at least I understand, that there has been a significantly higher number or percentage of lieutenant colonels retiring, perhaps prematurely, because they perceive themselves to be passed over, kind of victims of two things: (1) the schools board on the one hand and (2) the extended... •

Wilson: Overseas.

Simmons...overseas and the reduced rotation from billets because of the PCS...

Wilson: Yes, right.

Simmons...they look at the calendar and they say, "Well, I'm passed over. I'm going to be here in this job for three more years; therefore I will leave the Corps and do something else."

Wilson: I don't think though, that the facts bear this out, that we've had that many more lieutenant colonels retire each year. I've kept up with this and I have heard this. But generally, we're having about the same number of lieutenant colonels retire that we've had in the past. Maybe more are giving this reason and maybe more would stay in if it weren't, but it's about the same number that retire each year.

Of course, it's not to say our aviators...we're having a higher number of aviators get out but they are retiring or resigning, because of several things--the overseas commitments, the long hours away from home and of course, the current high employment by the airlines. The airline pilots' pay has been raised considerably in recent years.

Simmons: Part of this same general trend or movement or centralization, I think we've moved essentially from company administration to battalion administration. I think this recognizes a number of things: (1) that there are just not that many good O-1's to go around; (2) our administration has probably become much too demanding and sophisticated to be done at the company level; (3) we certainly saw in the Korean war and I suppose to a degree, in the Vietnam war, that a company can't carry these things out in combat. They have to

be moved to a higher echelon. I know I'm very skeptical of our ability to continue with these high technology administrative methods in real combat. I don't know whether these optical scanning typewriters and all the generators that they are going to embark will work in a real flaming war. I understand the reasons why we're doing all this, but I am concerned at the other end by what I perceive as the diminution of authority on the part of the company commander and the first sergeant. They're already pretty much out of the picture, as far as military justice is concerned. They are now pretty much out of the picture as far as personal administration is concerned. Would you comment on that? .

Wilson: I agree. I have gone to battalion administration for just this reason; more and more people were being used in company administration. The T/O authorizes three people in the company and there was no company which I found that had less than nine or ten being used in administration. That's almost a squad. So we had to remedy this and we have 27 people now in the battalion administrative section. Frankly I have the same concern. Although I think we must not be misled by say, Vietnam, where we had so many people rotating in and out of companies. You remember World War II, when we didn't take the battalion administration with us to Bougainville, for instance, because it stayed in Guadalcanal. And the reason was that there was no movement of people. They were overseas and there they stayed until the war was over. So there was really not that much movement. Wounds and deaths of course, were reported back or kept on a piece of paper and eventually sent back. Now I can foresee in combat where we could have our optical scanners and things far back, and with the modern communication that we have of

course, to administrative channels, satellites for instance could be used to report casualties almost immediately.

But again, I, like you, don't want to go too far. But I think that we must take those chores away from the company commander because it's much too sophisticated, much too complicated and besides, it's his business to fight.

Simmons: We seem to have more and more acronyms. On Wednesday 18 May 1977, you were briefed on C-4 and MIFASS [Marine integrated fire and air support]. What is C-4 and MIFASS?

Wilson: Well, C-4 is command control communications. I have forgotten the other C now, but Bill Scott has set this up and the MIFASS is the intelligence and the fire control consolidation. But I, like you, have sort of resisted, as much as I could, using these terms but I'm not an acronym type of person.

Simmons: On 19 May, you left for California, returning on 25 May. I have no particulars on that trip. On 27 May, you began three days leave. On Thursday 2 June, BGen [William A.] Scott was in to see you on plans for the birthday ball, which indicates how early planning begins for the annual affair.

Wilson: Yes. Bill Scott ran a birthday ball when I was out in Hawaii--did a good job, and I was not particularly pleased with the way the birthday balls had been going previously. I wanted to have a new format and so I asked him to handle it. He is a very conscientious officer and did establish a new

format with which I was very pleased.

Simmons: On Friday evening, 3 June, there was a parade and a reception, at which Cecil Andrus, the Secretary of the Interior, designated the Commandant's House and the Marine Barracks as National Historic Landmarks.

Wilson: Right. And I was very delighted to be able to participate of course. This was all started by you several years ago and culminated in the designation on that date. This was a good idea for several reasons which may not be apparent. I had thought that we may lose all of our stewards or food techs because of Senator [William] Proxmire. This has not been the case; there are 17 left in the Marine Corps. But the Commandant's House is reduced to three, and I could foresee that without food technicians or stewards that it would be impossible to maintain the Commandant's House. Frankly, there's no way that the Commandant's wife could be able to maintain a house so large.

I felt that if we could make this a National Landmark--I had plans that, if it had affected us, the Commandant couldn't-- move to the second deck very much like the President at the White House, and we could maintain the first floor as it is now, having former stewards and food techs working there as curators. For formal dinners and entertainment, we could use the first floor and the trained help for that purpose.

This was sort of a long range plan, but Senator Proxmire has continued to reduce the stewards. Every year he tries to reduce them further. There are 200 now in the Armed Forces. I'm inclined to believe that this is the limit because in the

last year or two he has not received a great deal of support. But we may hold on with this for a while but I think in the long term that they are going, because the more senior stewards are retiring. We have no means to train the young stewards except by on-the-job training; no formal schools to send them to and so I think it is a dying breed. I think I have ridden the crest of the wave with stewards, because I had them when I was a brigadier general and have continued to have them whenever we had government quarters since that time, which is certainly not the case for generals these days.

Simmons: From 6 through 14 June, you were in Spain. On that trip, you received the Spanish Naval Cross of Merit from Adm Pascual Perry, the Spanish Navy Minister. What else of interest occurred on that trip?

Wilson: Well, I visited Gen Auriaga and called on His Majesty King Carlos. They were in the process of having elections for the first time since the Franco days, and it was sort of a disconcerting time for the Spanish. There was some concern about our security since there had been some murders and attacks on the foreigners, particularly the Americans, but we didn't have any occasion to be concerned -- the Spanish are great hosts. We went to Madrid, to some of the outlying cities, to where Columbus had begun his voyage and the palace of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand, and visited the Marine barracks at Rota and the Spanish Marines. All in all we just had a very fine trip and enjoyed it very much.

Simmons: What impressions did you gain at that time of the

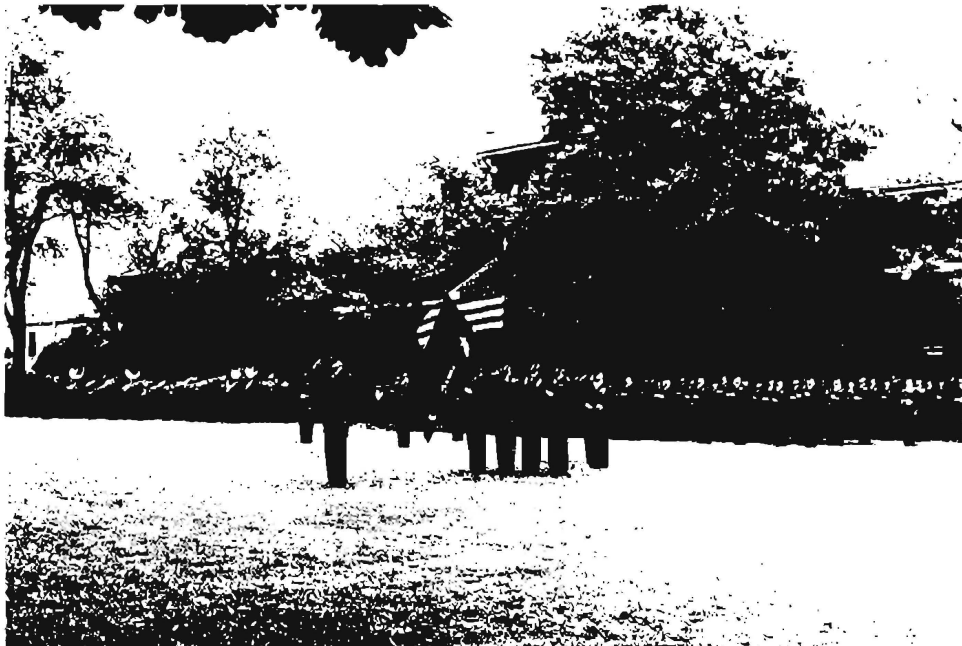


"FOR YEARS I HAVE HEARD, THEY SAY THIS AND THEY WANT THAT, WELL NOW I AM THEY AND IT WILL BE DONE." General Wilson, Commandant of the Marine Corps addresses Marines of the 2d Tank Bn., Force Troops, FMFLant, Camp Lejeune, NC August 1975, shortly after taking over as Commandant.



Captain Louis Wilson (rt) and Platoon Sergeant Donald C. Bushenell hold an American flag recaptured from the Japanese during the battle of Guam, July 1944. At their feet lies a Japanese battle banner, also taken from the Japanese.

Presentation of Navy Cross to Major Louis H. Wilson at 8th & I, April 1945. Wilson stands in front of reviewing officers as Star Spangled Banner is played.





Four Medal of Honor recipients at The Basic School, 1952; front row left to right: LtCol Louis H. Wilson, Col David M. Shoup, back row left to right: LtCol R.R. Meyers, Maj Carl L. Sitter.

The 26th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Louis H. Wilson (rt), accepts the Corps' colors from retiring CMC General Robert E. Cushman, Jr. during change of command ceremonies held at Marine Barracks, 8th & I, 30 June 1975.





General Louis H. Wilson, Commandant, visits with the Commandant's Advisory Committee on Marine Corps History during their annual meeting in August 1975. Left to right: Dr. Richard Leopold; MajGen Rathvon Tompkins, USMC (Ret); LtGen Alpha L. Bowser, Jr. USMC (Ret); General Wilson; Mr. Robert Sherrod, MajGen Norman J. Anderson, USMC (Ret); and BGen Edwin H. Simmons, USMC (Ret), Director of Marine Corps History and Museums

General Wilson escorts President and Mrs. Jimmy Carter as they walk to the Sunset Parade to be held in honor of President Carter, August 1978.





General Wilson sits in the cockpit of an F-4 Phantom, probably 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, ca. 1976.

General Louis Wilson (center) stands with aide LtCol Robert Carnes (lt) and Director of the Mexican Marine Corps Captain d'Oleire at the Mexican Independence Celebration, Mexico City, 1976.





General Louis H. Wilson, 26th Commandant and Mrs. Wilson, in the Commandant's home, 8th & I, 29 Sept 1975

Spanish Marines?

Wilson: I think they are a small but effective organization for guarding naval bases. They really have no power projection capability at all nor has the Spanish Navy. They would have liked very much to have one of our LPH's, and pressed me for recommendations to Adm Holloway. We don't have LPH's that are available and will not be for some 10 or 15 years. They do have six or seven of the British Harrier aircraft for the Spanish Navy. I mentioned earlier about our giving them some spaces to train Spanish pilots, which they seemed to appreciate.

Actually, it was a joy to visit King Carlos, but the Spanish military were preoccupied with the elections. It was really not a good time to visit to get a broad perception of the capabilities of the Spanish forces.

Simmons: I see our time has run out, so we'll have to end the session at this point.

End Session V

Session VI-- 26 June 1979

Simmons: This is Tuesday 26 June, and this is our seventh oral history session. We left off yesterday after having discussed your visit to Spain and the Spanish Marine Corps. You returned from Spain on Tuesday 14 June 1977. On Wednesday evening, 15 June, you and your daughter Janet,

attended a gala performance of "A Bridge Too Far" at the Eisenhower Theater in the Kennedy Center. How would you rate it as a war movie?

Wilson: Not very well. No, I wasn't impressed with it.

Simmons: I was left with the impression that the British had the better actors but we had the better generals.

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: On Thursday 16 June, you spoke at the FBI Academy at Quantico. This was a little different than your usual war college. Any recollections of the occasion?

Wilson: Yes, I was invited down by Mr. Kelley, to speak at the FBI Academy. This was one of the several classes they have every year for law enforcement officers throughout the United States and included the presentation of diplomas. Mr. Kelley and I had met when he became the FBI director. We liked him and Mrs. Kelley very much. We've had a close association with the FBI over the years in the Marine Corps. Of course, the FBI Academy was established in Quantico in 1939. A magnificent new building has been built in the Guadalcanal area, with the original building being turned over to the Marine Corps which is now the Development Center building. We have had a very close association with the FBI agents and directors over the years and it has continued on with Mr. Webster. So I was delighted to be able to go down and was flattered to be invited.

Simmons: This prompts a thought about urban warfare. We've

seen recently in Iran that conventional troops don't do very well against urban guerrillas. Has there been any effort in recent years to train Marines in this kind of warfare?

Wilson: Somewhat, I think that we are neglectful in our training for fighting in cities and built-up areas. We have some small jury-rigged types of buildings in each of our bases where so-called "urban area fighting" is taught. It is simply teaching Marines to climb to the second floors of buildings and to burst through open windows. But we really don't have any experience in that type of warfare, except perhaps in Seoul, Korea and perhaps in Hue in the Vietnam War.

If you are talking about terrorists, I believe that the Marine Corps has no business having specially designated units for fighting terrorists like, for instance, the Royal Netherlands Marines. This is a job for the FBI to do in the United States. I believe the Army should have this mission, to fly specially-trained units overseas. Of course, our BLT's and MAU's have some basic training in this and should always be equipped with tear gas and crowd control weapons in case they are required to act. We do some training in this. But I don't think this is a mission for Marines and I have resisted any such mission over the years.

Simmons: That afternoon 16 June, you went to a reception at the British Embassy in celebration of the Silver Jubilee of Her Majesty, Elizabeth II.

Wilson: Yes. It was an interesting evening to say the least. It was there that I chatted with John Warner and

Elizabeth Taylor, who later became his wife. This was their first date, and so we had a nice visit. John was at his charming best since this was their first date.

Simmons: On 17 June you became a summer bachelor; Jane and Janet went to Rehoboth Beach but I don't know for how long.

Wilson: It was just over the weekend. They stayed at the apartment of a friend of ours, Adm Parker Armstrong.

Simmons: That same day, MajGen Jim Jones retired and Col D'Wayne Gray was promoted to brigadier general. On 21 June I see that photographs were to be taken of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs. On 22 June, you had a luncheon here for Howard K. Smith, the news commentator. He has always been a good friend of the Marine Corps and I am sorry that he has now left ABC.

Wilson: Yes. It came about in an unusual sort of way. At the British Embassy which I mentioned earlier, I saw Howard Smith and we chatted and he pointed out that he had been given an "Iron Mike" award by the Marine Corps League during the Vietnam War, but that he had never been presented the award for some reason, I never really knew why. The next morning, I checked into it and found that this was in fact the case. I then called him on the telephone and told him that we would present him the award at his convenience, which we did at the luncheon here in the Commandant's mess; another fallout from Her Majesty's Birthday.

Simmons: Later in that same day, you left for a Commander-in-Chiefs' conference, to be held at Scott Air Force base.

Wilson: This was the annual event which we mentioned earlier, this Commander-in-Chiefs' conference. This was at Scott, at the Military Airlift Command there. MAC was under the command of Gen Bill Moore who was a classmate of mine at the War College. He is also retiring day after tomorrow, the same time that I am retiring. We are the two last members on active duty in the armed forces who were also members of the War College class in 1962. There will be none of us left after this. In fact, Herman Ailes, the Ambassador to Egypt who has been intimately involved with the Egyptian-Israeli talks with the President (and a very close friend of President Sadat's) is also retiring on the 30th of June, and he is the last of the State Department ambassadors from the class.

That is an aside from the Commander-in-Chief's conference. There was nothing particularly unusual about the conference, except that it was next to the last one that I attended.

Simmons: From 24 to 26 June, you were in Orlando, Florida and at Disney World. While there, you received from the American Academy of Achievement the Golden Plate Award at the 16th Annual Banquet of the Golden Plate, and were invited to join the awards council of the Academy which makes it fairly convenient to see on charts. If it were to be followed by every echelon of government, I think it would probably be worthwhile. But it is not followed.

We asked our commands to comply. We put it together at this Headquarters. It then goes to the Navy Department. The Defense Department really puts it together and then in what is commonly called "Saturday night massacre," it is all

changed at the last minute and the bands are so readjusted by the Defense Department to fit the results they have already determined.

Simmons: The last day of June...

Wilson: For instance, just excuse me, but I will just give a "for instance." The Department of the Navy put into band one below the basic budget, the AV-8B, last year; it is the highest priority of the Department of the Navy. At the last minute, because the Department of Defense did not want to budget the AV-8B, they moved things from bands two and three into band one and pushed the AV-8B down so that it would be just outside of the President's budget. Then, when the testimony occurred, the Secretary of Defense could say, "Well, we would like to have had the AV-8B, but we just didn't have the money." So the manipulation which goes on is a subterfuge.

Basically, the President has to decide how much money he wants to spend for defense, and then he asks for a recommendation from the Departments. This is readjusted by the Department of Defense and in the end, he puts what he wants to in there anyway, zero-based budgeting or not.

Simmons: ...the last day of June and the first day of July are always a busy time of retirements and promotions. I note that you presided at the retirement of MajGen Mike Ryan on Thursday, 30 June 1977 and at the promotion of BGen Bill Fleming, Col Larry Seaman, BGen Warren Johnson and Col Dick Kuci on Friday, 1 July.

Wilson: Yes. Retirements are always a difficult time, except as you get older, it's sad to see your friends, with whom you have been associated with for so many years, going their separate ways and there begins to be the inevitable parting of the ways. At the same time, it is always good to see young, vigorous, enthusiastic, imaginative officers be promoted, because in the way I look at it, this shows the vigor of the Marine Corps and marks its continuity and vitality.

Simmons: On 5 July, you had the sudden and tragic death of MajGen Ed Wilcox at Camp Pendleton. You flew out to California on Sunday, 10 July for his funeral and were back at your desk Monday morning.

Wilson: Ed Wilcox and I served together when he was the comptroller at FMFPac and I was the chief of staff. I was very fond of him and his wife Dottie and their children. And it was a tragic death for Ed, who had gone home at noon to take some physical exercise. There was no indication that he had actually begun to exercise when he was found by Dottie as she arrived home. It was a very difficult time for me. He had a great future in the Marine Corps.

Simmons: Haven't you found all this air travel very demanding physically?

Wilson: Not really. I don't mind traveling. I adjust fairly easily and so if I can stretch my legs--I happened to go out in this instance on the C-9 aircraft. The T-39 has a tendency to make me cramped since I'm not able to move around much and my knees get a little stiff as I get older but it

has not affected me greatly.

Simmons: On Wednesday 13 July, you received the ships' bell from the Mayaguez from Mr. [Charles] Hiltzheimer, Chief Executive of Sea-Land Services, Incorporated, owners of the ship. The bell is now in the Marine Corps Museum. The actual Mayaguez seizure and recovery took place on 12 and 15 May 1975 while you were CG FMFPac. It was also a time when you were in process of moving from Hawaii to Washington. To what extent were you involved in the planning and execution of the Mayaguez recovery?

Wilson: None whatsoever. I had already left Hawaii and was en route to Washington when this occurred and I was not involved in any way with it. Tom Miller was acting CG FMFPac at the time.

Simmons: Do you have any comments on the operation, particularly with respect to the raid on Koh Tang Island?

Wilson: No. I think the major lesson to be learned is that you simply are not able to fly over an island at 5,000 feet and have any conception of what the enemy strength is, which is really what happened. And the decision was made by Washington to begin the operation. It was done in a jury-rigged sort of way, bringing the Jolly Green Giants [CH-53s] from the Air Force down and putting Marines aboard and flying 200 miles at sea, with some close air support which we had never practiced before with the troops, and it was put together in a very, very haphazard sort of way.

The Marines met very strong enemy resistance, much more

than had ever been expected. All services performed magnificently. But this is where we should have learned a lesson. We had some 40 Marines whose lives were lost tragically because we really did not have any conception of what the enemy strength was or other vital intelligence.

The reason that we invaded was that it was believed that the crew of the Mayaguez was on Koh Tang Island. At 10:00 that same morning, it was determined that they were not on the island and that the crew had been returned. The word went out to stop the attack but it was too late. We had helicopters already shot down, Marines afloat at sea trying to save their lives, and we were not able to perform any rescue operations until darkness fell that day.

Simmons: On Thursday 14 July, you were off on a four-day trip to San Francisco. Do you recall the purpose of that trip?

Wilson: I visited the 12th Marine Corps District, and I visited the Marine Memorial Club and I went to the Bohemian Grove--had been invited by Dr. Tom McKnew, a friend of mine. I spent two days in the Bohemian Grove, which I enjoyed very much.

Simmons: From Monday 25 July through Friday 29 July, there was a full-fledged general officer's symposium. There were 62 generals, active and reserve, in attendance. You opened the conference at 8:00 on Monday and closed at 1630 on Friday. It was a very busy week. The days were filled with seminars and there was a busy social schedule in the evening. The symposium was centered at the Sheraton National Hotel, which is very convenient to Headquarters Marine Corps. What

would you say were the highlights of that symposium?

Wilson: That was the first entire general officer symposium that we had since I have been Commandant. As I look back, I think we probably should have had more of these and I was wrong to limit them previously to those who had common interests.

The first year was not the proper time to have it. The second year I had a symposium with generals of the Fleet Marine Force at one time, and the bases and the post and station the other. This was the first that we have had for all the generals, as you've said, and their wives. It's a very good idea for them to get together; I think a very close association, getting to know one another.

However, it is very expensive to do this and we always subject ourselves to the possibility of bad publicity when we bring this many generals and their wives into Washington. Admittedly, it is to get a great deal out of it; nevertheless, it might have the appearance of a boondoggle.

We didn't have one last year. I notice that Bob Barrow is going to have one this year and I think it is a good idea. I think that probably every other year might be a good idea, although I would certainly not be critical of every year as has been done in the past. But I believe the Commandant has to make that decision in light of the potential which exists for bad publicity, largely depending on conditions at the time. For instance, if there were a fuel shortage, Jack Anderson or Senator Proxmire could make something out of it, they probably would.

Simmons: On Friday 5 August, the Joint Chiefs attended

another lunch at the White House, and that evening you hosted a reception and parade in honor of Secretary of Defense Harold Brown.

One of the Carter administration approaches to shortages in defense resources has been the total force approach. If I understand this concept, it means that no force or service can be considered self-sufficient of itself; it must plan on working with and incorporating the resources of the other services, the Reserves and real or potential allies. To some extent, this seems to be at cross-purposes with the Marine Corps concept of self-sufficiency to the largest possible degree. You published a White Letter to all commanding generals and commanding officers on 21 July 1977, which sets forth total force policy as it applies to the Marine Corps. How well is the total force concept working out?

Wilson: I think it is working out very well and I don't disagree with the Carter administration on this. I don't think that the Marine Corps can be an island unto itself. I believe that we have learned some valuable lessons over the years, and that a great many of the things in which we thought that only the Commandant, for instance, could control is not necessarily the case.

For instance, our own supply system, which we resisted for so long moving in any way to DSA (now called DLA [Defense Logistic Agency]), turned out to be wrong. DLA has been very responsive. I think we must be careful then in believing into these old shibboleths that "No one else could do it as well as we."

Every commander would like to have all of his own

resources, but this is vastly expensive, even to the extent as I remember so well, the company commanders never liked-- when I was a junior officer--to have the machine guns from the weapons company "in support" because they wanted their own machine guns. And they resisted machine guns being "in support" because they wanted them "attached." The weapons company commander wanted them in support, didn't want to give his resources up. And so it is all the way up the line.

I believe the total force concept is a good idea, and there a point of diminishing returns of course, but just where that is depends "on the conditions and the terrain."

Simmons: Another term which is a little more recent than total force is interoperability. Is that part of total force?

Wilson: I think so. You know in Washington we have buzz words that keep changing around but for all practical purposes conditions remain the same.

Simmons: In the last few days, Gen Bernard Rogers, Chief of Staff of the Army, has announced Army plans for something called a Unilateral Corps, which seems to move away from the total force concept. It also sounds something like our Marine Amphibious Force concept. Would you comment?

Wilson: I really don't know what Bernie had in mind when he had his news conference two days ago. I have discussed this with Bob Barrow, because I think this might be in opposition to what the Marine Corps or what the consolidated guidance envisioned when the guidance indicated that there would be

available for Middle East contingencies, two Army divisions and a Marine Amphibious Force. If the Army is working on a Unilateral Corps, presumably this means a corps which is made up completely of Army. I would interpret what he had in mind. Certainly they cannot go anywhere without air support however.

Bob and I have talked about this and I have suggested that he confront the Army with this and demand to know what this is they are doing, or at least have the Joint Staff discover if there is something going on which we don't know about.

Simmons: Another very active issue during the summer of 1977 was the Panama Canal Treaty. You issued a White Letter on 22 August, enclosing a fact sheet on the basic elements of the agreement, in principle, on the new Panama Canal Treaties. On 25 August you were the administration's spokesman on the treaty at the American Legion National Convention in Denver, Colorado. How did the Legionnaires receive your remarks?

Wilson: Very poorly. I had thought that I might be the first victim of the Canal by going into the enemy camp and indicating that I supported the Canal Treaty. I was not greeted enthusiastically. Several Legionnaires tugged at my sleeve as I was being escorted up the aisle saying "I know you're not for it, General, but they are making you say this." This was hardly the place to stop and debate with them. But when I did make my remarks there were a few boos in the audience, but after it was over I had been told that the announcement had been made that I was going to indicate support of the treaty and the word went out "Don't boo the

Commandant."

Simmons: The treaties were signed by President Carter and BGen Omar Torjillos on 7 September. You were present at the signing, which took place in the Hall of the Americas at the Pan American Union Building. Next evening, you attended a reception at the Panamanian Embassy given by Gen Torjillos in honor of Vice President [William] Mondale. The Congress is currently struggling with the implementation of those treaties.

Wilson: Yes, it's still a very, very unpopular decision in the United States and I think the Congress has recently voted, with about a 25 vote majority to go ahead and appropriate the money which would implement the treaties. I have talked to many Congressmen who were against the treaties themselves, who felt that not to appropriate the money would be an abrogation of their responsibilities after in fact the treaty had been ratified by the Senate, which is in accordance with the American processes.

Simmons: On 23 August we lost another active duty major general, Clarence Schmidt. You attended his funeral on 26 August. Was that in San Diego?

Wilson: Yes, that was in San Diego. Bud had cancer and it had been diagnosed while he was in Albany. He'd come here to the Naval Hospital in Bethesda. He was not given very long to live, which turned out to be a good prognosis, and he did retire in California and died very shortly thereafter.

Simmons: From Wednesday 14 September until Friday 16

September, you were in Camp Lejeune. On Saturday evening 17 September, you spoke at the annual awards banquet of the Marine Corps Combat Correspondents Association here at the Stouffer National Center Hotel.

Wilson: The Combat Correspondents Association has been a very active group. Their patron saint of course, is Gen [Robert] Denig. Gen Denig was able to enlist many young correspondents who have later turned out to be outstanding journalists, newsmen, and photographers. It is heartening that the Combat Correspondents Association still continues to maintain the active interest in the Marine Corps that they do, and even well-known correspondents continue to be members and attend the annual conventions.

Simmons: On Wednesday 21 September, you went to New York City for a reception of the National Football Foundation and Hall of Fame at the Racquet and Tennis Club. You stayed overnight and then went up to Newport to speak to the Naval War College, getting back to Headquarters Marine Corps Thursday afternoon.

That night there was a reception for naval attaches in the Benjamin Franklin Room at the State Department. It was about this time also that the Royal Marine Attaché, Col Mottram, was being relieved by Col Brewster. They paid calls on you on Tuesday 20 September, and I believe you had a dinner for them the preceding evening.

Wilson: We did. We had been closely associated with the Mottrams. They participated in our United States Marine Corps life here in Washington to a preeminent degree. She was

always available and volunteered to give tours through the House, and Col Mottram enjoyed a close association with the Commandant of the Royal Marines. I believe he has a fine future in the Royal Marines as indeed has Col Brewster, who is a quieter chap but equally effective.

Simmons: On Wednesday 28 September, you left on another trip to the western Pacific, which would last until 11 October. The first part of your itinerary took you to Korea, then you went to Iwakuni, then to Okinawa, then to Hawaii and then home. Do you recall the main purposes of this trip?

Wilson: Yes. This was another in what I had intended to be annual trips. It didn't turn out quite that way, to be annual. I was to make one more before I retired, about that itinerary, I had no particular remembrance of this except it was a routine trip. I was pleased enough with the way things were going and that is just about the extent of my remembrance of it right now.

Simmons: On Saturday 15 October, you went to Pascagoula, Mississippi for the commissioning of LHA-2, USS Saipan. Do you have any special recollections of that day?

Wilson: Yes. This was a special occasion. This LHA was considerably improved over the Tarawa, which was LHA-1. Many lessons have been learned from Tarawa and many changes have been made. We were still concerned then about whether we were going to be able to finish all five of the LHA's because of the cost over-run problems which were then very much in the headlines.

Senator Stennis made the main address. It was a very impressive commissioning ceremony, as indeed all commissioning ceremonies are in the Navy. I was pleased with the ship accommodations for Marines and it has subsequently joined the Atlantic Fleet. It will be sailing I believe within the next six months to the Mediterranean.

Simmons: On Tuesday morning 18 October, Adm Thomas E. Hayward called on you. I think at that time he was CinCPacFlt or CinC...

Wilson: CinCPacFlt, right.

Simmons: ...of course, he was destined to become CinCPac and then CNO.

Wilson: Well not CinCPac, but CNO.

Simmons: CNO, that's right. How well do you know him?

Wilson: I did not know him too well. We were out in Hawaii, only a few days together. He had the 14th Naval District just as I left to go to Okinawa to command the 3d Division, and he had left by the time that I went back to Hawaii to be CG, FMFPac. Of course, I have come to know him very well in the last 18 months and am very fond of him.

Simmons: That afternoon, Mr. George Graff, President of the McDonnell-Douglas Aircraft Company, called on you along with Mr. John Caffalulo, Chief Program Engineer for the F-18 to make a presentation on the F-18. This is a lot of horsepower

to be making a presentation.

Wilson: It was just about this time that the AV-8B was becoming competitive with the F-18 in the Marine Corps. I think I've mentioned my own participation in the F-18. I believe that George Graff and Sandy McDonnell too, who was not here, understand the Marine Corps' role in the F-18 controversy and the fact that had we not been enthusiastic about it and selected it over the F-14 it probably would not have been built. So I think that that was the reason for the visit. They gave me a model of the F-18. But I believe that this was their way of showing their appreciation for the Marine Corps' interest was started by Bob Cushman before I became Commandant and I am reflecting his concern of it, He sent Marc Moore to Annapolis to try to give a little more Marine prestige and example to the Naval Academy. The Naval Academy of course, has been very adamant over the years about funneling Marines to have too visible jobs there. But they indicated they were willing to take a colonel for the first time, in recent years anyway, to be on the staff and to, in effect, be a potential recruiting officer, although he has to walk a fine line in trying not to be a full-time recruiting officer in inducing some of the best midshipmen to opt for the Marine Corps.

Marc did a fine job. We have about 40 officers in the Naval Academy staff. So I was very interested in insuring that we got our 16 and 2/3s percent which we're authorized by law. We did this, and I think the great deal of credit belongs to Marc for establishing a long-term program in insuring this is continued.

