

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Major General Paul J. Fontana
U.S. Marine Corps (Retired)



Major General Norman J. Anderson
Interviewer

HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION
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FOREWORD

This typescript, the transcribed memoir of Major General Paul J. Fontana, USMC (Ret), results from a recorded interview conducted with him at his home in New Bern, North Carolina on 29 November, 1983, 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 verbatim transcript containing historically valuable personal narratives relating to noteworthy professional experiences and observations from active duty, reserve, and retired Marines.

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

Copies of this memoir are deposited in the Marine Corps Oral History Collection, History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington, D.C., and Breckinridge Library, Marine Air-Ground Training and Education Center, Quantico, Virginia.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "E. H. Simmons", is positioned above the typed name.

E. H. SIMMONS
Brigadier General
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MAJOR GENERAL PAUL J. FONTANA, U.S. MARINE CORPS, RETIRED

Paul John Fontana was born in Lucca, Italy, on November 27, 1911. He grew up in Sparks, Nevada, and on completing high school there entered the University of Nevada at Reno. He graduated from the university in 1934 with a Bachelor of Science degree in electrical engineering. A member of the Reserve Officer Training Corps unit at the university, he resigned his Army Reserve commission to accept appointment as a Marine second lieutenant, July 6, 1936.

After Basic School at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, a sea duty assignment aboard the U.S.S. Salt Lake City, and duty at Marine Barracks, Mare Island, California, Lieutenant Fontana was ordered to Pensacola, Florida, for flight training in January, 1939.

Lieutenant Fontana was designated a naval aviator on January 25, 1940. In March, 1940, he was assigned to the Naval Air Station, San Diego, California. He returned to Pensacola in November, 1940, and served as a flight instructor until July, 1941, when he joined Marine Fighter Squadron 3, Marine Aircraft Group 2, at Quantico, Virginia. He also completed the aviation course at the Army Chemical Warfare School, Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland. He was promoted to captain in October, 1941.

When the United States entered World War II, Captain Fontana was ordered to aviation duty in San Diego. In March, 1942, he joined Marine Fighter Squadron 112, becoming commanding officer in May, 1942. He was promoted to major in August, 1942.

In October, 1942, Major Fontana embarked with his squadron for the Pacific area. As Commanding Officer, VMF-112, Marine Aircraft Group 14, he took part in combat against the Japanese in the capture and defense of Guadalcanal. Downing five enemy aircraft in four days over Guadalcanal in November, 1942, he was awarded the Navy Cross and designated a Marine Corps ace. Remaining with the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, he was named the assistant operations officer of the Strike Command, Solomon Islands, in April, 1943. After taking part in the consolidation of the southern Solomons, he returned to the United States in October, 1943. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel in December, 1943.

Lieutenant Colonel Fontana was then assigned to Marine Fleet Air, West Coast, in San Diego, as assistant operations officer, having served briefly as commander of the Flight Training Unit, Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, California. In December, 1944, he was ordered to Hawaii for duty with the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing as assistant operations officer. He also served in this capacity with the Tenth Army's Tactical Air Force for the Okinawa campaign, and was awarded the Bronze

Star Medal with Combat "V" for heroic action against the Japanese, prior to and during the amphibious assault of Okinawa, from January 9 to June 30, 1945. The Distinguished Flying Cross was awarded to him for heroism as a fighter plane pilot in the Ryukyu Islands area from May to July, 1945. He remained on Okinawa until January, 1946.

Following World War II, Lieutenant Colonel Fontana served in Washington, D.C. as Assistant Plans, Operations, and Training Officer, Division of Aviation, Headquarters Marine Corps from March, 1946, to July, 1948. The following month he entered the Air War College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Maxwell Field, Alabama. After graduation in the summer of 1949, he returned to the Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, in July as commander of Marine Fighter Squadron 311, Marine Aircraft Group 12, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.

At the outbreak of the Korean conflict, Lieutenant Colonel Fontana was serving as Deputy Commander, Marine Aircraft Group 12, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, Fleet Marine Force, having assumed this assignment in May, 1950. For conspicuous gallantry in action, September 21, 1950, while serving briefly as Deputy Group Commander, Marine Aircraft Group 33, executing close air support of the Army's X Corps during an attack on enemy installations at Yong Dong Po, Korea, he was awarded the Silver Star Medal (Army). Rejoining his group on its arrival in the Wonsan area, he earned the Legion of Merit with Combat "V" for exceptionally meritorious conduct from October 10 to November 8, 1950, prior to and during operations at Wonsan.

In January, 1951, Lieutenant Colonel Fontana was named commanding officer of Marine Aircraft Group 33, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, and in this capacity continued combat operations against the communist forces. He was promoted to colonel in March, 1951, and the following month returned to the United States.

Colonel Fontana reported in to El Toro in April, 1951, and in May became the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. He served there until July, 1952. The following month he entered the National War College, Washington, D.C. After graduation in June, 1953, he served at Headquarters Marine Corps, as Head, Operations and Training Branch, Division of Aviation. While serving in this capacity, he completed helicopter training at Pensacola in the summer of 1954.

In June, 1955, following his detachment from Headquarters Marine Corps, Colonel Fontana took command of the Overhaul and Repair Facility, Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point, North Carolina. He served in this capacity for two years. In August, 1957, he assumed command of Marine Aircraft Group

13, 1st Marine Brigade, Marine Corps Air Station, Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, and in addition was assigned with his group to the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing in Japan from October, 1958, through February, 1959. Following this assignment, he became Chief of Staff of the 1st Marine Brigade in June, 1959. While serving in Hawaii, he was promoted to brigadier general in July, 1960.

In August, 1960, General Fontana began a two-year tour of duty at the Pentagon as Deputy Director for Operations, J-3 Directorate, Joint Staff, Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Following this assignment, he became Commander, Marine Corps Air Bases, Eastern Area, and Commanding General, Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point, North Carolina, in September, 1962. He served in this capacity until August, 1963, when he assumed command of the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing at Cherry Point.

In June, 1964, General Fontana was promoted to major general and assumed command of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing in Japan. During this assignment, elements of the 1st Wing engaged in combat operations in Vietnam. Upon his detachment in June, 1965, he was awarded a Gold Star in lieu of a second Legion of Merit with Combat "V" for exceptionally meritorious service in Vietnam.

Upon his return to the United States, he served as Director, Education Center, Marine Corps Development and Education Command, Marine Corps Base, Quantico, Virginia, from July 7, 1965 until June 15, 1968, earning a Gold Star in lieu of a third Legion of Merit. Following that assignment, General Fontana was assigned duty as Deputy Commander, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. A Gold Star in lieu of a fourth Legion of Merit was awarded him for service in this capacity from July, 1968, until March, 1970. Upon his return to the United States, he became Commander, Marine Corps Air Bases, Eastern Area/Commanding General, Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point, North Carolina, until his retirement on July 1, 1973.

A complete list of General Fontana's medals and decorations includes: the Navy Cross, the Army Silver Star Medal, the Legion of Merit with Combat "V" and Gold Stars in lieu of second through fourth awards, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V," the Air Medal with Gold Stars in lieu of second through fifth awards, the Navy Commendation Medal, three Presidential Unit Citations, the Army Distinguished Unit Citation with Emblem, the American Defense Service Medal, the American Campaign Medal, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with three bronze stars, the World War II Victory Medal, the Navy Occupation Service Medal with Asia Clasp, the National Defense Service Medal with one bronze star, the Korean Service Medal with two bronze stars,

the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (Vietnam), the United Nations Service Medal, and the Korean Presidential Unit Citation.



Major General Paul J. Fontana.



2ndLt Fontana, 1936.



Major Fontana on Guadalcanal, 1943.

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MARINE CORPS ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Interviewee: Major General Paul J. Fontana, USMC, Retired

Interviewer: Major General Norman J. Anderson, USMC, Retired

Place: Gen Fontana's home in New Bern, North Carolina

Date: 29 November 1983

Begin Session I

Begin Tape 1/I, Side A

Anderson: This November the 29th, 1983, interviewing MajGen Paul J. Fontana at his home outside Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point, North Carolina.

Paul, would you talk a little bit about your early life prior to coming into the Marine Corps? What was it that induced you to become a Marine? Could you give us a little run-down on that?

Fontana: I was raised near Reno, Nevada and attended the University of Nevada in Reno from 1930 to 1934, graduating with a degree in electrical engineering. Those were very difficult times in the Depression years and I had to work my way through college. ROTC was required of all able-bodied students for two years. After having participated for two years, I enjoyed it and got interested. So I continued in the remaining two years for two reasons. One was to get a

Reserve commission in the United States Army, and the other was for the monthly, though meager, remuneration which I received for participating. I was fortunate, I won the military scholarship given to a student in his junior year, which helped finance my education a little bit. By today's standards it really wasn't much. I graduated as the honor student in the ROTC at Nevada, the cadet major, which was the highest rank because we only had a battalion of cadets. Upon graduation I was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Infantry Reserve but had no intentions of following a military career, because the services were not awarding regular commissions to new officers except those from the service academies, and at that time the services were reducing their officer strength.

In 1935 I was informed that the Marine Corps was commissioning certain graduates from colleges and giving them a regular commission in the United States Marine Corps. I wanted to fly, I wanted to become a pilot, particularly in military aviation. At that time, I was a surveyor for the Department of the Interior in western Nevada, southeastern California and southern Oregon area. I could not apply in time to come in in 1935, or be commissioned in 1935, however, I inquired from the Professor of Military Science and Tactics (PMS&T) at the University of Nevada and the president of the university, if I could be recommended the following year. I was informed that they would be happy to because I had

graduated rather high in the military department. The following year I was recommended, accepted, and commissioned a second lieutenant, and went to The Basic School in Philadelphia in July, 1936. That's where my Marine Corps career began.

My first years in the Marine Corps were routine; Basic School, sea duty, and then the Marine Barracks, U.S. Naval Base, Vallejo, California--and finally to Pensacola. An interesting sidelight about my Marine Barracks duty in Vallejo, was that I was assigned as one of two officers at the Naval Prison, known in those days as "Old 84." That was the number of the building. There were two of us which meant that one of us would have to sleep inside the prison--every other night--so when I was transferred after eight months, I felt that the Marine Corps already owed me four years of incarceration in case I became involved in any infraction of discipline in the years to come.

When I graduated from Pensacola, was assigned to VMSB-2, Marine Air Group 2 at NAS, North Island, California.

Anderson: What year was that?

Fontana: That was in January 1940, but my tour there didn't last very long. Aviation was expanding and some of us had to go back Pensacola and become instructors. I returned to Pensacola to instruct in October, 1940. I instructed in

primary training until June, 1941, when I was transferred to Quantico, Virginia, and joined VMF-111, which a few months before had been VMF-1. We received the Grumman Wildcat (F4F-2A) at the time I was there and did extensive training, mostly gunnery. Our squadron participated in several big military maneuvers in 1941. The first was the Louisiana maneuvers operating from a cow pasture near Natchitoches, Louisiana, and then later the Carolina maneuvers based at Fort Jackson, Columbia, South Carolina.

We returned to Quantico for about one month and were transferred to Cherry Point, North Carolina. The contractor was behind in the construction of the runways at Cherry Point, so we established our camp in what is now the municipal airport in New Bern. At that time it was nothing but a grass field. Before we could move our camp to Cherry Point, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 December, 1941. We returned to Quantico immediately and deployed to the west coast ready to go to war. When I say ready, I must use that term very guardedly because we had some second lieutenants in the squadron that had only 25 to 30 hours in type, which, by today's standards, is the primary stage of squadron training.

Anderson: Sure.

Fontana: But we patrolled from North Island out to sea every morning and every evening looking for Japanese war ships. Everyone was confident that after Pearl Harbor, California was going to be the next objective of the Japanese Imperial Fleet. That never happened and as Marine Corps aviation expanded, on August of 1942 we were still there, and I was fortunate to receive command of one of the new squadrons, VMF-112. We trained for two months and deployed to the South Pacific in October of 1942. Our training, of course, had been very limited. Except for myself and one captain, the other 22 pilots were second lieutenants and sergeants with very few flight hours of training.

Anderson: You were still in the Grumman, in the Wildcat?

Fontana: We were still in the Grumman Wildcats which we received just about one month before we deployed. Up until about a month or so before we were flying Brewsters. After the great losses we experienced with the Brewsters at Wake Island, no more squadrons were deployed with the Brewsters.

The junior sergeant pilot of my squadron at the time we deployed had 24 hours in the F4-F. I regret to say he did not survive. Despite the lack of training time in the Wildcat, I was very fortunate, as the squadron did a magnificent job. They possessed good talent and a fine esprit de corps. When I left the squadron, in March of 1943, we

had shot down 56 Japanese airplanes and lost two pilots in combat but we lost four pilots in operational accidents; one mid-air collision, two on take-offs from wet, soggy runways and one medevac after a severe Japanese night naval shelling.

When I left VMF-112 I was assigned to Strike Command on Henderson Field.

Anderson: Let me interrupt a second.

Fontana: Alright.

Anderson: You yourself accounted for quite a number of airplanes. How many did you knock down?

Fontana: I was credited with five airplanes in the air during the time I was commanding VMF-112. I don't know how many planes we destroyed on the ground because we didn't count them in those days. They were counted later.

Anderson: Can you talk about any particular one of those encounters?

Fontana: On my way to Guadalcanal, we had a stopover in Espiritu Santo and I saw my old squadron mate of a few years before, Chick Quilter, who was an ace at that time and later

retired as a major general. Chick assured me that the Grumman was a sturdy airplane. Although the Zero could out-perform it, the advantage was with the Grumman. That, of course, we took with a grain of salt because we all liked speed and altitude. He said, "It's very simple. When you get involved in combat, the Zero is going to get on your tail, but don't panic. Just put the airplane in a dive and then when he gets in close just put your plane in a skid, and you'll see his bullets go off to one side." That was not very comforting, but it was true.

I don't think I have any particular incident which is the highlight of my tour on Guadalcanal. One day I was fortunate to shoot down two airplanes, a bomber--a Betty--and a Zero, and in each case I had the altitude advantage. Also, by being the squadron commander I was up front and got the first shots. If you look at the list of aces in the Marine Corps--and in the Air Force and the Navy for that--you'll note that the squadron commanders and flight leaders are some of the top aces, because they got the first shots.

Anderson: That's an interesting observation. I never really thought of it that way.

Fontana: Most fighter squadrons at Guadalcanal were divided into two or three flights with the CO leading the first flight, the exec leading the second and the Ops officer

leading the third. Joe Foss was the exec, and led the second flight in VMF-121. Duke Davis, the CO, led the first flight. Duke was an Ace also, but Foss flew more missions than Duke and downed more enemy aircraft. Greg Boyington led his flight and flew many missions, plus he was quite an airplane driver.

Anderson: On the other hand there were squadron commanders such as Bill Gise who didn't survive his first combat mission

Fontana: Yes, Bill didn't survive his first mission, but that was an exception. I don't know what happened to Bill Gise. I was not on that mission.

Anderson: . . . which was remarkable in the sense that he was a pretty well trained pilot . . .

Fontana: Yes.

Anderson: . . . but he had, well that's beside the point of this.

Fontana: His executive officer, Greg Weissenberger, became an ace on that first tour in the Solomons. He led the second

flight and, of course, became the squadron CO when Bill was downed.

Anderson: Yes, and Kenny Walsh . . .

Fontana: And Kenny Walsh, of course, was the high man as a sergeant. Kenny was a good pilot. They all were, those who survived. There was a lot of luck connected with it of course, but they had done an awful lot of training in the Corsair. That squadron introduced the Corsair into the Marine Corps, and it turned out to be the bird we flew right on up through the Korean War.

Anderson: Yes, that's right. Well, you went to . . . you couldn't really call it a staff, after you left your squadron, but you did go to a supervisory operational job, still with ComAirSols, I guess.

Fontana: That is correct. Initially I was a briefing officer in the Strike Command. This command was responsible for all bombing operations in the Solomon Islands and controlled all bombing aircraft such as the SBD and TBF squadron. My primary duty was to brief flights on specific targets as assigned to us by ComAirSols and coordinate fighter cover when it was required. After participating in many fighter combat operations, this duty became rather dull. Finally I was

given permission to go on some of these missions having checked out in the SBD airplane. The missions in which I participated were bombing attacks on a Japanese seaplane Base at Rekata Bay, Santa Isabel Island and the southern most Japanese air base at the time on Munda Point, New Georgia Island.