We have a lot of competition with other branches in the

Navy; air, surface, and subsurface. During the last three years we've done extremely well. As an aside, we've had some problems with our NROTC's, because the Navy has tried to play it both ways. For instance, the sixteen and two-thirds percent of Marines at a university would be Marine option students. In some instances BuPers would move students who were perhaps not good in mathematics, and therefore could not get a commission in the Navy, move them to the Marine Corps. I was unwilling to accept this, even though they may have turned out to be good Marines. I was unwilling to let them give the appearance at the university that Marine lieutenants were second-class citizens. Conversely, they would try to pull some of the better Marine option students into the Navy, saying that we were over our 16 and 2/3s percent in other colleges. I made an arrangement with the CNO that we would get a thousand students each year from the NROTC. We could take our choice as to where the thousand students were and they were to stay Marine option. That has cut down a lot of bickering and I believe made a better system. Adm [Hyman G.] Rickover was furious over this because he insisted on first choice from all the students. The Navy let him get by with it because they were afraid of him, but I wasn't and told him so.

Simmons: On 27 October you went to Meridian, Mississippi for the dedication of the Sonny Montgomery Recreation Area.

Wilson: Sonny Montgomery had been a great supporter of the Marine Corps and a great supporter of mine. The Naval Air Station in Meridian named and dedicated a recreation area to him and I went there to make the main address.

Simmons: On Friday, 28 October you had dinner at the quarters of Adm Holloway and then went to the Navy Ball. On Sunday 30 October, you left for San Diego to attend the change of command and retirement ceremony for Major General Kenny Houghton. Was command of the Recruit Depot taken over by Dick Schultz at that time or was Dick out there?

Simmons: On Saturday 5 November, you attended the 6th ROC Association Reunion, at the Sheraton National. We've spoken before how the 6th ROC has shown great cohesion over the years. On Sunday it was again time for the service at the National Cathedral, and you again read the scripture there. On Wednesday morning, 9 November, Adm Mickey Weisner, CinCPac, called on you. I am sure you've known him for a long time.

Wilson: Yes. We are great friends, and have been for many, many years. He was a guest of ours at the Birthday Ball, which was to be the next day. I consider him the finest admiral I have ever known. The Navy and the country need more officers like him to lead our country's armed forces.

Simmons: You had luncheon that day, that would be 9 November, with Col Barry Zorthian, USMCR (Retired), vice president for Washington operations of Time-Life, Inc.

Wilson: I just recently was distressed to learn that he is no longer going to be with Time. There had been some misunderstandings between Barry and the president of Time and I believe that he has resigned.

Simmons: I didn't know that and I am sorry to hear it.

Wilson: He has been a great friend of the Marine Corps and a great Marine.

Simmons: Certainly has. Next day Thursday, 10 November, was the 202d Birthday of the Corps. You officiated at the traditional 1100 ceremony at the Iwo monument, and that evening there was the usual reception, dinner and ball at the Washington Hilton. You said that Adm Weisner was your guest that evening. Next morning you were off to Birmingham. This is another one of those cases of Veteran's Day coming on the heels of the Birthday Ball, and here in Birmingham you were the guest of honor at the Veteran's Day observances.

Wilson: The Birmingham Veteran's Day observance is the largest in the nation on Veteran's Day. It is a huge parade, attended by over 100,000 people and it has become larger each years, run by Mr. Raymond Weeks, who by the way, is calling on me tomorrow and I am giving him a little plaque for his patriotic efforts in Birmingham. He has been involved with this for many years. I have been going there for many years, both for Medal of Honor affairs and representing the Marine Corps on Veteran's Day.

Simmons: You must have done pretty well at reading the scripture at the National Cathedral because on Sunday 13 November, you were asked to read the scripture at the Navy Yard chapel.

Wilson: Yes. This was "Marine Sunday" which has become a sort of a tradition at the Navy Yard Chapel, being the Sunday

following the Navy, the Marine Corps and the Coast Guard anniversaries. The Sunday before of course, is the traditional one at the Cathedral and so the Navy Yard Chapel picked the Sunday after the Birthday.

Simmons: You were in Florida from Friday 18 November, until Sunday 20 November. While there, you addressed the Forum Club of the Palm Beaches, visited various Marine Corps units and attended a Birthday Ball in Palm Beach. You were home Sunday, in time for dinner at the French Embassy in honor of the visiting French Defense Secretary. Next morning, you went to a prayer breakfast at the White House.

Wilson: Mmmmmmm. Yes. The Forum Club of Palm Beach invited me to come. Jerry Thomas, who was the former Under Secretary of the Treasury, had gone back to his former position as President of the First Marine Banks in Florida. He asked me to come down to address the Forum Club of Palm Beach.

End Tape 1, Side 1

Begin Tape 1, Side 2

Simmons: On Wednesday 30 November, the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs had luncheon at the White House, once again with the President. This may well have been, or had to do with the new President's budget which was then being formulated. This was the period between Thanksgiving and Christmas when the President takes the departmental submissions and recasts them in the form of his own budget.

Wilson: Right, which he was doing at the time.

Simmons: On Monday 5 December, there was another fellowship breakfast at the White House and as we have said earlier, these appear quite frequently on your calendar. At 11 o'clock on Monday you presided over the retirement of MajGen Harold Chase, USMCR. This was a prelude to his appointment, I believe, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs.

Wilson: It was. He retired early to become Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs. We are delighted to have a Marine in this position. And Hal, although he's had some medical problems since that time, is still there, and doing a fine job.

Simmons: On Tuesday 6 December, you went to New York, where you were the recipient of the National Football foundation and Hall of Fame Gold Medal Award for 1977, at the 20th Annual Dinner of the Foundation held in the Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. I believe that only 20 other persons had received this award.

Wilson: Yes, I think so. I think that four or five former Presidents and other individuals of national renown. I was flattered to be included in this number and it is quite a prestigious affair. It meets once a year for the benefit of the National Football Foundation Hall of Fame, which is now established in Ohio, in Cincinnati.

Simmons: We are now getting into the Christmas season, and then on Sunday, 1 January 1978, you greeted the New Year in

the traditional fashion. In this case, the reception was marked by your official portrait, which had taken its place with the other Commandants on the walls of the Commandant's House.

In the first few days of 1978, there are several entries on your calendar concerning meetings on the CH-53E. What was the issue?

Wilson: The CH-53E is a three-engine aircraft which has considerably upgraded our CH-53 Delta and Echo models. It has a great capability for the Marine Corps. It is the heaviest lift helicopter in the free world. We were very enthusiastic about it and still are. The Navy had planned to use the CH-53E for their mine warfare counter-measures aircraft and also for their vertical on-board delivery (VOD). We had hoped to be able to get these aircraft for about \$10 million apiece. Again the Navy, finding themselves strapped for money, chose to neglect mine warfare counter-measures, as they have in a great many other instances where amphibious warfare-related matters are concerned. They decided not to buy 36 aircraft, which was quite a blow to us, because we had planned to procure them. This then ran the cost of the CH-53E up to \$14 million dollars apiece. These were a series of conferences that we had relating to this and the budget. However, it was decided that the Marine Corps would buy 36, the Navy 12. It looks firm at this time.

Simmons: On Monday 9 January, you spoke at the Inter-American Defense College at Fort McNair. I think that might have been the first time that you had addressed this group.

Wilson: Yes, it was. As a matter of fact, the last time, too. I don't think I was invited again this year. It's a very disconcerting experience for the first time to lecture to an audience where many, many languages that are spoken. With everybody sitting there with headphones on, it is very disconcerting not to know who the questioner is. When the question was asked the question came in over my headphone in his language and then they were interpreted into English. So I was not able to look at the speaker in answering the question. I remember that more than anything else.

Simmons: On Thursday 12 January, there was a one-day general officers' conference at the Sheraton National. I think this was a target of opportunity made possible by the number of general officers who were in from out of town to serve on the various selection boards.

Wilson: It was and we thought this would be a good opportunity to bring in also the generals from the local area, plus the board members, and I think it was very beneficial.

Simmons: You left that evening, 12 January, for Howard Air Force Base in the Canal Zone. Was this another Commander-in-Chief's Conference?

Wilson: .No. This was an effort for me to become more familiar with the Canal because I was destined to testify concerning the Panama Canal ratification. And although I had been down there before, I felt that it was important for me to go down to become more familiar with the circumstances and

the terrain, and of course, visit the Marine Barracks.

Simmons: Gen Jourgesen, the Danish Chief of Defense, called on you on Thursday 19 January. Afterwards, there was a lunch in his honor given by the Chairman of the JCS. I would guess that our series of exercises on NATO's northern flank has brought us much closer to Danish, Norwegian and German defense officials.

Wilson: I don't think there is any question about it, and I believe that in spite of the fact that we have failed to get a mission earmarked for the northern flank, it is generally conceded that that would be where the Marines would go. We have become very close to all the Scandinavian countries, and their defense personnel. I believe that this is good and I believe that they feel closer to us. I know that they are anxious to learn the organization, the philosophy, the training, and the capabilities of the Marine Corps.

Simmons: On Tuesday 24 January, you were scheduled to testify before the Senate Arms Services Committee as you anticipated, on the Panama Canal Treaties. Did you in fact testify?

Wilson: Yes, I did. I testified along with Jim Holloway and Gen...I can't think of his name now, CinCSouth.

Simmons: On Thursday, 26 January, you attended the retirement ceremonies for Gen Daniel "Chappie" James, the first four-star black general at Andrews Air Force Base. From the television coverage, this was quite an emotional

ceremony. Gen James did not long survive his retirement. You would go to his funeral on Thursday 2 March.

Wilson: Yes. Chappie James and I were born the same day, on the the 11th of February in 1920. We discovered this when I was in command of the Marines in Okinawa. His daughter was married to an Air Force doctor there, and he and his wife came out to Okinawa to visit. At that time, we were having some racial problems in Okinawa and I requested that he come up and talk to the troops, particularly the black troops, which he did on leave and on his own time.

We became close friends. We discovered at that time that our birthdays were the same and we had a little byplay back and forth after that, each time we saw each other. He was a close friend of Frank Petersen, who was then a colonel. Although Frank Petersen did make general, it was after Chappie James died and I know Chappie would have been pleased. In fact, his widow came to Petersen's promotion ceremony. And I did go to his funeral, which occurred within a month after his retirement.

Simmons: On Saturday 28 January, you and Jane went to Pascagoula, this time for the christening of LHA-3, the USS Nassau. Jane was the sponsor. This must have been quite an exciting day.

Wilson: Yes, it was and a great day for the Wilson family; Janet also came. I made the major address. It was a fine day, and Jane performed her duties in a very professional manner by striking the ship for the first time with a bottle of champagne. Janet said "Mother, if you miss that ship,

I'll die of embarrassment" a la Mrs. Nieman. In fact, she is going down for the commissioning on the 26th of July of this year.

Simmons: On Saturday 4 February, you spoke to the Women's Forum on National Security at the Washington Hilton Hotel, and that evening, you attended a reception and banquet given by the forum.

Wilson: They change the service sponsor each year. This was a Marine-sponsored year, and I thought it appropriate that the Commandant go. The Women Marines seemed to appreciate it.

Simmons: On Tuesday 7 February, you delivered your posture statement to the House Armed Services Committee, and this signaled the beginnings of your hearings in support of the fiscal year 1979 budget. On Wednesday, 8 February, you spoke to the Marine Officers' Wives Club at a luncheon at Hogate's. On Friday evening, you and Jane had cocktails, dinner and dancing with the Marine Aviation Officers' Wives Club at Fort McNair Officers' Club. I hope that later when we bring Jane into these interviews, we'll have a little more information on the wives' activities.

Wilson: She's been very interested in wives' clubs for years. I think she was one of the founders of the wives' club, in Hawaii along with Mrs. Watson, for whose husband I was an aide when he was CG, FMFPac in 1947. And she's been interested in wives' clubs since then. She's been an honorary member of the Aviation Wives' Club and we have attended each year the dances sponsored by the Aviation

Wives' Club.

Simmons: On Friday 17 February, you went to Phoenix, Arizona, to speak to the Optimists Club and you came back on Sunday.

Wilson: I had not been to Phoenix before. I had visited with the recruiters, the reserve unit, and spent a weekend and two nights with an old friend of mine, Al Gentleman by name. Al and I were together in New York City for several years. Al is married to a very lovely girl in New York who is a very successful lawyer. They also have a home in Carefree, Arizona. We stayed two days with them. They had a delightful party for us, which the governor of Arizona attended and also Senator [Barry] Goldwater.

Simmons: There were numerous briefings and hearings on the fiscal year 1979 budget throughout this period. I'm skipping over these. I note that on Wednesday 22 February, you had the Attorney General, Griffin Bell, and his wife to dinner at the Commandant's House.

Wilson: Yes. We've become very fond of the Bells. I believe he has been a very effective attorney general, and very forthright, and the most effective of the President's cabinet. And we still are close friends. He's leaving this year, I understand, and looking forward to leaving to return to Atlanta.

Simmons: On Thursday 2 March, you had Senator and Mrs. Eastland to dinner at the Commandant's House.

Wilson: Yes, I had not known Senator Eastland too much over the years of course, but knew his reputation as a distinguished legislator from Mississippi and as the President pro tem of the Senate. He has represented the state and the nation quite well I think over the years and he (unknown to me at the time) was to make the announcement the next day that he would not seek re-election.

Simmons: Next evening, you went to the annual Carl Vinson Hall benefit dinner dance at the Stouffer National Center Hotel.

Wilson: We feel very close to the Navy-Marine Corps Residence Foundation and Vinson Hall. I was on the board of trustees for the Hall when it was built. I was assigned by Gen Greene when I was a brigadier general to be the Marine Corps board member and participated in the ground-breaking ceremonies. Jane has been very active in the fund-raising over the years and we always go or if we are not able to do so, we send a donation to the Vinson Hall Foundation dinner.

Simmons: From 7 through 16 March, MajGen Ohmean, the Commandant of the Royal Netherlands Marines, toured the United States as your official guest. His program in Washington followed the pattern we discussed before. As I recall, while he was here, there was another one of those terrorist activities in the Netherlands in which the Dutch Marines participated.

Wilson: Yes, and in fact, he left early to go back because the Dutch Marines as I mentioned earlier, are responsible for antiterrorism and he went back to take control.

Simmons: On Friday, 10 March, you went to Dallas, Texas, where on Saturday evening you were the honored guest at the Military Ball held in the Fairmont Hotel.

Wilson: Yes. This also this is another one of the affairs where they rotate services in the sponsorship of the Military Ball. As Texans do, it was first class, a fine ball and I was able to see my old friend Bill Clements. He invited Jane and me out to his house for cocktails. He was then running for the Republican nomination for governor, almost a sure loser, according to prognosticators who had given him practically no chance. He was not without money of course, both his own and other money which was available to him. He outlined to me how he planned to secure the nomination and later the election and it came out almost exactly that way.

Simmons: Very good. On Wednesday 15 March, you went to Maxwell Air Force Base to speak once again to the Air War College. Mayor Fuller and the Chamber of Commerce of Montgomery, Alabama, hosted a luncheon for you. There was also a mess night that evening given by local Marine Corps officers.

Wilson: Yes. Montgomery has always been a great Marine Corps town and, as always, I tried to tie in a visit to the reserve unit, the mayor's office, and to call on distinguished officials when I went to the Air War College.

Simmons: You were back in Washington Thursday morning in time to promote Col Rice to brigadier general, and that evening you hosted a dinner for Congressman and Mrs. Whitten.

Wilson: Yes. Jamie Whitten, Congressman from Mississippi, of course is now the Dean of the House, the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee. We've known each other for many years. He tells an interesting story about how he was first elected to Congress in 1941, and when the war began he came over to see Gen [Thomas] Holcomb about getting a commission as a captain in the Marine Corps. General Holcomb advised him in the following way: "Whitten" he said, "you can do more for your country by staying in Congress and voting for Marine Corps appropriations than you can by getting a commission in the Marine Corps and having some administrative job." "I took his advice" he said, "and I've been voting for Marine Corps' appropriations ever since."

Simmons: For 40 years.

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: On Monday 21 March, you spoke at a Congressional Marine Breakfast held at the Marine Corps Historical Center, and that evening you gave a dinner for Presidential aide and former Marine, Jack Watson and his wife.

Wilson: Yes. Jack was a student of mine at Quantico. At that time, he held the record for going over the obstacle course in the proper manner in the shortest possible time. Whether or not he still holds that record, I don't know, but he did a fine job later as a reconnaissance company officer; returned to civilian life after his obligated service, got a law degree, and was in a very prestigious firm in Atlanta. He was one of the early supporters of President Carter.

He came to Washington as one of the transition team members. There was some falling out between him and Ham Jordan I believe, and Jack lost out early in securing one of the more inner sanctum jobs. But nevertheless he's done a fine job for the President as the inner departmental coordinator. I know the President thinks a great deal of him. He is dedicated individual, patriotic, and has done a lot for his country both on active duty and as a loyal public servant.

Simmons: On Wednesday morning, 22 March, you attended a briefing along with the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations on "Concepts '85, a Navy-Marine Corps Study on the Future Amphibious Warfare and Air Cushion Vehicles". The presenter was Col Joe Hopkins from Operations and Training. I'm intrigued by the title. Is the future of amphibious warfare linked to air cushion vehicles?

Wilson: Not necessarily. We were trying to come up with a concept about how we were to set Navy shipbuilding for the next few years. I believe we've already discussed the LVA and the air cushion vehicles and the problems with that so I won't repeat this. But this was the forerunner of a subsequent study which had caused me to cancel the LVA.

Simmons: On Monday March 27, you were scheduled for a discussion of the Military Compensation Commission with the Undersecretary of the Navy, James Woolsey. That afternoon, the Armed Forces Policy Council met with the Secretary of Defense, Dr. Brown, on the same subject. What was it that the commission was recommending at this time?

Wilson: The commission recommended a compensation which would result in considerably less money than is now the case for the serviceman over his entire lifetime earnings, both from a point of view of active duty as well as retirement.

I did not agree with the commission's findings and as a matter of fact, do not agree now with the bill which is about to be presented to the Congress by the President. It incorporates some, but not all of these findings. In other words, there was to be a stretch-out over a career, do away with 20-year retirement, and to give vested earnings, after ten years of service. This is not too unsatisfactory, in order to give an opportunity for a first-time enlistee to stretch out his time in the service until ten years, after which he would have some vested interest. That has some merit.

But on the other hand, what we need is also a period of time where people can retire from the service before they stay for thirty years, because some lose vigor and enthusiasm. We're looking for NCO's of the future, about the sixteenth year of service, and not professional privates such as many were when you and I joined the Marine Corps.

Simmons: This is all a very emotional issue, particularly with career personnel. Most career personnel, at least those who are of the middle ranks, who are older, feel that this is an abrogation of the contract that they undertook with the government. It is also hard for some of us to understand the recommendations that would perhaps give us 55-year old staff sergeants. Just recently, I read some splinter study which said that nine out of ten servicemen don't go into combat anyway: therefore they don't have to be young. I may be very

prejudiced but it seems to me that the thinking that goes into that kind of recommendation is very superficial indeed.

Wilson: I think so too, but will say, however, that there is to be a grandfather clause so as not to affect anyone now in the service. So that this would not be an abrogation of anything anyone had felt they were due because of an implied contract when they joined. This was a bill which purported to set compensations for the next 75 years. That's entirely too long to anticipate. I would not have wanted anybody to set my compensation 75 years ago. But in the end it amounted to considerably less lifetime stream of earnings for the serviceman. And I resent people saying to me, "Well, it shouldn't make any difference to you because it doesn't affect you." It does in fact interest me because I am the representative on my watch for the service of the future. I frankly do not believe that the President's pay study is going to get anywhere in the Congress, and so therefore, I am not too concerned about it now.

Simmons: On Friday, 31 March, you went out to Great Lakes, Illinois, to take the review at the Naval Recruit Training Command. Any recollections of that day?

Wilson: Yes, I had never been to Great Lakes and had been asked by Adm Gallery, a retired admiral who has assumed responsibility of securing speakers and reviewing officers for the parade. I was fascinated with Great Lakes, the fine training facility that they had and was aware of the study then going on about the possibility of closing Great Lakes and expanding San Diego. This would in turn have affected the Navy recruit depot because of the high utility costs which

Great Lakes has, and its harsh winters. They do have some fine field houses there. I don't know about the expense, but it is a fine facility. We also visited--it seems to me that we also went to a Marine Corps Scholarship Ball.

Simmons: You did.

Wilson: That next evening, which was the first ball in Chicago, sponsored an old very close friend of mine, Orville Bergren. We had known each other for many years and he is one of my closest friends. Orv is the president of the Illinois Manufacturers Association, and we spent the night with them at their home in Barrington, north of Chicago.

Simmons: Haven't we reduced or eliminated the Marine Barracks at Great Lakes?

Wilson: Yes. The Marine Barracks at Great Lakes is now gone. We have an officer there on the staff but we don't have a Marine Barracks there now.

Simmons: On Tuesday 4 April, you left on an eight-day trip to South America. My notes are very sketchy. I think you were in Brazil for three days, then in Colombia for four days, and then back to Washington. Did you visit any other countries?

Wilson: No. I had intended to make a Latin American swing. Each Commandant has done so once in four years, but now there are many problems in Latin America now with the concern that many Latin American nations feel about the President's Human Rights Program, it was just not the time. We are not welcome

in Latin America. In fact, I did not go to Venezuela because of an election. I could not go into Chile because of the state's objection. I could not go into Argentina for the same reason. In fact, in Brazil, I was invited down by the Commandant, but not as an official guest of the Brazilian government, which was a technicality, but another way of showing their distaste for what they considered to be U.S. interference in their internal affairs.

We arrived in Brasilia, where I made a call on the ambassador, and then went to Rio, where we had a delightful three days and visited the Brazilian Marines, a dedicated group to be sure. I was very impressed with the Commandant and his wife, who later were our guests here in Washington. We then went to Colombia, to Caracas, and then down to the training center on the coast. We enjoyed it, and I had been to Latin America before, but Jane had not, so we had a very pleasant trip.

Simmons: This is probably a sign of the times, though, that your trip was so circumscribed when you compare it for example, with the trip or trips that General Shepherd made when he was Chairman of the Inter-American Defense Board, and also the UNITAS cruises that the Navy used to make, all the way around the rim of South America.

Wilson: Yes, very much so. When I was at the War College, I made the Latin American trip, where we visited all the capitals of Latin America. But now of course, the reason why we're so limited is that the U.S. has alienated many of the countries in Latin America. We were discussing earlier the problems that I can foresee in all of Latin and Central

America, as there's an ever-growing problem of Communism, Cuban exported-type of Marxist-Leninism, which certainly doesn't bode well for the future.

Simmons: I see that on Thursday morning 13 April, you had breakfast with Mr. Claytor, the Secretary of the Navy, and Dr. Kissinger, the former Secretary of State. Any impressions of that breakfast?

Wilson: Yes. It was Secretary Claytor's request that he have a breakfast for Dr. Kissinger. Jim Holloway and I were present. Dr. Kissinger is a very clever, articulate, and able individual and very charming; a warm person with whom you can talk. He made many observations about being on the outside these days. He was critical then of the SALT talks. He has not yet revealed his position on SALT and I will be interested to hear if he is going to be consistent with the position he took at the breakfast.

Simmons: On Friday 14 April at 1100, you received a Veteran's Administration briefing on the new national cemetery planned for Quantico and afterwards had Mr. Max Cleland, the head of VA, stay on as your luncheon guest.

Wilson: Yes. I might tell here about the Quantico cemetery and how this came about. When I first came into the Commandant's office, there was a request for the Marine Corps to donate 700 acres of land at Quantico, to augment the national cemetery system. It was given the usual "no," by the staff with the usual position that we can't afford to make any land available.

I looked at this carefully and felt that we should be a little more forthcoming on this issue. After all, Marines die too. There is almost no place in which cemeteries are close enough to large cities for the next of kin to visit. I was aware of course, of the Quantico site, having been stationed there so many times, hunted over it so often, and had been involved in the Basic School and the Education Center. The area around the Joplin Road, across from the Prince William Park, was available and there was absolutely no reason why we could not relinquish some of the land for a useful purpose so long as it did not interfere with training.

I have often remarked in a joking sort of way that cemeteries are the best place to have because you don't disturb the occupants there or get letters from the occupants complaining about the noise. We did look into this seriously and I then said "Show me why we cannot give this land for the cemetery." Well, they were hard-pressed to do this and admitted that probably we could because it is too near habitable areas to fire weapons. We don't use it for any of our training exercises, either by the Officer Candidate School or the Basic School, and so I said "Okay, we'll do it."

Well, this was met with a considerable amount of enthusiasm on the part of the Veteran's Administration. This is before Max Cleland became the Veteran's Administrator. Senator [William L.] Scott was delighted and so was the Congressman from Prince William County. So therefore, I feel personally responsible for this and I am pleased.

It's going to be a beautiful cemetery, enhancing that whole area of Quantico. It's going to be done in a first-

class manner. In fact, I have considered, and this reminds me, that I must mention to Bob Barrow about moving the Iwo Jima statue from the entrance to Quantico to the cemetery entrance. This was the first Iwo Jima statue made by Felix de Weldon, and put in front of the old Navy Department building. By way, I was the Commanding Officer of troops on the 10th of November in 1945 when it was unveiled. I believe this would give a Marine flavor to the cemetery nearby Quantico and I think it might have some merit and I would ask you what you think of it, Ed.

Simmons: On Monday 17 April, you and Jane left for leave in Memphis, Tennessee. The next day, you went on to the University of Mississippi to address the law students there, and from the university you went on to Jackson where you continued your leave through 26 April. Were you perchance house-hunting at this point?

Wilson: Yes, as a matter of fact, we were, and turkey hunting too at the same time. We had determined that the house which we eventually bought was satisfactory.

Simmons: This might be a good point to end Session VI•

Wilson: Alright.

End Session VI

Session VII-- 24 February 1980

Simmons: Today is Sunday the 24th of February 1980. All of our previous sessions were held in your office in

Headquarters Marine Corps. This afternoon, we're sitting in the study or rather the family room of your new home on Old Canton Road, Jackson, Mississippi. It's almost exactly eight months since you retired. I know that they have been a busy eight months for you. What are some of the things you and Jane have done since retirement?

Wilson: Well, indeed they have been busy. We're very happy in our retirement. Much happier than I'd thought we'd be. In fact, Jane and I mentioned the other day that it's beyond our fondest dreams that could we be settled as well as we have, in good health, with our daughter Janet in law school and doing very well that our situation now would have too much to hope for a year ago.

I suppose there are always apprehensions about retirement as to what one is to do and how one is to use one's time. Upon retirement we came to Jackson and set about refurbishing this house that we bought from a cousin of mine. This is a large place, an acre and a half of ground and a large house; with a guest house, which we've done nothing with yet but intend to refurbish soon. We've certainly been accepted in the community. Many of our friends that we went to school with are in the positions of responsibility in the state and we see them often. As a result of this, we have been almost as busy socially, as we were in Washington. To be out every night is certainly not the ultimate; nevertheless, the transition has been good. For myself, I was elected before I retired, to the board of Unifirst Federal Savings and Loan Company, here in Jackson, the largest savings and loan company in the state, and have continued to be a member of the board. Subsequent to that time, I have

been elected to the board of Fluor Corporation, an engineering and construction company, with world-wide interest, which is one of the two largest such companies in the world, the other being Bechtel.

I might mention the trip to South Africa with the board of directors which I enjoyed very much. From there, we went to the Ivory Coast, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi and stopped by Manchester, England. We did also make a trip to London for five days with Fluor and I have made trips to Italy in my capacity as a member of the Battle Monuments Commission, to tour the cemeteries located in Florence and Anzio. I mistakingly mentioned China; I intend to go to China within the next year or two with Fluor.

I've recently been elected to the board of the Louisiana Land and Exploration Company, a large developer and explorer for oil and gas in the North Sea off Alaska and the largest private land owner in Louisiana except for the state of Louisiana. I was also recently elected to the board of the Merrill Lynch Company, the holding company of Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner and Smith. They also have subsidiaries real estate insurance both domestically and overseas.

I've recently been appointed by the governor of Mississippi to be a member of the Board of Economic Development of the state as well, as the Jackson Redevelopment Authority. These civic organizations are non-paying but nevertheless, if I can make a contribution, I am delighted to do so.

This does keep me busy and with the trips connected with board meetings, to Fluor whose headquarters are in Irvine, California and Merrill Lynch in New York and the Louisiana

Land headquarters in New Orleans.

So all in all, I have been busy, happy, and given good health for both of us, the future looks bright indeed.

Simmons: I saw General Benjamin Davis not so long ago and he said that he had been with you in Italy.

Wilson: We had a great trip together, he and Aggie, his wife. We enjoyed it tremendously. TWA lost her baggage which, in fact, she never received. She was a good sport about it and we had a great trip.

Simmons: These past eight months have also been filled with events important to the nation and its security. I might mention some of the more important events and ask your comments.

On 17 July 1979, just after your retirement, a joint session of the Nicaraguan Congress accepted the resignation of President Anastasio Somoza, ending 46 years of Somoza family rule. Two days later, the Sandinistas entered Managua, the capital city. Nearly every news story linked the Somoza family and their National Guard to the U.S. Marine Corps.

Wilson: Yes, I kept up with this. I'm very concerned about Latin America I have indicated to you several times before. Obviously, there were extremes in the Somoza regime. But I do know that the Cubans were involved in training the Sandinistas, which was clear from the intelligence reports before I retired. I cannot help but to believe that this is one of a continuing series of problems in Latin America. Not

only with Nicaragua, which I think is gone, but there's Costa Rica and of course, the problems which we're having today in El Salvador. I think this is just one element in our not taking a firm stand. Of course Carter is not taking a firm stand anywhere else in the world either. That this may in the long run, be more damaging to the United States than the problems in Afghanistan which is now in the news. Obviously there is nothing we can do there.

Simmons: On 31 August, the U.S. confirmed a report that Soviet Russia had a combat brigade of from 2,000 to 3,000 men in Cuba. The State Department says the brigade posed no threat to the United States. President Carter, however, says that its presence in Cuba was unacceptable.

Wilson: Yes. I noted three weeks later he said they were acceptable. So, as a result, this is a continuing series of problems that the President has had, in which he speaks and then has to back down.

Today, we're confronted with the situation in Iran to which he said, as I remember, that "each day the hostages were held, they would pay an increasingly greater price." Today, although, of course I don't know where the negotiations stand, there is evidence that if the hostages were to be released, we not only would have them not pay a price, we would be willing to give them military and economic aid and recognize that nut Khomeini. How this will turn out, I don't know. But this is just another example of what I consider to be an appalling lack of fortitude on the part of this administration.

Simmons: Getting back to the brigade in Cuba, what did you think of the landing of the battalion landing team in Guantanamo? Was this a useful demonstration of our reinforcement capability?

Wilson: Well, I suppose that I would look at this that you spell it M-A-R-I-N-E and they do a good job, which apparently they did. We need the publicity and the American public deserves to know that the Marines are available and ready. The fact that it served any useful purpose is questionable on my part, but nevertheless, apparently they did a good job and I like to know that if the U.S. needs ready forces, the Marines are there.

Simmons: At midnight on 1 October, U.S. sovereignty over the Panama Canal Zone officially ended. This was the first step in implementing the Panama Canal Treaties, under which U.S. control of the Canal itself will end by the year 2000. In our 26 June interview, you talked about being the administration's spokesman for the treaties at the American Legion Convention in September. How do you regard the treaties now?

Wilson: Yes, I think it was a good idea for us to sign this treaty. I have no regrets in regards to my position on the treaties. I think that, particularly, now that we have seen the lack of willingness on the part of the administration to do anything positive to enhance the United States' prestige--there would have been massive demonstrations against the Americans and against the Canal if we had not signed the treaty. I doubt that Carter would have done anything to save the Canal and I am even more convinced now that the Canal

would probably have been closed.

Simmons: You already partially answered my next question, and that is, how would you assess the United States strategic position in the Caribbean today?

Wilson: It is very bad. While there are some who say that we gave away the Canal, I would not express it like that. We did of course, give up sovereignty over it, because we were unwilling and unable to maintain the Canal as a viable entity for the free passage of ships, which is the reason that I was for it. But I think the whole Caribbean is a hotbed of Communist-inspired insurgents brought about in a large part by our willingness to put up with Castro's exporting communism to that area and of course the President's human rights' program, which is a disaster.

Simmons: As recently as the Dominican Intervention in 1965 the Marine Corps had a special role in the Caribbean. Do you think that special role is at an end?

Wilson: Yes, I think it is at the end as far as this administration is concerned. And of course Ed, you know more than almost anyone about the problems in the Caribbean, after having had such long experience there, both in your studies as well as being personally involved. But I think the role of the Marine Corps is at an end. I also think the role of the United States is at an end, unless we change our policy. We are losing ground rapidly and in the whole of not only the Caribbean, but all of Latin America.

I will close to that by saying that the human rights

program in Argentina and Brazil, has been one of alienating both of those very, very strategically and economically important countries, to the extent that the Argentine government, would not even hear of participating in the sanctions against Iran, which we would have liked very much. The fact is that there have been no sanctions yet against Iran and they will keep selling wheat to them.

Simmons: As recently as, well, look at another part of the world. On the 26th of October, President Park Chung Khe of South Korea was assassinated. The involvement of very high level officers in his murder seemed to reveal just how brittle the government of South Korea was. Since then, there have been some very small steps taken towards accommodation with North Korea. Do you think that South Korea is defensible?

Wilson: Oh yes, I think South Korea is defensible against North Korea. North Korea of course, has the smaller population, but has almost as many men in its armed forces as does South Korea. The North Koreans are economically in very difficult straits. China will not support them, because China believes now that it is in their interest for the United States to maintain a strong presence in the Western Pacific which includes South Korea. Russia will not support them and as a result; the North Koreans have nowhere to turn. South Korea with its burgeoning economy will outlast them, although I suspect that they could even reach Seoul if they chose to make a surprise attack.

Simmons: You made a very interesting and I think an important point there, that North Korea is somewhat isolated

or insulated from other communist support in its present condition.

Wilson: There is no question about it. They are so isolated and have no logistical capability to maintain any kind of a long war. I think our presence in South Korea lends credibility to the United States policy and I have continually supported the U.S. Army remaining there until there is some effort toward accommodation.

Simmons: Getting back to Iran, on 4 November 1979, about 500 Iranian so-called "students" seized the U.S. embassy taking about 90 hostages, including 60 of the 65 Americans. That's nearly four months ago. Fifty hostages are still being held. These include the Caucasian members of the Marine Security Guard. Early during the crisis, there were many calls upon the President to "send in the Marines." Do you think that this was realistic?

Wilson: No, it was not realistic at all. There's no way that we could have gone in to seize the hostages. Teheran is 300 miles inland, too far for helicopters to reach from carriers. As a result of this, there's no way that we could have gone in successfully. Russia let us know right away that in the 1921 Convention, they had a bilateral treaty with Iran. They suspected we might want to destroy the F-14's, which Iran had, to keep them from falling into Russian hands. They informed us that they would consider this an invasion and feel perfectly free under the agreement to move south.

I think there are many other ways that we could have put pressure on. An example: the United States built the oil-

gathering terminus at Kharg Island, which is off the coast of Iran in the Gulf. In my talks with engineers and constructors, I found many of them know where the sensitive points are that could have been destroyed by underwater demolition teams or whatever. This is not bombing indiscriminately, this is by CIA divers and undercover people. We know their location and as a result there is no way that the Ayatollah was going to release the hostages, particularly when he has the eyes and ears of the world on TV every night. He can always release the hostages and now he has the best of both worlds. There has to be some pressure put on him to release them. The only pressure that we could have put on early was the wherewithal to keep Iran going, which is their roughly two and a half million barrels of oil a day that they were selling at spot prices, well above the OPEC prices. We could have gone in there and knocked those out and then let the Ayatollah die on the vine. Only America put them in and only America had the knowledge as to where to destroy them. Then, later, America could have had the knowledge as to where to repair the damage.

Of course, this is known by the CIA as well as known by the administration, but the lack of willingness to do something is appalling. And I might also add that the Fluor Corporation has just finished 99% of a 200,000 barrel-a-day refinery. I had talked to the head of DIA, LtGen [Eugene F.] Tighe, at the request of Fluor, and asked what would be the United States' position if Fluor dragged their feet and did not finish this refinery. They could because all the Americans were gone, and they had only three West Germans and two Canadians and were hiring 12 Iranian employees. The word I received was that kerosene heat is like food, and you can

talk to people better with full stomachs and therefore, they believed the refinery should be finished. At the moment, it is not finished only because the Iranians are unwilling to allow subcontractors to ensure that all of the pieces are placed hoping they will not have to pay for the material they seized from Fluor. So this is where we stand.

Simmons: That's very interesting. On 21 November, a mob of Pakistanis attacked and set fire to the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad. Forty Americans and 50 Pakistani employees were trapped in the third floor vault. Their eventual escape was generally attributed to the coolness of the NCO in charge of the Marine Security Guard, MSgt Loyd Miller. MSgt Miller has since been critical of the instructions he received from the Regional Security Officer and the Administrative Officer of the embassy. He says that he several times asked for authority to use deadly force, and this was denied. Do you have any comments in general to make on the role and mission of the Marine Security Guards assigned to the U.S. Diplomatic missions or any specific comments in respect to Islamabad and Teheran?

Wilson: No. I was not aware of this incident that you just mentioned. It would be something which I would expect a master sergeant of the Marine Corps to request; as I would equally expect him to be concerned that he did not receive this permission.

I think however, that we must leave this up to the ambassador or charge' to determine whether or not deadly force should be used. I don't believe that we can allow our Marine NCOs to be left with such discretion. This is a

responsibility in which they do not understand the full implications. Nor however, do I believe the ambassador should leave it to a low-level security officer to make such a decision. The Marine NCO should have authority to go directly to the ambassador and to hear his rationale whether or not to use deadly force.

Simmons: On 27 December, President [Hafizullah] Amin of Afghanistan was removed from office and executed in a Soviet-backed coup. In 48 hours, the Russians had 30,000 men in Afghanistan and that number subsequently went up to between 80,000 and 100,000. Do you see anything that will stop the eventual march of the Russians south to the Indian Ocean?

Wilson: Not a thing. I think it is inevitable that the United States will lose; the west that is, will lose the capability of buying oil at their own discretion from the Middle East.

Now, I don't believe that the Russians, at the moment, are going to move their troops overtly to the Indian Ocean, through Pakistan or through Iran. I believe that they are going to do this by surrogates; they are going to do this by drying of the vine. We are unable to put conventional forces of any size in the Middle East to challenge the Russians in their own backyard. In the first place, we have no real support. An example: I was in Kuwait in November and was challenged by some intellectuals at a luncheon given by the Kuwait Oil Company, when they found that I was a general. This was even before the Iranian situation, three days before, in fact. They indicated that the United States policy of "protecting" their oil was nothing more than a facade for the United States coming over and confiscating

their oil, and they actually believed this.

Any move which we would make in that direction would be immediately challenged. In fact, most of the Gulf States believe that they would be no better off or no worse off if the Russians were there now, except perhaps Saudi Arabia.

But Saudi Arabia has only four million people, only 30,000 in its armed forces. They have absolutely no capability to do anything constructive. They don't work, everything is free. And the problems at Mecca, which you may mention later, were a part of a much larger coup attempt against the royal family. The royal family is destined to go; it's not a matter of if, it's when. King Khalid now, is in poor health with a heart problem. He may not live but a few weeks or months. The Crown Prince will probably take over, but the royal family has over 400 members now, increasing all the time. He has over 30 half-brothers and there is no way that the royal family is able to continue living this sumptuous style for long. And with that, Saudi Arabia is going the way of Iran.

Simmons: You did anticipate my question and I think you have shown quite clearly the situation in Saudi Arabia, if anything, is more fragile than it is in Iran.

Wilson: There is no question about it. Before I left JCS, we believed that South Yemen could successfully challenge the Saudis. The South Yemenese army is, of course, supported by the Russians.

Simmons: As one of his actions to improve U.S. readiness, the President has announced creation of a Joint Rapid

Deployment Force to be commanded by Marine LtGen Paul X. Kelley. Is this something really new, or is it just a case of "old wine in new bottles?" I am thinking of StrAC [Strategic Army Corps] MEAFSA [Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia], Strike Command.

Wilson: No. I think it is old wine in new bottles; Gen Barrow discussed this with me. Not that he asked my advice nor should he, but I told him that under the circumstances, I agreed with his decision to participate in the Rapid Deployment Force. Had I been Commandant, I would have been concerned because I remember very well that Gen [Merrill B.] Twining told me once of an incident which happened to him. Gen Twining was probably the intellectual leader of the Marine Corps during the Vandergrift years. Gen Twining related to me a proposal he once had which offered him command of a force, very much like this, if he would get the Commandant to agree to go along with what later turned out to be MEAFSA or Strike Command, He turned it down because he suspected a trick. But, as you say, these proposals come by different names. Now, I think that this might be the same thing.

But I believe that the Marine Corps future as we now know it lies in changing our direction from that which has been perceived by our predecessors to be purely an amphibious force. Now obviously this cannot be the case. But there are those Marines who either by lack of knowledge of current conditions have typed us an amphibious force but without amphibious ships, we were in danger of dying on the vine. Now remember, the Marine Corps is a much more viable, larger, and prestigious force than it was in those days. The

Commandant is a full member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Marine Corps is recognized as a separate service and not as an adjunct to the Navy. In order to preserve our stature that we have now built, we have to widen our combat ability to get involved in all types of war. The fact is that the U.S. Navy will not build amphibious ships, and the Navy has always given us the back of their hand when it came down to what they considered to be important, which currently of course is the nuclear submarine and carriers. But Carter is not building ships of any type now.

Simmons: The shipbuilding program for forward deployed depot ships [pre-positioned] for the Marine Corps has also been announced. I thought that concept had been explored at least two times before, since the mid-1950s, and discarded. What has changed?

Wilson: I think the same applies, as I had mentioned in my earlier comments, that they were discarded because they certainly are not amphibious. I don't believe that we can get equipment out of these ships on land (out of the protective coating), into the hands of troops, much sooner than we could if we sent them from the United States. But this is a popular concept now. But if we are not able to get amphibious ships in order to move Marines, then either we do this or we don't do anything. But practically speaking, I think that it is a waste of money not to build amphibious ships. I have not been articulate enough to express these convictions to the right people who can give us the wherewithal and get us moving in the right direction.

Simmons: That's very interesting. So many of us, perhaps in

an old-fashioned way, are fearful of being separated from our pack on the battlefield; you never find your pack. That's been the thrust of the Marine Corps philosophy all these years that we go with our pack on our back, in different ships, in different airplanes.

Wilson: Absolutely. Now I'm told that the equipment for this will be over and above the organic equipment and the mount-out equipment, which is traditionally what Marines take to battle. I doubt that they will finance this. It costs a billion dollars to outfit a division, and I doubt if there is going to be a billion dollars worth of equipment put aboard these ships in addition to the billion dollars which the division has as organic.

But nevertheless, it is my understanding that that is what had been promised and therefore, under these circumstances, I think the Commandant has to go along with it. I suspect that Gen Barrow feels the same way. Without the ships, we simply have to get into the act because it is the only game in town.

Simmons: Perhaps I have been asking too many "wife-beating" questions, so let's move to more neutral territory. What are you doing now to keep fit? Have you resumed your running?

Wilson: No, I haven't and I have been neglecting my golf. I joined a golf club which is being built but has not been completed yet. I have been doing some quail hunting on horseback. But I really haven't had much exercise. But I have been maintaining my weight about the same. I have never had much trouble with that.

Simmons: You look very much the same. You haven't put on an ounce. Now I think we should go back and pick up where we left off last June.

As we ended our interview last June, you had just told me appropriately enough, that while on leave in Jackson, in April 1978, you had found a house that you liked and subsequently, you had bought it. That is this house, and you described this house.

Wilson: That is this house.

Simmons: You came back from Mississippi on 26 April 1978 and the next morning, 27 April 1978, you had Adm and Mrs. Mickey Weisner as your breakfast guests at the Commandant's House. They were old friends, I suppose, from Hawaii?

Wilson: Yes, they were. I had worked for him when he was CinCPacFlt and later on, when he was CinCPac. It's interesting that we were with them last weekend. They have visited here, by the way, when he retired in November, and now lives in Pensacola. They came up to visit us in December; we went quail shooting on horseback, which he seemed to enjoy. He's a great golfer, but the weather was not conducive to golf at that time of year. I saw them at the Mardi Gras last weekend, in New Orleans, and he is doing very well.

Simmons: That's very good to hear. On Friday afternoon, the 28th of April, you went to Quantico for a change of command and retirement ceremony. LtGen Joe Fegan was being relieved by MajGen John Miller. The rank of commanding general for Quantico was reduced from lieutenant general to major

general. Why was this?

Wilson: Well, I did not actually make that retirement, due to a JCS meeting that afternoon, which I felt that I had to attend. This was the SALT meeting in which, for the first time it was revealed [??] that I was the only member of the JCS that would vote against the SALT Treaty. I thought Bernie Rogers was going along with me until this meeting. This was a very important meeting in which I felt that I must attend to express my firm conviction that SALT was not in the best interests of the United States. I had called Joe and he seemed to understand, but I regretted not being there.

This reduction of rank of the commanding general of the Marine Corps Development and Education Command was a decision that I made in order to give that lieutenant general's spot to Phil Shutler to be the J-3. The Marine Corps had never had a principal joint staff officer. I tried to get the J-5 job for Larry Snowden, which I mentioned earlier. We had to have a lieutenant general billet and I took it from Quantico with the full expectation that after this three-year tour was up for Phil, it would go back to Quantico.

I had a letter from Jim Holloway recently telling me what a fine job that Phil Shutler had done and that he had several occasions to be back in the Pentagon since his retirement a year and a half ago, and that he had heard nothing but high praise about Shutler's work both from his Navy officers as well as from other members of the Joint Staff.

But subsequent to that time, Gen Barrow has merged the Assistant Commandant and the chief of staff billets, which

freed a lieutenant general billet, and he gave it back to Quantico. Now, he has been given one for Gen Kelley, and I suppose that Kelley will take Phil's job when he retires at the end of his term.

Simmons: Did this cause Joe Fegan to retire early?

Wilson: No.

Simmons: His plans were already made.

Wilson: His plans were made and I had told Joe, when he went to Quantico, that this was for a two-year billet here. I did not believe that I could extend generals beyond five and 35. Certainly not where an officer had been there for two years and we needed to bring younger generals on. He understood this. As early as Christmas, he told me that he remembered our conversation and he had planned to retire. He said that he perhaps, would leave a month or two early and I said that it certainly was alright with me, "anytime that you make the decision," which he did.

Simmons: On Sunday 30 April, you went to Valley Forge Academy to speak in the chapel to the cadets. LtGen Willard Pearson, U.S. Army (Retired), is the superintendent there, and BGen Ted Metaxis, U.S. Army (Retired), is the deputy superintendent and commandant of the cadets. Both are very fine officers. Had you known them before?

Wilson: No. I had known Gen Pearson's reputation. I think he had been J-1 for several years, on the Joint Staff. I knew him by reputation, and I knew the Valley Forge Academy.

It is a very fine organization, from which we got a great many Marines.

I went up by helicopter. They had a fine parade after the ceremonies and a luncheon. I have subsequently been in touch with Gen Pearson several times. I might mention, too, a young Marine sergeant from the Academy was captured in Teheran during the Shah's departure, put in solitary for several days, and conducted himself very heroically. In fact, Ambassador Bill Sullivan has written me, and sent a message as to what a great job he had done. I thought that we should recognize him in some way. I sent a citation to Ambassador Sullivan, who endorsed it, and we had a ceremony out at Andrews when he came in. I believe we gave him the hero's welcome that he deserved. He got his initial training at the Valley Forge Academy, which Gen Pearson reminded me. So my point was that not all of them were officers when they finished, and they certainly have been very fine Marines.

Simmons: On Monday 1 May, you had another busy day. You went down to Norfolk in the morning to speak to the Armed Forces Staff College. You had Armed Forces Policy Council and Navy Program Committee meetings in the afternoon. Then you presided over the promotion of Harry Hagaman to brigadier general. Then there was a Mississippi reception at the Capitol Hilton followed by dinner at Trader Vic's. I don't know whether any of those events need comment or not.

Wilson: No, but I remember them. I think this was sort of a day in which several business and social events came together which kept us busy.

Simmons: On Wednesday of that week, the new combat ration was presented in the Commandant's dining room, presumably being served for lunch. What is the new ration like?

Wilson: It was very good. It was billed as soy beans tasting like steak and a few things which I think would taste good over a long period of time, certainly better than the C-rations in World War II. I don't believe however, that they have lived up to their billings both in shelf life and cost. I believe the introduction of those rations have now been delayed for several years.

Simmons: On Friday the 5th of May, I was on your schedule for a discussion of the Mississippi Military Museum in Jackson, and support that we might give it. It doesn't look as though we're going to have time during this visit to get there. So perhaps, you will tell me about it.

Wilson: As a matter of fact, there really hasn't been a great deal done.

End Tape 1, Side 1

Begin Tape 1, Side 2

Simmons: You were telling about the Mississippi Military Museum.

Wilson: You remember that I have given a few Marine Corps items. It is in the Veterans' Hall which is next to the old Capitol Building, which I will show you. It's still under

construction.

Simmons: Maybe I'll ask for the curator's job.

Wilson: Yes, we'd like to have you.

Simmons: That weekend, you were again traveling. On Saturday 6 May, you went to College Station in Texas to Texas A & M University for the commissioning ceremonies of the new second lieutenants. I am sure that you saw LtGen Orm Simpson?

Wilson: No, unfortunately, although Orm was instrumental in me coming down there to present the commissions. As you know, he's held in as high regard there as he was in the Marine Corps. Marge was having surgery in Houston and naturally he was with her, as he should have been. Fortunately, it was non-malignant and she is fine now. The president of the university was a Marine. It is always inspiring to be at Texas A&M to see the graduation and the old-fashioned patriotism and military spirit which prevails there, probably as much as at any of the service academies.

Simmons: You then went on to Albuquerque, New Mexico, where there was a Marine Corps Reserve Officers' Association banquet in your honor.

Wilson: Yes. It was there that I received a feather as an honorary Navajo Indian from the Navajo Indian tribe chief, Peter McDonald. You will remember that the Navajos were the "talkers," so called, in Guadalcanal. Their language has never been deciphered to the extent that it could be

understood by other than a Navajo. Frankly they have overplayed this over the years; nevertheless, it does give them an identity and pride. I think it is very important to continue and I made every effort to overstate the importance of the Navajo talkers. They're very appreciative of being Marines, and as a matter of fact, Peter McDonald is the leader of the Navajo nation. He is also a leader in the Council of Indian Tribes; there is a name for it which I can't remember right now. Furthermore, they are the owners of probably the greatest coal shale reserves and perhaps oil in the United States. The Navajos have been exempted from the windfall profits tax. Their tribal lands have a great deal to do with the future of the energy supplies in our country and it certainly doesn't hurt to have the leader as a dedicated Marine.

Simmons: The next morning, you proceeded to Fort Leavenworth and on Monday 8 May, spoke to the Army Command and Staff College there, and then you came home.

Wilson: Yes, that was a busy weekend. I went to Texas, to Albuquerque, and played golf in Fort Leavenworth on Sunday afternoon and, as usual, enjoyed the Leavenworth challenge very much. That's an inspiring group of students who asked particularly good questions; a thousand students. I remember them since they laughed at my jokes, perhaps from a cue card which I could not see.

Simmons: On 10 May, there was another luncheon with the President at the White House. The subject of this luncheon was "consolidated guidance." I asked what that means.

Wilson: "Consolidated guidance" was a term that appeared during the Carter administration. It was supposed to be the document that comes down from the President and the Secretary of Defense on which all programs are based. I am trying to think of a similar name, but I can't think of it right now, it was supposed to emanate from the President and the Secretary of Defense and down to the departments and the services on which their programs would be based. It never worked out. There was the usual controversy from the beginning. The Under Secretary for Policy, to which the former Secretary of the Army was appointed, but later resigned because of a difference of opinion, was Stan Reso. It was his brainchild. I am not sure it is being used now

Simmons: They're still issuing it.

Wilson: It has no future because it is so general an order that all departments can agree [???]-- it becomes useless.

Simmons: On Thursday 11 May....

Wilson: It's surprising how I forget terms so quickly, even in a short eight months; you don't live with them every day.

Simmons: On Thursday 11 May at 1100, there was a truly historic event. You presided over the promotion of Margaret Brewer to brigadier general. She was the first woman Marine to reach this rank. Can you tell me how her promotion came about? Particularly, did she have to compete with her male contemporaries?

Wilson: I believed that it was time for a woman general and

as I look back on it, it caused less controversy than I had anticipated. I talked to Sam Jaskilka, and the usual group of generals at Headquarters, with whom I discussed important policy matters, before I made any major moves. There was agreement that we should have a woman general.

I knew that the Secretary of the Navy would be for it because he was very much in favor of women for many reasons, and not the least of which was that Mrs. Claytor had been a WAVE [women accepted for volunteer emergency service] officer in World War II. Nevertheless, he had made several remarks to me that there was not a woman general, although he had never put any pressure on to have one selected, I had the law researched and determined that, in fact, a woman had to be appointed by the Secretary of the Navy. Any woman could be appointed. She was not required to be up for selection from among her male contemporaries. The precedent had been set by the Navy in making the first woman rear admiral.

I believed, however, that there should be a recommendation to me from a board to select the best fitted woman to be appointed. I did appoint a board and I've forgotten who was the senior member. But in any case, Margaret Brewer was recommended. I had known Margaret for a long time and was highly pleased. I was then confronted with the problem of having to have a job before she was selected. As I remember, the law stated that she had to be the best fitted for a particular job. Now that might not be the exact words, but that was the upshot of it. I was then confronted with the problem of having to conscientiously state that a woman was best fitted for a particular job, which I frankly could not do unless she was particularly qualified.

The job of public information was made to order for her since she was a graduate of journalism, had been my public affairs officer when I was a colonel in the Sixth District in Atlanta and she had subsequently worked for me when I had the Education Center at Quantico. She is a very capable writer and I believe a very capable individual. As a result, I had appointed her the Director of Public Information, which worked out extremely well, and she was appointed by the Secretary of the Navy.

I pointed out to Margaret that she could be a general for only two years, that I believed a woman general should be like our lawyers and while I would not be the Commandant when her two years were up, I would tell my successor that I had given her this choice. And therefore, she should not plan to stay on longer than two years because she could not be selected for major general. She would still have a couple of years to do before her 30 years but she should plan to retire with 28 years of service.

I don't know what intentions Gen Barrow has for Margaret. I made it clear at Headquarters Marine Corps that the public affairs job was not forever destined to be a woman general's job, and that a woman general should be on a best qualified basis ... (tape interference here)

Simmons: We were talking about Margaret Brewer as the first woman brigadier general...

Wilson: Yes, right. I said that the Director of Public Information should not always be considered a woman general and I believe that whenever the Commandant felt that he needed a woman general, that she should be made on the merits

of her background; i.e., administration, personnel or whatever. Nor did I believe that the Marine Corps is committed to a woman general all the time.

Simmons: Promotional opportunity would be considerably better wouldn't it, for a woman, if there was one dedicated slot for her?

Wilson: Of course, because there's probably not over three colonels now, perhaps even two. I passed my philosophy on to Gen Barrow. And what he does obviously is his choice. I mentioned this to the Secretary of the Navy also.

Simmons: The Marine Corps moved rather rapidly while you were Commandant, in erasing the differences between male and female Marines, so far as MOS's and assignments were concerned. Does a line have to be drawn between them? And if so, where should it be drawn?

Wilson: Well, I had as a policy in our policy file, (and by the way, these remarks that I am making, as I have philosophized, are all in the policy file in Headquarters Marine Corps). I believe that women should not be assigned to MOSs which would take them forward of the division headquarters or forward of the artillery regimental headquarters, or forward of the wing headquarters.

Simmons: Well, do you think even that is realistic? It would be realistic perhaps, in a stabilized situation such as we had in Vietnam, where you had relatively sophisticated division headquarters, even regimental headquarters. But in a mobile situation, what some people might call a "real

war"...

Wilson: Yes. Well, I'm aware of its basic weakness, but the line had to be drawn somewhere. And therefore, we simply would not be able to have the numbers of women that we could use profitably, if we put the area back of the division headquarters this policy opened up the MOSs enough so that the women were in almost all but the combat skills.

You see, the problem we have is that men in restricted MOSs can foresee that if too many women go into this MOS, they have to rotate overseas much sooner than they would if the MOSs were for men only because of the restrictions on Okinawa for women. We Marines have a peculiar requirement there. I believed we had to move their presence as far forward as possible—but not too far—a difficult choice. Realistically though, we can put them in the division headquarters, the wing headquarter and the artillery headquarters in peacetime. There has to be good judgment in a wartime situation as to where they should have a presence. So this is the rationale which I justified in doing what I had to do.

For instance, in communications, women can be used in communications, but we could have so many women in communications, but they run the division headquarters, then we could have this rotation going equally.

Simmons: How do you feel about women registering for the draft?

Wilson: I think they should register for the draft. I have so testified: in fact, I was the only one to testify for this

unequivocally when we testified before the Nunn Subcommittee. I was willing to step up and say at that time that I thought they should register.

Now, on the other hand, drafting women is something else again. Since I don't believe that we're going to have any draft bill passed in the immediate future anyway, that I think that, simply, we need to have the registration of women for nothing more than a basic inventory of our assets; and any business has to have an inventory.

Simmons: On the 18th of May, you went to Charleston for Armed Forces Day ceremonies; next day you went to New Orleans to speak to the Chamber of Commerce Armed Forces Day luncheon. Any specific recollection concerning this trip?

Wilson: Yes. I had not been to Charleston before. I stayed in the beautiful "little" quarters of the commandant of the naval base and spoke on the deck on the USS -- which is permanently moored in Charleston. I'll think of it in a minute. There I saw Gen Mark Clark. Gen Westmoreland was there also and there was a sunset ceremony in which Marines from the Marine barracks participated.

Simmons: It wasn't on the USS Yorktown?

Wilson: Yorktown yes. It was in the city of Charleston, a sort of a formal retreat as the sun set; a very beautiful setting. I went to New Orleans the next day for a chamber of commerce meeting. I saw Mr. Hebert at that time, who has subsequently died. I went to his funeral here just a couple of months ago. He was always very considerate to me

personally and a great friend of the Marine Corps. He had been ill but had gotten up to attend the luncheon. I was always amused that he never ate but he always had a special plate brought to him with a special pot of coffee. It turned out to be bourbon.

Simmons: That weekend was the 6th ROC reunion. We had spoken about these reunions in earlier sessions. And on Sunday, you hosted a brunch for the class at the Commandant's House. Any particular recollections of that?

Wilson: Yes. We had intended to have our class to the house as I mentioned earlier. We have always had a close-knit class. We rode the crest of the wave of promotions during World War II, having been commissioned just before the war. I wanted each of them to feel that they shared in my success, of which I must say that I have a great deal of gratitude to each of them because I have never felt that there was a deep resentment on the part of any of them because I happened to have been selected as Commandant. They seemed to have enjoyed the brunch. It was a delightful time of year; in May when the gardens were green and the flowers blooming and so we had tents out in the yard, which we had set up for the evening parades.

Simmons: On Tuesday 23 May, you spoke to the Inter-American Defense College at Fort McNair. That is a little different than most of your college talks, because this is an international audience.

Wilson: Yes, one in which I felt I was most inadequate, I believe, of any of the talks that I made to colleges. I was

a little ill at ease. It was surprising because I had never before encountered this. When the questions were asked, they were asked in the language of the student, and interpreted simultaneously by the interpreter. It came through the microphone and therefore, I was not able to see the questioner. The questioner was speaking at his seat in his own language and it came out in the microphone in English. It was very frustrating to me, to not be able to see the person who was asking the question. I had mentioned this to the commandant of the school and suggested it might have been well that he stood up, even though I was not answering directly to him, because many times I have talked to people through interpreters. But to see everybody out there looking and not being able to see his lips moving was very frustrating. I was ill at ease the whole time.

Simmons: On Friday 26 May, you went to Winter Park, Florida, and the next day delivered the commencement address at Rollins College and received an honorary degree. Should I call you "Doctor" from here on?

Wilson: Well, I didn't know whether it was General-Doctor or Doctor-General. I believe this is something which was a question put to Gen [Wilburt S.] "Big Foot" Brown, where you have just been for his day at Tuscaloosa. I think he was the first one who--I believe he sent a message to the Commandant, didn't he, and asked that?

Simmons: That's part of the legend.

Wilson: Nevertheless this is not new with me. I did enjoy, very much, being with Ed Danowitz, an old friend of mine,

whom you know very well. He is a Doctor of Russian language, professor of languages and he is specializing in Russian. He has had many years at Rollins. The president at that time was a Marine. He subsequently left to become president of the telephone company there. They honored me with a doctorate. It is a very impressive school. I remember Rollins when I was in college here in Mississippi. In fact, we use to play against them in baseball. Rollins at that time was a very good school and still is. I remembered it so well because I thought it was the ultimate in schools when we went down to play. If you majored in economics or business, which I did at Millsaps, you went to school for a half year and then went to New York and did practical work for half a year. The students were wealthy enough to be able to afford that at the time. I don't think they do it now, but it is still a very wealthy school with a large endowment.

Simmons: On Wednesday 31 May, you attended the retirement of MajGen Lloyd Wilkerson in the morning. That afternoon, MajGen [Kenneth] McLennan paid an office call on you. I believe Ken took over Lloyd's duties in the Personnel Department.

Wilson: He did, yes. Lloyd I have known for many years. He did a fine job as commanding general of the 3d Marine Division. He had broken his leg in several places in an unusual accident. He was running for a helicopter when he slipped and fell over a little bridge in Camp Hanson which leads to, the helicopter pad. You remember where that bridge is? He was in a cast almost the entire time that he was commanding general of the division. I had several reports on his condition and was out there once and observed that he was

able to continue as commanding general. He had a jeep built known as "Ironsides" after the TV program, and was even able to get aboard a helicopter by being rolled aboard.

Lloyd was a little older than most of his contemporaries. In fact, I informed him that, for this reason, I simply could not make him lieutenant general. But, as a major general he would be working for somebody who had previously been his junior. I didn't like that, but, nevertheless, this was the alternative: to either do this or retire. He decided to stay on for a year or two and did a fine job and I was very appreciative.

Simmons: On Friday 2 June 1978, you had a reception and a parade for a retiring JCS member. Do you recall who it was?