After our Marine division had seized the Russell Islands, about 25 miles northwest of Guadalcanal, the Navy SeaBees constructed two airfields. I was moved from Henderson Field to be the operations and briefing officer of one airfield used by an SBD squadron. This was in June, 1943. VMSB-144 commanded by Maj Al Holler was the combat squadron assigned. And, targets were the Japanese airfields at Munda Point, New Georgia and another Japanese airstrip on Vella Lavella Island. I rather enjoyed this duty; occasionally the squadron would have an SBD bombed up, and a rear-seat gunner for me to participate in the bombing attack.

This assignment ended in the middle of July, 1943, when I was transferred to an emergency air strip which the SeaBees had carved on the southern tip of New Georgia Island, known as Segi Point. I and a Navy lieutenant, my intelligence (S-2) officer, were flown to Segi in a PBY as the strip was not yet operational. This strip was to receive aircraft that were low on fuel or damaged to where they could not return to Guadalcanal or the Russells. Segi was an emergency strip only 3000 feet from water to water. We had no

permanently based squadron there. ComAirSols tried the P-39s but invariably they would run off the end of the runway. So that was terminated. One day we had about 10 or 12 airplanes lined up alongside of the strip, and we got a frantic call from a Corsair pilot that he was badly shot up--no hydraulic pressure left, going to come in flaps up but gear extended. He came in; of course he had no control over the airplane and piled into six airplanes. I designated him a Japanese ace, and his name was Kenny Walsh. (Laughter) Fortunately, he was not hurt. He was clipping off tails as he was going down the runway until he stopped; Corsairs and P-39s, showing no preference at all. (Laughter)

Anderson: As much of an embarrassment for him I'll bet.

Fontana: It certainly was.

Anderson: He was probably pretty damn happy to get on the ground.

Fontana: That's right.

Anderson: That's an awful price in materiel.

Fontana: But of course, we saved his life and I think that old Corsair probably went back in the air, I don't know. I

was relieved shortly thereafter. I had a bad case of malaria so I was evacuated to MOB-4 Hospital in Auckland, New Zealand.

Anderson: But through Tontuta.

Fontana: Yes, through Tontuta. It was in New Zealand that I met two officers also being evacuated to the United States. One, Col Pugh, Ed Pugh; and one Robert Conley, who had been on Guadalcanal as a dive-bomber pilot in Bob Richard's squadron. Well, I got the malaria out of my system and I was chomping to go back. I did, I went back in December, 1944. Incidentally I came back in November 1943. I went back in December 1944 . . .

Anderson: You came back to the United States in November . . .

Fontana: I came back to the states and I was made an assistant operations officer at Marine Air, West at NAS, North Island, California. For all practical purposes this organization was similar to a wing headquarters but not designated as such.

Anderson: Oh, yes.

Fontana: We supervised the training of all squadrons going into combat. Beside the squadrons on the west coast, we gave operational training inspections to squadrons that came from the wing at Cherry Point. At that time I think it was the 9th Marine Aircraft Wing. In fact, an interesting incident was George Axtell's squadron which was one of those that didn't pass our inspection when he came. They were based on the airstrip in Pendleton, and George did a tremendous job. He whipped that squadron into a finely tuned and trained squadron. By the time they deployed to Okinawa they were just superb. George, himself, became an ace the first week he was there. That little extra time that they had on the west coast, spending all of it on gunnery, day after day, really paid off for his squadron.

Anderson: I remember when Axtell came through Green Island. I was at Green Island at the time, it was my PBJ squadron. We'd had a lot of squadrons go through there but you could tell the class of this one and the high spirit of this outfit. They knew what they were doing and they were on their way.

Fontana: Yes.

Anderson: It was nice to watch.

Fontana: Yes, very well trained. That extra training time did it. I can understand that the east coast wing had to produce so many squadrons to go out because the operations in the western Pacific were really expanding daily. We kept hopping those islands, establishing new bases, and the 1st and 2d Marine Aircraft Wings were getting bigger and bigger, by the week. Just a little extra time in the west coast where we had beautiful ranges, Mojave Desert and out over the Pacific. We had better ranges, at that time, than Cherry Point had. People were anxious to stop there for a couple of weeks, a month, and get themselves in real fine shape.

Anderson: So you went back out to . . . in time for what operation?

Fontana: The Okinawan campaign. I went to Hawaii and was stationed at Schofield Barracks. We formed the Tactical Air Force, Tenth Army for the Okinawan campaign. Again I was an assistant operations officer. The operations officer was Perry Parmelee, Col Parmelee. The 2d Marine Aircraft Wing was the administrative command unit for the Tactical Air Force, Tenth Army. We had three Marine aircraft groups, two Air Force squadrons and one Navy patrol squadron assigned to us. So we were truly a combined air organization.

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: Gen Mulcahy, a Marine as everyone knows, was the commanding general. A Col Bridgett, Air Force--Army Air Corps at that time--was the chief of staff, a Navy captain served as deputy chief of staff. You probably know him, "Greasy" Neal.

Anderson: Yes, I remember him.

Fontana: Captain Neal was the senior naval officer, aviator. We departed Hawaii, some of us by ship and some by air and rendezvous-ed in the Philippines where the Task Force was formed. We sailed near the end of March, 1945, for Okinawa where the landing took place on 1 April, 1945--Easter Sunday.

Anderson: That was a strange organization in a way. It was called Tactical Air Force, Tenth Army?

Fontana: That's correct.

Anderson: And Mulcahy . . .

Fontana: Mulcahy was the commanding general . . .

Anderson: . . . was the commanding general of that and the 2d Wing as well.

Fontana: That is correct, the Tactical Air Force, Tenth Army and the 2d Wing as well. He had two chiefs of staff; Bridgett was the chief of staff of the Tactical Air Force, Tenth Army and Boyden . . .

Anderson: Hayne Boyden.

Fontana: Col Hayne Boyden was the chief of staff of 2d Marine Aircraft Wing. Capt Neal had very little to do.

Anderson: I see.

Fontana: The 2d Marine Aircraft Wing also provided the logistic support for the headquarters organization such as rations, tents, medical, etcetera. SeaBees and Army Air Corps engineers performed the airfield construction jobs. We were responsible for fuel, ordnance, and food for our Marine and Navy units. We had the administrative responsibility for all Marine aviation units. I don't quite recall, but it appears to me that the units of the other services had their own supporting units. Operational control rested with the Tactical Air Force, Tenth Army, and that was Gen Mulcahy, who received his orders from the designated Fleet Amphibious Force Commander. As you may recall this was the operation where the U.S. Fleet "came to stay." And stay

they did. Not until the war was about to end did the Fleet Commander pass over all control of air operations ashore.

Anderson: And you were the . . .

Fontana: I was the assistant operations officer, Tactical Air Force, Tenth Army and 2d Marine Aircraft Wing.

Anderson: Who was the operations officer?

Fontana: Col Perry Parmelee, and LtCol Pearch, my opposite number, was also an assistant operations officer. He was Air Force (Army Air Corps). A Navy commander, whose name escapes me at the moment, was also in our operations section as the Navy counterpart. We had a truly integrated command.

Anderson: You know, that's something that hasn't been emphasized or realized, it seems to me. You know, at the tail end of World War II, the movement in the direction of unified or multi-service commands had taken place. For example, the MAG-12 business in the Philippines where . . . who the hell was it . . . I guess Colter Dyer was it? no it was Jerry Jerome was the CO of MAG-12 in support of MacArthur's armies on Luzon. A move in the right direction in some senses.

Fontana: The first chief of staff when we went in was Ward Dickey, Col Ward Dickey. I'm sure you remember him.

Anderson: Yes, I do.

Fontana: He died of a heart attack shortly after the landing, and then Hayne Boyden came in and became chief of staff of the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing.

Anderson: Well, that was a very satisfactory arrangement because you had staff people who knew the peculiarities of the Air Force organization and could adjust to their peculiarities as well as put them on the right targets and so on, and similarly the Navy and Marine-type equipment people.

Well, now did you . . . and you also were in on the planning for the invasion of Japan I suppose.

Fontana: Yes, not deeply involved because that amphibious planning was done at Guam. We did air operations planning, primarily air support and air defense of the objective area.

Anderson: Oh?

Fontana: The OLYMPIC operation planning was done at Nimitz' headquarters. But we knew that we were going to be involved. I'm speaking now of the Marine units because I was not privy

to the plans, the detail planning, the event planning. Certain of our air groups were ear-marked and the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing, again as a headquarters, was ear-marked to go in for the invasion of Japan.

Anderson: I remember Claude Larkin visiting . . . I guess this must have been way back at Emirau at that time, and he was beginning to work . . . He must have been anticipated relief for Mulcahy for that OLYMPIC operation. But he was very much involved in that.

Fontana: Well Mulcahy was relieved before the Okinawa campaign ended and returned to the U.S., and Gen Louis Woods replaced him as Tactical Air Force commander . . .

Anderson: Oh, did he?

Fontana: . . . on Okinawa. Gen Woods was the commanding general; then Gen Schilt replaced him after the war was over. But for the duration of the war, Mulcahy had a bad leg and was evacuated, sent back, to San Diego and Louis Woods came in and became the commanding general of the Tactical Air Force, Tenth Army. I mentioned the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing was targeted for the OLYMPIC operation. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing was also in the Philippines. They had come up through the

Solomons and the Philippines, so the Marine Corps had two wings in the western Pacific.

Anderson: Yes, with Mitchell I guess, Ralph Mitchell, as CG.

Fontana: With Mitchell in command of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing at that time; and the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing on Okinawa with Louis Woods. I was not involved in the planning because we were very much involved in what we were doing because the Japanese fought right up until the 15th of August . . . or the 14th I believe. I might mention here as a sidelight, I think that every available . . . or let me put it differently. Every bit of ammunition that was available to the troops who had weapons to fire were fired the night that the war ended. It was the most dangerous night on Okinawa. Shrapnel was dropping everywhere.

(Laughter)

Fontana: The sky was lit all night long. It wasn't safe to be out in the open. We spent many hours in our foxhole, believe it or not, because it was not safe! People were just celebrating that wildly! I can't say that I blame them; I was too. I did not participate in the shooting however.

(laughter)

Fontana: You'd hear shots going off everyplace. You'd stick your head out of the foxhole and you'd see the sky looked like the 4th of July fireworks in Washington, D.C.

Anderson: Except there was all this fallout . . .

Fontana: That's right.

Anderson: . . . or fall down. Well, then what happened to you Paul? After the . . .

Fontana: I stayed on, on Okinawa, with the occupation forces; very monotonous duty and not very challenging. I checked out in the PBJ when we got one. We had one of Jack Cramm's specially outfitted airplanes. I enjoyed that very much. I flew to the Philippines; I flew to China and Japan as often as I could get away but not always in the PBJ. Of course there were restrictions as to where one could or could not go. I tried to enjoy my tour there as much as possible because we really were sitting there as occupation forces. I think the ground forces had much more to do than we did. The Japanese air force had been destroyed! The Japanese navy was inoperative at that time at least from my point of view. So we didn't have much to worry about. We didn't feel like training; we'd just finished fighting a war. We

were waiting to be returned home; when we didn't know. I stayed there until January of 1946 at which time I was returned to CONUS. After leave, I went to Headquarters Marine Corps and served in the Operations, Plans, and Programs section under Col Kreiser. Gen Geiger was head of Marine aviation in Headquarters Marine Corps. We were located in the old Navy building on Constitution Avenue with the Navy, and not in Henderson Hall.

Anderson: Now this was not exclusively aviation type work was it?

Fontana: Yes.

Anderson: Oh, it was.

Fontana: It was.

Anderson: I see.

Fontana: Yes, it was. We were separated from Headquarters Marine Corps because of our close ties which we had with OpNav, especially Deputy CNO for air, Op O-5 which was Naval Aviation. We were entirely supported by Naval Aviation except for pay and housing. Later we became Marine Corps supported in every way. But at that time our bases were supported by

the Navy; our aircraft were purchased by the Navy; our fuel and ammunition support was included in the Navy support budget. Today I think the Navy still trains our pilots, but beyond that I don't believe that there's really very much Navy support in comparison to what it was then. The Navy also supports us for common aeronautical equipment and, of course, medical, dental, and chaplains.

Anderson: Well, its true. I think the Marine Corps prepares its own budget for Marine Corps aviation. Of course, the same administrative and logistic activities that the Navy Department take care of Marine aviation and naval aviation together.

Fontana: At that time, other than command--there was no question who commanded aviation, the Commandant commanded it--other than command, the Marine Corps direct relations with its aviation units was administrative, personnel, Marine Corps materiel, specifically clothing, food, tents, and pay. That's what really was the highlight of my two and a half years on this job. I was not involved with the Navy so much because we, our section was not responsible for the hardware. That was G-4. But we were responsible for types of aircraft. I'll never forget, we had a plan for a 100,000-strong Marine Corps; we had plans for 75,000-strong Marine Corps; and we had plans for a 50,000 strength Marine Corps; because we

didn't know just how big the Marine Corps was going to be. The Defense Department was being reorganized at that time. The Air Force came into being in 1947. So everything was in a state of flux. Every change in Marine Corps' size, naturally aviation changed proportionately.

Where it really became critical was in the naval aviators; how many pilots we could have. Plans and Policies Division (Pots and Pans), Headquarters Marine Corps with Gen Gerry Thomas, was responsible for the personnel planning of the entire Marine Corps; how many people would be aviators, how many people would be supply, or Quartermaster Department at that time. I can recall the Quartermaster had his share of personnel--supply duty only category.

Anderson: Yes, sure.

Fontana: Old W. P. T. Hill was going to have his boys. So we would make the plans for the aviators' strength. We had a plan where we had 18 pilots per squadron, where we had 20 pilots per squadron, where we had 24 pilots per squadron, etcetera, depending on the number of officers that we would be allowed.

The other big problem was how many regular officers was the Marine Corps going to have. Now was the time to integrate. We had fought the war with the largest Marine Corps ever, but most of them were Reserves! We had to

integrate. How many people are we going to give commissions in the regular Marine Corps? That's where the struggle really was because Marine aviation had so many Reserve officers due to the pilots requirements in World War II. We had so much talent in the officers wanting to be regular Marines, with duty involving flying. But we could not get all who wanted to integrate and get a regular commission with duty involving flying.

Anderson: That's right, yes.

Fontana: It became almost an acrimonious affair. We'd go to the Plans and Policy Division begging for another 50 aviators because we knew that we had 50 officers out here that were head and shoulders above anyone who could be commissioned into the regular Marine Corps. Some of those officers could come into the regular Marine Corps if they gave up their flying status.

Anderson: There weren't too many of them that would . . .

Fontana: And not too many of them did. Some did, thinking that perhaps later they could get their wings back.

Anderson: Which, perhaps, happened, too.

Fontana: Two of them only that I know of.

Anderson: Who were they?

Fontana: Well, Jim Mueller was one of them. He came back . . . He got out and came back without his wings and later was reinstated. There was one other individual who was reinstated later and his name escapes me right now. Those were the only two people that I know of, of the literally hundreds that were offered a regular commission but no duty involving flying. It's too bad that we had to lose all that talent, but it couldn't be helped.

Anderson: No, I don't think it could. Granted the mission of the Marine Corps you just had to curtail the aviation side.

Fontana: This is a guess only, but I would say because of our pilot strength in World War II that aviation probably had almost as many officers as the ground components did. I say that's a guess, I'm not saying that's an accurate statement. So when you come down and you're going to give aviation, say, 10, 15, 20 percent of the officers of the Marine Corps when you were say 70 percent of the officers in the Marine Corps, you can see what the opportunities were for these Reserve aviators to integrate into the regular

Marine Corps with duty involving flying. The odds were against them.

Anderson: Absolutely.

Fontana: So the people that we got were truly outstanding officers, as is shown through the years. We were blessed with a lot of talent. It's unfortunate that a lot of those young men did not accept commissions in the Marine Corps without duty involving flying because they would have made outstanding Marine Corps officers, in whatever assignment that they would have been placed.

Anderson: Did you go to school then, after this tour?

Fontana: Yes, in 1948, after almost three years, over two and a half years on the same job. I changed bosses during that time; I wore them out I guess. (Laughter) I went to the Air War College, which was really a wonderful rest after that hectic two and a half years at Headquarters Marine Corps demobilizing so to speak.

Anderson: Yes, adjusting to the change in the Department of Defense, all of that.

Fontana: I was exposed, of course, to the air power theory. You've known me, Norm, for many years. Once I decide on something I pursue that course quite intently. It came time to write our thesis at the Air War College. We were given a list of subjects from which to select and if none of those satisfied you then you could come up with one of your own, which I did. My subject was the role of carrier aviation in the future.