Wilson: That was George Brown. The 28th of June?

Simmons: The 2nd of June. It seemed like an early date that was in your appointment calendar. On Tuesday 6 June...

Wilson: I don't remember now if it was George Brown's retirement. George may have retired early.

Simmons: On Tuesday 6 June, the commanding general of the Royal Marines arrived for a visit. This would be LtGen John Richards. Do you have special recollections of this visit?

Wilson: Yes. We had met the Richards in England when he was a brigadier and we were the official guest of the previous Commandant, who subsequently was promoted to four stars and had been sent to be CinCNorth.

Simmons: We were talking about Gen Richards and you were recalling that his tour as commandant of Royal Marines was interrupted.

Wilson: Peter Whitely was the commandant and his tour was interrupted by his appointment to CinCNorth, after Sir John Sharp died. Peter Whitely had been his chief of staff. I was delighted for him to receive this appointment, the first time a Royal Marine had been given such recognition. It dismayed the British Army considerably as a matter of fact. John was then appointed commandant. They are a nice couple and we enjoyed their company.

Simmons: Well, I had known John and Audrey when he was the Marine Attaché with the embassy here. I have a special recollection of that trip also because I was Gen Richards' escort when he laid a wreath at the Tomb of Unknowns. This was my last uniformed ceremony in which I took part before going back on the retired list.

Wilson: Well, I didn't realize that. I had forgotten.

Simmons: He also spent quite a bit of time with us over at the Museum.

On Tuesday 8 June, you had a lunch with Ambassador Zahedi of Iran. He had a great reputation as a host. Six months later he would be denounced by the Iranian revolutionaries. Do you have any special recollections of Ambassador Zahedi?

Wilson: Yes. I was very fond of Ardeshir. He had been particularly generous to me, having been to the house several times. He was a delightful host. There was just the two of us for lunch and it was there that I accepted an invitation to visit the Shah. I am sure this will come up later. I believe that he has been unduly maligned, as well as the Shah. I am sure it will come up in later questioning.

Simmons: The entries for the weekend of 16 June through Sunday 18 June are a little obscure. You were apparently scheduled to go to Cherry Point for the retirement of Gen Vic Armstrong and then on to New Orleans for a change of command ceremony for the Reserve 4th Marine Division. MajGen Marc Moore, whom you had just promoted, was relieving MajGen E.J. Miller, who would go on to receive a third star and command of FMFLant. But your appointment book shows that you went to Kentucky instead. Can you straighten this out?

Wilson: We had accepted an invitation to go to Kentucky that year to visit the Van Stockums for the Kentucky Derby. Reggie Van Stockum was a brigadier general of the Marine Corps (Retired), friends of ours, and we had accepted an invitation to visit them. And there was a mix-up because I had been unable to accept Vic Armstrong's retirement, although it was in my book.

Simmons: On Thursday 22 June, you had Mr. and Mrs. Donald Regan at the Commandant's House for dinner. That reminds me, it was through Mr. Regan that the Merrill Foundation made the Commandant's House a substantial gift. How did that come

about?

Wilson: Don and I had known each other over the years. He was a Marine, a couple of classes ahead of me at the Basic School. After he left the Marine Corps, he had been with Merrill Lynch and has subsequently become the Chairman of the board. His wife Ann was a Marine junior; her father was killed in Nicaragua in 1927. His name was Buchanan.

D
on had asked me what the Merrill Foundation (of which he was Chairman) might be able to do for the Marine Corps because they were under a court order to wind up the Merrill Foundation. Mr. Merrill, the founder of Merrill-Lynch, had left 20 million dollars to the Merrill Foundation. They have given over \$100 million in various philanthropies to schools, colleges, and various worthy causes.

Don asked me what he might be able to do for the Marine Corps. I mentioned the Marine Military Academy, Tun Tavern, and the Commandant's House. He asked for my recommendation. I said that I believed that a fund, the proceeds from which, with the relatively high interest rates payable at that time, (I thought, although the interest rate today is much higher now), could be invested and the proceeds be used for items; i.e., draperies and those things; which were needed for the Commandant's House for which it would be inappropriate or illegal to spend appropriated funds. He thought it was a good idea and as you remember, Ed, since you wrote the background papers for the Foundation: subsequently we received a check for the \$25,000 which was accepted by the Secretary of the Navy.

Later, Mrs. Buchanan (his mother-in-law) called Jane and

asked if she could donate a gold leaf mirror, which was then in Lee Mansion, to the Commandant's House although it was on a loan from her to the Lee Mansion. Jane measured it at Lee Mansion and found that it would fit perfectly in the entrance hallway, which indeed it does, and is a valuable addition to the Commandant's House. I believe this was valued roughly at \$10 or 11,000 itself.

So Don, and through his family, has been very generous with the Marine Corps, which is just another evidence of Marines never forgetting their belief in and affection for the Marine Corps.

Simmons: I don't believe you ever asked anyone for gifts for the House, but in addition to the Merrill Foundation giving \$25,000 and the Buchanan gift of the mirror, you did receive several other substantial gifts while you were Commandant. Isn't that right?

Wilson: Yes, I did, although never directly. I also never failed to mention that there was a fund for this and that if someone wanted to do something to perpetuate the Marine Corps and its history, a foundation was available for tax-free gifts. Now, an example of this was a great Marine, named Al Gentleman, who was our guest at the house. Al was a very close friend of mine and we had been stationed together in New York City. We invited Al and several friends of his and ours, to the House for a weekend. One was the Chairman of the Board of the Union Pacific and I will have to think of his name in just a minute.

But later on, we were talking about the house and it was Sissy Gentleman, Al's wife, who said, "Why doesn't Union

Pacific do something for the Commandant's House?" And within a period of about ten days, we received a check, as you remember, for \$5,000 from the Union Pacific Foundation which was added to the fund, which again, is for the purposes that I enumerated. His name is Jim Evans, who is still Chairman of the Board of the Union Pacific a great company whose interests extend far beyond railroads now, and include land, copper, coal, oil and timber.

Simmons: As we get to the end of June and the beginning of July 1978, we get into a busy time of retirement and promotions. You frocked MajGen E. J. Miller a lieutenant general on 27 June. And that evening, you went to a dinner honoring Gen George Brown, chairman of the JCS, who was about to retire, a dinner given by the Secretary of Defense, Harold Brown, at the Blair House. Do you have any recollections of that evening?

Wilson: Yes, I do. I am very fond of E. J. Miller. He was a tremendous officer. I think he did a great job as CG FMFLant in the last year of my tenure as Commandant. I know he has been asked by the Commandant to stay on another year in this job.

Secretary Brown gave his dinner for George Brown. George had cancer, detected in January of the year before. - He had made trips around the country to determine if surgery would be desirable. He chose not to have surgery, but to have chemotherapy. I would like to point out here that a ridiculous aspect of the law which implies that officers who retire for medical reasons, are cheating the government.

George Brown was advised not to even go to his office to

pick up his mail, from January until he retired, because going to the office even once might be held that he was fit for duty. Therefore, he did not even go to his office for the last six months and here was a man obviously dying of cancer.

But talking about the George Brown dinner, it was given by the Secretary who had complementary words both for George and Skip and within the next two or three days, his retirement was held at Andrews Air Force Base, in which the Marines were able to have the AV-8A fly by and as far as I know, this was the only time that Secretary Brown had ever seen the AV-8A, a plane in which he has consistently deleted from our budget. I saw to it that at least he would see it perform that day in the flyover for George Brown.

Simmons: That was on Friday 30 June, and I see on your calendar on that day at 0930, "retirement ceremony for BGen Simmons." I remember you were pressed for time and had to leave immediately thereafter, go out to Andrews Air Force Base for that farewell review.

Wilson: Yes. I would like to state here Ed that your retirement marked the end of a very long and illustrious career our friendship has lasted for many years, and it was a retirement which I regretted to have come about. Your efforts in promoting and recording Marine Corps history during your time on active duty as Director of Museums and History, is one which Marines will remember and be grateful for many years.

Simmons: Thank you. Going back to the 28th of June, on that morning there was a retirement parade for BGen Joe Bartlett.

You may want to comment on that.

Wilson: Yes, I would like to comment on Joe. Joe was a remarkable young man in his early days. He has been quite a factor in the Republican Party. Joe's promotion to brigadier general was controversial, to say the least. It was predicted by many people that he would be promoted because of the influence on Capitol Hill he had at that time. He was promoted and there were threats of an investigation which never came about.

But when I became the Commandant, Joe was very supportive of me, irrespective of what had gone on before. There had been rumors that he had tried to get someone else promoted. But as I say, he was very supportive of me personally and the Marine Corps throughout my tenure as Commandant.

Joe was very disappointed when he did not make major general. I as surprised that he was so publicly disappointed since he had indicated to me privately, prior to the board convening, that he really had thought that his duties in the Marine Corps had not been as substantive as that of many of his competitors and he did not really expect to be promoted. Nevertheless, I believe that he understood that we did have a shortage of major generals in the Reserve after we lost one because of the double counting which may come up later. We had to limit the number of generals we made that year. Joe eventually left his job as the Reader in the House and also as Clerk of the Republican Party. I believe that he is going to run for Congress from West Virginia. But I am not sure of that.

Simmons: That afternoon (I'm still speaking of 28 June) you

went to Norfolk for LtGen Miller's Change of Command. He did relieve LtGen Bob Barrow as CG FMFLant. Bob came to Washington.

Wilson: Right.

Simmons: The next day, you were still on this retirement cycle. 29 June was Gen Sam Jaskilka's retirement parade.

Wilson: Yes. Sam and I had been friends for many years. Sam was a tremendous officer. Generally, he did not sell for his real worth on his initial impressions on many people.

Sam had really run the campaign in Cambodia, while serving as the operations officer for Gen Abrams. He had set up for the Commandant, in the early years, our computer program. Sam was the director of the Staff and Command College at Quantico when I had the Education Center. He had been passed over for major general the first time but had continued to do an outstanding job. He came to Headquarters before I became Commandant as Director of Personnel and I believe it had a great deal to do with the stability of the Marine Corps at a time when there were a great deal of rough spots.

I was delighted when he accepted my, offer to be the Assistant Commandant. An example of the type of individual that he was, I told him that I thought we could, probably, by counting all of the people in the Marine Corps, by some manipulation, not dishonest, but nevertheless extending the regulations, make him four stars, as had been done in the past. But that I would like to use him as a test case.

End Tape 1, Side 2

Begin Tape 2, Side 1

Wilson: I was talking about Sam Jaskilka. I asked Sam if he would be the test case, not be promoted, and not make an effort to use the 200,000 Marines maneuver in order for him to have four stars. We could have counted the officer candidates who were still in college and other facades, which could have recorded the 200,000 members. But I wanted to get the Assistant Commandant to be four stars permanently and as I did not feel that if he was four stars at the time, we would have as good a chance. If he were three stars, we could be more successful so that we could say that he needed to be promoted. Sam agreed, which I thought was very generous of him because he could have insisted, and had he insisted, I would have made every effort to have him promoted to four stars.

In any case , we set about to try to get this legislation passed. I think we have discussed this earlier, but I am not sure at what point. I tried to emphasize the great injustice that was being done in the Marine Corps by not having the Assistant Commandant as four stars, when his contemporaries in the other services had four stars. An anomaly would be that he could be junior to the Director of the Joint Staff, at a time when he was acting as the Commandant. We were successful. The law was changed so that the Assistant Commandant would always be four stars. I was delighted for this change for Sam.

Simmons: 30 June was a busy day for ceremonies At 1500, you attended a ceremony on the Pentagon River Plaza, so-called,

where Gen David Jones, Gen Lew Allen, and Adm Tom Hayward assumed their duties respectively as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Chief of Staff of the Air Force and Chief of Naval Operations.

Wilson: Yes. That was a busy day for promotions and retirements. Lew Allen and Tom Hayward joined the JCS, of which I was not a full member at that time. They performed the traditional flipping of the coin, which was done to determine the initial seniority. Lew Allen won or lost, I suppose, depending upon how you looked at it. He was then senior to Hayward for the next year.

Simmons: I believe Gen Jones had been the de facto acting chairman for about six months at that time, hadn't he?

Wilson: He had been, because of George Brown's illness. He took over as chairman when George was unable to function only because of the coin flip earlier which had made him senior to Jim Holloway.

Simmons: Would you care to speculate, do you think the chairman would have been another Air Force officer if Gen Brown had indeed finished his tour?

Wilson: Yes, I think it probably would have been Dave Jones, in any case. I had been summoned by Secretary Brown and Secretary Duncan a few weeks before, and was informed that the President had intended to nominate Jones to the Senate and Hayward and Allen would be nominated to be their respective chiefs. I had known Tom Hayward; had not know Allen until he had been appointed two or three months earlier

as the Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force.

I suspect Dave would have been the nominee. He was very compatible with Brown. He would have had to retire since the law states that a service chief cannot serve but four years and there will be no reappointment. Dave is not given to resisting the Secretary or the President. It seems to be a happy relationship, which I think is important, that the Chairman and the Secretary be compatible.

Simmons: An hour later on this same day, in the Secretary of the Navy's office, LtGen Bob Barrow was promoted to general. That evening, you had a dinner and a parade honoring him as the new Assistant Commandant.

Wilson: Yes. He had been in Washington as Director of Personnel before he went to FMFLant. He returned to be the Assistant Commandant as I thought that he should be there when the time came for the selection of the new Commandant. He should have exposure along with the other lieutenant generals at that time, so all the potential candidates could be given a fair evaluation. There were a great number, at least four lieutenant generals, all fully capable of succeeding me the next year.

Simmons: As kind of a postscript to all these changes, on Saturday 1 July, you went in the afternoon to the Naval Academy for the retirement of Adm Jim Holloway.

Wilson: Jim and I had been friends for many years. We were classmates at the War College. I had great respect for Jim and still do. Except for the disagreement over the J-3, we

were unusually compatible. That, after three years, was a very good record.

I will say that he had a very, very difficult job following Bud Zumwalt, who almost ruined the Navy. Zumwalt had so weakened the discipline in the Navy that Jim Holloway certainly could not turn it around immediately. It takes years to reverse such a decision when discipline is so relaxed. The Navy had almost become a group of pirates in appearance and discipline. And so, Jim began the turnaround and I think it is being continued by Tom Hayward. But it still will take years to undo. I am sure that he was trying to do what he believed was correct at the time. But he was wrong.

Simmons: On Monday 3 July, you officiated at two promotions. The first was MajGen Phil Shutler, for three stars, which we have already discussed. The second promotion was that of your fine military secretary, John Donovan, from lieutenant colonel to colonel.

Wilson: Yes. John had been my aide, and I think that he is an outstanding officer, with a great future in the Marine Corps. He is articulate, knowledgeable, a fine leader and I am deeply indebted to him for advice, counsel and support for the years in which I was Commandant.

Simmons: On Friday 21 July, you gave a luncheon in the Commandant's dining room for Ambassador Robert Komer. How well do you know Ambassador Komer?

Wilson: I knew Ambassador Komer briefly in Vietnam; more so

in Washington when he was the special ambassador and the NATO expert (I've forgotten his title) for Secretary Brown. He has always seemed to be supportive of the Marine Corps, although we never were able to convince him to be our advocate for amphibious shipping. I believe that he was a supporter for the Marine Corps in NATO. Now he is the Under Secretary with a great deal of influence over Brown. From what I understand from Gen Barrow, he has continued to be quite supportive of the Marine Corps in the last few months.

Simmons: That evening, you gave a reception and parade in honor of the new chairman of the JCS, Gen Jones, the new Chief of Naval Operations, Adm Hayward and the new Chief of Staff of the Air Force, Lew Allen. On 25 July, you left for leave in Jackson, Mississippi, a very brief leave--only two days. On Friday 28 July, you officiated at the retirement of LtGen Bob Nichols. As I remember it, his retirement was delayed because the bill that would have made him a lieutenant general on the retired list, got stuck somewhere in the system.

Wilson: Yes, that's right. He went to take a job in Boston and he returned because of the foul up after this massive heart attack and heart bypass. He came back and was a hard worker, very conscientious and a very capable officer. The Marine Corps owes a great deal to Bob Nichols, who in earlier years as the president of a selection board, simply would not be dictated to and had taken his case directly and forthrightly to the Secretary of the Navy. I believe that very few people know the debt which the Marine Corps owes Bob Nichols.

Simmons: Just recently, he had another heart attack that was very bad.

Wilson: Yes, I knew that he was ill. I didn't know it was a heart attack.

Simmons: Maybe I am wrong, but I had assumed---immediately after Bob's retirement, you promoted MajGen Ken McLennan to lieutenant general and to succeed Bob as Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower.

Wilson: Yes, Ken is a fine officer. He is very articulate, knowledgeable and was a super division commander. I think that he was one of the finest staff officers, commanders and one of the greatest individuals that I know. I am delighted to see that he is the Assistant Commandant now and I know he is performing such a magnificent service to the Corps.

Simmons: You probably won't want to comment on this, but in one of our earlier session, we discussed the differing responsibilities of the Assistant Commandant and the chief of staff. The present Commandant (we're getting ahead of ourselves here of course) has chosen to combine these two jobs and this might appear to be very difficult to do, for a person to perform both of these very different functions.

Wilson: Well, I think it is a good idea. As a matter of fact, Bob discussed this with me after he had made his decision to do it. I supported it completely.

Now, Larry Snowden did not think it was a good idea. Les Brown had thought it was a good idea. I may well have

done this and obviously this was an alternative. It is logical, because the Marine Corps is the only service that does have an Assistant Commandant and a chief of staff. I had considered it but I was not willing to bite the bullet. Personalities have a great deal to do with these changes. When I became the Commandant, I had many problems regarding individuals who had not supported me for Commandant and I really wasn't willing to reorganize the Headquarters Marine Corps at this time while this sorting out was going on. But later on, it was suggested by Les Brown. Nevertheless, by that time, I was committed to three-star individuals staying for a certain length of time, and once you get committed to these assumptions, it is disruptive to change. But Bob is coming in with a clean slate. He needs to be his own man, make changes as he sees necessary, as every Commandant needs to do early. He can't be, and should not be, a carbon copy of the previous Commandant. This gave him an opportunity to make a bold stroke, which I think was correct.

Now, on the other side of the coin, I am sure that it is going to be a very difficult job for one individual to serve as the Assistant Commandant and the chief of staff- He has to be the alter-ego of the Commandant, take JCS meetings on a moment's notice, for example. Then as chief of staff, unless he has delegated to the general staff a great deal of authority, administrative matters grind to a halt while he is acting Commandant. But, this is procedure which I am sure that they have overcome now, and I hope that it is working fine. Besides, it gives us another lieutenant general for the field.

Simmons: On Saturday 29 July, you left for California. You

attended the 3rd Marine Division reunion in San Francisco that evening. On Sunday you went to Caramel. Did you play the Pebble Beach Golf Course?

Wilson: No, we visited some friends, whom we had met through the Gentlemen's, the same group who were with Jim Evans of the Union Pacific Railroad. We spent the night with them and then went to Sacramento, where I made a speech to the Sacramento Comstock Club and then came home.

Simmons: The following Saturday 5 August, you went to Norfolk for the commissioning ceremony of the USS Mississippi. Senator Stennis was the principal speaker at that.

Wilson: Yes. I went because of my Mississippi background as opposed to the Mississippi being an amphibious ship, although it does have a Marine complement.

Simmons: On Friday 18 August, there was a dinner and a parade in honor of the Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance. Wasn't that a little unusual to have a parade in honor of the Secretary of State?

Wilson: Perhaps, but we're both very fond of the Vances. We had known them in earlier years. I remarked at dinner, in jest, that Secretary "Vance commanded more Marines than a great many Marines," which he in fact does because of the roughly 400 people in the Department of State. He was very gracious in his remarks about the Marine Corps and it is recognition of individuals' things like this that enhance the prestige of the Marine Corps and our close association with

the Department of State, as well as other governmental departments in Washington.

Simmons: On Wednesday 23 August, I see you were scheduled to have a special briefing on Iran by a Cdr J.A. Kelly, Iran desk officer in ISA [??]. The Shah was still on his throne at that time, and I believe that you were planning a trip to Iran.

Wilson: Yes. In August we were in preparation for a trip to Iran, in which I was trying to get the background of Iran and political aspects of the situation in the Middle East. I guess we will talk about this later.

Simmons: While we're speaking of Iran, let's talk about oil. I remember in our conversations of that period and even earlier, you expressed some rather strong opinions on oil and its sources. Do you recall your thinking at the time?

Wilson: Yes. Why don't we talk about Iran now, both here and my trip, which was in September? I thought then, and I think even more now, that our treatment of the Shah has been very shabby indeed. The Shah gave us oil when we needed it. In 1973 we were without oil for the fleet in the Indian Ocean and the Shah, in spite of protestations from the other OPEC countries, allowed us to have oil from Iran. He gave landing rights in Bandar Abbas, for the surveillance of Russian submarines in the Indian Ocean, when we had no other way to go, from Diego Garcia to Bandar Abbas. He held down the price of oil when the other OPEC countries would have allowed it to rise to what the price would bear. Now it is true, he owed his throne to the United States because of the CIA's

efforts 25 years before. But nevertheless, there is a point beyond which debts like that can be paid.

Now to the trip. We visited Iran at his invitation which came through Ardeshir Zahedi, which I mentioned earlier. I had a two-hour session with the Shah. He was a very troubled man at that time and looked weak physically. He just declared martial law two days before we arrived, and there was some question in my mind as to whether we would be allowed in. I was somewhat concerned about Jane's safety. There were Secret Service everywhere. We traveled in large motorcades with armed guards, which always makes me upset, pushing local people out of the way and a general arrogant attitude. But nevertheless, this was his way of life. We stayed with the head of the Military Assistance Command Group, because General Zia (who is the President of Pakistan) was visiting the Shah at that time. I understood Zia was there to advise him on the conduct of martial law because the Shah had never imposed martial law and General Zia had had martial law almost all his tenure in Pakistan.

We went to Isfahan, down to Bandar Abbas, over to Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf. I believe that I got a good feel for Iran at that time. We stayed over with Prince Shaffit, the Shah's nephew, and the son of his twin sister. The Prince regrettably was murdered in Paris two or three months ago. He was a fine young man, who was dedicated, hard-working and one who would have made a great United States Marine.

Back to the Shah. He asked me, "What do you think about martial law?" I said to him, "Your Majesty, I looked at the faces of the people in the streets and they are resentful. I

believe they know you are not going to fire the 120mm guns of the Centurion tanks at them. With the soldiers at sling arms, with the rifles pointed at the people, there is resentment which even the casual visitor could see. It seems to me that what you have done is, to use the armed forces against the people. What you really need is mob control equipment, like the Japanese have. The Japanese have the world's best mob control equipment. They have vehicles which, when driven down the street, have water turrets that can control mobs with pressure hoses. The police have whistle signals for each other. Iran has nothing but military equipment bought to fight the Russians." I further stated, "Citizens resent using their own military equipment against themselves." He was sort of fascinated with my explanation of "banana peels", which is a slippery substance put on the streets in which causes people to be unable to stand up. Subsequently I understand that the next day he directed his staff to look into the purchase of some Japanese equipment. But it was too late at that time. In any case, we had an informative five-day visit. He was obviously a very troubled man at that time and of course, subsequent events, about which we know, have borne this out. Nevertheless, I believe that he has been dealt a raw deal by the United States by our abandonment of a friend when he needed us.

Now, I will continue on about Iran right here. When "Dutch" Heiser [??], who was the deputy for Al Haig, Deputy CinCEur, was sent over there by President Carter to try to prevent a coup. At that time the United States' policy was that a coup was better than Khomeini. But when the time came we could not bring ourselves to foster a coup, so "Dutch" Heiser went over there to talk the generals out of it, and

permit Bazargan to rule after the Shah left. It is true that the generals sent their families out early. Heiser was trying to get them to remain, which they did, and of course when Khomeini came, they were murdered within 24 hours. Unfortunately, I feel partly responsible for this. Had I spoken up, which I almost did, it probably wouldn't have made any difference; but nevertheless, I could see it coming. We had persuaded these officers to stay there; but at the same time, we were unwilling to support a coup. I am not saying that the coup would have been successful, but I am saying what the U.S. policy was and the generals knew this, but in the end we couldn't bring ourselves to carry out our own policy.

Simmons: You left, I believe, for Europe and subsequently for the Middle East on 6 September and were gone for about two weeks from that period?

Wilson: Yes. We stayed over with Hal Shears in Naples. The Shears are friends of ours and we always enjoy being with them.

Simmons: Going back a little bit earlier, still on the subject of oil--on Friday 25 August, you had a reception and parade in honor of Deputy Secretary of Defense Duncan, who has since moved up to be Secretary of Energy.

Wilson: Yes. He was a fine deputy secretary. I believe that he was a popular choice to be the Secretary of Energy. The President made a fine appointment and I believe that if anybody could be acceptable in this very, very difficult job as Secretary of Energy, it would be Charles Duncan. He has a"

fine background in business, as president of Coca-Cola, a Texan—a wealthy man in his own right. You have to give credit to capable people like that who subject themselves to the barbs which occur in the public service.

Simmons: On Monday 28 August, you and Jane had had an informal dinner party, hosted by Ambassador Zahedi. I suppose that was sort of a send-off before going to Iran.

Wilson: Yes, it was.

Simmons: You then took a few days leave in the Washington area before leaving for the Mediterranean and the Middle East and I see that you went for a Goodyear blimp ride at Dulles Airport.

Wilson: Well, unfortunately, we never made it. We had made arrangements for it. But it was a foggy and cloudy day. They had cancelled it and the next day we had scheduled a JCS meeting, so we never made it unfortunately.

Simmons: We see here one of the pitfalls of appointment books. Things that don't happen don't get scratched out.

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: Retired Capt James Webb called on you Tuesday 5 September to present you with a copy of his book, Fields of Fire. How did you like it?

Wilson: I thought it was good. I think he did a wonderful

job within the limits of what he had experienced.

Simmons: Did you see his article in the Washingtonian magazine on women at the Naval Academy?

Wilson: No, I did not.

Simmons: You would have enjoyed that. He takes a very firm masculine position on that, much to the irritation of the Superintendent of the Naval Academy. He spent a year there as a writer in residence. He says, and I guess you can't really argue with his premise, that the Naval Academy exists to train men to serve in men-of-war, and it is not a place to train women for lesser duties.

Wilson: He's with the Department of Energy?

Simmons: He was a staffer on the Hill. Then he went to the Naval Academy for a year as a writer. I believe right now, he is just kind of managing his writing affairs. He went to the Naval Academy intending to write a semi-fictional novel on life at the Naval Academy during the Vietnam War. How far along he is on that? I am not sure, but his Fields of Fire is about to be made into a major motion picture. So he is negotiating with that.

Wilson: Apparently it has been very successful.

Simmons: Yes it is. It is particularly interesting to me because, although I was not there while he was operating in the area, he was operating south of Da Nang in front of Hill 55. I was there before and after his time. He certainly did

describe the war from a platoon leader's and company commander's viewpoint, much more accurately and validly than Philip Caputo.

You went to New Orleans the weekend of 29 September to 1 October to attend the Association of Naval Aviation. What are your recollections of that?

Wilson: Yes. I had been asked to come down by Tommy Lupo, a friend of mine. Well, as you know I am not an aviator but nevertheless, I was delighted to feel that the aviators think about the Commandant, as the senior aviator of the Marine Corps. I enjoyed being with them and have joined the Association at their invitation. In fact, someone told me the other day that I was going to be on the board of directors.

Simmons: On Monday 2 October 1978, you promoted MajGen Dolph Schwenk to lieutenant general to become the Operations Deputy and Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Policies. It must have been about this time that LtGen Andy O'Donnell went to Hawaii to relieve LtGen Les Brown as CG, FMFPac.

Wilson: Yes. That was interesting. I had a call from Les Brown and he said that he wanted to retire. I always believed that an officer of that rank should have that privilege, when he wants to retire. He wanted to retire quickly because he was going to be the president of a bank in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Dolph Schwenk was going out to be his deputy and his household effects and his car were on the docks at Long Beach. I called him and asked him if he would come to Washington instead of going to Hawaii. Graciously he and

Midge (who are great friends of ours) agreed and instead of going to the balmy breezes of Hawaii, they came to a very cold winter in Washington. Dolph is a fine officer, and he is doing a fine job. I am delighted to know that the Commandant has asked him to stay on another year. Andy O'Donnell had also done a good job as OpDep. He wanted to go to Hawaii and I believe he has done a fine job out there.

Simmons: The next day 3 October, you left for a rather lengthy trip to the West Coast. You visited the Marine Corps Air Station, Yuma; Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Training Center at Twenty-nine Palms; Marine Corps Logistics Base, Barstow; Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro; Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton; then up to Pasadena and back to Anaheim for the Marine Corps Aviation Association banquet in Disneyland; again back to Camp Pendleton; and Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego; home on 12 October. You must have had a very exhausting trip.

Wilson: It was a long trip. But this was really to be our final trip except for short visits later. But as my final year in the Marine Corps approached, I felt that I should visit all Marine Corps installations on the west coast. I was glad to see and talk to as many individual Marines as I could.

Simmons: When you got home, you found out that you had a house-guest, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. How did that come about?

Wilson: Our trip to the coast was originally planned for a little longer than we actually stayed. But earlier Senator

[Malcolm] Wallop, whom we had met and known on a trip when Jane christened the USS Nassau, called Jane and said that Prince Philip (Senator Wallop's sister married a relative of Prince Philip's) was coming to Washington on an unofficial visit for the English Speaking Union with his aide, his equerry or personal bodyguard, or secretary and that he would like for Prince Philip to stay in the Commandant's House.

Jane called me and I pointed out that we would be in California. I could feel her disappointment because most women somehow have a great affinity for royalty. So I said that we could change our trip plans if she would really like to have Prince Philip stay there. She was delighted and so we did shorten the trip in order to come back in time for his arrival.

He turned out to be a charming house guest. We had drinks for a couple of hours--our daughter, Janet, was home--the four of us. He remembered his days back at the Commandant's House when he was the guest of Gen Pate, and had reviewed the troops at the Barracks. In fact, we had a book here from the Historical Section, as you may remember Ed, when he reviewed the troops. He remembered the occasion. Senator Wallop had dinner at the Capitol. He spent the night at the Commandant's house.

We had a note that His Royal Highness liked fresh figs for breakfast. Well, it was that time of year when there certainly were no fresh figs. Jane decided that she would give him a typical Southern breakfast which' included grits. He tasted the grits and said, "What is this?" We pointed out that they were grits and he said, "Oh yes, I have had grits." He managed to get down two spoonfuls. Later he wrote Jane a

two-page handwritten note of which she is very proud. I must say, he does better than I as a house guest when he sends a handwritten note to the hostess. He was a very charming individual, and we have delightful memories of his visit.

Simmons: During the last two weeks of October, there was an exercise called "Nifty Nugget" that occupied a good deal of your time and attention. What was that all about?

Wilson: Well, "Nifty Nugget" was a readiness exercise, which we have heard a great deal about subsequent to the exercise. Many of the appropriation line items which have been passed by Congress for conventional forces were based on the results of "Nifty Nugget," exercise. The results showed unequivocally facts we had been saying for a long time, that we have no rapid deployment force, either ships or aircraft. Given any type of scenario, that we simply are not able to get the troops to the right places at the right time soon enough. "Nifty Nugget", as an exercise, has been very useful to prove these facts. Sam Jaskilka was ordered back to active duty as one of the four-star officers from each service to be the evaluator of this exercise. Sam has been a big help to us in getting the scenario arranged in order that the Marines were able to assume their proper role as an amphibious force in the exercise.