I couldn't have waved a bigger red flag in front of a mad bull. I was called in, to the head office I might add, and the Chief of Staff at the Air War College of Maxwell said, "Fontana, do you want to graduate from this school?" (Laughter) I said, "Of course!" He said, "You know carrier aviation is finished!" I said, "Sir . . ."

Anderson: This was in '49 wasn't it?

Fontana: This was in '48 at the time of the war between the admirals and the Air Force generals; B-36 would take care of anything in future wars.

Anderson: Right. (Laughter)

Fontana: I said, "Sir, no, I don't think it's finished at all. I think there's a great future for mobile aviation from carrier bases, operating from overseas bases." He said,

"You know we assign a tutor," or a monitor or a supervisor, I don't recall the exact term, "to every student as he develops his thesis. We don't have one to assign to you!" I said, "Very well, sir. I'll go it alone." And I did. I don't know if it was because I was an oddball, because I chose a subject which wasn't for real, but I got to present my paper to the student body!

Anderson: That's pretty broad-minded of them! of the administration.

Fontana: I don't what their purpose was, maybe to shoot me down in flames. I don't know if it was to find out how many holes they could punch in my theory or what. I know very well I did not make believers out of them. Of that I'm positive.

Anderson: Maybe they did it with a view . . . based on the philosophy of "know thine enemy." They figured that this would be informative after all.

Well, let's hold off here and I'll switch this over.

End Tape 1/I, Side A

Begin Tape 1/I, Side B

Anderson: . . . at the Air War College. How many of those Marines were down there with you?

Fontana: Stan Trachta. He and I were the only two Marines in that class. I think the Marine Corps sent only two people, later on they raised it to three, but at the time that I attended the two of us were the only Marine pilots--aviator officers--in the class. Later on they started sending ground officers down there also.

Anderson: That's right. Did you get an assignment following that that utilized your experience with the Air Force.

Fontana: No, not necessarily, except perhaps in hardware, because my next assignment was flying TO-1s, which were F-80s. To add a little to that, the Marine Corps formed its TO-1 squadron at El Toro with Johnny Condon as commanding officer at the same time that I went to the Air War College. We knew that tenure for squadron commanders at that time was one year so Johnny and I kept in close touch. Johnny wanted me to relieve him, and I wanted the job very badly. Louis Woods was commanding at El Toro and Field Harris was commanding at Cherry Point. But those two generals did a flip-flop every two or three years--they'd swap jobs. I knew--or was told--that their next flip-flop was about to take place the summer of 1949.

One day, one Saturday, I got a Beechcraft--C-45, SNB, JRB, call it what you want--and with Stan Trachta as my copilot, I flew to Cherry Point to talk to Gen Harris about getting 311 when Johnny Condon was relieved. Johnny Condon was slated to go to the Air War College for a year. We landed at Cherry Point, and the weather was GCA minimum or below, but they had a good GCA and they brought me in and we landed. I called Gen Harris at his quarters and I told him I was on the base and I would like to see him. He invited me over to his quarters, so Stan and I went up. After greeting me he said, "What ever brings you to Cherry Point on a day like today?!" I said, "General, I came here to ask for the command of 311, the jet squadron at El Toro. I understand you're going to be the commanding general." He kind of laughed and he said, "Anybody who flies in weather like this to get command must want it awfully badly. I'm not going there for some time but I'm going to call Louis Woods tomorrow or Monday and I'll tell him." Sure enough when I got to El Toro, the squadron was ready to be turned over to me. Johnny Condon went to the Air War College and I took over his squadron.

John had done a magnificent job in getting that squadron going! Goodness! He had the best talent on the west coast. I think he probably had the best talent in the Marine Corps as far as aviators and maintenance personnel. He was given a free choice by Gen Woods. The Navy had bought 36 F-80s and designated them as TO-1s. The Navy got 16, based at North

Island, and the Marine Corps got 16 based at El Toro but we could only fly 12. Four were in operational backup for each squadron--Navy and Marine. The first time I took off in the F-80 it gave me a real thrill. I had flown the Banshee--I came down and flew Marion Carl's FH several times when I was at Headquarters Marine Corps. But that TO-1 was quite a sensation! It reminded of my first hop in the F-4B at Pensacola.

Anderson: It did?

Fontana: Yes, it did. Full power, release the brakes and it seemed in an instant I'm in the air. "Where's the gear handle?" (Laughter) "Get the gear up!" Except there was no guess work in that. Johnny had established such a detailed, complete checkout system, with blind cockpit checkout to the extent one could identify any circuit breaker, any switch in the cockpit instantly. That's what made that a success. The day before I took over the squadron, Gen Woods had me in his office and he complimented Johnny very highly. He said, "Colonel Condon has done a great job down there, and they've had very minor accidents. It was an outstanding job and I know you'll do the same. I'm a great beleiver in aviation safety, and I have a theory of my own which I apply and it seems to work out. If the squadrons start having accidents I relieve the squadron commander and the accidents stop." I

got the message. (Laughter) I went back and I got the group together, after Johnny had left, and I said, "We're going to continue to march on the course established by Col Condon. There will be no accidents. Is that clear?" (Laughter)

That fall, I was detailed to go to Washington on a board to design the Marine Wing Service Group. It was quite a task. I was there for a couple of weeks, and on Thanksgiving day I was having dinner with Mitch and Mary Michener, in Alexandria. The phone rang, Mitch came back and said, "It's for you from El Toro." I thought of Claire and the children as I went to the phone, and it was Joe Quilby, who was my exec. He said, "Boss, when are you coming back?" I said, "Joe, I really don't know. We should be through in about a week or ten days. Why?" He said, "All the planes are in the hangar. We had an accident. Gen Woods called me down and said, 'Put the planes in the hangar until Col Fontana gets back.'" (Laughter) I said, "What are you doing?" "We're drilling; drilling and having inspections."

Anderson: I can hear Joe Quilby, with that Boston voice of his, putting that on.

Fontana: "How long have you been grounded?" "About a week." (Laughter) Sure enough that's exactly what Gen Woods did. He said, "Put the planes in the hangar. There will be no more flying until the squadron commander gets back." He had

me in his office the first morning I was back and he told me, "I don't like to have accidents." Again I got the message.

That was a wonderful experience, commanding 311. I was blessed with great talent.

Anderson: I remember very well that you checked out a lot of people. You were a transition training activity.

Fontana: That's correct.

Anderson: I, fortunately, had a chance to go through that.

Fontana: We transitioned not only west coast pilots, but we transitioned east coast pilots. It was in the austere days when we had a limited amount of funds for fuel for flying. Squadrons were restricted to so many hours. Gen Woods and Gen Harris worked up a system amongst themselves that we would transition the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing pilots along with the 1st Wing's. 2d Wing pilots would bring their money for fuel used in the transitioning; Bravo funds, which was flight operations. We knew exactly how many hours they got. We knew how much that JP cost per hour, and the officer in charge would get a bill, and the 1st Wing would be reimbursed by the 2d Wing. Money was scarce in those days.

Anderson: How about that.

Fontana: I don't believe it was ever done before or been done since. But that's how austere the situation was. Every squadron from Cherry Point, starting with Aggerbeck's squadron of about 24 pilots, which was the first squadron, we transitioned three squadrons before they were outfitted with the F-9s.

Anderson: Rake-wing F-9, yes.

Fontana: I don't know why they didn't set up a transition system on the east coast. The F-9 was easier to fly than the F-80, but we were an established transitioning squadron. We had the reputation and I don't think we lost a pilot during the two years that we did this. No pilots were lost during my tenure, and I don't believe John lost a pilot. That was the first time I'd heard of an aviation unit going someplace to get some training and it had to pay for it. (Laughter) It was like enrolling in college, tuition first.

Well, we did . . . in the spring of 1950, we started receiving the F-9Fs. The ferry command ferried the aircraft from Grumman to North Island for NavAirPac's pool. I went down to North Island and checked myself out with one of the ferry pilots looking over my shoulder. I checked myself out and flew the F-9 to El Toro; the first combat jet airplane that the Marine Corps received of that series. Marion Carl

had had the Banshee but that was not much of a combat airplane.

We phased out of the transition with the TOs and turned the TOs in to the Navy. We still had all 16 of them; the Woods theory worked.

Anderson: Yes. (Laughter)

Fontana: We used up quite a few wing tips and a few nose gears, but . . .

Anderson: And a few main gear too; burned tires, blown tires.

Fontana: Oh yes, yes we used to have . . .

Anderson: Ground down wheels.

Fontana: We had heavy fines for pilots involved in "bone-head" accidents. If anyone landed short of the runway, he became a member of the "desert club" and was fined \$10.00. If anybody came in and blew a tire, he was a "tire biter." He paid five dollars. This money went into the coffee fund. (Laughter) I think a nose strut fine was \$25.00. On landing, the pilot would fly the airplane on and not stall the airplane like we were accustomed to doing with a prop plane. If the nose wheel came down hard, the nose fork or strut

would snap. It was very fragile. The plane had to be greased on the main gear and nose wheel about six inches off the deck.

Anderson: Yes, that son-of-a-gun floated like mad . . .

Fontana: It did.

Anderson: . . . so if you didn't have the right speed you would go to the end of the runway before you'd touch down. Nasty.

Fontana: After we had completed transitioning to F-9F, I was relieved of the squadron. Spike MacIntyre relieved me. I became deputy group commander to Boeker Batterton in MAG-12. But before I was relieved I was detailed to take a composite group for carrier qualification. I was a senior squadron commander in the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. So we had twelve airplanes from three squadrons, 36 Corsairs, and 24 pilots from each one, and I was the group commander, so designated. I've forgotten the name of the carrier or the skipper. I'm sure you know him, a real fine gent, friend of ours. We went out toward the San Clemente area and naturally, my squadron qualified first. (Laughter) I got my five landings and five launches. The next day, we were almost finished when the skipper called me to his cabin. He said, "Paul, the North Koreans have crossed over to South Korea. We're

going to war. I've been told to stop flight operations and return to San Diego for refueling and refurbishing and pick up an air group immediately, ASAP, as soon as possible. So," he said, "you've got to launch."

This was about 4:00 in the afternoon. So we sounded flight quarters, everybody geared up, the 36 airplanes and pilots flew back to El Toro. Of course, everybody else knew what had happened before I got back. We flew back to El Toro and the carrier went in to North Island where the remainder of the pilots and maintenance personnel were bused from North Island to El Toro. We got ready for the Korean War. I think it was the 20th of June.

Anderson: Well, let's see. You went to Korea as an executive officer . . .

Fontana: Deputy group commander to MAG-12. We shipped out about the end of August. You were already out there.

Anderson: We had left in mid-July?

Fontana: Yes, you were already out there, operating from CVEs.

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: And you were the group commander of . . .

Anderson: I had the equivalent job with MAG-33.

Fontana: Right.

Anderson: They called it group tactical officer.

Fontana: Group tactical officer. In fact I became your relief because you were aboard a carrier and the Navy would not release you from the carrier. When we got to Japan, Frank Dailey wanted a tactical group commander and we're sitting at Itami and no place to go, so I became the tactical officer for MAG-23 and took your job because you were on the carrier. You recall, we saw each other quite a bit out there.

Anderson: I certainly do, at Kimpo particularly.

Fontana: Right, at Kimpo, that's where it happened. J. Frank Cole loaned me one of his squadron's Corsairs to fly to Korea. I flew one of his airplanes; and I believe it was the 15th of September. The Marines captured Kimpo, and we were called in that evening. The next day we started out. The weather was lousy. I had eight Corsairs from J. Frank Cole's squadron . . . no, I had eight Corsairs from Dick Wyczawski's squadron. J. Frank Cole loaned me two of his

airplanes, one for me and one for Sam Richards who was my wing man. I had eight F-7Fs commanded by Max Volcansek. The weather was really horrible. We filed IFR to Itazuki but did not land as we were going non-stop to Kimpo, Korea. We had the drop tanks so we had plenty of fuel.

At Itazuki, when I asked for further clearance to Korea, I was informed that the weather was very poor and they were evacuating casualties and for me to land at Itazuki. I did not acknowledge the message. I just did a 90-degree turn and headed for Pusan. I got down to about 50 feet off the water-- Sam Richards and I, two airplanes, the others were behind me. I could hear Itazuki control calling and advising all non-evacuating aircraft to divert to Itazuki. Finally Sam Richards said to me, what ever my call sign was, " One, you are being called," and with that I just looked at him and I gave him the fist to clam up and he put his hand over his face and said no more! (Laughter) They kept calling. But we were 50 feet off the water and out of the traffic lanes, so kept on going. Made landfall at Pusan, followed the west coast line of Korea, until we sighted the Naval Task Force. I knew that was the amphibious force. I did a 90-degree turn to the east and on to Kimpo which had beautiful weather. (Laughter) We landed at Kimpo and who waved us in? Gen Harris and Gen Cushman, who had come ashore with the Landing Force. (Laughter) Plane directors!

We landed and they said, "Where are the rest of your airplanes?" I said, "General, I think they're at Itazuki. They were told, by airway traffic control, to land because the weather was so poor and there were many Air Force aircraft troop carriers evacuating casualties." He said, "How'd you get through?" I said, "I had a bad radio."

Anderson: No further questions.

Fontana: No further questions. He just looked at me and smiled.

Early the next morning, the 16 planes which had landed at Itazuki arrived. All 18 airplanes would have been a pretty massive formation to come flying through that weather, but I figured just the two of us, down on the water, we'd keep out of those transports' way. No problem.

All of us have taken a few liberties now and then.

Anderson: Yes, The landing actually was on the 15th or so, so this must have been about the 18th, about that, yes.

Fontana: Right after the 15th. The second day the Marines were ashore, they marched right on up to Kimpo. As soon as it was secured they wanted air in there to cover the crossing of the Han River.

When the planes got in the next day, I went over to the 5th Marines' CP. It was Ray Murray's 5th Marine Regiment which was bivouacked in and around the Kimpo airfield operations building. You [Gen Anderson] and your pilots had damaged it a little bit but not too much. Ray Murray and I worked up the air cover and support for the Han crossing which was to take place the next morning. They crossed the Han river in mid-morning and then attacked Seoul from the west. Louie Puller and his regiment [1st Marines] was attacking from the south of the Han towards the bridges. We could not do much supporting on that day as he had what we brought with us. All Corsairs had eight five-inch rockets and one 500-pound bomb rack and just enough fuel left for a couple of sorties.

Anderson: Louie Puller?

Fontana: Louie Puller had the 1st Marines, and--I may be off on these regiment designations--but it was Louie Puller's regiment attacking from the south and Ray Murray's was north of the river. Ray was regimental exec but something happened to the regimental commander, he got sick about the time that they were ready to load out, so Ray got the regiment as a lieutenant colonel!

Anderson: I remember Ray being there, of course, very definitely and in the Pusan perimeter period. He was . . .

Fontana: Yes!

Anderson: Craig, the brigadier--E. A. Craig, I guess it was-- was a brigade commander; and I thought that Ray was a regimental commander but maybe he was . . .

Fontana: Maybe he was! Maybe his regimental commander got sick before the Pusan action . . .

Anderson: Yes, probably so.

Fontana: . . . and Ray was doing such an outstanding job that he was retained. But Ray was still the regimental commander when they made the landing . . .

Anderson: At Inchon? Yes, at Inchon.

Fontana: At Inchon.

Anderson: Right.

Fontana: So we supported them. We were MAG-13. These were

MAG-13 squadrons. Our (MAG-12) airplanes would follow later. We came out by air from the U.S.

Anderson: You're talking now about MAG-12?

Fontana: MAG-12 headquarters.

Anderson: Yes, came out by air.

Fontana: Part of our staff came out by air. I was there and you were on the carrier. The Navy would not release you and Frank Dailey was not flying. In fact, he was evacuated three or four months after that. I stayed there about three weeks. Then the war progressed north, and MAG-12 was scheduled to go into Wonsan. That's when Boeker Batterton demanded that his tactical officer be returned to MAG-12 and Doc West came in and relieved me. You were still on the carrier!

Anderson: Yes, yes, until the middle of October or late October, I've forgotten just when.

Fontana: Later . . . our planes, MAG-12, had arrived by ship and were unloaded in the Tokyo area, and flown to Itami, fully operational. So we brought our squadron into Korea after the South Koreans cleared Wonsan on the east coast of

Korea. We flew our aircraft into Wonsan and waited for the division to land but the harbor was mined so heavily that they could not land. We were supported by air for fuel, rations, and ammunition until the harbor area was cleared of mines. We did mostly reconnaissance work. We did some support work for the Army on the other side of the spine of the peninsula, and that's where the battle for control of the air began.

The 1st Marine Division was attached to the X Corps with LtGen Almond, USA, in command. Because we were supporting Army units, the Fifth Air Force wanted to take control (laughter), and we weren't about give them control of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. And that is where the control of air battle started between the Marine Corps and Air Force. We considered ourselves as an integral part of the 1st Marine Division.

Anderson: So the JOC . . .

Fontana: That was established later.

Anderson: . . . was established.

Fontana: Yes, but at first we were our own bosses--for a while, not very long; our own bosses or in coordination

with the Navy. The Navy had one carrier, I believe, off the east coast of Korea.

We were there to welcome the division when they landed; the first time that aviation has been ashore before the ground troops. They cleared the harbor and finally they came in and landed. We'd been there about a week. They didn't waste any time. They just landed, formed up, and off they went. They went to Hungnam and started toward the Chosin Reservoir. That's when I was relieved of my job with MAG-12 and I was made the G-3 of 1st Marine Air Wing.

Anderson: Oh, yes.

Fontana: We established our headquarters in Hungnam right in the same building as the X Corps.

Anderson: I see.

Fontana: We were there when all hell broke loose. The Chinese came in.

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: One highlight item of that operation for me was: one day I went on reconnaissance. We had a request from the-- or directive, I presume--from the Fifth Air Force, to conduct

reconnaissance all the way to the Yalu River. I took that first hop myself, and we flew up to the Yalu. I've forgotten the name of the city on the Korean side of the river, but I think it was Nanpojin.

Anderson: I wouldn't remember that.

Fontana: It was a long time ago. I've never seen so much activity as they had there. When we got within about five miles of the place, we were greeted by the biggest curtain of anti-aircraft fire you have ever seen. My reaction was to crank that throttle all the way to the fire wall and get out. When I tried to push the throttle, it didn't go. I'd already pushed it up unconsciously. (Laughter)

(cross talk)

Fontana: . . . really got a start.

Anderson: In an F-9?

Fontana: Corsair.

Anderson: Corsair.

Fontana: In a Corsair. John Kinney and myself.

Anderson: Oh, yes, geeze.

Fontana: He was the operations officer of the group, MAG-12.

We came back and debriefed all of this activity. The bridge over the Yalu was clogged with troops moving south. The trains were puffing steam like mad. The firing came from the Chinese side of the river. They put up a barrage, at our altitude. We were about 20,000 feet.

Anderson: They saw you coming.

Fontana: They saw us coming. They picked us up on radar and saw us coming and, boy, they opened up as soon as we got within range. We came back and debriefed. The debrief went to the Fifth Air Force. Fifth Air Force sent it in and it caused a furor in Tokyo.

Anderson: This was before the ground encounter between the Chinese . . .

Fontana: That's correct.

Anderson: . . . who had already--probably--had already filtered in but . . .

Fontana: They were filtering in.

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: They were staging their troops in North Korea. No one else other than MajGen Willoughby, Gen MacArthur's G-2, came to interrogate LtCol Fontana and LtCol Kinney.

Anderson: That's interesting.

Fontana: We were sure? "Yes, sir." Did we see troop movement? "Yes, sir." "Were you fired on from the north bank of the Yalu River?" "Yes, sir." "And you saw a lot of traffic, a lot of truck traffic and a lot of train traffic across the bridge?" About three days later a B-29 Recce airplane was sent in to take pictures of the area. The Recce plane was shot down at the same place near where we received that enemy fire.

Anderson: I wonder what date that was. That's also a very interesting event to record because I think it was around the middle of October when MacArthur met Truman at Wake Island and the outcome of that was MacArthur being quite positive that the Chinese were not going to intervene and so on.

Fontana: Let's take a break.

Anderson: Alright.

Fontana: Let's take a break and let's see if I can find my log book.

Anderson: Yes, that'd be very interesting to establish that.

Fontana: I had my other log book but the other log books are up in the attic. I'm going to look in one trunk only. I'm not going to turn the attic inside out. I'll look in one trunk only and see if I can find my log book. That will give the date. [Gen Fontana later found all his flight log books and reports that according to his flight log book the date was 23 October, 1950, when he flew to the Yalu River and was taken under fire from across the river.]

Anderson: Good, let's do that.

Fontana: Okay.

(interruption in tape)

Anderson: Well, maybe you can let me have those dates sometime later at your convenience, or, as you suggest, the exact date is in the MAG-12 diary of our historical summary.

But that's a very important thing because it shows that the Far East Command . . . that MacArthur and Willoughby were terribly interested in knowing just what those Chinamen were up to, that the result of that conference with President Truman at Wake in the middle of October when MacArthur assured Truman that to the best of his intelligence sources the Chinese were not in a position to intervene, was being checked on very seriously by the G-2 of the Far East Command, Willoughby.

Fontana: This occurred in the latter part of October. I do recall that there was snow on the ground from about the Chosin Reservoir on up the Yalu River. Of course, they get snow much earlier than that. But that's an indication that it was fairly . . . I think the latter part of October.

Anderson: I guess the first encounter . . . well, that's sort of beside the point, but the first encounter on the ground with the Chinese communists--other than the . . . there were some prisoners taken in late October--but the first encounter was around the 5th of November. Then, as you say, all hell broke loose.

Fontana: The 7th Army and Owens, Gen Owens' Corps, headed fast to the Yalu.

Anderson: 7th Division.

Fontana: 7th Division headed fast at that time.

Anderson: Yes, they'd gotten overextended.

Fontana: But they were to the west of this community that I've described.

Anderson: Oh?

Fontana: The Yalu flows south-west. It doesn't flow straight east and west, it flows south-west. So the further west you go the closer you are to the Yalu let's say from Seoul. This place was further north and it was closer to the east coast of North Korea.

Anderson: I see. Well, they were very sensitive about that because of it's proximity to Vladivostok.

Fontana: Yes, yes.

Anderson: Well, you stayed with MAG-12 during the evacuation from Hungnam back to Itami I guess.

Fontana: Back to Itami. All Marine units were returned to Japan with the exception of VMF-311, which was operating with Air Force units at an airfield near Pusan. We went back. K-1 was under construction at that time and MAG-12 was designated to occupy that base. MAG-33 did not have an airfield assigned as of that time.

I didn't mention that right after the first of the year I was selected and promoted . . . I was selected for colonel--September, October--October I guess it was, of 1950. I was promoted in 1951.

When we pulled out of North Korea and Kimpo--we still had a squadron at Kimpo, the F-7Fs were at Kimpo, the night fighters--when we pulled out of North Korea, out of Korea (except for 311 down in Pusan), we regrouped at Itami. Col Frank Dailey was evacuated to the United States and there was a vacancy for group commander. Gen Harris called all of his colonels together at a conference and included me. I was a selectee but I was not yet promoted. He started out something like this, "Gentlemen, the first order of business this morning is to select a group commander for MAG-33. Now I know a lot of you are interested in that job. I have a nomination. I nominate Paul Fontana." (Laughter)

Anderson: A strange way of doing business but it sounds like Field Harris to me. (Laughter)

Fontana: "Would anybody like to volunteer?" (Laughter)

Instead of volunteering, everybody--I was sitting in the back row--no one volunteered but they turned around to congratulate me. (Laughter) I think they were very happy to let me have it, to be honest with you.

Anderson: Yes, I suppose so.

Fontana: In fact, Colter Dyer said, "I envy you. If I couldn't have that job, the next person I would want to have it is you." I noticed he didn't raise his hand. Roger Carleson was in there . . .

Anderson: Oh, well . . .

Fontana: Boeker Batterton . . . Boeker had a group.

Anderson: Even in World War II Roger Carleson wasn't touching a stick.

Fontana: Well, I could name quite a few. Gen Harris said, "Alright. Paul, you're the new group commander. Now you just get back down there to that group and get it organized because I want it back in Korea as fast as you can get it there!" I said, "General, give me a base and we'll get there." With that I went back and called the staff together

and told them I was their new group commander. Doc West was my exec.

Anderson: Oh, yes.

Fontana: The division, of course, was re-inserted just about immediately. It was re-deployed to South Korea. Only the aviation units were re-deployed to Japan. They formed this JOC at Taegu and they wanted a Marine aviator for coordinating the air support for the division. So I lost my tactical group commander, Doc West. He went to Taegu as the senior Marine liaison officer on this JOC. Then Dick Beard was my exec.

I got in an airplane and I started flying around Japan looking for a place closer to Korea and I found an airfield which had been used during the occupation of Japan by either the Australians or New Zealanders, I don't recall exactly. It was know as Bufu on Honshu Island, almost down at the southern end of Honshu. I and some of my staff members, we'd fly around in Corsairs--that's all we had--and examined the base and we thought we could put Corsairs in there. I went back and reported to Gen Harris and I told him that if we could make arrangements for fuel, we could operate out of this airfield. We'd need some bombs, 500-pound bombs, and rockets. That was all we could carry because had to carry

drop tanks to go to Korea. So he thought that was a good idea.

I deployed, initially, down there with two squadrons. Then I called for another squadron, then I called for another squadron. Pretty soon I had all the Corsair squadrons--six of them--in BuFu.

Anderson: Of both groups?

Fontana: Of both groups.

Anderson: I'll be darned.

Fontana: You see K-1 was not operational yet. We used to fly these horrible missions to Korea. It was the middle of winter. We used to have to wear poopy suits and those poopy suits, as you well know, left an awful lot to be desired. You put them on, you sweated like the devil, condensation all over the inside of that suit. We had no heaters on those airplanes because we didn't expect to be there during the winter. The heaters had been taken out. You get in there and you'd get so cold all that condensation would freeze inside of your suit. But we had to wear them just in case we went down in the water. It would only give us a few more minutes of survivability, but it was something that we just wanted.

So we would fly those missions with two drop tanks, two bombs, about four rockets--five-inch rockets--and go looking for the 1st Marine Division and their forward air controllers and see if they needed any help. If they needed help--we could only stay on station about 15-20 minutes--if they needed any help we would give it to them. If not, we would call the Far East Air Force Control Center in Taegu and say, "I've got a load of," this type, "where do you want it?" They would say, "Drop it any place north of the bomb line." We'd drop it and come back. We did that.

Then the Marine division headquarters moved up to Pohang, the 1st Marine Division established its headquarters near the airfield. They had VMO-6 on the Pohang airfield. One day, on one of these missions, I decided to drop in on VMO-6. Vince Gottschalk had the squadron. Vic Armstrong was in that squadron, the helicopter pilot. They had six helicopters and about six OEs.

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: Gosh, I looked it over and it looked good to me and I said, "How would you fellows like to have me bring the group in here?" "Oh, we'd love it! We're tired of cooking for ourselves; we're tired of supporting ourselves." I went back and flew to Itami, I talked to Gen Harris and his staff members. I told them that Pohang could support at least two

squadrons as it was. We needed fuel. The beach was not too far away and they could drop the drums overboard and let waves bring them in and then we'd haul them with our Marines into camp. Many people worked on that. I don't want to take credit for the operation entirely. Perhaps I had the idea, but a lot of people did an awful lot of hard work on it.

Permission was obtained to move Marine Aircraft Group 33 into K-3, designated K-3, Pohang. We moved in there with two squadrons. It was in February. The ground was frozen solid. We set up our camp on what I thought--you know a graduate engineer--was high ground. It was a high ground. Everything was fine. We'd been there about two weeks. Two squadrons of Corsairs moved in also, and we had a thaw; we had a rain. We'd built our camp in a rice paddy, frozen rice paddy. We sank up to our knees in mud! I've never been so chagrined in my life. So we commandeered some lumber from the division. Al Bowser was the G-3. They got their engineers to start hauling gravel up there from the river bed that was about a mile away from there; truck load after truck load after truck load. The airplanes were alright because we used an old taxi-way for parking. They brought enough gravel up there to where we could build a mess hall.

End Tape 1/I, Side B

Begin Tape 2/I, Side A

Anderson: Go ahead, Paul, please.

Fontana: Well, as you know, eventually K-3 housed the wing headquarters . . . Let me go back. K-1 became operational MAG-12 and the wing headquarters moved into K-1 which was at the southern tip of Korea. Later (I had gone) but another jet squadron operated out of Pohang, and the wing headquarters eventually moved to Pohang. We were supported, and supported beautifully, by the 1st Marine Division while we were there. They gave us our food, and as I've mentioned the gravel, they literally pulled us out of the mud. They hauled our fuel for us from the beaches. We got everything that we could ask for.

Then the division headquarters deployed into the center of Korea. I recall Gen O. P. Smith was going by helicopter from K-3. He came over to the airfield in a jeep, and I saw him off. His departing words were, "Fontana, I sure hate to lose sight of that blue water." From then on, I think the 1st Marine Division was just another division in the Army fighting in Korea. We supported them as best we could. I returned to the states, and that was the end of the Korean campaign for Paul Fontana.

Anderson: That was about May, I suppose.

Fontana: Late spring, early summer of 1951.

Anderson: Of '51.

Fontana: That I left. However much fighting remained to be done . . .

Anderson: Sure.

Fontana: . . . by the Marine division and all the other troops there.

Anderson: So you went back to the states. I know that shortly thereafter, in another year, you were at the National War College. But what was the assignment?

Fontana: I went back and I became the G-3 (I'd been promoted to colonel). I became G-3 of Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific; Air FMFPac.

Anderson: Air FMFPac.

Fontana: Air FMFPac, at El Toro. MajGen Wallace, at first, commanding; later relieved by Gen Megee. Gen Brice came through in early 1952. He had been--I don't know exactly whether in Korea or whether he'd been at FMFPac on duty--he came through and he was going to Washington to take over

Division of Aviation. In one of the conversations we had he said, "How would you like to go to National War College?" Of course I didn't expect to go to National War College. I said, "I'd love it!" He said, "Alright, I'll make a deal with you. You're going to go to the National War College this coming year, and then you're going to serve three years in Washington for me." I said, "I'll take it!" (Laughter) And that's exactly what happened. (Laughter)

And that's exactly what happened. I went to National War College. So did you and Lane (the three aviators) with Wally Greene, Jimmy Masters, and Sid Wade. There were six Marines in that class. As you know, that was a wonderful year. I learned a lot. It broadened my views; it broadened my education. I think I became a better officer because of that. It was the first time I had really been exposed to high-level planning and thinking and the experts that we got to lecture to us. It was amazing to me.

Anderson: And many of the associates, like Dick Bonesteel for instance.

Fontana: Yes, yes. Well, my boss later, in the J-3 of the Joint staff, was Dean, who became a lieutenant general in the Air Force; Fred Dean.

Anderson: Yes, Fred Dean.

Fontana: And, as you say, we had a lot of distinguished people in that class. Of course, our leading Marine became Commandant, Gen Greene; Jimmy Masters, a lieutenant general. All of us made general except for Dick Lane.

Anderson: Hank Lane.

Fontana: Hank Lane.

Anderson: What did you write about? What was your thesis? Since you wrote on carrier aviation at the Air War College, what was your major topic?

Fontana: (Laughing) You would ask. (Unintelligible) subjects. I wrote on the strategic importance of North Africa. And let me tell you, I really had to do an awful lot of research to put any meat into that subject. But it proved, in World War II, that it was a vital area from which we could attack southern Europe.

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: And I think my paper, perhaps, was embellished with that premise, hopefully not. But that's what I wrote. What did you write about?

Anderson: I wrote about the Congo.

Fontana: (Laughter) The belly of Africa.

Anderson: That's right, the belly of Africa.

Fontana: I recall you presenting your paper. (Laughter)

Anderson: Just one opening.

Fontana: That's how I remember that. (Laughing) You said, "My subject is the Congo, the belly of Africa, and you see the umbilical cord coming right out to the Atlantic Ocean."

Anderson: Well, and Wally Greene handled . . . I'll never forget his paper.

Fontana: I'll never forget his paper either.

Anderson: Amphibious operations in the eastern Med.

Fontana: Yup.

Anderson: Boy, I tell you, I thought that was about as wild an idea as I'd ever heard!

Fontana: (unintelligible)

Anderson: Yup. He, too, was a . . . would latch onto a most provocative idea and work it over. He was certainly . . .

Fontana: Well, that's reminiscing.

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: Well, needless to say, Gen Brice held me to my promise. And after I graduated I went to Headquarters Marine Corps. At that time, Headquarters Marine Corps had moved to the Pentagon from the Navy Building. My first tour, as I told you, was at the old Navy Building across the reflecting pool.

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: This time we were in the Pentagon. But we were there for a short time, and then we moved over to Headquarters Marine Corps.