Simmons: On Wednesday 18 October, Vice Admiral Cortez, Commandant of the Brazilian Marine Corps, arrived for a visit. What are your recollections of that?

Wilson: He is an interesting and very delightful chap. Mrs. Cortez is an MD, an endocrinologist. He has subsequently

retired as Commandant of the Brazilian Marine Corps. I think he enjoyed his visit here very much. He took the C-118 to the west coast and to see the United States at a lower level as compared with a jet. We have subsequently corresponded with he and Mrs. Cortez.

I believe really that these visits are of great help so long as our country, under the present administration, continues to alienate the people in Latin America with our human rights program. We need to do all we can with our military friends, on a military to military basis, because those are about the only contacts we can continue with Latin America which we so desperately need.

Simmons: On Tuesday 24 October, you went to Gulfport, Mississippi, to speak to the Chamber of Commerce and then you went on to Jackson for a few days, getting back to Washington on the 27th. I note that on Saturday 28 October, you went to a brunch at the Army-Navy Town Club in honor of the anniversary of BGen and Mrs. James J. Keating. It must have been at least their 50th anniversary and he died a short time later.

Wilson: Yes. It must have been their 50th or maybe their 60th. We had known the Keatings in Hawaii when he was G-2 for FMFPac and I was aide to Gen Turnage. We have been friends for many years. Mrs. Keating was quite a talented artist in her earlier years. Gen Keating must have died within a month after the brunch. It was sort of a nostalgic affair with Gen Keating, Gen Shoup and Gen Thomas and many of the older Marines who were present. I suspect that that was the last time Gen Shoup had been out to a social affair. I did not see him out at any social occasion after that. And while Gen

Thomas was very feeble, presumably he's about the same now.

Simmons: I always associated Gen Keating with the Army-Navy Town Club. I don't think I was ever in the Army-Navy Town Club at lunch time that I didn't see Gen Keating.

Wilson: Yes. I know that he was a very old member there.

Simmons: On the 20th of October 1978, something very important to the Marine Corps happened: HR-10929, the DOD appropriation bill, was signed into law by President Carter. The bill contained an amendment to Sec 141, Title 10 of the United States Code, which gave the Commandant of the Marine Corps full membership in the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This was a status to which we had aspired for many years. Let's go back and retrace the steps that led to this development.

On 3 May 1978, you received a routine memorandum from the office of the Chairman of the JCS, stating that on Thursday 4 May, Gen Kerwin, Vice Chief of Staff for the Army, would be the acting chairman of the JCS because the other service chiefs were going to be out of town. You were going to be in town, and as senior officer present, you took exception to Gen Kerwin being the acting chairman. I believe you telephoned Gen Jones, who was acting chairman at that time because of Gen Brown's illness.

Wilson: Yes, I did. I will give you my best recollection of this, although you will remember that I discussed this with you as the events unfolded and that I said I would like for you to keep a detailed account of this as the Director of History and Museums because I believe that in future years it

may have some historical value.

Where I use the word "I" it should be understood that I am trying to receive no personal credit. However, I felt this incident might be the catalyst I was waiting for. I had the right contacts at the right time. I determined to pursue it rather vigorously. With that background, I'll try to relate as best I can the circumstances and they are documented in a brochure which you have kept.

When I became Commandant, my long range plan was that in my fourth year of office, if Senator Stennis were still chairman of the Armed Services Committee, and if I still had friends in the House, that I would try to have the law changed to make the Commandant a full member of JCS. The reason I was waiting for my fourth year, was to make it clear that it was not self-seeking for me personally but I was doing it for the Corps and for my successors.

On the date that you mentioned, I was incensed that...the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army... (tape ends)

End Tape 2, Side 1

Begin Tape 2, Side 2

Wilson: ...would be the Acting Chairman while I would be continued as a junior member of the JCS. I called Dave Jones and Bill Smith, who was his assistant, and told them that I was upset about it and I would like for them to justify why I could not be the Chairman. Within a couple of days, I had a

call from Dave, who said that he had discussed the problem with his lawyers and they said there is no way for one who is not a member of an organization to become the "acting" head of the organization. Dave, in his usual manner said, "Now, of course Lou, you have to understand that I would very much like for you to be the Chairman. You're perfectly capable of this, but the law is the law."

I said, "Fine. Thank you very much. I'll take it from here." So with that, I determined upon a course of action. First I talked to Bob Wilson, the ranking minority member of the House Armed Services Committee, and requested his advice. It is to Bob that I owe the suggestion which I followed. He said, "The Authorization Bill has passed the House but," he said, "if you can get the Senate to come up with clause in the authorization bill, which would make the Commandant become a member of the JCS. I believe that I can get the House to agree to it."

With this promise I went to Senator Stennis, and told him that it would mean a great deal to me for the' Commandant to become a full member of the JCS, that I would like to have it happen on my watch, and needed his active support and experience. He was enthusiastic. I told him that I could get the bill introduced by Senator Dewey Bartlett and asked if he, as the floor manager of the authorization bill, would recognize Dewey at the proper time. He said, "Yes, you talk to Bartlett. I'll talk to him and we can work it out." I talked to Dewey, who was delighted to comply. He called me back in the afternoon and said that he had talked to Sam Nunn and Sam was more than willing to second it and sponsor it from the Democratic side, Bartlett being a Republican.

I then went to see Senator Stennis and he said, "Yes, alright. I will do it." He said, "There are ways and means of doing these things. I will recognize Senator Bartlett as one of the last speakers of the day. When Senators get tired they are not as apt to be as controversial as they may be earlier." He said, "I don't think anybody is going to resist it. On the other hand, it really is not germane to the authorization bill and there may be an objection to it." He said, "I must say to you that I have been very strict in not having peripheral issues brought into the authorization bill which frankly, this is. But I will do it for you."

Naturally, I was very pleased. We both chatted with Bartlett about our plans. The Marine Corps JAG drew up a recommendation for the bill. I then began to lobby in earnest. I talked to Bob Wilson, Mr. Price, Sam Stratton, and several others of the ranking members of the House Armed Services Committee, none of whom disagreed with it, saying that they believed they could get it through in conference if the Senate passed it without controversy.

The day of the bill, Senator Stennis called and said, "Now Louis, what is this that I told you about the bill?" He said, "Dewey Bartlett has been in here and I didn't quite remember that I said it that way." I repeated our plans to him and he said, "Well, that's what Bartlett is saying, but it's not very germane, and I must say that I'm a little reluctant to bring it up." I said to him, "Senator Stennis, this means very much to me and I would deeply appreciate it if you would do it, and I will be very disappointed if you do not do this." "Well," he said, "I can't promise you but I will see about it." I had the feeling that he had forgotten it but, to his everlasting credit, he came through.

I had a debrief from the Legislative Assistant, Al Brewster, that Senator Stennis when the time came, late in the afternoon, before he recognized Senator Bartlett, made an impassioned speech on the floor for about five minutes in which he unerringly brought up all of the problems which the Marine Corps had experienced during about 25 years, his years in the Senate. These were problems when they had little authority but had performed magnificently. He said, "I recognize that it may not be germane, but nevertheless this is the time to make the Commandant a full member. He should have been 25 years ago. The Marine Corps has not had the opportunity in the past to express themselves and I think this bill should be passed tonight." And indeed it was passed without a single vote against it.

No one knew of what I was doing. I had kept this very quiet. I did tell--not ask--tell the Secretary of the Navy the day before what I was doing and requested his confidence. I had not said a word to anybody in the Department of Defense about it, or to my fellow members of the JCS. Well the next morning, this came as quite a blow in the halls of the Pentagon when it was discovered that the Senate had passed a bill which made the Commandant a member of the JCS. Harold Brown said that he was appalled that something that was this important had gone through without any discussion whatsoever and he knew I was behind it.

Nevertheless, the die was cast and the Senate had passed it. It was the talk of the day in the halls of the Pentagon. I had a call from the Chairman, who said that he was quite surprised that this had been done without his knowledge and that he was sorry that I had not discussed this with him. I pointed out that I had told him in July when he had said to

me that he could not make me the Chairman because of the law, that I had said "Very well, Dave. The ball is in my court." He said yes, that he had remembered that. I said "Well, I had taken the ball and this is my serve. Stand up and be counted. If you don't want the Commandant as a member of the JCS, I suggest you call Senator Stennis and tell him so." He said, "Why, you know I can't do that. But you have used your influence with Senator Stennis to get this through." I said, "I did it without any malice whatsoever, but nevertheless, stand up and be counted. Are you for us or are you against us?"

I really thought that they would make an effort to fight it, the Army particularly. But the CNO, I must say (at that time it was Tom Hayward) was very supportive. I understand that the Army and the Air Force were upset and frustrated, but none of them were willing to stand up and openly criticize the Commandant's full membership. I have no indication that there was an organized effort to try to get it deleted in the House. It went to the Conference Committee, with the ranking members of the House Armed Services Committee present, and it passed without dissent. I was feeling pretty good, when lo and behold, the President vetoed the bill because a nuclear carrier was authorized and therefore it caused the whole bill to be vetoed.

I was then discouraged because I thought now would have been an excellent time for our opponents to dissect the bill, piece by piece led by the Department of Defense and the other service chiefs, take out or try to resist our part of the bill along with the nuclear carrier. But fortunately, this did not occur. They chose not to resist, and so when the bill went back to the conference, after the deletion of the

carrier, it was passed and the President signed it. I was given a plaque on the day the President signed it by the JCS members and welcomed as a full-fledged member of the JCS. I believe they were sincere.

In fact, the Armed Forces Policy Council met on the next day. Secretary Brown congratulated me upon becoming a full-fledged member of the JCS and congratulated "the Marine Corps for the high prestige it has in Congress which permitted such a potentially controversial bill to go through in such a smooth manner." So that is how it came about. I believe that future generations of Marines will benefit from the fact that the Congress was finally able to have the Commandant take his rightful place as a full member of the JCS.

Simmons: Was there ever an opportunity for you to serve as Acting Chairman of the JCS?

Wilson: No, there was not; maybe for a day or two, but not long enough to be recorded in the books.

Simmons: You never chaired a meeting of the Chiefs.

Wilson: Never chaired a meeting, no. Now this may be a good time to point out something which I have discussed with Gen Barrow. We had one final set-to about this, because it came to my attention that in the legal department of the Army word was passed, "Well, the Commandant may have become a member of the JCS, but he has really been hoisted by his own petard" because another law states that the senior members of the Armed Forces are, in this order, the Chairman, the Chief of Staff of the Army, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, and the CNO, and therefore, the Marines have imperfectly drawn

the law. The Commandant cannot be the Chairman of the JCS because his name is not mentioned in the law, Section 10, and furthermore, in the Department of the Navy the regulations state that the Chief of Naval Operations is the senior person in the naval service; therefore, the Commandant can never be senior to the Chief of Naval Operations."

I immediately set about to see that this too was rectified by asking for a ruling by the Secretary of Defense, pointing out that "if in fact the ruling went against us, I wanted it by the first day of February 1979, because it was my intention to go to Congress to point out that this narrow interpretation of the law was limiting the Commandant's ability to serve as Chairman. Therefore he should take his place in seniority with the other service chiefs in the due course" (which means upon their becoming a member of the JCS, you assume seniority by date of assumption). There was foot-dragging on the part of the Legal Counsel and finally I said that as of the 1st of July, I was going to Congress if I had not had a ruling. This ruling finally came about, which stated that the Commandant was indeed a full-fledged member. He took his seniority by virtue of his becoming a member and that these two laws, even though they were still in effect, did not supersede this one. The Commandant has the original of this ruling.

It has been my belief all along that within the Department of the Navy; the Commandant should be junior to the CNO. I believe that the CNO should be the senior military advisor to the Secretary of the Navy within the Department of the Navy. I think this is important for the Marine Corps because we are an equal but junior member of the team in the Department of the Navy, but not so in the JCS.

The JCS and the Departments are entirely separate and apart and should remain that way. There is nothing incompatible with the Commandant being the Acting Chairman and the CNO being junior to him in the JCS while at the same time the CNO is senior to him in the Department of the Navy. I have expressed this many times. It is currently the policy in Headquarters Marine Corps, and I believe Gen Barrow will continue this policy. Finally, this has put to bed most of the problems of seniority between the Commandant, the JCS, and the Navy.

Now there is another interesting thing that has just happened here because of the retirement of Al Haig. When Bernie Rogers (who was then Chief of Staff of the Army) went over to relieve Haig, he left the JCS on the 28th of June. There was a four-star vacancy in the Army, by which Rogers was able to keep his four-star rank, and he left on the 28th of June and [Edward C.] "Shy" Meyer became the Chief of Staff of the Army on the 28th of June. Rogers then became SACEur on the 1st of July. Therefore, Meyer is three days senior to Barrow and the appointment is four years. I am sure that this was done deliberately on the part of the Army, which has set Meyer up three days senior to the Commandant, and that four years from now it will again be the 28th of June; therefore, the Chief of Staff of the Army will always be senior to the Commandant.

Actually, had I known that this was happening; I would have retired on the 1st of June, which I could have easily done, and not have served my four years. I have mentioned this to Gen Barrow but I leave this to my successors for whatever action they want to take.

Simmons: Well, that was a very interesting excursion.

Now, to go back to October 1978. Towards the end of the month, an exercise called Alpha II filled a good part of your schedule. Can you tell me what that was about?

Wilson: Yes. This was an exercise that was brought together, a scenario, with members of the Department of State, CIA, some of the ambassadors, a typical exercise in which more than the Defense Department gathered. I think that they are relatively useless. It sounds good but frankly, takes too much time.

Simmons: On Monday evening, 30 October, you went to a dinner given by Ambassador Zahedi given in honor of the Crown Prince of Iran. Do you remember that evening?

Wilson: Very well. The Crown Prince was in the United States taking flight training. He was a cadet down at Randolph Field in Texas. It was a rather routine dinner party for Washington. He seems to be a nice young man, a personable chap, but of course, he is not in flight training now and presumably is with his father in Panama.

Simmons: On Sunday morning, 5 November, you presided at the starting ceremonies for the Marine Corps Marathon. Tell us something about these marathons.

Wilson: The marathon was started as the Marine Corps Reserve Marathon. A Marine colonel, Jim Fowler, had the idea and it has grown tremendously over a very short period of time, and

it has become very, very popular. I, like many people, am apprehensive about big Washington events. Mike Ryan, who was the Director of the Marine Corps Reserve, was enthusiastic about it and pursued it. I think we owe to Mike, along with Jim Fowler, the credit for beginning this. It has become quite an affair in Washington, and presumably will get larger as the years go by and hopefully, will be equal in prestige to the Boston Marathon in the years to come.

Simmons: That afternoon, Sunday 5 November, you went to the traditional birthday worship service at the National Cathedral. You have commented on those ceremonies earlier, and that evening you went to the Birthday Ball at Quantico; excuse me, no, not that evening. You went to the Birthday Ball the evening of 9 November, and the next day saw the traditional 11:00 service at the Iwo Jima Memorial, and that evening, the Birthday Ball at the Washington Hilton.

Wilson: Yes. Birthday balls, of course, are a great tradition in the Marine Corps, and I think they should be continued. John Miller had asked me to come to Quantico. I enjoyed the ball in the hangar, which in other years, I had a great deal to do with. In fact, one time while commanding officer of the Officer Candidate School; I was given the job by Gen Twining to decorate the hangar; a job which I knew almost nothing about. I almost had heart failure, but Jane and I set about to decorate the hangar. The balls in Washington are always enjoyable, but finding an honored guest who is willing to commit himself early enough to ensure that the programs are made and are carried out according to schedule, is difficult to do.

Simmons: The next day, 11 November, was Veterans Day and you went to the ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington Cemetery. Were you the senior officer for this ceremony?

Wilson: No. The President was there, and made the speech. I believe that I was the only service chief there. Max Cleland, the Director of the Veterans Administration, had especially asked me to come and I did go, and it was very impressive. It was at that time that he asked me to be Chairman of the VA Commission on Cemeteries and Memorials, which I subsequently accepted,

Simmons: On Monday 13 November, you left for the Commanders in Chief Conference at Offut Air Force Base, Nebraska, and we have talked about these Commanders in Chief Conferences before. Offut Air Force Base, of course, is the home of the Strategic Air Command. Any special recollections of that conference?

Wilson: No. It was a routine conference. Secretary Brown came out, as he did to all the conferences while he has been Secretary. I think that it was a good thing to get to know the individuals socially and have a rather free exchange of information. They should not get so large so that the breakers are given to impressing the audience, instead of freely exchanging views. I believe though, that they are worthwhile. Conferences tend to get bigger each time; the end result is that they lose their effectiveness.

Simmons: You came back from Offut on the evening of the 15th. At 1100 on 17 November you presented a Meritorious Civilian Service Award to Tyrone Gary Cooper of Alabama. Do

you recall the occasion?

Wilson: Yes. Gary Cooper is a very distinguished legislator in Alabama. He is a Marine lieutenant colonel who is the commander of the unit in Mobile. He is also a very capable businessman, personable; a black Marine who I believe has a great future in both the Marine Corps Reserve as well as the state of Alabama and indeed, the nation.

Simmons: Gary Cooper commanded Mike Company in the 9th Marines in Vietnam while I was regimental commander.

Wilson: Indeed.

Simmons: Yes. I was very sorry when he found it necessary to resign from the regular Marine Corps to take over the family business.

Wilson: Yes. Well, I believe that Gary has a great future in the state and the nation, and that he will be a real credit to the Marine Corps.

Simmons: I see that you went bird hunting over Thanksgiving weekend. On Thursday 30 November, you went to Newport, Rhode Island, to address the Naval War College. Then in early December you had the usual busy schedule. But I don't see any unusual events. On 5 December, you did go to New York City for the National Football Hall of Fame awards at the Waldorf Astoria. Do you have any recollections of that evening?

Wilson: Yes. I believe that we discussed earlier. I had

been presented the gold medal by the National Football College Hall of Fame on the previous year. I went up this year and sat on the dais, as did my predecessors as gold medal awardees. It is quite an impressive banquet with many distinguished people there. I might say that as you came in today Ed, I was chatting with Jimmy McDowell, who is the Executive Director of the National Football Hall of Fame, as you came through the door.

Simmons: The man with sandy hair?

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: On 8 December you went to the funeral of Gen George Brown. You were at the Marine Corps Logistics Base in Albany, Georgia from 10 through 12 December. This was budget time. I see numerous sessions on major budget issues; also a full round of Christmas parties. On 16 December, you went somewhere to cut a Christmas tree.

Wilson: Yes. This has been traditional for our family since our days at Quantico when Janet was still small. We cut a Christmas tree out in the Guadalcanal area at Quantico. We had continued to do this when we were in Washington (with the permission of the commanding general of course). We usually went out and selected one on our own rather than have it designated by the Guadalcanal area warden, and we continued this on our last Christmas in Washington. I suggested to Joe Fegan, when he was commanding general (and I believe that this has been accomplished) that families should be encouraged to cut Christmas trees. The idea was that the power lines which go through Quantico which have been

stripped of trees, be planted with Christmas trees. They never grow high enough to interfere with the power lines and within a few years Marines--retired, reserve and regular--would be able to go to Quantico and cut their own Christmas trees. There could be thousands of trees. Only Marines would be allowed with their families, at Christmastime. This would give them a feeling of family ties, which is so important at Christmas. I think that they may have been planted. I hope so.

Simmons: I think that is a great idea. I had not heard of it before.

On Thursday evening 28 December, there was a quail supper at the Commandant's House for Congressman and Mrs. Jamie Whitten. Were those perhaps some of the quail that you had shot at Thanksgiving?

Wilson: Yes, they were, and I had brought them back from Mississippi. Congressman Whitten is a very distinguished member of the Appropriations Committee in the House. We had asked the Whittens and some other friends to come over, which they did.

Simmons: On New Year's Day, you had the traditional "surprise" serenade by the Marine Band and reception. I believe that you had an unprecedented large number of guests and I believe that the weather was bad.

Wilson: Yes. We were not blessed with good weather for these affairs during my term as we had been for the parades.

I remember it rained; it was so cold that the band had to come in because their lips froze to their instruments, and we had snow. I guess "What you make in peanuts, you lose in popcorn" in the circus vernacular.

Simmons: The next day you went on leave to Jackson. You spoke to the Pearl Rotary Club on 5 January. You were back in Washington Sunday evening. Tuesday 9 January, the selection boards for major general and brigadier general convened. I don't remember who the selectees were, but I do remember something you said to me early in your tenure as Commandant, and that was that you did not want to leave your successor with the legacy of a great number of junior major generals, and I also know that you have been very insistent always on the 35-year rule. Would you review that for me please?

Wilson: Yes. I had thought that the 35-year rule, everything being equal, was probably a very good idea that generals would go ahead and retire after 33 years. Although there are exceptions and, as a matter of fact, this year I note that Bob has asked at least three of the lieutenant generals, to stay on for another year. I certainly am not critical of that, because I did it myself in one or two instances. But unless specifically requested by the Commandant, I believe that they should move along.

On the other hand, I think that we should be very careful in making the major generals too early, because they have a long time to serve--35 years--and as a result of this, their assignment becomes difficult. I think that what I had in mind was making lieutenant generals early; therefore my

successor would not have lieutenant generals whom he would have to ask to retire in favor of others while they still had several years to do before reaching the 35-year mark.

But peaks and valleys in our general officer strength are brought about by commissioning as second lieutenants during wars and crises. For instance, the 1942 year group was extremely large. In the late 1940's, there was a dearth of commissions. In 1950 another peak occurred because of Korea. Services are saddled with problems and decisions in personnel assignments for many years to come.

Simmons: You were in attendance at the President's State of the Union message on Tuesday evening 23 January. The next day, Wednesday 24 January, you went to the swearing-in ceremony for Togo West as Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, and later he became general counsel, I believe that he is an old friend of yours.

Wilson: He is, although I have just known Togo since he was general counsel in the Navy, but I am very fond of Togo, his wife and family. His wife is a lawyer as well as Togo. He has been very thoughtful and considerate of the Marine Corps when he was Assistant Secretary of the Navy. We have a real friend there, one who understands the capabilities of the Marine Corps. In fact, I didn't realize that he was now general counsel of the Department of Defense. Did he relieve Deanne Siemer?

Simmons: I believe so.

Wilson: I believe I heard that she left with Secretary

Duncan to go to the Department of Energy.

Simmons: That evening you went to a dinner at the Marine Corps Aviation Association at Arlington Hall, and Saturday evening, you went to the dinner of the Alfalfa Association at the Capitol Hilton. You appeared before the House Armed Services Committee on Friday, the 2nd of February. This was the first of your congressional appearances for the new budget season. This would be the Fiscal Year 1980 Budget. You went to the Carabao Wallow at the Sheraton Park on Saturday night, 3 February, and we have talked about those kinds of evenings earlier. I am not going to repeat your various appearances before the several congressional committees, nor your visits to the service schools as these both follow the patterns of previous years.

I was scheduled to begin these oral history sessions at 1100 on Monday, 12 March, but I was preempted by a discussion of SALT II by the JCS, and we have talked before about SALT II and you again summarized your opinion of SALT earlier this evening. Have your opinions changed or been modified about SALT II in light of today's world situation, the things that have happened since you have left your office of the Commandant?

Wilson: No. After I retired I testified, not at my own request, I emphasize, because I had said that I would not go out and campaign against SALT. I indicated this earlier, I believe. However, I was requested to testify by Senator Nunn before the Senate Armed Services Committee. I believe that it was in July, after I retired. I did at that time reiterate that I did not believe that it was in the military

interests of the United States. I have not changed my mind but I have not gone out and campaigned against it. In fact, I resisted, I suppose 25 invitations to appear with other speakers in debate because I had given my promise I would not do this, although I have expressed in individual remarks an opinion that I did not think that it was in the military interests.

I noticed that the President has set aside SALT because of the Russian actions in Afghanistan, and I also cannot help but note that recently the Russians have tested a missile which I believe is their Typhoon. They have encoded the results of this, which is another indication of the unverifiability of SALT II. I am inclined to believe though that SALT II is dead, as we know it now.

I think probably that had the Afghanistan invasion not come about that would probably have passed. The President has enough clout in order to have it barely pass, although I think it would have cost him dearly with his IOU's. I am speculating now, but it is not passed, which I think is a good thing for our country.

Simmons: You left on an extensive trip to the western Pacific on 16 March and returned on 1 April. We have talked about that trip in our second oral history session, which we held on 24 April last year. Gen Chung, the commandant of the Korean Marine Corps, arrived on 4 April for a visit. Do you have any specific recollections of that visit?

Wilson: No. It was the usual routine visit of one of the commandants of our allied marine corps. We have known the Chungs for several years. He and his wife are very charming

individuals. The Korean Marine Corps has had its problems, as it still has. He is no longer the commandant, but is Vice Chief of naval operations, which I think I have mentioned before. There is no indication that this is going to change. The Korean army is very jealous of the Marine Corps and of course, I have no idea whether it will change as the result of the death of Gen Park, but I suspect that the army still holds sway and there is going to be no change.

Simmons: You hosted a dinner on Wednesday evening, 11 April, for the American Battle Monuments Commission and I suppose that by that time you knew that you would be joining the Commission.

Wilson: Yes. I was then a member. The meeting was in Washington. We had them over to the house for dinner. Gen Clark was the chairman and still is. I believe that all the Commission members were there, and we got to know them well. As I have mentioned, I made one trip subsequent to that time with Gen Ben Davis.

Simmons: You went to Jackson on 12 April, returning the 14th. I imagine that you were ensuring that this house was ready for your move. Easter was that Sunday. You, Jane, and Janet went across the street from the Commandant's House to the Broker Restaurant for Easter brunch.

Wilson: Yes we did. In fact, the Secretary of the Interior, Cecil Andrus, had gone with me to Mississippi on a turkey hunt and we got back in time to go over to the Broker Restaurant for Easter brunch.

Simmons: On 18 April, you made a one-day trip to Dallas, Texas, to speak to the Navy League. On Saturday 21 April, you went back to Texas, this time to Houston and spoke to Monday luncheon of the Houston Forum's men's club. On Friday night, you went to New York City for the Leatherneck Ball, coming back Saturday morning. On Saturday morning, you went to Camp Lejeune and next day, went on to Atlanta to speak to the Marine Corps officers' spring banquet. The next day Saturday, you went to Cherry Point and then came home on Sunday.

You were back home on the 13th. You turned around quickly and headed for the west coast on the 14th of May. We talked about both of these trips, the east coast trip and the west coast trip, in our fourth session, which was on 24 May 1979.

On 19 May, you played in the 6th ROC golf tournament at Quantico. Could I ask who was the best golfer in your class?

Wilson: Fogo Quinn probably takes more trophies than anyone else and has more time to play and I believe that he won that year.

Simmons: Jack Watson, an aide to the President and a former Marine, gave you and Jane a small dinner party at their home on Sunday 20 May. Do you have any recollection of this?

Wilson: Yes. Jack was a student of mine at Quantico. I am very fond of him. He is a very valuable member of the President's administration as a special assistant. Most of the special assistants were there at the time, whom we enjoyed meeting and seeing again.

Simmons: In this period, there is a dinner party almost every night, as you prepared to leave Washington.

You made another quick trip to Jackson on the 29th and 30th of May. You came back briefly on Thursday, 31 May, to officiate at the retirement ceremony and parade of LtGen Larry Snowden, who had been your chief of staff for the second half of your tenure as the Commandant. We haven't had too much discussion of Larry earlier. Rumor has it that he and Bob Barrow were very close contenders to succeed you.

Wilson: I think that is true. I had said to both of them along with Tom Miller that I would take no active part in selecting my successor that I thought there were numerous officers who were all fully capable of doing the job. I think that is particularly true of Bob and Larry and Tom. They were the most senior, and probably the ones that were the most eligible.

Larry Snowden is an officer of great ability, marvelous personality, wonderful family, articulate, dedicated, and had been a tremendous Marine for 37 years and would have made a fine Commandant. The disadvantage for Larry is that he would have had to have a waiver because he would have been 62 before his four years were completed. I think that if there were any one disadvantage for Larry that probably was it. And while this could have been overcome as it presumably has been before, there was really no precedent that I could find, although I really did not search too thoroughly, Larry was interviewed, and I think that this was one of the reasons, if not the main reason, that he was not selected. For my part, he had certainly been a wonderful chief of staff, and I believe I reflect the views of his subordinates in Washington

that he had personality, ability and all the attributes which made for a very smooth working team. You will mention Tom Miller, I suppose, next here...

Simmons: Yes.

Wilson:...whom I would like to make a few comments about.

Simmons: You went back to Jackson, your leave there continued there until 8 June. Your calendar for the last three weeks is filled up with promotions and retirements. The JCS gave you and Gen Rogers, the outgoing Chief of Staff of the Army, a farewell dinner at Bolling Air Force Base Club on 19 June.

Wilson: Yes. This was the traditional dinner in which the members and the OpDepts give for outgoing members of the JCS. Bernie of course was leaving to relieve Al Haig as SACEur. Bernie and I had known each other from our first trip to Mexico that we made to celebrate El Grito, the Mexican Independence Day, when we became very close friends with him and Ann. He is a worthy successor to a tremendous soldier, Al Haig. I know he will do a good job in a very difficult position. You must hand it to Bernie for accepting a job of that magnitude and to continue to stay on active duty to provide for our country his expertise and his abilities.

Simmons: The next night, the Secretary of Defense and Mrs. Harold Brown had you to cocktails and dinner at the Blair House.

Wilson: Yes, the Browns...

End Tape 2 Side 2

Begin Tape 3 Side 1

Simmons: cocktails and dinner at the Blair House on the evening of 19 June.

Wilson: The Browns had a dinner party. We were requested to invite some guests. We included some friends from Jackson as well as the senior officers in the Department of the Navy and other the members of the JCS.

Simmons: The next afternoon, you attended a review at Fort Myer in honor of Gen Rogers and on Friday, you went to the swearing in of Gen Shy Meyer as the Chief of Staff of the Army. As you pointed out, it was just a few days early.

Wilson: Yes. This was, as I had indicated, not necessarily with malice aforethought, but nevertheless, it is very unusual to have a ceremony and assume a rank before the end of the month.

Simmons: By what I have here, this was a few days earlier than you mentioned earlier. This was the 20th of June, so it might be a 10-day situation.

Wilson: It might be a 10-day situation; I have forgotten.

Simmons: The Chief of Naval Operations, Adm Hayward and Mrs. Hayward gave a dinner in your honor at the Tingey House, on

Sunday evening, 24 June.

Wilson: Yes. We had a very delightful dinner. As I said, we had known the Haywards in Hawaii before I went to Okinawa. He had just made admiral and was assigned as commander of the 14th Naval District just as I went out to command the 3d Division.

Tom is making a fine CNO. We have had our differences, probably a few more differences than I had with Jim Holloway, brought about by the stringent budget. This always makes for difficult times. Our biggest problem was with the AV-8A; he felt that he could not support the AV-8Bs, because of their cost. I felt that this was so necessary for the Marine Corps and that we had more than paid for this by our failure to get up-to-date aircraft in the past. We took our differences to the Secretary of the Navy where, the Marine Corps won since the Secretary had supported us. I felt that there were many admirals, not necessarily Tom Hayward himself, but many of his subordinates were going around the Secretary's decision and furnishing erroneous and biased information to the Department of Defense which they purported to be the "Navy" position. I felt that Tom could have put a stop to it if he had wanted to.