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: Where it belonged from the very beginning. Because, as I said, over the years we severed our support and logistic dependence on the Navy; every year more and more; except for common procurement of aircraft. But all the financing done by Headquarters Marine Corps; all the aeronautical support we needed, the Navy had to continue. Now we were really becoming all in this one big family as we should have been. But because of the reasons, some of which I indicated, logistic support primarily for aviation, the Marine Corps was not equipped or structured to support us in the early years.

So I stayed in Headquarters Marine Corps, Division of Aviation, for two and half years. A tragic thing happened at that time. My wife died, and I had to make plans. Well, I didn't have to make any personal plans at that time, but I felt that before long I would have to make a decision. I had four children; I was non-deployable. I felt that I could not truly serve the Marine Corps and my family at the same time; leave the four children with someone, relatives I presume, in case I was deployed. I had a very serious discussion with Fish Salmon on this subject. He said, "Why are you worried? You're here in Headquarters and we can send you to Cherry Point to the air station." I could not see it that way. One day he surprised me. He said, "The Navy seems to be rejecting every officer we have offered to

relieve Elliott Bard as commander of the O&R, Cherry Point." This is Fish Salmon, who was then Deputy Director of Aviation.

Anderson: Oh, yes.

Fontana: He said, "You're an engineer; why don't you take that job? You're not going to be deployed from there." I said, "Let me think about it." It didn't take me long. The next morning I walked in and said, "I'll take it if I'm acceptable to the Navy." Well, at first the Navy rejected me because I had no O&R experience. I'd been an operations man all of my years in the Marine Corps. I never involved myself in hardware, except perhaps aircraft. But he had me write out my credentials, what I had done, and so forth. And the Navy agreed; BuAir. We speak of the Navy and speak of BuAir at the time.

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: Some admiral in BuAir said, "Okay, fine, if he's your man we'll take him." I have no idea who was offered and who was rejected or on what grounds. So I went to George Washington University and started drawing books on management. (Laughter) I'd work all day and read all night on management because I had a pretty good idea what the O&R was.

I came to Cherry Point and I saw many things. Even though I knew nothing about O&R, I saw many things which I thought could be improved. I just rolled up my sleeves and I poured myself into that O&R. I stayed with it a little over two years. When I went in there, it was down near the bottom of the totem pole, and I'm happy to say by the time I left it was rising very fast.

Anderson: This was '55 and '56, I guess.

Fontana: And '57.

Anderson: '57. Well now, you were . . . Somewhere along the line there, you acquired another wife.

Fontana: Oh, yes, yes. I married Beth in '55, and a wonderful wife; wonderful mother for my four children. I think today they love her more than they love me.

But I'd been in O&R about two years when I got an invitation to visit the General Electric plant in Evendale, Ohio, right outside of Cincinnati. We were overhauling the J-65 engine, which was the engine for the Saber, F-86, and for our F-4Bs. F-4s, the sister of the Saber, the Navy/Marine Corps version of the Saber, F-86. But they had the same power plant.

We were overhauling those at Cherry Point for about one-third less the cost that the Air Force was paying General Electric to overhaul the engine. The Air Force was overhauling its J-65 engine with a contract to General Electric who had built the engine, the power plant. So the tech reps, the people, the GE people that came to Cherry Point were interested, I might say perhaps. They thought that an interview would be profitable. So I was invited to visit their overhaul plant in Evendale, Ohio. I went there; they put me up at the Hyatt-Regency; filet mignon dinners; theater tickets. Today you wouldn't be able to accept all of that. In those days it really didn't make all that much difference. Toured the plant for a day and a half, and finally ended up in a session with some pretty high executives of General Electric.

The conversation went something like this: "We understand you're a very dedicated Marine," and I said, "Yes, I am." "Well, we'd like to have you join us." "No way." He said, (I'll never forget this) "Would \$25,000.00 a year un-dedicate you?" I was making about 10 as a colonel in the Marine Corps at that time, maybe 15, not that much. I said, "I don't think so." "Just think it over, think it over. We'd like for you to come down and run this plant." I said, "No." "Well, think it over. Don't turn us down. By the way, we have a goose blind at Nattamuskeet, North Carolina, which we have all goose season. How about joining us next weekend to

hunt geese at Nattamuskeet." I said, "Fine, I like to hunt geese." And through their tech rep at NARF, then O&R, we went goose hunting. We had a wonderful time. They paid for everything, the blind, the booze, you name it.

But when I came home, I said to Beth, "Honey, sit down." She said, "What for?" I said, "Sit down, I want to talk to you. I have 20 years in the Marine Corps. I can retire on 20. How would you like to live in Cincinnati, Ohio?" She said, "What are you talking about? What's the Marine Corps have in Cincinnati, Ohio?" I said, "The Marine Corps doesn't have anything. General Electric has a big plant down there they might want me to manage." Well, she broke out crying and left the room. That was enough. I called them back the next day. I said, "I'm dedicated. Thank you very much."

Anderson: Rededicated, huh?

Fontana: He said, "Shall we negotiate?" I said, "No, we can not negotiate. I'm going to be a Marine as long as the Marine Corps will have me." I don't know what I would have done if Beth had said, "Yes." I was not sold myself, really, but I thought it was . . . I think it played to my ego to get an offer like that at that stage. In fact, I don't know how firm the offer made to me by the GE folks was. We never negotiated. Perhaps it was bait.

Anderson: Hell of an offer.

Fontana: I was still a young man; I was 43, 44, 45 years old. I could easily start on a second career. So from that day on I never even gave it any thought; I was going to go all the way as far as I could go in the Marine Corps.

But the O&R was a very interesting assignment. I enjoyed it; it was challenging. I think we accomplished a little bit while we were there. I think Al Clark . . . Jim Clark, who later had the NARF, told me that as he reviewed the situation that there were some procedures which I had established were still being followed, which made me feel good. As late as the last NARF commander . . . I get invited to all the change of commands here at the NARF, and I'm always introduced as one of the former commanding officers now retired as a major general. It's very pleasant.

Anderson: Sure.

Fontana: Very satisfying. So, I was called one day by Guy Morrow, who he said, "Paul, I've been passed over for brigadier general. So I'm looking around at industry. I can go with one (I'm not at liberty to name it), but they feel that I would do much better, pay-wise, if I got some industrial experience. I want to relieve you at the O&R." This was one year before I was due to be relieved. I said,

"Guy, I came down here for three years. I set these programs up for three years. I've got another year and a half to go, a little over a year to go. Let me finish it out." "No," he said, "I've got to retire in about a year." Then he said, "I've already talked to Gen Schilt," who was Director of Aviation. "He has approved. I've been accepted by the Navy." I said, "Well, I've lost my job. You've outrank me." He said, "Well, don't put it that way. We'll give you any assignment you want. Besides, Toby Munn wants you in the 2d Wing. He wants you to implement the Wing Service Group which you helped to structure some years ago. It hasn't been working and he thought maybe you might make it work."

I went to see Gen Munn. I told him that . . . He said, "Hey, I know about you!" I said, "General, you're not going to give me the Wing Service Group. After two and a half years in the O&R, I should get a group command. You've got a group of F-4s here. Your group commander flies a JRB."

Anderson: F-J4.

Fontana: F-J4s, excuse me, F-J4; not the F-4; that is the North American F-J4s. Wherever I used that term . . .

Anderson: Yes, I thought I caught it there, but . . . yes.

Fontana: He said, "No, I'm going to give you the wing service group. If you put it on its feet, at the end of a year you can have a jet group." Well, I wasn't very happy but I didn't have any alternative. Again, Guy Morrow called me one day and said, "Come on up and bring up a list of the people that are being relieved this summer," these are Marine officers and Marine enlisted, "and let me know of some that you think should go down there. While I'm here in Washington I'll see what I can do about getting them sent to the O&R."

Of course, one thing that I was pushing for that was never done was I wanted a test pilot from Patuxent to come down there, not plow him back into the Navy system. Everybody wanted to stay at Patuxent. Marion Carl did that, and others, just stayed there and they flew experimental aircraft. My former aide is now a graduate test pilot, and he's at Patuxent. I felt that the O&R should have at least one or two test pilots from the Patuxent school to test these airplanes after they'd been stripped right down to the skin, re-wired, refurbished, re-outfitted, rather than have just a garden variety pilot fly this airplane.

So I went up to him. I walked into the office and Guy Morrow is talking on the telephone to someone, and said, "Well General, if you don't want him I'm sure we'll have no trouble finding someone that will take that group at Kaneohe." I raised my hand, and he said, laughingly, he said, "Of course, one of them just walked in my office here and raised

his hand." I was told the conversation went something like this: "Who is he?" "Paul Fontana." The person he was talking to was Jerry Jerome!

Anderson: Oh ho!

Fontana: At Marine Air West . . . at Air, FMFPac in El Toro. The General said, "I'll take him!" and Guy said, "You can't have him. We've already promised him . . . I've already cut his orders and promised him to Toby Munn." Jerome allegedly said, "I'm senior to Toby Munn. I want him! You tell Frank Schilt I'll take Paul Fontana for MAG-13."
(Laughter)

Anderson: Nice ____.

Fontana: I didn't even know what they were talking about. I went back. I got to Anacostia. Pete Peatross came over as I was cranking up the airplane. I think I had an F-7 at the time. And he said, "Col Morrow wants to talk to you." So I called Guy on the phone. He said, "You've got the job at MAG-13. Now, you're the one that's supposed to tell Toby Munn."

I got home; it was kind of late, and I wasn't about to tell the general that night. I told Beth, and Beth was unhappy because she liked Cherry Point and she was deeply

involved with the Ladies Golf Association and bridge clubs and what not. She was having a great time. My being in O&R didn't involve her in too many activities, although she was deeply involved in Navy Relief and Gray Lady.

The next morning I went in the general's office. No one had called and told him. It was about 8:15. I walked in and he said, "Sit down." I said, "No, sir, what I have to say, I'll stand right here." I said, "Sir, I'd just like to inform you that I'm not coming to your command." He said, "You're not? Why not?" I said, "I'm getting MAG-13 in Kaneohe." He said, "You son of a 'blank.' You've been politicking! You've been politicking because you didn't like that Wing Service Group! Get out of here!! And don't ever come back into this office." I said, "Sir, I did not politic behind your back. I just happened to walk into the situation yesterday and I was offered the job." He said, "Get out of here!" (Laughing) "I don't want to talk to you." So with that I did an about face and I walked out. Well, he called Gen Schilt, and I guess Gen Schilt told him. For years, old Toby would say, "You traitor, you. Just because I didn't give you a group, you went and got one on your own, a flying group."

Well, I went to Kaneohe. I had the most rewarding tour any group commander could have. I went there in '57. We deployed, the whole group, to Japan in '58 when MAG-11 went from Atsugi to Pingtung, Taiwan. We went to replace MAG-11

at Atsugi for the air defense of Japan. We flew 24 jets from Kaneohe to Atsugi, the first time that was ever done by Marines. And all 24 planes arrived combat ready in three days. The rest of the airplanes were on carriers and arrived ten days later.

Anderson: That was a in-flight refueling problem, but also the base structure was helpful. How did you make that?

Fontana: I have to give the credit for planning this operation and for training for this operation to Jack Bolt, who was the commanding officer of 214, the Black Sheep squadron, and to Bill Guss who was his exec. They had friends at Hickham Field in the KC-50 squadron . . . that's KC-50 squadron.

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: They asked their Air Force friends boys if they would refuel Marine planes if we were to fly to Japan. They checked it out with their superior. They thought it would be great training for them because they just sat there at Wake, and they waited for Air Force squadrons to fly from the west coast to Japan or Korea and then fly back, and they were not really over worked. They were looking for operational missions. They agreed to do it. They talked to

their superiors. Their superiors agreed to do it. But that's where it stopped. I was informed of it so we started setting up training missions with them. They would get airborne; we'd meet them someplace and we'd plug in and became qualified for air-to-air refueling. I and 28 . . . 28 pilots all together to fly 24 airplanes.

We were going to get the Air Force to refuel us over Wake. We were going to fly from Kaneohe to Midway; RON at Midway; then the next morning take off and refuel over Wake. Anyone who had trouble refueling could land at Wake and refuel on the ground. And then take off and fly to Guam; RON in Guam and then refuel with Navy A-Js over Iwo. I think they were A-Js.

Anderson: Yes, I think they were.

Fontana: And they were rigged for air refueling at that time. They have since been replaced by their CV, carrier tankers. They would refuel us over Iwo. If we had any trouble refueling with them, we could land at Iwo. So my pilots got all the procedures and everything worked out. As I said, I've got to give credit for this mission where it belongs, 214. Although they also brought in 212 which was Moore.

Anderson: Oh, really? Benjie Moore?

Fontana: No, no, no . . . God, isn't that awful, the name escapes me; lieutenant colonel. He was very enthusiastic about it. But all the spade work, all the planning, all the laying on with the Air Force had been done by Jack Bolt and Bill Guss. You see, Jack Bolt became an ace flying on exchange duty with the Air Force in Korea. [Note: The CO of VMA-212 was LtCol Charles "Chuck" Moore, USMC.]

Anderson: Oh, yes.

Fontana: So he had some clout with these Air Force officers. He would say, "I'm one of you guys, you know. I shot down six airplanes flying with you guys, flying your F-86s." So they embraced each other.

Anderson: And these were F-Js . . .

Fontana: And these were F-J4s . . .

Anderson: Same airplane.

Fontana: Different designation, but very similar to the Air Force F-86s. So I went to Gen Avery Kier, with Jack Bolt and Bill Guss backing me up. I explained the mission to Avery, who was the brigade commander. Avery said, "I buy it. I

buy it! but we've got to sell it to Gen Megee," who was then CG, FMFPac. So he called up Gen Megee and told him that I wanted to see him, that I had a proposition and wanted to explain it to him. So they set up an appointment. We went in and Avery started to talk, and he said, "General, Paul has something to present to you. I wish you would hear him out in its entirety and then make a decision. Don't make a decision until you've heard what he has to say from start to finish." He didn't want Megee brushing me off.

Gen Megee said, "Alright. Go ahead, start talking." And I went into my song and dance. By that time I had really rehearsed it, and I knew all the answers by that time because I was just as enthusiastic as Jack Bolt and his boys in 214. Gen Megee, surprisingly enough, listened to me; didn't interrupt. I could see that he was getting interested. He was really getting interested. Then he started asking me questions. He said, "Have you cleared this with the Air Force?" I said, "We've cleared it to the squadron level, sir. And we would hope that you would clear it at PacAF level. The pilots over there are looking for work and we can give them one more mission. They're willing, ready, and able." "Have you cleared it with the Navy?" "No, sir. We haven't cleared it with the Navy, but we know if we can refuel off the KC-50s that we can refuel off the A-Js. We would ask you to talk to CinCPacFlt about that, and get CinCPacFlt's permission." He said, "Fontana, you're going to get me in

trouble." "No, sir, we're not going to get you in trouble; this is feasible. This is the first time the Marine Corps has transPaced airplanes with air-to-air refueling. It's the first time the Marine Corps has done an operation like this in either the Pacific or the Atlantic." He said, "I'm going to give it a go."

He put his staff to work on this. A few days later, yes, PacAF was agreeable and they would do it. And the Navy was agreeable, reluctantly because they wanted us to go by carrier.

Anderson: Oh, yes.

Fontana: But they would do it because if the Air Force was going to get us as far as Guam, we could have gone to Iwo, refueled on Iwo and then gone to Japan. We still could have done that. We thought that if the Air Force got us to Guam, we would go the rest of the way by refueling at Iwo.

Well the mission was set on and we started out. Gen Megee came to see us off. Oh, he did this. He called Avery Kier and told him that the mission was approved but Paul Fontana could not fly on that mission; the squadron commanders should lead the two squadrons of 12 planes each. So Avery said, "It's up to you if you can talk him into it." I said, "I'll try." So I talked to Gen Megee. I said, "Sir, please let me do it. I'm qualified aboard a carrier. I'm qualified

in air-to-air refueling. I have no qualms." He said, "You're an old man!" I was 46 years old. I didn't think I was old at all.

Anderson: No.

Fontana: I thought I was 26.

Anderson: (Laughs)

Fontana: So he said, "Alright, you can fly as far as Midway. I'm going to send my R-5D," whatever he had, C-54, "to Midway and you get out of the jet, and you fly that C-54 from Midway to Japan." I said, "Do I have to?" He said, "Yes, you do. I don't want to lose you. You're too old to do this, take that long hop from Midway to Guam and then from Guam to Atsugi."

All the wives were there to see us off. Gen Megee was there to see us off carrying his swagger stick. (Laughter) And we had a delightful departure. _____ something like the Kamikaze Kids of Japan, and off we went. Of course we could fly only 12 planes one day, 12 planes the next day. A piece of cake to Midway; French Frigate Shoal, the first landfall and then Midway where we landed. It started to rain like hell that night that even the Gooney Birds weren't flying. But, the Air Force was going to be on station at 20,000 feet

the next morning about 50 miles north of Wake and they were going to pick us up on their radar and bring us in.

The next morning we launched. As I said, even the Gooney Birds weren't flying so we didn't have trouble with the Gooney Birds. Twelve airplanes; Bill Guss was leading four airplanes and Jack Bolt was leading four airplanes. Jack Bolt took off first. I was leading the second element on Bill Guss. I was flying the second section on Bill Guss. Bill had a wing man and I was his second element leader and I had my own wing man. We took off, got to altitude, transferred . . . started to transfer fuel, and I started getting a little bit right-wing heavy. So I used a little bit of tab, trimmed very nicely, and pretty soon right-wing heavy. Used a little more tab, pretty soon I was really right-wing heavy. I was transferring out of one wing tank only. The transfer hose on one side had come loose during taxi at Midway. We had a regulation that if one plane had difficulty enroute, he would not go back alone; he would be accompanied by a wing man. I called . . . I was Apple Two. Bill Guss was Apple One. I said, "Apple One, Apple Two. I'm not transferring from my right tank." He said, "Oh, really, try this!" "I tried it." "Try that!" "I tried it." "Try this!" "I tried it." "Try that!" "I tried it. I'm just not transferring from my right tank. I'm very wing heavy and I've stopped the transfer because I have to control this airplane on landing. He said, "Wait one." As he said "Wait one," his wing man said, "Sir,

I'm not transferring either!" He said, "Go with Col Fontana, return to Midway." (Laughter) It didn't take him long to make a decision.

So my wing man joined Bill Guss. His wing man joined me and we did a 180. We were out about an hour and a half . . . about an hour out. Went to Midway, flew around to lighten our load, and dumped my right wing fuel.

Anderson: You could do that.

Fontana: Yes, we could do that with the wing fuel tank but not the drop tank. Went in and landed. I didn't dump it all so I took the wind from the side of the full tank (landed cross wind) so that I wouldn't cartwheel, and we both landed without any trouble. I don't know if you remember Hathaway. He was a warrant officer.

Anderson: No, I don't think so.

Fontana: He was the maintenance officer of the year for the MCA one year. When I taxied up and he looked at my airplane . . . Here's the group commander has to return. I was going to be the first one to land at Atsugi. Jack Bolt took the first group to Guam. Bill Guss, with me flying on his wing, was going to take the first hop to Atsugi. I was going to be the first plane to land at Atsugi. That was

the agreement. That was an order! Here's the group commander coming back. Hathaway could have cried. He said, "Okay, you're going to court martial me. It's my fault. I'm the top man in maintenance." I said, "No, Hap," Hap Hathaway, a wonderful gent, "not your fault at all." There was nothing wrong with my airplane. They just reconnected the hose . . . the darn hose had come loose taxi-ing to the take-off position or during the take-off roll.

The next morning we took off, ten airplanes. In the meantime we sent a message . . .

Anderson: You joined up with the other eight now making ten in all.

Fontana: I had told the R5-D crew to take off and go to Atsugi. We didn't say anything to FMFPac or the brigade what had happened; two planes, unable to transfer, returned to Midway. Discrepancy corrected, the airplanes will take off with ten planes the next morning. The next morning we took off, and I was flying on Chuck Moore. You remember Chuck Moore?

Anderson: Oh, yes.

Fontana: Charles, Chuck Moore. I was flying on his wing now. And I had an "Apple" call and he had something else.

He had another fruit. So we . . . and I had . . . I was flying a 214 airplane. We refueled over Wake. Two of his boys had trouble refueling. They had to land at Wake, and by landing at Wake and refueling on the ground they couldn't make it because the Dumbo would not be on station. We had a Dumbo on station halfway between Midway and Wake and one on station halfway between Wake and Guam, which was routine. This was the way the Air Force ran it. These were Air Force planes, Dumbos. They had life rafts--they wouldn't land--but they had life rafts with all survival gear that you one would need until he was picked up. So they had to stay there. They came in the following day.

We went to Guam. I was upset because I'd had mechanical trouble. They housed us in the barracks which was right next to the run-up area. They were working on the airplanes all night long. I slept very little. But the next morning I got up and I couldn't find my airplane. I looked and I looked and people were just snickering away. That night, the crew of 212 had repainted my airplane, VMA 212.

Anderson: (Laughs)

Fontana: And given me one of their squadron numbers. That's why I couldn't find my airplane. Including the call letters on the tail, Whiskey Echo or whatever I'd been changed to, Whiskey Charley. Chuck said, "Colonel, I had nothing to do

with it." That I never believed and never will. He said, "I had nothing to do with it. My gang did that. I'm very sorry." I said, "Chuck, that's perfectly alright. These people have to have some fun. You've got good morale. When they do something like that you've got good morale." So we took off and my wing man was Trigger Long, and he had waited for me at Wake--I mean waited for me at Guam. From Guam to Atsugi wasn't anywhere as hard a flight as from Midway to Guam.

Well, to make a long story shorter, we took off . . . we refueled over Iwo Jima. Just before we got to the refueling point I got the worst case of vertigo I've ever had in my life. I hadn't slept much. I was tired from the anxiety of all of this thing. But I believed the gauges. A young pilot might have been in trouble.

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: And I called Trigger. I said, "Trigger, I'm getting vertigo." He said, "Yes, I see." I said, "Take over the lead." He took over the lead. I flew formation on him and just like that the vertigo disappeared. As soon as I flew formation on him I had a reference, I leveled myself to his wing, and it disappeared immediately. As soon as I was cleared up and we came off the instruments--we were in clouds--I retook the lead. We went in and landed. Jack

Bolt was there, of course, to meet me. You know how low-key he is. He chuckled, and he said, "Colonel, you wouldn't do this to me! You wouldn't . . . " They had photographers out there. "You wouldn't do this to me. You repainted your airplane!" (Laughter) He said, "I can tell that's one of my airplanes." I said, "I didn't do it Jack. This was how it was this morning. I didn't have time to have it repainted. I had to take off."

But a funny incident occurred on this flight. As I told you, Gen Megee insisted that I was to fly in the R-5D.

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: When we got a message from the 1st Wing, Gen Fog Hayes, who was then commanding the wing, requesting MAG-13 flight echelon to come to Japan to replace MAG-11, sent a message to Hawaii and said the group was to bring "Everything including the kitchen sink." That was an official message. I said, "Okay, if that's what they want that's what they're going to get." I went to public works at Kaneohe and asked for a surveyed sink.

Anderson: (Laughter)

Fontana: The R-5D developed engine trouble on one engine on the way to Wake. So the plane is down at Wake. As I go by

Wake, air traffic controllers or someone from Wake called me, "Apple Two we have a message for you. Ready copy?" and I said, "Yes." And this airplane call number, which was the R-5D such and such, "has developed engine trouble. It has landed at Wake. It will be repaired. It will take a couple of days because the parts have to come from Guam. All your gear is aboard including your kitchen sink."

Anderson: (Laughs)

Fontana: Everybody in the Pacific that was reading that frequency must have said, "Boy, this colonel goes to war in style."

Anderson: Yes, boy, the Marines are at it again, huh?

Fontana: "He even brings his kitchen sink."

Anderson: (Laughs)

Fontana: Well, Jay Hubbard was fit to be tied because his squadron had gone by boat, and we got there before his people who had left three or four days before us. The Navy was conducting carrier ops on the trip to Japan and had space on the carrier for one squadron, so we had to send one squadron by boat.

End Tape 2/I, Side A

Begin Tape 2/I, Side B

Anderson: So your group, MAG-13, was displaced to Atsugi as a backup, I presume, for MAG-11 which was now in Formosa.

Fontana: Primarily for the air defense of Japan. And we took advantage of the situation. We were there from September until February. We took advantage of the cold weather; we did cold weather training which we would not have been able to do in Hawaii.

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: So we got some valuable training out of that. We deployed away from Atsugi to the northern field on Honshu. I've forgotten the name of it, way up--north Honshu--the field that was used here quite extensively recently by search aircraft for the Korean jet liner debris. [Note: The Japanese air base in northern Honshu was Misawa.]

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: I can't think of the name right now. Fukuoka? No. Anyway, we were in Japan until February when we could not

make the arrangements to fly the airplanes back. So we came back by carrier. And I stayed with MAG-13 until that summer when I was received by Gay Thrash, and I became chief of staff for the 1st Marine Brigade at Kaneohe.

Anderson: Oh, yes.

Fontana: I served as chief of staff for the brigade for one year.

Anderson: With Dick Weede as the skipper then?

Fontana: Yes, first Fred Wieseman. Wieseman relieved Kier and then Wieseman was ordered to Washington he was relieved by Dick Weede. I was selected for major general in July of 1960, promoted immediately . . .

Anderson: To brigadier general.

Fontana: To brigadier general, what'd I say?

Anderson: You said major general. It was to brigadier.

Fontana: No that was incorrect, to brigadier general. Transferred immediately to the Joint staff.

Anderson: Well you had a pretty interesting tour on the Joint staff.

Fontana: It was an exciting tour, we did have an exciting tour. I would say that my tour in MAG-13 two years, one year with the brigade, and two years in the Joint staff-- without question the highlight of my career, the most rewarding and the hardest working period in my career too.

Anderson: What were the big problems that the Joint staff was faced with at that time?

Fontana: Well, the big problem was really the SIOP, The Single Integrated Operational Plan for Nuclear Warfare. The Navy and the Air Force had a terrific fight. They selected a neutral general on the Joint staff to referee that bout: Paul Fontana. I got more purple paper (Purple paper meant non-concurrence.) than you can imagine. What the Air Force proposed the Navy rejected. What the Navy proposed, the Air Force rejected. We worked on that interminably. First, the concept for the plan came from Omaha, Nebraska where the preliminary planning was done. Now we had to come up with an operational supporting plan for the services to write their respective operations plans.

Anderson: Right, they were the joint targeting group.

Fontana: They were the targeting group. I'll say that we worked on that for a good two or three months. That was one of them. The other highlight of my two years on the Joint staff was perhaps my becoming involved with the President of the United States in briefing him; strictly by happenstance. I was in my office one morning around 10:00 when I received a call from Dick Bonesteel, the Secretary to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Gen Lemnitzer, U.S. Army. I went in and Gen Lemnitzer was sitting at his desk, and Dick said, "The general has something to tell you." So Gen Lemnitzer said something to the effect, "I'm involved in a very highly classified mission. I can not tell you what it is. I want talking papers on the southeast Asia SEATO plans, and all the contingency plans which have been approved by the JCS. I want a talking paper on each one. And I want it by 9:00 tomorrow morning." I said, "Yes, sir. I'll do the best I can." With that he sent me off.

I called my southeast Asia (SEATO) planners to my office. Fortunately my planners were a hard working group; mostly Air Force and Army and a couple of Marine Corps and Navy officers. Early the next morning I received another call from Bonesteel informing me the Chairman wanted to see me immediately. I said, "Oh, my gosh, the papers aren't ready. What does he expect?" I went to his office and here was Gen Lemnitzer just like a raging bull, pacing his office.

I went in and he said to Bonesteel, "Who'd you say you talked to?" Dick said, "I talked with McGeorge Bundy." He said, "I just can't believe it! I wonder if the President knows this?" Dick replied, "Yes, sir, this is a request that's been made by Mr. MacMillan." I'm wondering what the heck is going on here?

What happened was that the President was going to Key West to meet with Mr. MacMillan, Prime Minister MacMillan, who was vacationing in Jamaica at the time. But MacMillan took advantage of his proximity to the U.S. and arranged a meeting at Key West with the President. MacMillan, as I said, was vacationing, and he had, on his staff, a brigadier general. One of the stipulation of the meeting with the President of the United States was that the President of the United States should not have any military officer senior to a brigadier general, which eliminated Gen Lemnitzer. And that's what the second call was about. Dick Bonesteel said, "By the way, General, you can not go. You've got to send a brigadier." Well, who should they send? They sent the brigadier general that was responsible for preparing his briefing papers.

Well, I got my papers that I prepared for Gen Lemnitzer. We got into a helicopter on the pad at the Pentagon, and we went to Andrews Air Force Base. He waited for the President to come, shook hands with the President; I was introduced to the President. I went up the rear ramp; the President goes up the front ramp and off we go. Before leaving the Pentagon

I was told to get into civilian clothes. I had no idea where we're going. I was not told where I was going. I was told to bring warm clothes and winter clothes. It was in the winter time, so dressed in warm clothes we landed at Palm Springs.

Anderson: At Palm . . . ?

Fontana: Palm Beach.

Anderson: Palm Beach.

Fontana: Palm Beach that afternoon. I knew we were going south. I knew enough about that; I could look at the sun; I knew where we were headed. We were going south.

Anderson: (Laughing) Yes.

Fontana: I knew I wouldn't need my winter clothes.

Anderson: Not at Palm Beach.

Fontana: McGeorge Bundy was with us; Chip Bohlen, the former ambassador to Russia; Averill Harriman, the expert on Russian affairs; I've forgotten who was the Ambassador to England at that time, his name; and an Assistant Secretary of State,

and I don't recall his name; and this little ole brigadier general. We went to this swanky hotel in Palm Beach. Of course, the President got in the first car. The Secret Service then got in the second car. And I was directed to the third car. So naturally I wasn't comfortable. We were all in the motorcade. There was a photographer taking pictures. My picture appeared in the Chicago Tribune, and Beth's friends just thought that was really something when they saw Paul Fontana riding behind the President . . .

Anderson: Well, yes.

Fontana: . . . in Palm Beach. Even Beth didn't know. I couldn't tell Beth where I was going because I didn't know.

Anderson: You didn't . . . (Laughs)

Fontana: It was announced later from the White House as Beth was driving home. After the President took off, it was announced that the President was going to meet with Prime Minister MacMillan at Key West the following day. When Beth was driving home the car radio wasn't on, so she didn't hear it. Her neighbor told her after she got home.

We stayed in Palm Beach that night. The next morning we took off and flew to Key West. We landed at the Key West Naval Air Station. The President landed first as he was the

host and Prime Minister MacMillan landed a few moments later. We were escorted to the "Little White House," which President Truman acquired while he was President. The Prime Minister and his party were escorted to a house a short distance away.

So the President sat down on a sofa in the living room where we all gathered. McGeorge Bundy was in charge and briefed the group on what Mr. MacMillan wanted to discuss. He particularly wanted to discuss southeast Asia and what involvement was expected of the British. The President said, "Well, who's going to brief me on southeast Asia?" At that McGeorge Bundy says, "Brigadier General Paul Fontana from the Joint staff will brief you Mr. President." Well, he said, "Hello, General," and stood up and shook my hand. He forgotten that he had met me at Andrews, (laughing) and that I had been with his party for two days. I briefed the President about the SEATO plans, what countries were involved, what troop involvement we had in the various supporting plans.

Anderson: Now was Lemnitzer with you on this?

Fontana: No!

Anderson: Oh, I see. He had gone out to the airport but . . .

Fontana: To meet the President hoping the President would change his mind, I suppose.

Anderson: Yes, I suppose.

Fontana: I think. I wouldn't have been surprised if there was a suitcase on that helicopter. Lemnitzer went back the Pentagon.

I briefed the President for about five or ten minutes when the President said, "Alright. You come with us to the conference." They had a conference room and Prime Minister MacMillan on one side with his assistants including his brigadier in civilian clothes. I'm on our side in civilian clothes also. I was in civilian clothes. I was told to wear civilian clothes. I went in military uniform but changed into civilian clothes at Palm Beach.

The President and the Prime Minister exchanged niceties, and they started the discussion about this, that, and the other subject. Pretty soon the subject was southeast Asia, and the President said, "Mr. Prime Minister, I have an officer here from my Joint staff that can give us a short brief on southeast Asia." I had maps; I'd already made arrangements for an easel and tacked my maps up. I got up and I briefed him on the SEATO Plans. We had a plan for every contingency imaginable. But I briefed the main one. And they both listened and asked questions. So the President

asks me, "How wide is the Mekong river at Vientiane?"

Vientiane is the capital, you know. Well how did I know?

I did not know exactly but had a general idea so I responded,

"About as wide as the Potomac is at the Lincoln Memorial

Bridge." (Laughter) And with that MacMillan says, "And how

wide is that?" (Laughter) So the President looks at me, and

I said, "Oh, about 1000 meters." (Laughter)

Anderson: That's a half a mile.

Fontana: Well, it's maybe a quarter of a mile, three-quarters of a mile. I made a guess, Norm.