On the other hand, I have no indication that he was ever personally involved. This was our biggest problem and he knew (and I made no secret of the fact) as did Secretary Brown, that I was making every effort to get the AV-8B. I was not doing it underhandedly because I openly stated to Congress that this was my position. I probably stated that I did not support the President's budget: I gave my opinion, which a service chief, by oath and by conscience, I was

required to do when I testified before Congress.

Simmons: At 1000 Tuesday morning, 26 June, you held your last Headquarters Marine Corps Staff conference, something you have been doing on a bi-weekly basis. I believe you were presented with a pocket watch by the Marine Corps Association.

Wilson: I was very surprised and grateful indeed. As I dismissed the conference and began to walk out, Bob Barrow asked me to come back and presented the pocket watch from the Marine Corps Association. I was flattered and pleased and I am using the watch now.

Simmons: On the evening of 27 June, there was another get-together with 6th ROC, a dinner in your honor at the Army-Navy Country Club.

Wilson: Yes. The local Marines from the 6th ROC had asked us to dinner. We were flattered and delighted to see so many of them as a group.

Simmons: On Thursday morning 28 June, you officiated at the retirement of LtGen Tom Miller, who was Deputy Chief of Staff for Aviation.

Wilson: Yes. I would like to say a word about Tom Miller as I did for Larry Snowden. I had known Tom briefly when he was chief of staff of III MAFin Vietnam and I was commanding general of the 3d Division. I had heard of his reputation but had not really known him until he had come out to be my

chief of staff at FMFPac. I became increasingly impressed with his knowledge, his ability, his dedication, his loyalty, and this has increased over the years. If there is anyone to whom I could entrust the affairs of the Marine Corps or my own affairs, it would be Tom Miller. He is dedicated, loyal, honest, hardworking, extremely capable and conscientious. I think he has certainly served as a tremendous Deputy Chief of Staff for Aviation. He is not intimidated by anyone. He does his homework and I am convinced that the success of Marine aviation, its tremendous decrease in accidents in the last three years is unprecedented, is largely due to Tom Miller's leadership and ability. As you can see, I am very devoted to Tom and Ida Mae and the fact that the Marine Corps Aviation has done as well as it has, it due largely to him. In the long run, the Navy might not have liked him but only because he knew more about naval aircraft than they did.

Simmons: You just touched on something that is Tom's technical knowledge of aircraft and also his proficiency as a pilot himself.

Wilson: Yes. And he has flown every aircraft in the Marine Corps. Tom's size precluded him from being an astronaut and going with John Glenn into the program. Other than that, whatever Tom sets about doing, he does well.

Simmons: At 1100 on Friday, 29 June, we, the Marine Corps community, and guests, convened on the parade ground at Marine Barracks, Washington, for your retirement ceremony. As part of the ceremony, you received an oak leaf cluster to your Distinguished Service Medal for your exceptionally distinguished service during your four years as Commandant.

After the ceremony, in best military tradition, you immediately cleared the post, leaving for Jackson. And that ended your tour as Commandant, but not this oral history memoir. It is now necessary for us to go back to the very beginning of things.

You were born on 11 February 1920 in Brandon, Mississippi So you just passed your 60th birthday. How far is Brandon from where we are just now?

Wilson: Twelve miles.

Simmons: I don't expect you to remember much of what happened on the day of your birth, but what is your earliest recollection?

Wilson: I suppose my earliest recollection is the death of my father, who died when I was five years old. I was born rather late in the life of both my mother and father. My father was almost fifty and my mother was forty when I was born, I have one sister who is nine years older than I. I have a brief remembrance of my father's death and funeral. I was reared by my mother, who never married or even considered such. My sister, to whom I am devoted, being nine years older than I, was off to college by the time I started in school. It is my mother to whom I owe a great deal for my upbringing and the character traits, which she endeavored to instill in me throughout the years.

Simmons: You once told me that your grandfather was alive at the time of Thomas Jefferson.

Wilson: Yes, my grandfather was. My grandfather was born before Thomas Jefferson died. In fact, he was seven or eight years old when Thomas Jefferson died on July 4, 1825. My grandfather had come to Mississippi from Virginia at the age of 21. He set about clearing land, which was then available for the mere fact of blazing a tree and claiming it. He married my grandmother, who was a teenager when he was in his thirties. Their first son was born and was a teenager when the Civil War began, my father's oldest brother. My father was born in 1870, the youngest of seven sons.

Simmons: I believe that Wilson is a Scotch-Irish name. I suspect there is Presbyterian in your background.

Wilson: There is. In fact, it is a Presbyterian family. My mother's name was Buchanan, which is also a Presbyterian name. In fact, my forebears had been here in Mississippi for a long time. There is a cemetery about fifteen miles from here, or five miles east of Brandon, in which my grandmother and grandfather on my father's side are buried, and my great-grandfather and my great-grandmother on my mother's side are buried. The cemetery is not much bigger than this house.

Simmons: What was it like growing up in Brandon in the 1920's and the 1930's?

Wilson: Well, it was similar to any small town in the South during the Depression. There probably were not over ten people in my class. When I started school, there were two grades in one room. It was, as I said, a typical small town. My earliest remembrances probably were during the days of the Depression, in 1929, when the banks closed and I had a goat

and wagon and sold vegetables from the goat wagon to customers in the town, which was not over 300 or 400 people. I had chores to do: milk cows in the morning and evening and grow vegetables; things that were typical of a small town in the country for all youngsters in those days.

Simmons: Where did you go to high school?

Wilson: In Brandon. I think we had probably about 16 to 20 graduates, which was the largest class that Brandon had ever graduated, in 1937.

Simmons: What extra-curricular activities might you have had?

Wilson: They had begun a football team about two or three years before, in which I had played, not very well. We didn't have enough people to play to make 11 men other than having all the students who went out for the game. We were as unsuccessful as you might imagine from a team which had just started with not over 20 available people playing, particularly from the 10th grade to the 12th. We played basketball on outdoor courts. We had a little tennis court in front of our home in which I played. But for the most part, one's recreation was done by working in the afternoons after school and occasional trips to Jackson to the "picture show", which cost ten cents in those days.

Simmons: How did you get into Jackson?

Wilson: We would hitch-hike for the most part. We did have a car, but I was not allowed to use it for such frivolous

things until I was a senior in high school. It would take a good long time over graveled roads.

Simmons: I am sure you are interested in hunting and fishing very much?

Wilson: Yes. I began hunting early, quail and squirrel, which was the sport of the day. Everybody had a bird dog of dubious parentage, and farmers would allow youngsters into their fields without permission. Cotton farming was the crop that almost all small sharecroppers grew in those days. Quail were in the hedgerows and fairly easy to shoot.

Simmons: What year did you graduate from high school?

Wilson: In 1937 and I then went on to Millsaps College on a scholarship. Millsaps is less than a mile from where we are now. It has not gotten that much larger.

Simmons: What was the student body?

Wilson: About 800 then and it is about 1200 now. It has a good reputation scholastically, not only in Mississippi, but in the South. It was then a liberal college as it is so considered now by a great many people who are conservative in the South. I doubt that it would be considered liberal from a national point of view, but from the point of Mississippi, it is still considered liberal.

Simmons: Does it have a church affiliation?

Wilson: Yes. It is a Methodist school and still has a Methodist affiliation.

Simmons: You continued to play football.

Wilson: Yes. I played football when I was a freshman and a sophomore. I hurt my knee as a junior and didn't play any more until I was a senior.

Simmons: I believe you are also a letterman in track. Were you a track or field man, or both?

Wilson: I was on the track team and ran the mile.

Simmons: Did you go to any of the larger relays like the Drake Relays or the Penn Relays?

Wilson: No. Millsaps is too a small school for that. We usually played junior colleges and the other small colleges in Mississippi and Louisiana.

Simmons: What academic course did you pursue?

Wilson: I majored in economics in college and was a member of the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity. With the exception of meeting a young coed by the name of Jane Clark, which was certainly the highlight of my college career.

Simmons: Where was Jane Clark from?

Wilson: She was from a small community to the south and east of Jackson, about eight miles from Brandon. I met her while

I was working on a highway one summer after my freshman year college and she was then a senior in high school.

Simmons: What was the name of the town?

Wilson: Pearson was the name of the post office, which is no longer in existence.

Simmons: How were your grades in college?

Wilson: They were average; I certainly did not excel and did not apply myself really well. I suppose I was about in the middle of my class.

Simmons: Did you live in the fraternity house?

Wilson: Yes, I did for the last two years, Pi Kappa Alpha.

Simmons: When did you first hear about or learn about the Marine Corps?

Wilson: It must have been January of 1941 when a second lieutenant named Nathan Peters, who had graduated from Ole Miss a year before, in 1940, and was an honor ROTC graduate, and commissioned in the Marine Corps. He was assigned recruiting duty in the colleges back in Mississippi. In those days, the Marine Corps took the honor graduates from the ROTC's throughout the U.S. and Peters was one of those in the class of 1940, in fact he has returned and lives in Jackson now.

Simmons: Did you know any World War I Marine Corps veterans?

Wilson: No. I knew no Marines at all. In fact, I told Jane the day I joined the Marine Corps. It was the 16th of May as I remember. "We had gone over" to the grill for a sandwich, and I said, "I joined the Marine Corps today." She said, "What is that?" I said, "Damned if I know, but I guess I will soon find out."

Simmons: You went to Officers Candidates' Class in Quantico arriving on 24 June 1941. What are your recollections of that first day in the Marine Corps?

Wilson: I rode overnight by train from Jackson. I was assigned a berth according to my ticket, and there I met an increasing number of young men who got on the train at various stops, who I suspected might be destined for the same place. One of my earliest friends I met on the train was Bubba North, Royal North, a graduate from Old Miss. He was already aboard when I got on in Brandon, headed east. I had heard of Bubba, who was a famous football player at Ole Miss, and I suspected who he was but did not really meet for a few miles. Then a third Mississippian came aboard later. It was Hunter Cohern, also a famous football player, from Mississippi State. The three of us met in Meridian and as we proceeded on the Southern Railway and later the RF&P, we met additional, people who were obviously headed for the same place. We got off the train in early morning in Quantico and went to A Barracks, which was the Officer Candidates School headquarters and living quarters.

Simmons: That was one of the red brick barracks on Barnett Avenue?

Wilson: Yes. The first one, as you proceed south on Barnett Avenue. It was later the Headquarters of the Marine Corps Schools, before they built Lejeune Hall.

Simmons: I would guess that the train journey from Brandon to Quantico was probably the longest journey you had made up to that point.

Wilson: Oh yes, by all means and farthest.

Simmons: Do you recall some of your instructors?

Wilson: Oh, very well. As a matter of fact, our commanding officer was Col B. Dubell, who died not too long ago. He retired near Parris Island at the Officers' Candidate School. My drill instructor was a Sgt Bodna, who was later Sergeant Major of the Basic School when I was commanding officer. He lives in Pittsburgh now and visited me when I became Commandant. He came to Washington and was honored in a parade at the Barracks. He was my first drill instructor, whom I remembered so very well. Like all Marines who remember their DI's, I was no different.

Simmons: How long was that Officers Candidate Class and in general terms, what was the curriculum?

Wilson: Well, this was the Third Candidates' Class. The Marine Corps was just beginning these classes; remember it was still before the war. We got there on the 25th or 26th of June and it lasted until about the middle of October. After completing the class we were allowed to come home for ten days and then went back and were commissioned on the

first of November.

We had to clear an area where Russell School is located, called Flag Pole Hill, with machetes. Hardly a training session, but nevertheless, it had to be cleared and without the modern clearing equipment like bulldozers. There was no other way to learn the terrain. The Guadalcanal area in Quantico had not been purchased then and only the five thousand acres now comprising Quantico east of the old highway was all of Quantico that existed at that time. All of our training was done within that part of the reservation. Later on, while in the ROC, we moved out to other areas such as Manassas Battlefield. Various farmers would allow the instructors to bring the students on their farms to teach tactics. It was up to each instructor to seek out farmers who would allow them to bring second lieutenants to their farms in order to teach tactics. The instructors would go and get permission from the farmers, then go out, write the problem, and come back and have it printed and approved. Then the second lieutenants would come out to learn tactics.

Simmons: As you say, at the end of that class on 1 November 1941, you were commissioned second lieutenant on the Marine Corps Reserve; you were then assigned to the 6th Reserve Officers' Course, the famous 6th ROC about whom we have spoken so much. Were all the members of the 6th ROC straight from the OCS or was there some input from other sources?

Wilson: No. All the OCS members were 1941 college graduates. The other sources were the following: the "Panzer" platoon, so-called, were officers who had been commissioned for two or three years who had been in the Marine Corps

Reserve; for instance Russ Blandford, who I have mentioned before and was later a major general in the Marine Corps Reserve, had been commissioned two or three years earlier but had joined our class. At that time, as the war became more imminent, more reserve officers were joining. For instance, a very famous coach at that time, Bernie Bierman from Minnesota, joined our class. He was a major. Of course majors didn't live in the barracks like second lieutenants, but nevertheless, he attended class. And the 1942 class of the Naval Academy joined our class on the 15th of November after they were commissioned early in 1941. From the 1942 class that joined our 6th ROC were for instance; Jack Williams, and so many others whose names escape me right now. In fact, Hal Shear was a member of the class of '42, and is now the oldest and has more time on active duty than any other officer in the Armed Forces. Adm Shear is now CinCSouth.

Simmons: It is sort of a digression, but how is it that admirals do seem to last longer than generals on active duty? How does that come about?

Wilson: The Navy does not have a 35 year mandatory retirement. As a result of this, the admirals are not selected for their two stars. Their selection comes about after they automatically move to the so-called "upper half." Then, at that time, if selected they stay for a period of five years. There is then another selection process for five years, then they can stay until they are 62 if they are selected for a second time. This, however, is about to be changed by DOPMA.

Simmons: There has been some talk about resurrecting the rank of commodore and doing away with the rear admiral upper-half and lower-half. This resurfaces every few years. Do you think this will come about?

Wilson: Yes, I do. I think if DOPMA is passed, it includes the rank of commodore. I think it is a good idea and I will digress a moment to tell you that I was involved in getting the dates of rank of the Marine Corps changed in relationship with the Navy. If I might take up a minute to do this, you may remember when this happened.

The Army and Air Force several years ago passed a bill which allowed them, when they made major general, to assume the date of rank as of the date they made brigadier general. Admirals could assume the date of rank of rear admiral when he made admiral of the lower-half. But the Marine Corps was not included in this clause. The Navy had the advantage in earlier years that when an officer made rear admiral his date of rank was, let us say, the first of May 1960. At that time, he kept his date of rank throughout his rank as a rear admiral. But when a major general in the Army and the Air Force made major general, as of say 1964, their dates of rank were changed to the date of making major general, say '54 So, the Navy admiral was automatically four years senior to all other service two stars even if the admiral was commissioned the same day. The Army and the Air Force got this changed but it did not apply to the Marine Corps.

So for the Marine Corps, if an admiral and a brigadier general made their rank at the same, then when the Marine made major general at the same time the Navy admiral was moved from lower half to upper half, the Navy admiral was

automatically four years senior to the major general. This of course, made the major generals of the Marine Corps always junior to the rear admirals. The Army and the Air Force had already taken care of this inequity. So I set about this to see that this was changed for Marines. Again, I went to my friend Senator Stennis and discussed this with him and pointed out this inequity. He agreed to help change this so that the Marine Corps then was equitable with the Army and the Air Force. Now, when an officer makes major general, the Personnel Department simply calls the Navy, finds the admiral who has the latest date of rank and dates the major general's rank back to the admiral's date of rank. As a result, the Navy doesn't have the advantage of seniority which they had for many years. The Navy's alibi is that they say that the allied services do not have the rank of commodore and that they need to be equal to the other services, a ridiculous argument.

Simmons: We could have made the same argument that many of the other foreign services do not have the rank of brigadier, we could move immediately into major general.

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: Getting back to the 6th ROC, where were you billeted?

Wilson: We moved from A Barracks to C Barracks, for the 6th ROC. Virtually the same barracks of course, but at that time, we were able to have a dining hall in the first deck of the building. In the A Barracks, we had a mess hall. In C Barracks there was a dining hall where young Negro men lived

and served tables. They cleaned our rifles, shined our shoes and made our beds. Each of us paid them \$10 a month. They served two tables of four each. In other words, they made \$80 a month and we, as second lieutenants, made \$125. We paid them \$10 a month for their services. When we went on field problems, even over to Manassas Battlefield, they would ride over in trucks to serve us the sandwiches, then return in the truck. You remember this Ed because they may have done the same thing when you were at the ROC.

Simmons: Who were some of your instructors in 6th ROC?

Wilson: The commanding officer of the 6th ROC was a colonel who later commanded the 21st Marines and when he retired was in charge of the Marine Memorial Club for years in San Francisco.

Simmons: Ames.

Wilson: Col Ames. Col Wensinger was the executive officer. Some of my instructors were Gen Twining, Gen [Robert E.] Hogaboom, Gen [Edwin A.] Pollock....

Simmons: Who were majors at this time?

Wilson: who were majors at this time? Gen Pollock was a lieutenant colonel I believe and taught us map reading. Just this afternoon, I might digress to say that we had a welcome call from Gen Hogaboom, who was in Jackson. He dropped by and visited with us for about an hour and he reflected back on those days. Gen Hogaboom is certainly a remarkable individual and I was delighted to see him. It is rather

ironic that he happened to be coming at this time while we're taping the oral history of my career. He was the first instructor who talked to our class on Monday morning on the 8th of December and mentioned what a foolish move the Japanese had made by attacking Pearl Harbor, and they would live to regret the day.

Col Kerr, whom I mentioned earlier, had to retire early because of a blood disease, and had a home near Quantico. Individuals who were then majors had been commissioned for at least 18 years; promotions were very slow in those days.

Simmons: And men who left their mark on both of us.

Wilson: They certainly did and indeed for the Marine Corps. Early in the war they not only moved rapidly through the middle ranks to general officer, but certainly left an example for all of us.

Simmons: Any other memorable instances that come to mind as far as the 6th ROC is concerned?

Wilson: No. We had just been in the ROC for about a month when Pearl Harbor was occurred. After that the rumors began flying like mad.

I remember one day we were having class and an orderly ran into the room and there was a whispered conversation. We were all dismissed and told to go immediately to barracks where we were given a full canteen and one day's ration. We were issued a rifle, issued ammunition, ordered aboard trucks, and headed north within the hour. Later on, it was determined that Mr. Churchill had arrived in the United

States aboard a battleship by way of Baltimore. The welcoming salutes were mistaken as an invasion of the United States and 300 second lieutenants were apparently going to repel the enemy. Second lieutenants with pitted barrels would hardly have maintained the tradition of the Corps. But in any case, this is the type of rumor that panicked the U.S. at the time.

Simmons: You finished ROC on the 31st of January 1942; you then returned to Jackson for two months. How did that come about?

Wilson: Actually we didn't complete the ROC. There were 35 of us who were ordered early to recruiting duty. I came to Jackson in early January. I was assigned recruiting in the colleges of Mississippi and Louisiana. My classmates were sent all over the U.S., very much like our predecessors had done the year before, when I joined the Marine Corps. We were recruiting for the officers candidates class. I remember that I had to have an explanation of what the words "staff returns" meant. "Staff returns" were service record book and a health record which was about the extent of my knowledge of the Marine Corps. We were instructed to inform coaches particularly that the Marine Corps was not interested in having officers who were not college graduates. We could assure them that their athletes would be able to finish college.

This met with great enthusiasm on the part, of the coaches, who could envision their football teams and others being able to remain for their college careers. Their enthusiasm was unfounded and so they served as assistant recruiters getting all their athletes to enlist. However

about five months later the Marine Corps ordered the athletes, even before they had finished their sophomore year, to report for active duty. I was reluctant to come back to Mississippi for many years after that.

Simmons: Who were some of the Marines that you might have recruited in those two months?

Wilson: I recruited "States Rights" Jones, who was a famous Marine by virtue of his name and his ability. You probably remember States Rights Jones. A chap named Billy Sam who was the quarterback of the Ole Miss Football team, who was killed on Iwo Jima; as a matter of fact you may have known him.

Simmons: No, but I remember him. When were you and Jane married?

Wilson: We were married the 14th of November 1944 after I came back from the Pacific.

Simmons: On the first of April 1942, you went to San Diego and were assigned to Company H (How Company), 9th Marines. The 9th Marines were then a new regiment. Tell us about the duties in the 9th Marines. Where did you train?

Wilson: We actually went to Camp Elliott north of San Diego. I was assigned to the 9th Marines. Gen Shepherd was the commanding officer. He was just forming the 9th Marines as a matter of fact. He had just come from Quantico. I stayed in the 9th for the whole war. As a matter of interest, every company commander in the 9th Marines was a classmate of mine, and all but one of the S-3's in the battalions.

Simmons: You went overseas with H Company, 9th Marines, in" February 1943.

Wilson: Right. I think it was January of 1943.

Simmons: What was your itinerary? You went from where to where?

Wilson: We went from San Diego aboard the former USS America. 5,000 in one ship. We went directly to New Zealand unescorted. This ship could outrun the submarines—we went via Tahiti and into Auckland, New Zealand where we lived in a camp in the Puke-kohe Race Track, the regiment headquarters that is. I lived in Caraca North with the 2d Battalion, which was then commanded by Col Hankins. I was in H Company, which was a weapons company, along with two classmates of mine; Frank Fagan, who was killed in Iwo Jima, and Bill Flake, who stayed in the Marine Corps and retired as a colonel, a chap named Peterson, who was in the 7th ROC and who was killed in Guam and Fraser West, who had been in the 4th ROC. Fraser had been to Guadalcanal, and had been wounded returned to the U.S. and was overseas for a second time.

Simmons: You said that H Company was a weapons company. It might be a good idea to review the organization of an infantry battalion at that stage of the war.

Wilson: Yes. Each battalion had three rifle companies, and a weapons company. The weapons company was composed of machine guns and the 81mm mortars. A major was in command of the weapons company; a captain as the exec. A reconnaissance

officer was assigned, a job in which I served briefly for a time. The 81mm mortar platoon had two officers; a first lieutenant and second lieutenant. In the machine gun platoon there were six water-cooled machine guns.

Simmons: And you were the company commander at this time?

Wilson: No. I was a machine gun platoon leader and later a reconnaissance officer.

Simmons: And you were promoted to captain in April 1943.

Wilson: In 1943, in New Zealand. I then assumed command of F Company, when Roy Bastian made major. The promotion list was slow in coming. The communication facilities that we have today were almost non-existent then. It was done by mail. It took a long time from Washington to New Zealand. No rank insignia was ever available on time but we improvised.

Simmons: My captain's bars were made out of quarters; that was a fairly common procedure. You went from New Zealand, I believe, next Guadalcanal.

Wilson: Yes. I had a hernia operation in MOB-4 in New Zealand and Gen Shepherd was kind enough to come to the hospital to see me and I told him that unfortunately, it didn't look like I was going to get to go with the regiment. He had made arrangements for me to be taken aboard ship in a stretcher. Those days, if you had a hernia operation, you couldn't even sit up in bed for two weeks instead of getting up now, being forced up, in two hours, which has happened to me two times

since then. And so, I was taken aboard in a stretcher on the ship to go to Guadalcanal and didn't have to climb the cargo nets. But I was able to be up and around soon after that. I was so afraid I would miss the trip with the regiment, but he was kind enough to intercede.

Simmons: This time you were in command of F Company, and what you are alluding to is the Bougainville operation.

Wilson: It was then in Guadalcanal. We stayed there, I guess, three or four months, before we went to Bougainville and landed on the first of November, 1943-

End Tape 3 Side 1

Begin Tape 3 Side 2

Wilson: Are you getting tired?

Simmons: Oh no. I'm in good shape. We had just said that you had staged through Efate in the New Hebrides, codenamed "Roses." You landed, as you say, at Bougainville on the first of November at Cape Torokino. I believe the 9th Marines came in behind the 3d Marines.

Wilson: Yes, I think so.

Simmons: What are your recollections of that operation?

Wilson: Well, the first recollection is that we lost all our boats. Almost all of them broached coming in and there must

have been hundreds of boats lost after the initial waves. We had little resistance. However, there was a classmate of mine who had an amphibious tractor company who was killed in that operation. My remembrance of Bougainville--terrific rains--we landed in a rainy season and it was all swamps. It took us a long time to move out of the water into the hills. We were there for a couple of months. The Japanese were for the most part across the island, but they began to organize, patrol and map our area. But, we then would send out patrols up to two or three miles ahead of our line. The area was so very difficult and dense that even with a machete you couldn't move over a mile a day because you have to cut your way through the jungle and if you went another route the next day, which you are obliged to do to prevent detection, it meant cutting your way through again. The living conditions are very, very bad and the food was awful; no fresh food at all. However Mrs. Roosevelt had come out to the Pacific during the fall, and was very concerned about food and therefore the Army sent hundreds of fresh turkeys out for Thanksgiving Day. We brought up field kitchens in order to provide the troops with a good hot meal. We had the usual Thanksgiving meal. None of us had had fresh food in so long, including our days in Guadalcanal, that not only did we eat too much but the rich food was too much and we were sick with diarrhea for at least three or four days after that. The war almost had to stop for week because of the illness which we all had from eating the too-rich and obviously too much fresh food.

Simmons: How long did you stay at Bougainville?

Wilson: We were there two months. I was one of the last to

leave I designated to stay on for two days as a liaison with the American Division that relieved us for orientation purposes. The battalion came down to the ships, I came out two days later and, I was on one of the last ships of the division departing back to Guadalcanal.

Simmons: So you were back to Guadalcanal by the first week in January?

Wilson: That first week in January. We went back to the same area from which we departed, Tetere Beach.

Simmons: Next came the Guam invasion; the scene of your greatest combat adventure. How about the events leading up to the Guam landing?

Wilson: We were supposed to have gone to Kavieng, New Ireland. It was an operation for which we had prepared, even had a rehearsal landing and had tactically loaded for it. In later years, I understand that because of a decision that the Japanese were apparently folding faster than had it been anticipated, Adm [Chester] Nimitz won an argument in Washington that the Marines could move early into the central Pacific. We then loaded for Guam but we stayed aboard ship for 47 days. I was aboard the USS President Jackson. The Saipan operation, for which we had been the reserve, had taken much longer and was much more difficult than had been anticipated. And the reserve, which was the 4th Marine Division, was supposed to be a reserve for the 3d Division landing in Guam. Therefore, when the 4th Division landed on Saipan, we did not have a reserve and had to wait until the 27th Army Division, I think it is the 27th-25th Army Division

was in Hawaii—that they could load, sail, come be the reserve for the 3d Marine Division and the 1st Marine Brigade.

Simmons: Was this the 77th?

Wilson: 77th, that's right. We sailed back to Eniwetok and waited...but we were aboard ship for 47 days, which is a terrible thing for troop conditioning. Naturally this was before air conditioning; nothing like the modern ships, and hot; tough days with racks right on top of each other. The landing occurred on the 21st of July. I have thought about this many times and I am convinced there is no way that troops can be kept in shape on ships for so long. I am sure that there were many casualties, because once ashore men are so sore, tired, and thirsty, that after a point in time, they become careless and expose themselves unduly.

Simmons: Well, you did land on the morning of the 21st of July, 1944. The 3d Division landed with three regiments abreast between Adelupe and Asan Points. The 9th Marines were the right flank regiment, I think. Who was your regimental commander?

Wilson: Gen [Edward] Craig was the regimental commander, who was Col Craig at that time.

Simmons: And your battalion commander?

Wilson: Bob Cushman.

Simmons: Suppose you pick up the narrative from that point.

Wilson: Yes. We landed and my company, F Company, was supposed to land on the right flank. And the right flank of the 2d Battalion was on the right of the 9th Marines. We were to turn right and go down the beach to Piti Navy Yard. My company was going to be in the hills. One company would be on the beach up to the bottom of the foothills and up to the military crest of the foothills, with Piti Navy Yard as the objective. We landed in the face in rather intense artillery and machine gun fire, moved into the hills we received several casualties before arriving at Phase Line 1. We lost a lieutenant, our mortar" platoon commander, but we moved into Piti Navy Yard and captured this on the end of the second day. We discovered an American flag, which had been put into a foot-locker still located under the flag pole, presumably left there when the Japanese had captured Piti Navy Yard. A picture was taken of my first sergeant, named Bushong, and me, which was widely distributed in the United States, as the first American flag recaptured in World War II.

After that the 2nd Battalion went into reserves. The 3d Marines were having a very difficult time at Fonte Hill, and were not able to get to the top. They had taken many casualties; I believe it was the 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, commanded by a chap who was killed. I forget his name right now, but we then moved up to replace them.

We did get to the top of the hill, which is now where the Headquarters of ComMarianas is located, then we moved over the hill, which turned out to be the Japanese command post. We suffered rather high casualties ascending the hill and then after arriving, it got dark. We continued to suffer numerous attacks by the Japanese as they tried to dislodge us

from the hill. It turned out that that was the headquarters of the Japanese forces on Guam which, of course, we didn't know at the time.

Simmons: We are speaking about the night of the 25th and 26th of July. You might go into a little more detail about that.

Wilson: Yes. There were three companies involved. The company commanders were Fraser West, who was on the left; and I was in the center and a captain named Peterson on the right. Peterson was killed about dusk and the remnants of his company were leader-less and very disorganized. I tried to assemble them and to get them to join us, which they did. Fraser was farther down the line and finally he joined me and we were trying to organize the remainder of the battalion. LtCol Cushman at the time, was not able to move up and the battalion CP was well down behind the hill. The attacks were becoming more numerous all the time. We had called for some flares from the supporting destroyer but the flares began to fall short so that we were being silhouetted to the enemy instead of the enemy being silhouetted to us. Naturally, communications failed and we couldn't halt the flares. Our ammunition was about gone as morning neared. We then fixed bayonets and were prepared to withstand the onslaught, when Fraser (it was then about 3 o'clock) volunteered to go down the hill to try to get some tanks to come up at first light.

In the meantime, I began to try to rally the remaining Marines, and conserve the ammunition as best we could. We stacked up Japanese bodies that were in front of us to serve as a barricade against the fire that was coming in. By the

light of the flares we could see them drinking (presumably sake), laughing, and preparing to charge. Then another charge would come.

Simmons: Were you essentially commanding all three companies?

Wilson: All three companies at that time, with-Fraser having gone down for reinforcements. Fraser then was shot in the leg on the way back and was not able to get back up. But his efforts at getting the tanks were successful.

The tanks came rumbling up just about daylight, as soon as they could see an unimproved road which they followed, not at all similar to the road that approaches in front of Fonte Hill. The Japanese by this time were so psyched up that they would jump on the tanks and start slashing them with their sabers. It was a field day for awhile.

Simmons: You were wounded several times during the course of this evening?

Wilson: Yes. During that time I was wounded in the leg and in the shoulder, but not seriously enough to be evacuated. But after this though, we still had to capture a strategic hill which was still located to our front. So I organized a small patrol and moved up there to capture this hill in order to secure the high ground.

Simmons: And then you were more seriously wounded?

Wilson: No. I was not more seriously wounded later other than the two or three times that I had been hit in the

shoulder and in the knees which I mentioned.