Anderson: Yes, yes.

Fontana: I didn't expect that question.

Anderson: (Laughs)

Fontana: That did not have anything to do with troop dispositions. I don't know why they asked. They were talking about Thailand, and Thailand borders the Mekong River, all the way from China down to Cambodia. So they wondered how wide the river is. MacMillan says, "How wide is that river?" and the President says, "Well, how wide is that river?" My God, how wide is that river!

Anderson: It probably is about as wide as . . .

Fontana: The strange thing is that it's just about that wide! As wide as the Potomac around D.C.

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: Later, I did go to Laos, and I did go Vientiane and I sighed a big sigh of relief when I saw it. It was about the same width (laughing) as the Potomac river.

Anderson: (Laughter)

Fontana: So they continued their discussion. I had made notes on the back side of the talking papers that I had; troop strengths and other related information. I was talking from the talking papers which I had prepared for Gen Lemnitzer. Then, as I sat down in back of the President, I'm following the conversation. As the PM would ask questions, I would write PM and the question. When the President answered I would put down "President," and the answer, in my own shorthand. It got to where I couldn't keep up so I decided I'd use abbreviations. For MacMillan I used "Mac." And for the President I used "Jack." So when the Prime Minister said something, I would write, "Mac," and then the statement.

For the President I put "Jack" and I wrote his statement. Most of these notes were written on the paper with the troop strengths on the front side of the page; I had the page folded over. As the President turned around to me and he said, "General, could I see that paper from which you were talking and see those troop strengths again so I can review them with the Prime Minister?" I said, "Yes, sir." So with that, instead of turning to the troop disposition, he turns to my hand-written notes and pretty soon he gets down to "Jack" and "Mac."

Anderson: (Laughs)

Fontana: He turns around and he gives me a smile.

Anderson: I'll bet.

Fontana: I'll tell you, that really relaxed me. I was ready to be shot or whatever they do to brigadier generals that do things like that. (Laughter) And he turned it over, and that's what he was looking for. So with that, the President folds the paper and he puts it over to one side. I kept looking at that paper and wondered how to get it back? (Laughter) Soon the President gets the paper and unfolds it and reads it again, and continues discussing back and forth. I'm not asked many questions; they're just talking. The whole

information is on that talking paper, so he no longer needs me. If he had asked me for the talking paper at Andrews Air Force Base I wouldn't have had to go on this trip.

So he gets the paper, he folds it, and he puts it in his coat side pocket . . .

Anderson: For Pete's sake.

Fontana: . . . with the end sticking out.

Anderson: With your "Mac" and "Jack" on it.

Fontana: With my "Mac" and "Jack" on the back. I was in agony. I was in utter agony. I wanted that paper back. So with that, the President takes it out the third time, and he looks at it, and he puts it to the side again. I reached out and I got it. And I creased the paper at where the troop dispositions were, and I tore the paper in half. I put the paper with the troop disposition next to the President, and I put the other half in my briefcase. (Laughter) The paper's been shortened. (Laughter) Now, I don't know why I did that. I just . . . I didn't like that "Jack" and "Mac" routine that I had written. He was a great gent. He didn't say a word.

The conference ended, and we all went to lunch. Had a nice luncheon and then we flew back. The Prime Minister

left first, for Jamaica, and we left for Palm Beach. I was sitting in back with the press and all the fellow travelers, when an aide came from the forward section. The military aide came to me and said, "The President would like for you to join him." I thought, oh boy, here we go. I go in to the lounge--the President's lounge--with McGeorge Bundy, Ambassador Bohlen, and the people that I mentioned. I go in there and he said . . . he has a drink in his hand, highball. He says, "General, what'll you have? Scotch or bourbon?" I said, "I'd like bourbon and water please, Mr. President." "Bourbon and water for the general." So I get one, and they're talking and Bundy says, "Mr. President, on balance, I think we did real well today. I think we did great. I think we showed the Prime Minister that we know what we're doing in southeast Asia. We're prepared for any contingency." And he says, "Yes, thanks to the general here. Boy, you're really well informed on this thing." "Thank you sir." _____ that damned "Jack" and "Mac" thing _____. (Laughter) I didn't say another word, just sipped my drink. They did all the talking. He just called me to show his appreciation for having been a member of his party.

The President started to say something as an aide came in and said, "Mr. President, we're letting down for Palm Beach." He said, "Okay fellows." It was about 5:00. He said, "As soon as I get to my Dad's home I'm going to call Jackie. If she's at the White House, let's all stay in Palm

Beach tonight. Let's go for a swim and then we'll all meet for dinner. But if she's at Glenora, I think I should go back because it's kind of isolated out there, and Jackie doesn't like to stay out there by herself. But in the meantime, let's all go on in and have a drink and have a swim." So we go in, but there was no swim and no drink.

McGeorge Bundy said, "Okay now, you all separate and you write your share of the report." He told me, he said, "Gen Fontana, you write about the military discussion that went on." And he told someone from the State Department, "You write about the political situation involved and as discussed in the country." And someone else was told to write a paper-- Chip Bohlen--on the communist reaction aspect if we go into southeast Asia. What do we expect from China? What do we expect from the Russians? So McGeorge Bundy started dictating. He said, "Now when you get your reports done, bring them to me." So, I started writing like mad. I didn't know what the hell to write, but I got my talking papers out and I wrote one page . . . He said, "Don't make it too long, one page." So, in my crude way, I made out my report, and I go back to McGeorge Bundy. He's got two secretaries. They were on the airplane; they were in the back end of the airplane where I was riding. He dictates to one, and then he says, "Okay, Marie, you go type your notes. Come in Rosie." Then he dictates to the other one. The other one comes back and he says, "Alright you go type your notes."

And he just worked these two ladies in tandem, just like Landry or Gibbs would work a football team, take the signal in. He gets my paper, and he looks at it and he says, "Very good, general. Thank you very much." Then he calls one girl over and he dictates my report in his language and style, in the language of the President; not my grammar, his own. I was awed with what a great report I wrote. But it came out of him.

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: (Laughing) _____, fine, thank you.

Anderson: He is a remarkable . . . remarkably efficient guy.

Fontana: Brilliant, really a brilliant person. I really think he's a very brilliant person.

So, we get all finished and we're all sitting and he said, "Okay, fine. By the way, the President called; we're all going back to Washington. Grab a bite to eat and be at the airplane at 8:00. There'll be a car to pick you fellows up at 20 minutes to 8:00." So we went down to the restaurant. On the White House, the dinner for that four with many drinks, on the White House; that dinner was on the White House. And we packed our bags (we all just had one bag), and we got picked up and got on the airplane, and an hour and a half

later we were at Andrews. I get a staff car to drive me home. The President goes, I guess, to Glenora or wherever; the helicopter that was there took him.

The next morning I show up on the Joint staff . . . do you think this should go in the report?

Anderson: I think this is fine.

Fontana: I show up at the Joint staff and I get a call that the Chairman wants to see me. I go in there and he says, "How was it?" I said, "Oh, it was great. It was really great." He said, "How did it go?" I said, "Well, I think it went alright." And Dick said, "Yes, General, I think it went real great. I talked to McGeorge Bundy about 15 minutes ago, and he was very happy. He was very happy with Gen Fontana's presentation." Lemnitzer said, "Fine. Okay, good. Now, I'm not going to ask you to brief me. I've called a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for 9:00. I want you to give us a briefing on what took place from the time you got on that airplane 'til you got off." I said, "Yes, sir."

So, I go back to my office and prepare my brief. About a half hour later I get called back into the Chairman's office. Again, Lemnitzer is raging mad. McGeorge Bundy has now called Dick Bonesteel, "There will be no briefings anyplace by anyone except what comes out of the Oval Office. Tell Gen Fontana to turn in all his papers to you and send

them over by courier to me." The White House wanted the briefing papers. Well I'd written on the briefing papers. So I said, "What the heck," and turned them over. I reproduced, from memory, the "Mac" and "Jack" sequence, as much as I could recall, after I gave him the paper. We did not violate the President's order, but I did answer questions when I was asked by Gen Lemnitzer, Gen Shoup, Arleigh Burke. But I did not brief anyone. I just answered questions. As I said, I reproduced the "Mac" and "Jack" paper, from memory and may have given them to the ECU Library, Oral History Library, so I don't have them any more.

Anderson: Well, did you . . . is this story on your tape for ECU?

Fontana: Not exactly like this, and they do have some of my papers. They do not have the other briefing papers that I did not use. All of that stuff's been declassified now.

Anderson: I suppose.

Fontana: They were rated Top Secret at the time, but declassified by now, I'm sure. As far as I know SEATO no longer exists.

So those are the two incidents: fighting the SIOP agreement among the services and President Kennedy's trip to

Key West. We arrived at an acceptable integrated plan for atomic warfare, control of the submarines, aircraft and land-based missiles. The President controls everything; that's the way it turned out, and that's the way it should be. The services maintain the forces. And I've lived at Fort Ritchie, underground, four or five days at a time, each year when we had our atomic warfare command and control exercises. I've also spent many hours on the Silver Dollar, which was the Airborne Command Post out of Andrews Air Force Base during our exercises. And I got to where I briefed the President several other times on various subjects to the point where he recognized me. One time I was at the White House for an NSC meeting. I got there early to set up my charts. The President was walking down the hall and I stood up at attention and said, "Good evening, Mr. President. I'm Brigadier General . . ." He said, "I know who you are, Paul Fontana. We've traveled together." He told Beth that once. We went to a reception at the White House and met Jackie on one occasion. And he told Beth what a fine traveling companion she had. He must have had a terrific memory for names, figures, and facts.

Another memorable instance that I had before that, or maybe it was following that, I don't recall, is when I went to Geneva with Averill Harriman and Dean Rusk as a senior Joint staff representative on the Neutralization of Laos. Unfortunately, for this purpose, ECU may have some papers on

this subject. I was there a month. Secretary of State Dean Rusk came back after about one week. Ambassador Harriman was the senior State Department representative and Mr. Nitze was the senior DOD representative. Mr. Nitze was Deputy Secretary for International Affairs, and Harriman was the Assistant Secretary of State to the Far East.

Anderson: Is that it?

Fontana: Mr. Nitze was with the Department of Defense.

Anderson: He had already been the SecNav when he moved into this job?

Fontana: Yes, right.

Anderson: . . . DOD level.

Fontana: Very fine gent, oh I really liked him; extremely well educated. And Averill Harriman, I liked the old codger. We'd go out to dinner and he'd say, "Well, I think the railroad can pay for this."

Anderson: Yes.

Fontana: Or he would say, "I'll buy the wine tonight."

When I got ready to leave Geneva, I was catching a plane for Paris. Art Adams was going to meet me in Paris. Averill Harriman was feeling well. I went to see him, pay my respects as I was going back. I was called back to the Pentagon. He was in bed reading Mein Kampf. He wanted to talk to me. He said, "Now, when you get back, you go see Jack, and you tell him that we're making progress; slow progress, but we're making progress. And also, when you see Dean, you reassure him that nothing has changed since he was here." Brigadier general to go see "Jack" and go see "Dean?"

Anderson: (Laughing) Yes. You did, didn't you?

Fontana: Of course (Laughter). Yes I went to see them, and both of them saw me. I told them that I was bringing them a message from Mr. Harriman, the Ambassador. Harriman preferred to be addressed as "Governor" rather than "Ambassador"; Governor of New York. And I was bringing this message, and he asked me to personally bring this message back, just a call. Of course, Secretary Rusk knew that I was there because I was there with him. He was there for about a week, ten days, and then he had to come back; pressing business in the United States. When Secretary Rusk came back, Ambassador Harriman came over and relieved him. I was supposed to go see "Jack" and "Dean" and give them these messages. He told

me quite a few things to tell them, and I did, but never addressed the President as "Jack" and Secretary Rusk as "Dean." I wrote the messages down as soon as I got on the airplane. But to make a long story short, I missed my plane to see Art!

Anderson: Oh.

Fontana: So I had to catch the next flight. And I called Art from Geneva, called him at home, and he'd already left to meet the plane. I got Katie on the phone, and she relayed my message, and Art met me later.

But those were the highlights of my Joint staff. I also did some nuts-and-bolts job like everybody else.

Anderson: Were you . . . you weren't under any influence at all from Headquarters Marine Corps in this job. Were there instances when Uncle Dave and others would try to bend you in the direction of Marine Corps policies?

Fontana: I briefed the Joint Chiefs of Staff one day on the same SEATO plan. I had not written the plan. It was not my plan. It had been worked up by joint SEATO nation representatives and approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff before this session. This was just a contingency plan, one of the many contingency plans that we had. I was in my office

no more than half an hour, and I got a call from Gen Wieseman. He said, "The Commandant wants to see you." I said, "When?" and he said, "Right now, if you can make it." I said, "Sure I can make it."

I got in my car, and I drove to Headquarters Marine Corps, and I went in to see Fred Wieseman, and the two of us went in to see Gen Shoup. He didn't even ask me to sit down. He started right out, he said, "Fontana, I want to tell you one thing. You get one Marine involved fighting in southeast Asia, and you've had it!" That shocked me. I said, "But sir, I don't make these plans. I brief them. Any deployment made to southeast Asia has to have your approval." He said, "Yes, I know but you guys on that Joint staff, you go ahead and work up these plans; you sell them to the Secretary of Defense; you sell them to State; you sell them to the President. What chance do we have to turn them down?" I said, "Well, sir, it really doesn't work like that. We don't sell anything until you have put your stamp of approval on it."

Anderson: As the Joint Chiefs.

Fontana: As the Joint Chiefs. "We may see our counterparts and tell them what we're working on, but they're not finished plans." And Gen Wieseman came to my rescue. He said, "He is right, General. You have that responsibility and I'm

your advisor on that. Paul is down at the low level down there in the Pentagon." He said, "I just wanted you to know how I feel. I don't want any Marines involved in southeast Asia. Those guys aren't worth, no one's worth a dead Marine," or words to that effect. He had said that to the Joint Chiefs while in session once. I don't think I'm quoting anything that hasn't been known before.

Anderson: Well, whether he has or not, it's an interesting observation.

Fontana: The Deputy Chief for Plans of the Navy to Arleigh Burke . . . oh, I can't recall his name, not that it makes any difference. He called me one time that he wanted to see me; not Arleigh Burke. I had a wonderful relationship with Adm Burke. Once when Gen Lemnitzer got sick and was hospitalized for almost a month, maybe two weeks but then he was convalescing at home. Arleigh Burke was the senior flag officer on the Joint staff, and he became acting. On many occasions, he took me to the White House with him because, he said, "You know the ropes of the Joint staff." So I went with him to the White House quite a bit in the primarily to the National Security Council meetings; just the in case he needed a back up, which he never did. I was always one of the boys in the back row. I just sat there with my briefcase

full of goodies in case someone asked him a question on some subject that he needed help with. I never opened my mouth.

But his deputy called me one time on the SIOP. He just wanted me to know that under no circumstances would the Navy turn over their nuclear submarines to the Air Force. I said, "Admiral . . .

Anderson: This was the deputy.

Fontana: This was the deputy, a three-star admiral. I said, "Well, Admiral, I would never agree to a thing like that, but I'm just an action general. Adm Burke and the Joint Chiefs are the ones that have the final decision on the subject. He said, "Yes, but you people up there are working up these plans and then you present them as agreed plan of the Joint staff and it's hard for us, then, to break them down. I just want you to know this before you start working on these plans." Yes, I've had pressures, from both the Marine Corps--on several occasions; I mentioned one. And I've had pressure from the Navy on several occasions. And I could understand why they would talk to me. I was an action general and they were absolutely right. If you can influence the action during its formative stage, it's a lot better than having to buck a plan that has been bought by 90 percent of the people, or the participants, or 90 percent of the participants. So I can see the reason for it. I wasn't

really upset. I just wanted them to know that the final decision rested with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and not the Joint staff . . .

Anderson: Exactly, exactly.

Fontana: . . . under the present condition. Now if they change the mission of the Joint staff and the Joint Chiefs that's another thing. But the condition under which we were operating when I was there, I don't care who the generals were, the Chiefs had the final say. When they got in that tank and discussed it amongst themselves, that was the decision that was to go to the Secretary of Defense and the President of the United States.

Anderson: Well, that certainly is the way it continues to work, I feel sure.

Fontana: Gen LeMay was ill, got sick one time, and went to Ramey Air Force Base on Puerto Rico to convalesce. The Air Force had sort of a recreation facility down there. He had bronchitis. He had been in the hospital and then he went down there for a few days. He was gone about two weeks. That's when we were working on the SIOP. And it was almost ready to be accepted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I had briefed the Secretary of Defense McNamara on it. He was a

sharp individual, every bit as sharp as reputed to be. So he didn't need much briefing. He could read a paper and he could just tell you right away what was in the paper in its entirety.