Simmons: But in any case, by that time you were wounded severely enough so that you were not only evacuated but you were hospitalized for a considerable period of time.

Wilson: Well, no, it wasn't quite like that. I remained. We moved up then to the northern part of the island. Then I had developed a hernia, along with dengue fever, and the doctors thought that I really wasn't able to continue the patrolling which we were doing. By this time we had moved on to the other side of the island and set up a camp along the beach near the Ilig River, in the eastern part of Guam. By that time, the island had been declared secured, but there were still roving bands of Japanese all over the island. I wasn't able to continue to make the patrols. That coupled with the dengue fever and the hernia and my wounds. It was decided that I should be evacuated to Pearl Harbor.

Simmons: What was the date?

Wilson: Oh, that was about September 1st. I stayed in the area for awhile. I came back but just couldn't get rid of the dengue fever. I was evacuated back to the Naval Hospital in San Diego.

Simmons: You were released from the hospital about the 16th of October.

Wilson: Yes, the 16th in San Diego.

Simmons: And when you returned to duty, you were assigned briefly as commanding officer, Company D, Marine Barracks in Camp Pendleton. Was that a non-tactical unit?

Wilson: Yes it was. I came back to Mississippi on leave and Jane and I married on the 14th of November. We then drove out to Camp Pendleton where I had been assigned to the Marine Barracks, Camp Pendleton. It was a non-tactical unit in which I had an administrative job. The company had about 400 people in it; 300 of which were AOL. It was an absolute disaster for me.

Meanwhile, my sister had gotten a message from Washington addressed to me in Mississippi, saying that I should report to the Marine Barracks in Washington. She sent this out to me in Camp Pendleton. When I got it, I went to the commanding officer, the battalion commander, and told him about it. A very interesting incident occurred which caused me to want to leave Camp Pendleton for Washington.

A woman Marine was married to a warrant officer who was under arrest. I had a corporal who had been assigned to guard his room. The battalion executive officer found this warrant officer drunk and charged the corporal with dereliction of duty for permitting him to have liquor in his room. He went in before the commanding officer to make the charge and I accompanied him. I stood up for the corporal's defense saying that it was unfair because his wife was an officer and the corporal didn't have any orders to shake her down when she visited him. Therefore, if he was drunk, she could have very well brought the liquor in. And so the colonel said, "Fine, I agree with you." And Hughes came out

and looked at me and shook his finger in front of my face. He said, "Captain, when I want a corporal locked up, I don't want some damn young Captain standing up contradicting me. You better look out here because you're in trouble from now on."

Well, it was just the day I got the letter from my sister telling me of my orders to the Marine Barracks in Washington. I went to the colonel and showed it to him. He said, "I think I can spring you from this if you don't want to go." I said, "I want to go." So with that, we then traveled back across the country and went to Washington.

Simmons: That was in December?

Wilson: Yes. As it turned out I had been ordered to be an aide to the President. Jack Barnes, whom you may remember, was Assistant Director of Personnel then in Washington, later told me the story that they had ordered me back to be the Presidential aide. Col Kendall was then the commanding officer of the Barracks. When I reported for duty he said, "Well, I am certainly glad to see you, Major. We have been waiting a couple of months. The very idea..." I was a captain then, "...young officers these days, captains are even getting married." He said, "I'm certainly glad to see you." I said "I got married on my way." And I thought he was going to kill me. So since I was already there he had no choice but to keep me. We stayed two years.

Simmons: You had other duties at the barracks besides the Presidential aide.

Wilson: Well, I was not a Presidential aide because they

couldn't be married. Therefore, I was assigned at that time to be the commanding officer of the barracks detachment which is now the Ceremonial Guard Company, and later on was the dean of the MCI.

Simmons: You were presented the Medal of Honor for your heroic actions on Guam by President Truman. What was the date of that ceremony?

Wilson: It was October 16, 1945.

Simmons: What are your recollections of that day?

Wilson: It was Nimitz Day in Washington. Adm Nimitz had been ordered to Washington, as each of the commanders had, to participate in a ticker-tape parade. So, this was Nimitz Day and therefore naval personnel (Marines and sailors) who had been approved for the Medal of Honor, were all ordered there at the same time. There must have been twelve of us. The senior person was George Street, Navy commander, who commanded the submarine Tirante in Tokyo Bay and sunk a great many ships. There was the commanding officer of the Black Sheep squadron, [Gregory] Pappy Boyington, and myself-- we were the only officers. There were a goodly number of enlisted personnel. There must have been about ten or twelve of us at that time on the White House lawn.

Simmons: You were a major at this time?

Wilson: Yes, I was a major then.

Simmons: You were promoted in March?

Wilson: I was promoted in March. President Roosevelt died in April and I was commanding officer of the troops which lined the streets of the parade from Union Station to the White House.

Simmons: In July 1946, you were named assistant director of the Marine Corps Institute which is also located at the Marine Barracks. You continued in that assignment until October and then you were transferred to Hawaii in November 1946.

Wilson: Gen Turnage had been reassigned from his job as Assistant Commandant to be CG of FMFPac and had asked me to go out with him, which I did. We lived in Makalapa, a bachelor status because there were no wives allowed out there at that time. Mrs. Turnage and Jane came out later on. I believe it was March.

Simmons: I remember there was sort of, almost a ceremonial arrival of wives about that time.

Wilson: Yes. In fact, Jane went out aboard the USS Henrico, which had been an APA during the war. This was the first of the so-called "diaper runs" in which the wives and families came with other service persons. She came from San Francisco.

Simmons: You continued in that duty, as Gen Turnage's aide, until about the middle of November 1948. Then your next assignment commenced on 12 January 1949 as Officer in Charge,

District Headquarters, Recruiting Station, New York, a position you would hold until August of 1951--I know that you made many friends in New York city during this tour. Friendships that have endured you might mention.

Wilson: Yes, they have. I particularly think of Bob Kriendler. We had known each other during World War II. Bob was then the owner of the "21" Club. A dedicated Marine for many years and a very close friend of mine; embarrassingly nice to both of us at "21." We did have a good many friends there. Gen [John T.] Selden was instrumental in my coming to New York. Gen Selden was in Hawaii. He had been the liaison officer to CinCPacFleet. He made brigadier general and was assigned duty in Headquarters as Director of Recruiting and Director of Public Information. Those jobs at that time were the same.

He asked me to be the OIC of Recruiting in New York. I relieved Sid Altman, who had been there for a long time. Sid was a native New Yorker and a very difficult person to relieve. Sid was a wheeler-dealer, big operator, knew everybody in town. I was a southern boy who knew nobody in New York, and I didn't even know how to get around in the city.

Simmons: You may have even had a language barrier.

Wilson: Very much so. In those days, recruiting was rather difficult. New York City took in one out of every eight persons that enlisted in the Marine Corps. 12 1/2% of the population of the United States lived in my area which embraced the area from Peekskill in the north to Montauk to

Asbury Park, New Jersey to Phillipsburg over on the Delaware River. As an example, when spark plugs on trucks needed to be changed you had to have three bids. I had 35 pickups. Stragglers would report in and the OIC had to give them cash. When you are dealing with cash in the service it is very difficult. But all in all, I got a great deal of experience both being on independent duty at a relatively young age and doing many things in which you are solely responsible. As I look back on it, I got a great deal of experience.

I did make many friends, Al Gentleman, who had the public information job, whom I had mentioned earlier. In those days, the reserve job was separate from recruiting. So, there were three independent commands in New York at 90 Church Street. Later on, we moved up to 346 Broadway.

Simmons: Where did you live in New York then?

Wilson: In Stuyvesant Town, a new development which had been built in the lower east side of Manhattan. New Yorkers traditionally, do not know each other but it turned out that on the floor on which we lived, was the current chairman of the board of Austin-Nichols Liquor Distributors and a very distinguished surgeon in Louisville, Kentucky, also lived there. We have continued to maintain a close relationship with both of them.

Simmons: On the 25th of August 1951 you were transferred to The Basic School at Quantico, a school that trains newly commissioned officers. I believe that at first you were the assistant S-3 and then the commanding officer of the Training Battalion, and then commanding officer of Camp Barrett,

although those last two might have been double-hatted.

Wilson: They were.

Simmons: Then you became executive officer of The Basic School. You were promoted to lieutenant colonel in November 1951. Who was the commanding officer of the Basic School at this time?

Wilson: Col Shoup was the commanding officer of the Basic School. Pete Duplantis was the executive officer and Lew Walt was the S-3. I was the assistant S-3 and had the Weapons Section. Bob Taplett had the Tactics Section. I stayed there a few months and then went to the 1st Training Battalion and was commanding officer of Camp Barrett for several months. The interesting story here which won't take too long, but was famous on the cocktail circuit in Quantico. When Col Shoup made general, he left and Ray Murray, a very famous Marine, came in as a young colonel and took over The Basic School. He then had only 17 years of service which was almost unprecedented. He had received his first Navy Cross as commander of the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines in World War II and his second as commanding officer of the 5th Marines in Korea in the Chosin Reservoir.

In any case, his executive officer was a chap named John Burns, a lieutenant colonel, who had been a POW. He was captured while a warrant officer but had been promoted directly to lieutenant colonel upon his return. It was Christmas-time. Burns was Basic School Executive Officer. We must have been six or seven battalions at the time, in other words about 300 staff officers. Burns had asked Ray

Murray if he would accept a traditional New Year's Day call. Ray said fine, he would be glad to see him. So Burns then sent a message to all of The Basic School staff officers, that the commanding officer will accept a traditional New Year's Day call. The Murrays lived two houses on the right after you past the commanding general's quarters in Quantico.

I called John Burns and said "Are you sure that Col Murray would like to see all of us here?" He said, "That's the trouble with you young officers, you don't realize the traditions of the Corps. So long as I am the executive officer of The Basic School, we are going to get back to basics and back to the old traditions of the Corps." I said, "Aye, aye sir." And I put out word to my officers that I expected to see them at the commanding officer's house.

Jane and I were having June and Peyton Harris, who was a classmate of mine as visitors. We lived at 801, over by the Junior School at that time. And so in between the halves of the football game, I said, "Well, let me get into my blues and we will get over there and get this call over with." And we did. We got up to the Commanding Officer's house. There was an absolute mass of cars. We finally made our way in the door and the Murrays were there. Eve, his wife, had on a sweater and a skirt and they were watching the ball game when 435 people descended on them. On the second day of January, I was assigned as the executive officer of The Basic School.

Burns went to take over the rifle range. I happened to be the senior lieutenant colonel at that time but really was a junior lieutenant colonel. But that is an interesting story and it made the rounds of the Marine Corps. I don't know whether you have ever heard about it.

Simmons: I had never heard that story.

Wilson: I later, when I was assigned as commanding officer of The Basic School, and Tom Linmeweber [??] was my executive, I said, "Tom, old boy, we're going to get along fine, but don't you invite 500 people to my house without telling me."

Simmons: I am not quite clear where you were living at that time.

Wilson: Quarters 801. The first Lustron house by the Junior School.

Simmons: Those Lustron quarters were rather experimental weren't they?

Wilson: They were then and although we certainly got our money's worth out of, them, the Lustron houses were all metal, built after the war but were killed by the unions because they were pre-built with practically no construction work required. We are still using them, both for the officer and the NCO quarters. Although I believe they are going to make the 800 block NCO quarters now.

Simmons: In September 1953, you were assigned as a student in the Amphibious Warfare School Senior Course. Who were some of your instructors and classmates in that course?

Wilson: The instructors were Walt Reynolds, Pete Hahn. The commanding officer was Col Piper, who died recently. Gen [Edward] Snedeker was the director of the Education Center.

I can see the faces but at the moment, I just can't recall the name.

Simmons: The Senior Course was in Breckinridge Hall.

Wilson: Breckinridge Hall, yes.

Simmons: Ellis Hall had not yet been built?

Wilson: Ellis Hall had been built.

Simmons: Any particular instances stick in your mind?

Wilson: No. We had a very good graduation exercise. The name of the problem was "Packard 6." An APA came up the river and we all went aboard and went to sea and had a landing at Camp Lejeune, which was probably one of the last times an APA has come to Quantico. Gordon Gayle was also the instructor there and he had just come in from Amphibious Force, Pacific Fleet.

Simmons: You stayed on at the Senior Course as an instructor through the summer of 1954.

Wilson: Yes, I had orders to go to Korea, but I was late in going because having gone to Basic School and then having gone to the Senior School. I was in Quantico and lived in quarters there. The summer course was bringing reserve officers to active duty and Donn Robertson had taken over. Gen [Herman] Nickerson had just come in to take over the Senior Course--Col Nickerson then--they were all new. Donn

Robertson was also a classmate of mine in the Senior School. So he asked Donn and me to stay on for the summer for that transition period and we could go on to Korea later because Korea, it appeared, was going on forever. It turned out that that was not the case. In any case, we were later getting out to Korea than our classmates from the senior school.

Simmons: You did indeed go to Korea in September and you went to the 1st Marine Division, which was still in Korea at that time. What were your assignments in the 1st Marine Division?

Wilson: I was the assistant G-3. I relieved John Chaisson, who had been ordered to Washington, under Col Marvin Floom, who was the G-3. Gen Hogaboom had the division, Gen [Henry R.] Paige was the Assistant Division Commander. Jim McGee was later the G-3, but then he was the comptroller. But Floom was the G-3. Sam Shaw was the G-4 and Jack Leonard was a deputy G-1.

Simmons: It was during your tour that the division did return to Camp Pendleton and I imagine that as the assistant G-3, you had a considerable role to play.

Wilson: Well, the fact is that Orv Bergren was the assistant G-1. Gen Paige and all the deputies, headed by Jack Barnes, came back early to locate the division units. Jack had been commanding officer of the 1st Marines, had been relieved by Col [Robert H.] Ruud. Jack Barnes was the chief of staff for Paige. Gen [James] Berkeley was the chief of staff for Hogaboom. We flew back to locate the division units in their billeting areas. We decided the infantry regiments should be

roughly comparable in location. The 5th Marines came home first and there was an effort by the base commander to try to put the 5th Marines into barracks in the 14 Area, rather than out in the camps. I resisted this since I believed if an infantry regiment was put in there, they would soon get to be sort of the headquarters base troops. They would be assigned all the parades and other such duties. We should make the regiments equal as nearly as possible in the way of facilities and training areas.

So I was instrumental in getting the 5th Marines to Camp Margarita, the 7th Marines to Camp Pulgas, and the 1st Marines at Camp San Mateo, because they came home in that order, since they were relieved in that same order from the rear to front by the Army in Korea. The artillery then went into the barracks in the 14 area.

It is true that the artillery were further away from their training areas. Nevertheless, the artillery would have to be moved by prime movers even if they were near Camp Pulgas where the firing areas are. So, it made little difference to be towed a little further by the prime movers. They continued to be billeted this way until they left to go to Vietnam, when I was again the G-3 when we moved.

Simmons: Your daughter Janet was born on the 9th of January, 1956. Was this at the Camp Pendleton hospital?

Wilson: Yes. We had had a rather difficult time having children. Jane lost two full-term still births earlier. Naturally we were delighted when Janet was born, which was 11 years after we were married and she has been our pride and joy.

Simmons: When were you promoted to colonel?

Wilson: I was promoted to colonel while at The Basic School in June of 1960.

Simmons: In March 1956, you were transferred to Headquarters Marine Corps. You were assigned to duty as Head, Operations Section.

Wilson: When I came back to Camp Pendleton from Korea, I was assigned as commanding officer of the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines.

Simmons: I see.

Wilson: I kept that command for almost a year. [Donald??] "Buck" Schmuck and B.T. Kelley came out to witness over four of our operations at Camp Pendleton. They inveigled me to come back to Washington. I requested delay because Jane was pregnant with Janet. She was two months old when we came back to Washington. I was the assistant to Buck Schmuck there for two years under Gen Snedeker who was the G-3.

Simmons: Gen Snedeker was the G-3. Buck Schmuck had the Operations Section and you were the assistant head. Bill Bates was in training.

Wilson: Bob McDonough was in there, also Don Brooks.

Simmons: You were in this job for two years, 1956-58. The Headquarters had just converted to a full general and special staff system. Do you have any observations on how well or

how poorly that system worked?

Wilson: No, I think it worked very well. Of course, the G-3 really had Plans under him. However, practically, he had no control over Plans because the Op Dep controlled plans. Gen [Richard] Mangrum was the head of Plans. In Plans were Bob Heinl, Tiny Fraser, Donn Robertson, and Hunter Hurst. Gen Megee was the chief of staff... I can't think of who was the Op Dep-- Gen Mangrum was a brigadier general.

Simmons: Who headed up Strategic Plans?

Wilson: That was the only fault that I found of the organization, responsibility without authority.

Simmons: Well, the fault you have identified, I am going to have to come back a little later because something was done about it, and I was in G-4, Logistics Plans, at the time.

Wilson: Gen [Francis] McAlister was the G-4.

Simmons: That's right, Gen McAlister and then Gen Paige. And then Joe Stewart, Col Joe Stewart, had Operations and Plans for the G-4.

In June 1958, you were transferred to Quantico. For the next two years, you were commanding officer of the Test and Training Regiment, so-called. Tell us something about that regiment and what it was then doing.

Wilson: Gen Twining was CG at Quantico, and he requested me to be the commanding officer of the Test and Training

Regiment, which was really the Officers Candidates' School. There was some consternation at Headquarters. I had not finished my third year and it was a little embarrassing for me. But Gen Twining was persuasive and had a lot of clout at Headquarters, and I had worked for him before. He had requested me from the Personnel Department.

That is probably one of the most fulfilling jobs that I have ever had. I was my own boss there. It was not under the Education Center, which Gen Krulak commanded. Therefore, I worked directly for the Commandant of the Marine Corps Schools, which it was called at that time.

Everything went well. I was left alone. The officer candidates were recruited and I was responsible for their commissioning. The CO was the sole arbiter of whether a man got a commission or not, with no questions asked. So I found it stimulating and challenging. We were busy in the summertime when the PLC's filled the outlying camps. During the remainder of the year, we had the regular Officers Candidate School. And at that time, we also had NCO schools. I went to The Basic School later, which was also challenging, but I really believe that the Officer Candidates School was more fulfilling.

Simmons: What sort of quarters did you have for this job?

Wilson: We lived at Quarters 414, which was on the hill overlooking what was called "Whiskey Gulch." It was a wooden frame house, one of the old barracks that was brought up from Norfolk after World War I. It had just been redone, about the fifth time, but was very comfortable, with a view of the river and a big living room with a nice fireplace.

End Tape 3, Side 2

Begin Tape 4, Side 1

Wilson: Oscar Peatross, Wade Hitt, [George] "Cotton" Gilliland, George Webster, John Chaisson, and Bob Barrow lived on the street so that was a delightful neighborhood. In fact, almost all made general officer later.

Simmons: I note that you were also a member and later chairman of the Fish and Wildlife Committee. Any special recollections of this committee?

Wilson: I had always been interested in hunting and fishing. The new Lunga Reservoir had just been built and since I was in the Officer Candidates School training areas and later the Basic School training areas and was the senior officer in the Guadalcanal area, it was natural that I got in. I was involved in planting food for wildlife, feeding the deer in winter, and working with, the provost marshal to prevent poaching.

Simmons: In June 1960, you were named commanding officer of The Basic School. This was a very choice assignment and a rather good predictor of a future rank. What are your special recollections of the year you had at The Basic School?

Wilson: I was still a lieutenant colonel, although I had been selected for colonel when I was ordered to be the CO of

The Basic School. Gen Snedeker then had relieved Gen Twining as the Commandant of the Marine Corps Schools. It was a controversial assignment among the more senior colonels, because I, of course, was a lieutenant colonel, an almost unprecedented assignment for a selected colonel.

I was not unaware of this controversy of course. It was a job that many colonels wanted. I don't know why I was assigned except that I had worked for Gen Snedeker before and it had become a tradition for the Commandant of the Officers Candidates' School to go to The Basic School. This was started by Bill Jones and then Lowell English. There was me, and then Bob McDonough, who relieved me at the Officers Candidates' School, also relieved me as CO of The Basic School.

The new Basic School had just been built in the Guadalcanal area. Having had some experience as executive officer of The Basic School, in years gone by, I'm sure had something to do with it. But it was an enjoyable assignment and I had looked forward to being there longer than I actually was. But I was selected for the National War College the next year and was there for only slightly more than one year.

End Session VII

Session VIII-- February 25, 1980

Simmons: This is the morning of the 25th of February. We are still in the Wilson home on Old Canton Road, Brandon, Mississippi. We ended the last session with the discussion of your services as commanding officer of The Basic School.

You left that duty in August 1961 to go to the National War College. That was a very good year for you. Who were some of your classmates?

Wilson: Gordon West was one classmate that I can remember right off. We served together later on in the 1st Marine Division. I was the only one of the group of seven Marines that year that made general officer rank. We had a good class, but as we know, promotions do not necessarily flow to the best officers. This class probably had the worst record for making general officer than any other Marine class in the National War College. I don't remember that there was ever one class that did not make any general officers. But in any case, I was the only one in the '61 - '62 class.

There were, in my class however, the two Chiefs of Naval Operations, Bud Zumwalt and Jim Holloway. A great many of the Air Force officers made general. A good many of the Navy officers made flag rank. Not very many Army officers made general from that class.

Simmons: What foreign trips did you make?

Wilson: I made the Latin American trip, which was really a 23-day cocktail party. We visited almost all the capitals in Latin America. A plane was assigned, which was a custom at that time and it was a delightful trip.

As I look back on it, I certainly did gain a great deal from my Latin America trip and countries where I had never been. This was my third choice however. I was the junior officer in the class and the choices were made by seniority for the senior Marines attending. It was determined, by the

Commandant of the Naval War College, that of the five trips, one Marine had to be on each one.

I had written my paper on CENTO [Central Treaty Organization] and really wanted to go to the Middle East. But I was junior and had the last choice and since there were two that had to double up, I was assigned the Latin American trip; I believe serendipity is the word for it. Subsequent to that time, I have been to the Middle East but feel that I know a certain amount about Latin America because of the advantage of the trip.

Simmons: You said that you were the junior Marine in the class, and yet you were the only who was promoted to flag rank. I think there was a general perception in those years, in fact, until quite recently within the Marine Corps, that National War College was rewarded for past performance rather than preparation for future assignments. I think that that has since been reversed, or I believe you had some effect on that when you were Commandant.

Wilson: Well, that is probably true. However, when I was Commandant there was the decision that I made, regarding selection for schools which I regretted later, although I still think it is a good idea. I was never able explain to the officer population at large, that in the past selections for the schools, from the Staff and Command College and to the top level schools, was simply that of the availability of an officer and the selection was made essentially by the officer's monitor. It is true that "the Commandant" makes all the selections, but in reality it was made by the monitor with the recommendations up the line to the Director of

Personnel, who obviously, if he had faith in his monitors, generally approved their recommendations

I was convinced that there should be a board which selected officers to go to school. And I instituted this. The perception went throughout the officer community that this was actually a pre-selection for the next higher rank, and that those individuals who were not selected for school, either in the year of the school convening or the following year, were not considered qualified by this board for future promotions. Many were discouraged and some resigned. Although I was never able to tell how many resigned because of this decision, there were threats of resigning and there were rumors that many were resigning because of it. However a study showed that no more resigned that year than any other comparable year.

But there was a general dissatisfaction. In fact, I went to Quantico to try to explain my rationale to a convocation of all of the officers at Quantico, students and staff. I was not very articulate or persuasive and failed to do a good job on the platform. I have discussed this with Gen Barrow and I don't know what his plans are, whether he is going to change this system or continue it. It's a good system in theory; but things are not always what they are but what they seem. I do know, however, that there was a great deal of dissatisfaction within the officer community about it.

Simmons: You used the term "resigned" but wouldn't this in most cases be "retired?" Because weren't most of these officers in the lieutenant colonel bracket?

Wilson: Yes, they believed they would not have made colonel. An officer comes up for colonel in his 21st year. So many may have retired as lieutenant colonels. But also, there were some that resigned since this applied to the Amphibious Warfare School many of whom were majors and captains.

Simmons: In fact, that is really what happened. The boards were extended to our own schools in addition to the top level schools.

Wilson: Frankly, as I look back on it now, I would not have changed the system because I was not able to get it across properly. Although, had I been more articulate and more perceptive, perhaps I could have explained it better. But everyone looks at new policies as to how it affects them. Obviously there were many more officers who were not selected than those that were selected for schools. Therefore, if they wanted to leave the Marine Corps, they had a built-in alibi as to why they might not get promoted in the future, and therefore the time to retire or resign is now.

Simmons: Wasn't this effect heightened by the proportional lessening of the permanent change of station funds and the stretching out of tours and the availability of the person and a person becomes kind of a victim of the arithmetic of where he stood within his tour?

Wilson: Yes, we were not able to move officers. For instance, we were discussing my going to the National War College after a year at Quantico. This could not have happened in later years. As a result then, I might have been

selected to go the following year by a board; therefore, giving me two years in Quantico. But also I may not have been selected at all. Many officers believe that if they get too far from Washington, then they were out from under the scrutiny of seniors who could evaluate them. Insofar as promotions are concerned, many officers believe that they have a better promotion chance in Washington, because they are seen by senior officers every day and they have to face them in the halls as opposed to being elsewhere on independent duty for instance. I never really believed this, but I know this is a perception.

Simmons: Pursuing this point just a little bit further, the longer tours--the four-year tour becoming the rule rather than the three-year tour--many persons in certain ranks only have one job in a rank. For example, the colonel...

Wilson: Yes.

Simmons: probably has one job before he is up for brigadier general.

Wilson: Particularly now, as we reach that point in their careers where they have been lieutenant colonels for a long time.

Simmons: And this, does it not, have kind of an effect of a perceived pre-selection?

Wilson: A perceived effect, yes. However, selection boards for general officers certainly should know this. In fact, they should be briefed by the Commandant about this fact.

They should not relate the current conditions to their own careers; where colonels had two or three jobs. But they must be made to understand that they accept the career patterns as they are today and not what they might have been in the past or what may be in the future. Board members will have to take into consideration as an advantage or a disadvantage the fact that an officer had only one job as a colonel. In fact, it might well be that in this one job as a colonel, he did a good job and remained his full assigned time.

Simmons: Getting back to the National War College or at least your year at the National War College, I am sure this was a very good year for Jane.

Wilson: Yes, it was. Although we did have a good deal of sickness during that year we lived in an apartment in Washington. Jane had an ulcer, which she had left untreated too long and was in the hospital for three or four weeks. Also during that time, I was playing with Janet in the yard, fell, twisted my knee, and was in a cast for almost a month. But generally, it was a good year for me professionally, after which I was assigned to Headquarters Marine Corps.

Simmons: Where were you living at this time?

Wilson: We were living in Park Fairfax. Not knowing where I was going after we left Quantico, we wanted an apartment. I thought that I would be studying a great deal of time, which indeed I was. So, Janet was a first grade student at that time; she was then five years old. So we decided to take an apartment and await orders after the War College.

Of course, after being assigned to Headquarters Marine Corps, we moved into a new apartment complex, "Jamestown Village", where we had the great pleasure of associating with Col and Mrs. Ed Simmons, who had also moved into the Jamestown Village. I suppose that was the first time we had ever lived that close together. We enjoyed Jamestown Village. It was a new complex and we lived there for two years.

Simmons: Yes, that was a nice place to live. It was kind of a protected place so far as children are concerned, and a nice pool there. Col Ed Link, I guess at that time he was a lieutenant colonel, lived there.

Wilson: He was a next-door neighbor of ours.

Simmons: As you say, you had been assigned to Headquarters Marine Corps after your finishing National War College. I believe your assignment was as Joint Plans Coordinator in the office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, Plans and Programs.

Wilson: Yes. That office had just been established by Gen Hayes, who was later the Assistant Commandant. He was the Operations deputy at the time. You well remember that you relieved me as the Joint Coordinator.

Simmons: By that time, Gen Buse was the G-3.

Wilson: In the meantime, Gen Bowser had relieved Gen Hayes for a short time, and then Gen [Henry W.] Buse had come in to Headquarters from his job as commanding general of the 3d

Division, and had taken the Op Dep job as a major general. He was not promoted to lieutenant general until after I left.

Simmons: Yes. I recall that Gen Orm Simpson was G-1 at that time. He worked very actively in documenting the requirements. As you indicated a moment ago, it was about this time the old Strategic Plans Branch, G-3, which we had discussed earlier, was reorganized into the Joint Planning Group. You remember that both you and I worked on that reorganization and you mentioned that I succeeded you as Joint Plans Coordinator in June 1964, when you were transferred to the 1st Marine Division.

You now would have had two years with the 1st Marine Division as the G-3. In late 1965, the 1st Division began to send its regiments to Vietnam. Headquarters of the division moved first to Okinawa and then in March 1966, I believe, to Chu Lai.

Wilson: Yes. I was G-3 for a year at Camp Pendleton. Gen [William] Fairbourn was the commanding general of the division. Then he departed and Jeff Fields came in and took command when we departed. Gordon West was chief of staff. Hunter Hurst was the assistant division commander but he did not go to Vietnam with us. He was transferred and Wilfred Stiles, who had just made brigadier general, took over as assistant division commander.

We went to Okinawa initially, and took over the camps that had been vacated by the 3d Marine Division. They were in the worst condition that I have ever seen. It almost was as if the troops had been called out for a lunch break and never returned. I have never seen worse condition of

barracks--tape recorders left behind, blankets, unmade beds--the barracks were filthy and in terrible condition, and I could never understand how it could have been left that way and whose responsibility it was.

When we arrived, the 7th Marines, who had left Camp Pendleton earlier under the command of Oscar Peatross, were in Okinawa initially but had departed to Vietnam. The staff made several trips, as you will remember Ed, since you were the G-3 of III MAF at that time, into Vietnam before the division came down. You were a delightful host and certainly very generous with your time and advice to me since I was going down into Chu Lai, I shall always be grateful.

Simmons: You were sort of in a unique position. You had been the primary planner for the return of the 1st Marine Division from Korea into Camp Pendleton and now you were primary planner to go back out to the Far East. This was also a unique situation in that the 1st Marine Division was feeding its regiments in, a battalion at a time, into Vietnam, until the situation arrived where the commanding general really had no more troops in Okinawa, and moved his flag forward. Do you recall any particular problems that pertained at that time?

Wilson: No. We were anxious to get down there. I am sure that the long standing personality conflict between Gen Walt and Gen Fields was exacerbated after we got to Vietnam. Gen Krulak was the primary force in getting the division overseas. As a matter of fact, there is an interesting story.

The 1st Marine Division was never really ordered overseas. The 1st Marine division closed its CP in Camp

Pendleton and opened its CP in Okinawa without ever a set of orders being issued. At that time, there was a reluctance to order troops overseas because it would appear we were increasing the war effort. Already the American public was questioning the war and more troops were obviously needed. But there was a reluctance on the part of the administration to order units overseas. So this is how the 1st Marine Division got overseas, simply by closing its CP and opening in Okinawa.

Simmons: Very interesting. There was a perception at that time, right or wrong, that Gen Fields could not enter Vietnam or could not assume command of the division in Vietnam until Gen Walt was promoted to lieutenant general so as to correct the relative seniority of the two generals. Is that an accurate perception?

Wilson: I think that was true for a time, although Gen Walt had made lieutenant general by the time we arrived.

Simmons: In February.