So I was sitting in the tank with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. As I say, I never had a place at the table at any of these meetings that I attended. I was always a back-row boy. And the Secretary said, "Curtis, nice to see you back. You look great. I think that rest down there in the south did you good. Now let me tell you. We have done this and that that you wanted done, and this action in the SIOP you wanted done. That's been accomplished. In targeting, we accomplished this." He repeated himself about four or five times while LeMay was pushing his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. Finally McNamara said, "Well, Curtis, how do you feel about that?" He looked the Secretary of Defense in the eye, and said, "Mr. Secretary, I heard every word you said, and I don't believe any of it."
(Laughter)

Anderson: Is that right?

Fontana: I thought I'd die.

Anderson: Yes. He must have been briefed before he came into the meeting?

Fontana: Sure he was. Sure he was. I think he was briefed while he was down south, while he was away from the tank, constantly briefed, on a daily basis. He knew what was going on. It was a compromise; that's really what it was, a compromise. Well you have to compromise. When you come to that level, no one service can have it entirely as that service wants it.

Anderson: That's right, that's right.

Fontana: The other services feel they have a stake in the security of the United States. They have forces involved. They're looking out for their own forces, and they're just as loyal Americans as anyone else. There's never any question about that, of course.

Anderson: Sure.

Fontana: But Ole LeMay, that fellow was something else. I rather enjoyed him. The Joint Chiefs went to Omaha for a meeting once, and because I was a SIOP action general, I went with them. We were in a KC-737, plush 737, one of their command planes. The Navy OpDep at that time was Adm Jim Russell, a very well-known, capable aviator.

Fontana: Anyway, Jim was flying the airplane. LeMay took it off at Andrews; when he got it to altitude he turned it over to the Adm Jim Russell. Then he came back and he said to me, "How are you enjoying this, General?" And I said, "Oh, it's a wonderful airplane. It really is great." He said, "Yes, but your boss doesn't think so. Your boss won't buy any of this size." And Shoup's sitting down over there, Shoup and Freddy Wieseman. I said, "Well, we really don't need an airplane like this, sir. We need other kinds of airplanes. We believe in air power, but a different kind of air power."

I've told so many funny stories I'm going to tell just this one and this is the last one I'm going to tell about the Joint staff. It was the day before the Army-Navy game. The Chiefs are meeting. We had sort of a loquacious Army colonel around the Joint staff who was a guy who just talked to anybody about anything; very outgoing. This one day, we're standing near the entrance of the tank and Gen LeMay shows up and this Army colonel says, "General, who do you favor in the Army-Navy game this year?" Gen LeMay looked at him for about five seconds and said, "I hope they both lose."

Anderson: (Laughter) That's a beauty.

Fontana: Those were the days before the Air Force had its own academy.

Anderson: Own academy, yes.

Fontana: "I hope they both lose."

Anderson: (Laughter) Well, they were powerful people.

Fontana: Let's stop and take a break, Norm . . .

Anderson: Okay.

Fontana: . . . because we're at the end, now, of my career in the Joint staff.

Anderson: Alright.

End Tape 2/I, Side B

Begin Tape 3/I, Side A

Anderson: We've talked about the Joint staff experiences. What was your assignment following the Washington duty?

Fontana: I had an interview with Gen Shoup, and he informed me that he was going to send me to Cherry Point to command the air station, against the advice of many general officers with whom he had talked. His general officers advised him,

after coming back from the Joint staff like that, I should have a position of greater responsibility than commanding an air station, and that by sending me to Cherry Point he was giving me, literally, the kiss of death. He asked me if I thought I was getting the kiss of death. I told him no, I did not really think I was being given the kiss of death. I would try to do the best job I could at Cherry Point.

So, I came . . . Oh, he also said, "If you're selected . . . You're in line to be selected for major general. If you're selected for major general, I will make sure you're going to relieve Gen Mangrum with the wing." I couldn't ask for more. I came down to Cherry Point, served one year, was selected for major general and relieved Gen Mangrum of the wing in 1963 even though I was not promoted to major general until the following year. After serving one year as the wing commander, which I thoroughly enjoyed, I was ordered to command the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing in Vietnam . . . in Japan. I asked Gen Greene, who had succeeded Gen Shoup as Commandant of the Marine Corps, if he would frock me. In early April or May, when everyone above me had been promoted and a vacancy existed (I was the last one on the promotion list), I felt that it would give the Marine Corps a greater status if I was a major general at Cherry Point, commanding the wing, rather than a brigadier general. Gen Greene said no he would not, that was not his policy of frocking, that I would be promoted to major general when I

left the continental United States to take over the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing in Japan.

I flew my own KC-130, with the commanding general's permission, from Cherry Point to El Toro and RONd there that night. The next morning I transferred to a west coast C-130 for trip onward to Hawaii. As I departed El Toro, Gen Kier and his wife appeared, and Gen Kier said, "I have a job to do. I read the message transferring you to command the 1st Wing, that you will be frocked upon departure from the United States, and I'm going to promote you to major general." With that, he pinned two stars on me, and then I boarded the plane. I arrived in Hawaii; I was met by Gen Krulak and the first thing he noticed was two stars because he also had two stars for me in his pocket. And he said, "Who did that?" And I informed him that Gen Kier had. Needless to say, he was not a bit happy. He felt that was a prerogative he should have had, as Hawaii was by then a state. I was reporting to him, and he should have promoted me. After some briefings in Hawaii I went out and took over the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing from Frank Tharin.

We continued our routine . . .

Anderson: Who? From . . .

Fontana: Frank Tharin.

Anderson: From Frank Tharin.

Fontana: Gen Tharin. I had relieved him at Cherry Point as the station commander and now I was relieving him in the Far East as wing commander. We continued our routine training in Japan until the spring of '45 when the situation arose.

Anderson: '65.

Fontana: '65, excuse me, '65 when the Tonkin Gulf conflict started. Up until that time we had a reinforced helicopter squadron at Da Nang in support of the South Vietnamese troops and the military advisors serving with them, known as Operation SHUFLY. This had been going on for quite some time.

When the order came to deploy III MAF's amphibious brigade, to Vietnam, MAG-11, commanded by Col Bob Conley, was also deployed. The first squadron deployed was extremely ready; it was commanded by LtCol McGraw. I had helped supervise the training of that squadron early, at Cherry Point, when I was a wing commander. They had an outstanding squadron. We positioned the unit at Kadena, Okinawa. We knew that the message to execute was coming, so we deployed the squadron at Kadena, Okinawa, so when the order to execute was received the squadron was already halfway to Da Nang. They landed within an hour and a half after receiving the

message. A message was sent by LtCol McGraw, "Arrived." Everyone wanted to know how he had accomplished that trip from Atsugi, Japan to Da Nang in such a short time.

Anderson: (Laughter) That's right, he was the first . . . his was the first F-4B to be deployed from Cherry Point. And he went out there and became a squadron in MAG-11 and was the first in-country squadron to enter Vietnam.

Fontana: About an hour and a half after the execute order was received.

Anderson: That's pre-planning at its best. (Laughter)

Fontana: It is well known how events later dictated to deploy III MAF in Vietnam and Chu Lai was selected as a site for MAG-12. A SATS airfield was constructed at Chu Lai which proved to be, at best, not very satisfactory. The Seabees had trouble stabilizing the ground with their chemicals that they had--oil, macadam, whatever it was. I was told, because of the salinity of the sand, that it would not mix and therefore did not form a very good base for the metal landing strip to be supported. However, the Seabees did construct a 4000-foot strip with taxiway, parking ramp and MAG-12 was deployed to Chu Lai from Iwakuni. The 1st Marine Aircraft Wing now had both of its groups and a helicopter squadron

in Vietnam. When III MAF, Advanced Element deployed to Vietnam, I deployed the Advance Element of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. This was in May of 1945.

Anderson: Of '65.

Fontana: '65. I don't know why I say '45. '65, thank you for correcting me.

Anderson: This was May of '65, and you went into Da Nang airfield. Did you establish the 1st Wing headquarters, Advanced, at Da Nang then?

Fontana: That's correct.

Anderson: And III MAF--I guess was . . . yes, III MAF--across the river in the town of . . .

Fontana: No, at that time we all (1st MAF and III MAF) superimposed ourselves over the SHUFLY facilities. We put up a lot of tents, but III MAF occupied the building across the street from the airstrip facility that was constructed by the SHUFLY group. We erected frame tents alongside the SHUFLY group which at that time was MAG-16, a helicopter group, reinforced. And we started our operations.

Gen Greene had made a trip through the area shortly before we deployed to Da Nang, and while in Okinawa, informed the assembled generals and some senior colonels that some shifts in personnel were about to take place. Gen Walt was to relieve Gen Collins at III MAF, and Gen McCutcheon, who was then my assistant wing commander, was to relieve me at 1st MAW. This was not anticipated by me because I still had some time left before rotating to CONUS. I had figured I still had about three months to do on my tour. When I questioned Gen Greene . . . Of course Gen Greene never mentioned this to me when he stayed with me for one or two nights in Iwakuni, never said a word. I did not find this out until I got into Vietnam and I was informed by the ground generals there what the plan was. Needless to say, I was a little bit upset with Gen Greene. I sent a message requesting his reconsideration and to leave me in country and designate me as commander of III MAF. Gen Greene said that he had already selected Gen Walt to be the commander of III MAF. I was senior to Walt. So that there wouldn't be any command embarrassment, I would be relieved before Gen Collins, the III MAF commander, was relieved (Gen Collins had been in the Far East three months longer than I had). Gen Walt was frocked to two stars; at that time I was a permanent two-star general. He tried to soothe my feelings with such nonsense that my knowledge and expertise was needed urgently at the Marine Corps Schools.

Needless to say, I was not happy. Many thoughts occurred as to what alternatives I had. I volunteered to extend my overseas tour if I could be the MAF commander. That request was denied. I asked for 60 days' leave, but that was also denied. The Commandant informed me that he could not grant me 60 days, but that I would get 30 days' leave and was due to be in Quantico on the 4th of July. I called my wife, told her to catch the first plane for Tokyo, that we were going to go around the world on a 30-day trip. I instructed Keith McCutcheon to come to Da Nang and take over the advance echelon of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, and I returned to Iwakuni to prepare for the change of command. I turned over command to Gen McCutcheon on the 3d of June and started my trip around the world with my wife, who had arrived by Pan Am to Tokyo. I reported in to Quantico for duty at 11:00 pm on the 4th of July, which was my reporting-in date.

Anderson: Well, I don't know whether you want to make any further comments about that peculiar way of handling the command problems in III MAF. It would be interesting to elaborate on it, but that's a matter of . . . Were you able to develop a rationale for all this that you'd be happy to explain?

Fontana: No, I don't think it would serve any useful purpose for me to continue on this subject.

Anderson: Okay.

Fontana: I did report into Quantico. Gen Wieseman, with whom I'd served as chief of staff in the 1st Marine Brigade, in Hawaii, was the commanding general. He served for one year. It was a very enjoyable assignment, challenging, entirely different from what I'd been accustomed to in the educational environment.

Anderson: You were running the Ed Center then?

Fontana: I was at the Ed Center. And the following year, Gen Wieseman was relieved by LtGen Masters, with whom I'd attended the National War College. I had a pleasant tour under him.

After three years, I was detached from the Ed Center and assigned to Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, as deputy commander of FMFPac. That was not a happy assignment. I did not have a job. I had two responsibilities. One was the senior member of the Awards and Decorations Board, and the other was overseeing the comptroller to make sure that his arithmetic was correct. All the recommendations were made by the chief of staff to the commanding general, and I was very seldom consulted. I made several attempts to get the billet abolished, both to Gen Buse and the Commandant (who at that

time was Gen Chapman), but I was not successful. (As a point of interest, that billet no longer exists.)

Anderson: Who was the chief of staff?

Fontana: Lou Wilson, BGen Wilson.

Anderson: You were really sandwiched.

Fontana: I was sandwiched?

Anderson: Sandwiched.

Fontana: No, I was not sandwiched. I was a wart over on a limb. There was one social entrance into the commanding general's office. That was by my side of the office. There was one business entrance to the commanding general's office, and that was through the chief of staff's office. And of course I had the very important job of determining whether a person should get a Bronze Star Medal or whether he or she should get a Commendation Ribbon. Those were big decisions I had to make, and I made them for 20 months.

At the end of 20 months I was called by Gen Chapman and informed that, because of my age, he could not recommend me for three stars. I wasn't a bit surprised that my age effected my promotions because he had promoted, I think,

every two-star general out of the class of '35 and he had also extended Gen Buse another year and had recently extended and promoted Gen Tharin to three stars. So, in reality there weren't any vacancies.

So I was assigned to command Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, and Marine Corps Bases, Eastern Area, a job that I'd held as a brigadier general in 1962. I served three years before my retirement, 30 June, 1973, due to the fact that the year before I was to retire--or the year in which I was to retire, the Marine Corps, by Navy statute and regulation, had to have a selection board, a selection-out board. There were four of us, major generals, and the board was convened to select two to be retained for another year. I was one of the two retained to be offered another year, and consequently I remained at Cherry Point an extra year; and only for that reason, not because of the magnificent job I was doing.

Anderson: Was Orm Simpson the other retained?

Fontana: Orm Simpson was the other one, and he was . . .

Anderson: And he was promoted to three stars, wasn't he?

Fontana: Well, he was promoted to three stars before he

went to Washington. The Secretary of the Navy promoted him. By that I mean, the Secretary of the Navy selected him.

Anderson: What job was that? Was he Director of Personnel?

Fontana: He had Manpower and Personnel.

Anderson: Manpower, yes, okay. I had forgotten that.

Fontana: Orm Simpson was one of the "old" men that could not be promoted, until the Secretary of the Navy made a trip to Parris Island. That's where Orm Simpson was; he had the recruit depot at Parris Island. And the Secretary was so impressed (so I've been informed by a very reliable source) that when he returned to Washington, or shortly thereafter, Orm Simpson was relieved of his job at Parris Island, ordered to Washington and promoted to three stars. He was one of those that was retained an extra year.

In conclusion, I can say that I've had a wonderful career in the Marine Corps. I really had good fortune. I've been blessed with outstanding help and of course, to have fought three wars and be able to talk about requires an awful lot of luck.

Anderson: I know you never stayed . . . you never stayed out of harm's way intentionally.

Fontana: No, no, not intentionally. In fact, I was very fortunate; I got into the fracas fairly early both in World War II, Korea, and in Vietnam.

Anderson: Yup, yup.

Fontana: Flown combat missions in all three wars. As I say, I've just been lucky. Not too many people can be that fortunate. I regret that I was not given an opportunity to assume greater responsibility than I received after I had been at the Education Center for two years. I think I should have been transferred at that time to a more important job and not put out on the farm, to pasture so to speak. And that's exactly what happened to me. Just pleasant aging to retirement days, but that's the way things happen in this world. I'm very thankful for the career I've had.

Anderson: And now you're here in your selected area of retirement . . .

Fontana: Correct.

Anderson: . . . surrounded by good people that you . . .

Fontana: Yes.

Anderson: . . . always enjoyed. I think that's one of the great things in a Marine Corps career.

Fontana: The day after I retired I became a member of the board of directors of Carolina Telephone and Telegraph; a very fine group of gentlemen. I'm on the board of directors of the National Bank of North Carolina. I serve on the Scholarship Foundation of the Craven Community College. I serve, have served for nine years, on the Craven County Industrial Development Commission. Since shortly after my arrival in Cherry Point in '70, I've been a member of the East Carolina Council of Boy Scouts. I've been its vice president for four years. I've been the East Carolina Council representative to the National Council of Boy Scouts for six years. All of these have been very rewarding assignments that have made my stay in North Carolina very enjoyable.

Anderson: Well, it's nice to be able to continue to serve in other capacities, do good things. Well I must also say that you provide a wonderful haven for your friends from Norfolk.

Fontana: (Laughter) We're delighted to have you all over. We're delighted, Norm, to have you and Irene. The door's

open, the mat is out and you know that. The golf course is there to challenge you and hopefully the hospitality . . .

Anderson: The hospitality is just too much, and we really can't be down here frequently enough. But thank you, Paul, for these reminiscences and all these well-chosen and interesting experiences which I think future generations of Marines are going to be very happy to know about.

Fontana: If nothing else, it should prove amusing. Thank you, Norm, for the opportunity to express my views and tell about my experiences.

End of Interview

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