Wilson: But I believe this was the reason that it did not come earlier. Although there were some personality conflicts. You remember, there had been some generals relieved for various reasons, and commands were reassigned about this same time.

Simmons: Some comparisons could be made between Chu Lai and Da Nang. In Da Nang, there was almost a garrison situation. In Chu Lai there was almost an expeditionary situation. Can you comment on that?

Wilson: As you say, that was certainly the case. Of course, the brigade had originally landed in Da Nang unopposed. It had grown, but living in the old French buildings there made it a garrison situation. Chu Lai had been built from scratch, starting with the expeditionary air field and moving to tropical type buildings, which were virtually completed when we got there. MAG-36 had arrived, with its helicopters and set up the Chu Lai strip. The living conditions were more conducive to a combat situation than they were at Da Nang. But at the same time, we were under considerable restrictions as to what we could do and where we could go.

Of course, I never believed the philosophy of the search and destroy missions advocated by Gen [William] Westmoreland, because the troops would go out on these missions then the VC would flow right back into the towns and villages. It was an impossible situation as I saw it at the time. I believed we should consolidate within the area in which we had control. I think you probably felt the same way, and you might want to comment on it. The Marines kept building up strength in I Corps there. Everybody knew that the real place for the Marines was in the south, because of the opportunity for more amphibious landings and naturally we had amphibious expertise. But it is like the belling of the cat: no one could figure out who was going to relieve the Marines in I Corps in order for the Marines to go to the south. The heaviest fighting really occurred in I Corps, certainly in later months and years, next to the DMZ, and the Marines bore the brunt of it.

Simmons: You mentioned of course, Gen Fields, who was the commanding general of the division at that time. Who were

some of the other commanding officers and key staff officers in the 1st Division in Chu Lai at that time?

Wilson: Gordon West was the chief of staff; Willie Stiles was the ADC. Oscar Peatross had come back and had rejoined his 7th Marines with the other regiments of the 1st Division. Chuck Widdecke had the 5th Marines.

Simmons: Donald Mallory...

Wilson: Gene Haffey who later commanded The Basic School. His son is a captain at the barracks now. In fact, his assignment as the commanding officer of the 7th Marines created quite a controversy between Gen Walt and Gen Fields. Gen Walt felt that his experience in Vietnam was such that he, as the corps commander, should approve all regimental commanders. Gen Fields took violent exception to this as the division commander; they had quite a falling-out over it. He took over the 7th Marines. I think the controversy did get to CG, FMFPac, who ruled in favor of the commanding general of the 1st Division. Lou Baughman was the supply officer. Bill Bennett was the G-4. J.J. O'Donnell was the G-2.

Simmons: 1st Marines, Mallory and then B. B. Mitchell was the...

Wilson: No. B. B. Mitchell had the 1st Marines and Mallory, I think relieved him.

Simmons: When did you leave Chu Lai?

Wilson: I left, let's see, I must have left in July of that year (1966). I had been ordered to Atlanta as Director, 6th Marine Corps District.

Simmons: Right. And for your services as G-3 1st Marine Division, you received the Legion of Merit and the Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with a gold star.

In August you were assigned, as you indicated, as the director of the 6th Marine Corps District with Headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. What were your duties in that capacity?

Wilson: I had both the reserve and recruiting for the 6th District comprising of the seven southeastern states. I had, as we discussed earlier, been recruiting in New York many years before. I found recruiting quite different in the south than in New York which were the days before Korea. The reserve really took most of my time. There were many units and I set about trying to visit them as early as possible.

Atlanta was a friendly city. It is crowded and of course, it is getting much more crowded all the time. There is a fine Marine community and we were accepted most generously. We only stayed a very short time since I was promoted in December of 1966, and departed that month for the job of Legislative Assistant to the Commandant.

Simmons: What were your duties in this new job as Legislative Assistant to the Commandant?

Wilson: It was liaison with Congress. It is an unusual job in the Marine Corps as compared to the other services. The Legislative Assistant is a staff officer for the Commandant,

as opposed to being labeled legislative liaison. This is by design that the billet is entitled Legislative Assistant, instead of legislative liaison.

Since there is a requirement to report to the Congress, the numbers of people in legislative liaison, several years ago--perhaps it was during Don Hittle's time in the Marine Corps--we changed the title to the Legislative Assistant, or advisor to the Commandant. Therefore, the number of people in the Legislative Assistant's office and the Legislative Assistant himself, is not reported to Congress. We have Marines in the offices of the Navy legislative liaison, both in the House and in the Senate. These Marines are reported but the numbers, naturally, are considerably less than the other services: It also makes us look good by comparison.

Simmons: What were some of the key issues with the Congress at that time?

Wilson: This was during the early days of the Vietnam War; we had a tremendous number of letters from a militant and dissident group of Marines about that time. The draft laws had been before World War II had been gerrymandered to the extent that only the poor, the blacks and the disadvantaged were really drafted and we were taking the dregs of society. A great many fine youngsters came into the Marine Corps voluntarily. But many of the draftees, who were thrown in with them and the continuing disaffection of the American people regarding Vietnam and its consequences was spilling over into all the services including the Marine Corps as well.

As a result, there were hundreds of letters each day to

Congressmen, addressed particularly to the two Kennedys. As a matter of fact, Bobby Kennedy was Senator from New York and Ted Kennedy from Massachusetts. Sixty percent of all of our mail was addressed to the two Kennedys. And not ten percent of that 60 percent were from the states of New York and Massachusetts. Naturally they were routinely forwarded to the Commandant to prepare a reply and the requirements to investigate mostly frivolous charges were enormous. In fact, it cost us at that time about \$27 for each letter that we prepared and sent to the Congress. As an example of how the services got whip-lashed, the Kennedys-together had about 200 employees, many of whom they paid from their own funds. They would not permit us to answer: "Dear Senator Kennedy,

This is in reference to your letter of 7 October." They insisted we use the words "your recent letter." Therefore, since they did not have the personnel to answer the individuals immediately after they received our letter, they would apologize in their letter for not answering sooner, but implied that the Marine Corps was negligent for not answering sooner. It was disgusting, misleading, and duplicitous.

As far as the Marine Corps was concerned, our funds were appropriated and authorized fairly satisfactorily. We had enough appropriations and manpower. Little in the way of new weapons development was going on and the procurement of the existing weapons was about all we could assimilate.

Simmons: About the only major weapon as I recall that was acquired at that time was the 175mm gun. That probably was a mistake.

Wilson: Yes. I think it was and as a matter of fact, we

have subsequently taken it out of our inventory. Of course, it is interchangeable now with the eight inch. We have gone back to eight inch and put the 175 barrel into permanent storage.

Simmons: Who was Commandant at this time?

Wilson: Gen Greene was the Commandant when I first came in. He finished his tour in December, and the following year Gen Chapman was Commandant.

Simmons: You accompanied the Commandants, both Gen Greene and Gen Chapman in most, if not all, their appearances before the various Congressional committees, I believe.

Wilson: Yes, I did, both in the Authorization and the Appropriations Committees in both houses of Congress.

Simmons: Do you have any recollections of the style employed by these two Commandants in addressing Congressional affairs?

Wilson: Yes. Gen Greene being the very meticulous and thorough individual that he is, had a massive amount of notes. He would practice a technique, which I later used to good advantage. He would have notes in a file box manned by his military assistant and when a question would be asked of him, he would drop his right hand down and at the same time begin to answer the question. The military assistant, who was very familiar with the cards, would find the card with the appropriate answer and hand it to him, very much like a surgeon is handed his instruments. And he would then glance at it and refresh his memory. A very good technique that I

used, not nearly as effectively as Gen Greene, but one which I thought was a fine idea.

Gen Chapman did not use that technique. But he had a great deal, as did General Greene, of respect from the Congress. For the most part the Marines have always fared well; the questions have never been aggressive or combative as they have for other service chiefs.

Simmons: Well needless to say, this tour was a marvelous preparation for you, for your relations with the Congress.

Wilson: It was indeed. As I look back, this was the best preparation that I had for one of the most difficult jobs of being the Commandant. I felt comfortable on the Hill; knew a great many of the Senators and Congressmen from my days as Legislative Assistant. I really enjoyed discussing our desires with them personally and did not mind testifying.

Simmons: In July 1968, you were transferred to Hawaii to serve as Chief of Staff, Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, and Pacific. Once again, you were working for Gen Buse, who was the CG at that time. This was the peak of the Vietnam War. What are some of your recollections of this period?

Wilson: Gen Buse and I had been friends for many years. In fact, we were stationed with the Buses in Hawaii, when I was an aide to Gen Turnage. Gen Buse was then Assistant G-4 of FMFPac in 1947. I had worked for him when he was Op Dep, and when I went to Hawaii as Chief of Staff of FMFPac I relieved Chuck Widdecke, who was Chief of Staff for [Victor] "Brute" Krulak. It was the height of the Vietnam War. Gen Buse made many trips to Vietnam. Our involvement was becoming more

frustrating all the time, the lack of authority to aggressively attack the enemy and the continual casualties,

Simmons: Did you accompany Gen Buse on trips to Vietnam?

Wilson: Yes. I made several trips with him, 'perhaps about two a year. He wanted me to familiarize myself with the situation there and the people. But for the most part however, I remained in Hawaii when he left for either the western Pacific or California.

Simmons: You lived in Makalapa?

Wilson: We lived in Makalapa and after a hassle with the Navy about moving the Chief of Staff of FMFPac into a captain's quarters. We were later able to overcome this. Gen Buse really had to threaten CinCPacFleet, who constantly changed the rules by moving in junior admirals ahead of more senior Marines into desirable quarters. Gen Buse did get designated sets of quarters for the Marines in Makalapa, which very good for morale and prestige and had formerly been a source of contention for many years.

Simmons: You received your second Legion of Merit for this service. In March 1970, you were promoted to major general and given command of the 3d Marine Division on Okinawa. You were also concurrently the commanding general of the I Marine Amphibious Force or Expeditionary Force. Will you distinguish between these two commands?

Wilson: Yes. When I was at FMFPac as Chief of Staff, Gen Buse could foresee that plans were being made for the

withdrawal of American units from Vietnam. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, as you remember, was in Vietnam and two Marine divisions were there. We had Iwakuni, but without a name or command. We were concerned that DOD was going to withdraw the ground or division Marines from Vietnam, but leave the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing there to support the Army. I came up with the idea that we should establish a 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, Rear, in Iwakuni which was and is the home of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, so that when the Marine divisions departed, that we could legitimately state that the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing actually is in Iwakuni; and that those in country should join the parent unit. This might seem a little strange now, even childish. But at the time, words were very important in order to preserve the integrity of the air-ground team; a goal--as you know so well--of many of our sister services is to break us up based on any pretext. So Bill Jones, who was commander of the 3d Division, had returned the division from Vietnam to Okinawa and I took over just about a week after the division returned. The III Marine Amphibious Force, at that time, was in Vietnam.

We then established the I Marine Amphibious Force in order that we return the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing back to Iwakuni as I explained earlier. There was a little hassle that I had with some of the generals down in Vietnam because when we did establish the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, Rear, in Iwakuni, then this gave an opportunity for the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing to freely move its forces (they thought) back and forth between Iwakuni and Vietnam. We were then under constraints as to the number of people we could send to Vietnam since there could not be over a certain number in

country because of President Johnson's edict.

The I Marine Amphibious Force was formed to include the aircraft units in Iwakuni and the 3d Marine Division and to eventually absorb these units when they came out of Vietnam. It turned out that this worked very well. The units did come back without any problem and probably would have come back anyway. But I felt that it was very important to maintain the integrity of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, Rear, which, by name, was a "rear" but had nothing to do with the units in Vietnam.

Simmons: And you as commanding general of the I Marine Amphibious Force, were the commander for both the Wing, Rear and for the 3d Marine Division.

Wilson: So that we would have a parent unit to absorb the wing units when they came back.

Simmons: I was back in Vietnam at that time as the Assistant Division Commander of the 1st Marine Division. I remember that from the viewpoint of being in the country, that the wing enjoyed greater flexibility in moving people and units back and forth; whereas, with the 1st Division, once we moved a person or unit out of the country, he was lost to us. It was a one-way street.

Wilson: However, this was a flexibility assumed by the wing, but which was not in fact, legitimate. Of course, being in command there, why I was very interested in seeing that this interchange did not happen because I was losing assets. I felt that at time, we could have gone back in.

Simmons: You have already included the conditions of the barracks as you found them in Okinawa earlier. What were some of the problems of the 3d Marine Division on Okinawa in 1970? Wasn't it about the time that the Japanese asserted their sovereignty over the island?

Wilson: Yes, much of it was our fault. Marines brought back unbelievable items from Vietnam; hundreds of conex boxes, locked up but inside were articles only Marines would bring out. When I would go for inspection and ask what was inside, no keys could be found. I had my aide accompany me with a pair of bolt cutters. Then, if in fact, the key was not available when I indicated that I wanted to see what was in a conex box, he would cut the lock. There were unbelievable things there. For instance, cases and cases of liquor, white painted rocks for souvenirs. The packrats, for which the Marines have a tendency, were numerous. So I set about to get rid of this great excess of equipment. There was a reluctance to turn it loose, but we kept trying.

In addition, we were having considerable racial problems at that time, brought about again as I said earlier, by people who should have never been enlisted into the Marine Corps in the first place. It too, was a reflection of the racial problems at home, pot smoking, not the hard drugs which occurred later, was quite prevalent.

Okinawa was still under the High Commissioner then; Jim Lampert was the High Commissioner. We got along fine and I was very fond of him. Too, we were having a great many problems with the Japanese. The Okinawans particularly, were demonstrating against the Americans because of the High Commissioner's coveted status. Eventually, of course, the

island reverted to the Japanese (who, by the way, had as much trouble with the Okinawans later as we did earlier). We had many demonstrations, by Okinawans; burning cars, throwing rocks, attacking the air base at Kadena, to which we sent several battalions over from time to time, to protect the air base. They were opposing the B-52's arriving and departing and tankers departing for refueling the B-52's on their way from Guam to Vietnam.

End Tape 1, Side 1,

Begin Tape 1, Side 2

Simmons: You were saying that it was a difficult but interesting period in the Marine Corps' history.

Wilson: Yes. I felt that too, in training we had to get away from the Vietnam syndrome. We had to get away from training which smacked of "Southeast Asian villages" as training grounds. Vietnam was a thing of the past. Given the mood of the American people, there was no way that we could or should go back. We had to begin new training with new ideas. While we were indeed, still in the Pacific, we had to get away from emphasis on jungle training, which would inevitably be predominated by Vietnam. This was not easy to do, because everybody had been conditioned to it and everyone was an expert.

We tried the northern training area, established camps there, and almost without exception, unless we were very

careful, we would find ourselves in a Vietnam training situation in another week, because officers and men reverted to their background. We tried however, to maintain the expertise of building fire bases on mountain tops. This was Bill Jones' (FMFPac) idea. We, the Marines, had perfected the building of fire bases--artillery pieces being brought in by helicopter--and this expertise could be used at almost any situation, particularly where we would take advantage of our superior fire power. I could see this same technique used in Norway for example.

This caused trouble with the Okinawans. They were becoming more and more environmentally oriented and resented the fire bases in the northern training area, which was largely uninhabited, but they wanted to keep their areas as ecologically pure as possible. This certainly was understandable on their part, although they manufactured, conjured up, and imagined various rare birds, which had not been seen for years, if ever, to ensure that we did not disturb their mating and their habitat. One particularly was called the "Okinawa Woodpecker" known as "Okinawan Tern" which had never been seen by anyone alive, but they were sure the presence of troops disturbed its mating habits and surprisingly, environmentalists from all over the world began to write the commanding general of the 3d Division, the Commandant, the Senators, and the High Commissioner of Okinawa. There was a massive flow of letters from the environmentalists from all over the world.

This is just an example of some of the problems which are not directly related to commanding a division, but which made it very interesting; one of my most enjoyable tours of duty in fact.

Simmons: How about the habu, the deadly snake. Was he an endangered species too?

Wilson: No. We were not above invoking the snake as overly dangerous when we tried to get the troops to stay out of the Okinawan tombs.

Simmons: Wasn't Bob Barrow, as a brigadier general, the commanding general of Camp Smedley Butler at this time?

Wilson: Yes, he was. Bob and I have been friends for many years and we further cemented our friendship there. Patty, his wife (he was on an accompanied tour), was a lovely and talented hostess, and certainly did more than her share of entertaining, not only with the visiting Marines, but also the resident bachelors, of which I was the senior one. Also the Lamperts, who was the High Commissioner and Mrs. Lampert, depended a great deal on Patty for entertaining visitors that came through who were not necessarily related to the Marine Corps.

Simmons: For your services as Commanding General, 3d Marine Division, Commanding General, I Marine Amphibious Force, you received your third Legion of Merit. In April 1971, you returned to the U.S. and were assigned as the director of the Education Center at Quantico. What are your recollections of that tour?

Wilson: I had a good tour there. I had relieved [William] Gay Thrash, who had moved to be the commanding general of the Marine Corps Development and Education Command after Ray

Davis had moved to be the Assistant Commandant. I was originally scheduled to go to Parris Island. In fact, I had a set of orders to that effect. But when Lew Walt retired, and Ray was made the Assistant Commandant, Gay Thrash moved to MCDEC and I was changed from Parris Island to the Education Center at Quantico.

I suspect that my years at Quantico had conditioned me to expect more than I found when I arrived. I was more aggressive than was anticipated and perhaps more than the director of the Education Center should be in matters not directly associated with education. I busied myself for not only the Education but the appearance of the post. I moved rather smartly into The Basic School and the Officers Candidates' School. Sam Jaskilka was doing a good job at the Command and Staff College. So I left that alone.

I again felt that we should get away from the Vietnam syndrome in our schools and began to move away from being heavily oriented towards jungle warfare training, to move to desert and cold weather training. But in the Education Center, everything that is done is long-ranged. The Director of the Education Center has to look to the future because the day-to-day operations had been set, at least, the year before. We had tried to change the advanced base problem team to more amphibiously oriented areas of the world.

Simmons: Looking at The Basic School once again, perception through the years has always been that The Basic School is something special and a thing of itself. And that it is run from Washington, rather than by the Education Center.

Wilson: I don't think this is true. I know that this has

been a perception and may have been at times. But it certainly was not run from Washington when I was the commanding officer at The Basic School. I was given a job by Gen Snedeker. Gen Shoup was the Commandant: I know that he had nothing to do with it. But I do know that there is a perception that the commanding officer of The Basic School has to be approved by the Commandant. I certainly did not do that when I was at the Ed Center, nor check my decision out with anybody, nor did I approve the CO when I was the Commandant. This was discussed with me by Gen [Joseph C.] Fegan but I reiterated my position that he should take whatever colonels he had assigned to Quantico to do the job and I certainly was not going to send anyone down from Washington with a specific assignment from the Commandant.

Simmons: What sort of quarters did you have at Quantico?

Wilson: I lived in Quarters #12, which was a delightful set of quarters. I believe Jane thinks that this was the most livable set of quarters which we ever occupied. This was the set that had had a couple of fires in the past. Gen Thomas had once redone the quarters and enlarged the sun porch; as opposed to the other quarters which had narrower sun porches and were much less livable in the winter. I had discussed with Bill Chip, then the G-4 at Headquarters Marine Corps, the advantages of having a double set of windows in the house, in order to save energy. He was able to get this done for Quarters #12, Larry Snowden's quarters, who had the Development Center at the time, and Gay Thrash's quarters. Though I doubt if we could do that these days because of the limitation of money on general officers' quarters. But this made the sun porch much more livable, both in the winter and

in the summer. They were a fine set of quarters and we enjoyed them very much.

Simmons: In August 1972, you were promoted to lieutenant general. On 1 September 1972, you assumed command of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. Whom did you relieve?

Wilson: I relieved Bill Jones, who was CG, FMFPac and who had relieved Bill Buse two years earlier.

Simmons: By the time you assumed the command of FMFPac, we were essentially out of Vietnam, or so we thought. But there were a number of key events in Southeast Asia while you were on CG, FMFPac. I will name them and ask you for your recollections. The evacuation of Pnom Penh, 12 April 1975; Operation Eagle Full.

Wilson: Yes. The Marines were at sea for some forty days, about which I was much concerned since I remembered very well having been at sea that long myself. I was pleased with the training schedule aboard ship and kept up with it very closely because of my personal interest in it having had some previous background. The evacuation went off without a hitch and it was a classic evacuation based on plans made earlier. Of course, there was no opposition. I cannot say much for the next evacuation.

Simmons: The evacuation of Saigon, 29 April 1975 so called "Operation Frequent Wind."

Wilson: Yes. We had planned for this as we had for "Eagle

Pull." The command relations were intact. Dick Carey was the Marine general in command and aboard the flagship. The first thing he failed to do in my opinion was to report to the ground force commander. The ground force commander was an Air Force general who neither went to the scene of the action nor was he even in the air over the evacuation area. He did a terrible job.

There was confusion. I believe that Dick Carey should have reported to the Air Force commander, but he never did and the Seventh Fleet commander had no idea what was going on. Dick went ashore and the evacuation began fairly well, until MACV headquarters were blown up deliberately and we began to evacuate the people from the embassy. The plans were to blow up the trees in the embassy compound in order to provide two or more landing sites. One landing site was to be the top of the building and the other in the compound. The blowing of the trees did not occur, I have forgotten why.

In any case, toward evening, the only landing site other than the embassy was on the top of a hill. The helicopters were spotted on certain ships then had to go to another ship to pick up the troops to go ashore to support the - evacuation. This delayed the operation.

Simmons: Wasn't there some confusion between launch time and touchdown time?

Wilson: That is right. After all the experience that we had, that the H-Hour was considered by the Air Force not to be the hour of touchdown, but the hour of departure was criminal neglect. It was unbelievable that we could be so screwed up after so much experience in the past.

So that was a delay which obviously carried it into the evening hours. We had intended to have the full evacuation done during daylight hours because of the number of anti-aircraft weapons in Saigon and the obvious concern that the helicopters might be shot down and we could not retaliate. In the end, we had helicopters going back and forth with only one landing site, the roof of the embassy. The Marines and designated personnel were being evacuated when locals began coming over the fence into the compound trying to be evacuated also. The Marines locked the gates and were moving up floor by floor to the landing site on the roof. As I remember there were seven floors of the building.

Ambassador [Graham] Martin, who would not permit the evacuation commander to exercise his command role, felt very strongly that the evacuation should not have taken place. I don't think there is any question that he opened the gates to allow as many Vietnamese as possible to come in; just Vietnamese off the streets with no connection to the embassy.

As a result, there were many more people to be evacuated than we had ever planned for. In fact, as I remember, we evacuated about 8,000. Martin remained there even though he was ordered to leave. He was finally ordered to leave by the President and in effect, was told by the evacuation commander that if he did not leave, then they would evacuate him by force, which they finally did. He then declared the evacuation complete and there were still 100 Marines left, knowing full well that we would have to go back and get them, which we did, in the early hours of the morning. But it was utter confusion, which need not have been the case, had we followed command procedures and the ambassador had stayed out of it. This may not be a very clear picture that I have

given, but it is my best recollection. Where were you then Ed?

Simmons: I was back here. I remember when you came back and you were present--you were back and when Dick gave his debrief at Headquarters, and you called him to task for not adhering to the doctrinal line.

Wilson: Yes. Dick did a fine job under difficult circumstances. But at the same time, I suppose I felt very strongly about the reporting procedures. The Seventh Fleet commander frankly panicked-- I was horrified-- at 3:00 in the morning, when I had heard in the CinCPac Command Center, that he had said pilots had flown more than their allocated hours and they must stop flying.

I sent word back immediately that under no conditions was he to give such an order and that the Marine pilots were to fly long enough to evacuate the Marines, no matter how much longer it took, and that I did not ever want to hear such a message again or would prefer charges against him. I was aware that I really had no authority to give such a message to the Seventh Fleet Commander, who was indeed the operational commander because Carey had not reported as he should have to the commander ashore.

But nevertheless, I could not, under any conditions, allow the Seventh Fleet commander to interfere with what I considered a primary duty of the Marines, to evacuate the Marines, no matter what the regulations said. I was prepared to take whatever heat was necessary including being relieved of command if necessary.

Simmons: I have talked to Dick Carey several times about this evacuation, and I have also gotten his opinion of Snepp's book Decent Interval, which covers this period. Dick emphasizes or underscores the unreal attitude of the embassy towards the imminent evacuation. He went in there with the advance party; it was kind of a "business as usual" atmosphere and nobody wanted to think the unthinkable. And perhaps my memory is hazy on that, but perhaps this was the reason why the landing zone in the compound was not prepared. No one was going to go that step, to blow up the trees.

Wilson: I suspect that was the case. Ambassador Martin was obstreperous, an old and sick man; he was exercising his presumed prerogative as only old ambassadors can do. His disdain for the military, I know, caused a lot of problems too. And frankly, the landing force commander, surely the Air Force commander here, I think, was derelict in his duties in failing to take more control.

Simmons: Incidentally, this as you probably know, is a kind of favorite point with Gen Greene, who compares the command arrangements that pertained during the Korean War, when the Commanding General, United Nations Command, was the paramount commander. With the command arrangements that pertained in the Vietnam War, when COMUSMACV was subordinate to the ambassador in the country, Gen Greene always thought that this was wrong. He always thought that the war zone should have the military commanders as paramount commanders.

Wilson: Of course, I think so too. But the Vietnam War is a perfect example of how not to run a war, almost any way in which you look at it.

Simmons: The next of these key events in Southeast Asia was the Mayaguez incident which occurred from 12 - 16 May 1975.

Wilson: I was not there then. I had already left. After my nomination to be Commandant, an interesting anecdote occurred that morning after the Saigon evacuation at about 8:00. When I went to my office from the CinCPac Command center, having beer, up all night, I had a call from the Secretary of Defense, who had earlier called Lou Wilson--the Commander, PacAF (the same name as mine)--in the middle of the night, who happened to be in Clark Air Force Base, and congratulated him upon being named as Commandant of the Marine Corps. This has caused quite a chuckle over all these years in both the Air Force and the Marine Corps. Schlesinger's secretary got the wrong Lou Wilson. But he called me at 8 o'clock in the morning and told me that the announcement had been made. I left shortly thereafter; I made a trip to Washington for my confirmation hearing, and then went back to Hawaii where Jane, in the meantime, had been packing our gear. So I was on my way to Washington when the Mayaguez affair occurred. I have heard a lot about it, but Tom Miller was actually the acting CG, FMFPac.

This is a classic example of not having enough intelligence. Flying over the area to see if any troops are visible is reminiscent of Guadalcanal, when Gen Twining made such a reconnaissance by flying in the bomb bay of a B-17 bomber, flying over Guadalcanal at 5,000 feet and pronouncing that he didn't see any enemy but that the Marines were ready to go. This is just the same thing that Randy Austin did, who was the battalion commander, flew over and didn't see any enemy over the Koh Tang Island and said that, "If you want me

to go, I will go," like any Marine should do.

Simmons: Well, all three of these incidents to a varying degree, show certain doctrinal and procedural deficiencies which displeased you. I think it also reveals that our amphibious expertise had kind of worn thin during the Vietnam War.

Wilson: Yes. It had worn thin. Although I will say that everybody was in the act, from CinCPac to CONUSMACV to the ambassador. For instance, the very idea of commanders not being familiar enough with basic doctrine to know when H-Hour was. Admittedly the expertise of Marines over the years, had worn thin; not many Marines knew amphibious doctrine.

Simmons: That more or less completes the cycle. The next step of course, was your appointment as Commandant and we have covered that process quite thoroughly in our first session. So now I would like for you to sum up your 38 years of active duty. Looking back, what are the high points? The greatest satisfactions? What are the low points? Are there any things that you wish you might have done differently or seemed to have done differently? Specifically, what were major accomplishments that were attained while you were Commandant?

Wilson: Well, that is a big order. I certainly have given it no specific thought nor do I have any notes. I can, without emotion, say that my years as a Marine have been delightful and personally rewarding indeed. I believe that if I were a student at Millsaps College today, and having achieved whatever success I have, that I would still become a

Marine. Jane, of course, has been my greatest support and companion over the years. We have been married now for almost 36 years. She has certainly been a part of the Corps and I believe she has done a great job and been my greatest asset. My daughter Janet has certainly participated and with few complaints. The life of a service junior is not easy, particularly when her father is of higher rank than her contemporaries' fathers. She has never been interested in pursuing a military career. She laughingly said that when she was 21, that she wouldn't join the Marine Corps because it was time for her to retire anyway; she had her 20 in. But she has been a great pride and joy for us and we are delighted that she is doing so well. I know that she will have a great future.

My major low points I suppose, were two. One of which was when I was CG, FMFPac and I was under pressure from the Commandant and senior officers at Headquarters Marine Corps to retire, suggestions that I should retire and forget my aspirations to the commandancy. Many things going on in Washington which I did not like. Nevertheless, I was far away in Hawaii. I knew from rumor that I was the target of unfounded allegations made by those trying to kill my chances of being Commandant. I did not mount a campaign for the job, although I was accused of that.

My second low point was at the time of the death of McClure in San Diego and the DI shooting a recruit in the hand at Parris Island. I was aware of the Ribbon Creek incident years before of course. I could foresee that the Marine Corps was going to be on public trial again for these two unfortunate incidents. The more I investigated the drill

instructors' philosophies about their jobs, the more appalled I became that we had let ourselves get into such a situation that the drill instructors had so much authority and leeway to do those things they believed were helping the Corps but were actually hurting it dreadfully. I knew that we had to get this under control. At the same time, I was not sure that the drill instructors' union, as it were, and other NCO's might not rally around the drill instructors and, in effect, there would be sort of a mutiny against any changes at the recruit depots. Some were, even then, taking their case to the newspaper.

With tremendous help from my staff, particularly Bob Barrow, who was DC/S for Manpower compounded with his experience at Parris Island as my principal advisor, Dick Schultz was a big help and so many others I cannot name, and through the help of the Congress, particularly congressional Marines, we were able to come through this fairly well. I believe this experience will assist Bob Barrow in making him a superior Commandant.

In later years, there will be the inevitable tendency to move officers again out of the recruit depots as supervisory personnel because it will appear that they are duplicating the DI's jobs. There is no question that training can be done by NCO's and must be done by them. But they must have supervision. One incident, however, will bring all this down on us again and it will seem to the newspapers like yesterday.

I suppose that the high points of my career were when I was CG, FMFPac and was appointed Commandant. I am convinced our readiness has improved. I believe we improved the

quality of the Corps with the help of a great many people. The recruiting service did--an outstanding job under the most difficult cult circumstances.

I believe we improved the standards of conduct of the Corps which includes the appearance, grooming standards, and weight control. I can almost spot a Marine anywhere. His pride, bearing and alertness are marks he cannot hide. Marines are proud of this. We had some complaints, about the long hair which was popular during the Zumwalt years in the Navy, but this had largely dissipated, even the sailors are ashamed. So I believe these are my highlights of my tour. I leave to future historians to judge my watch in comparison to the many fine Commandants who were my predecessors and that long line who will be my successors. I am only delighted to have been a part of it.

I thank you Ed, for the efforts that you have made in the Marine Corps History program. The Corps is in good hands. As I look at officers of every rank, there is nothing but a bright future ahead and I will give them and all Marines my full and dedicated support all the days of my life.

Simmons: Thank you very much for your time given to these interviews. I think we have a good set of interviews. I appreciate it very much.

End of Interview

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