Brown Vietnam Veterans Oral History Project
Narrator: Robert Seiple
Interviewer: Elizabeth Taylor
Date: May 9, 2011
Location: John Hay Library
[Edited in [BRACKETS] by Robert Seiple, September 2011]

Taylor: So this is Monday May 9th 2011. This is Beth Taylor and I am interviewing Bob Seiple. So why don't you begin at the beginning Bob and tell us a little bit about where you came from and why you came to Brown.

Seiple: Well I applied to three different colleges, Delaware, Rutgers, and then was encouraged to apply to Brown through a football coach, one of the Brown coaches, and got into all three of them and the choice then became very easy because Brown had the distinction far above what the other two could command. And I came here in 1961, the fall of '61, graduated in '65, 1965, and found Brown many, many miles—in terms of social norms, in terms of intellectualism, in terms of the size of the pond and the size of the fish—then the small high school I attended back in New Jersey, the small town of Harmony, which is a place that had, at that time, absolutely no stop signs, let alone a stoplight, a place that had and continues to have more cows than people—Holsteins. And this was a stretch for me. Obviously I made the right choice to come but it was a very difficult transition, especially in the classroom, and especially writing. They had a required course for those who didn't write very well in just basic writing skills. Most people got out after the end of the first semester. I was a three-semester person in that program and it was my most frustrating time. After I passed at the end of the first semester sophomore year that was one of the happier moments. It probably left me fairly scarred for writing for the rest of my life. Although people have told me that I write well, I think back to that Brown experience. No one here ever said that to me. But I chose Brown because it was the obvious choice over the three. Pembroke was Pembroke and we were separate. I think the other thing that would be kind of surprising today—I only knew one black student when I was here and he was a member of our football team. I remember him [MEL] Bryant who must have—be interesting to talk with him in terms of his experience at Brown because he was the only one we all knew. So this was a place that still had chapel. You still wore [NECK…] ties to dinner, but it was changing. It would change dramatically by the end of the 60s, 1969 and the so-called 'new curriculum,' where the deans and the academic types basically turned and looked at the kids and said, "we want to be like you, dress like you, talk like you, think like you, and essentially capitulate the educational process to whatever you tell us you want to do." That was kind of a sad time but I was probably closer to the class that graduated in 1950 than I was to the group that graduated in 1970. When I came back to work here in '71 I was amazed at the transformation that had taken place in those few short years—dramatic transformation. Not all of it good and a lot of the traditions were gone and we were trying to be, I think, tradition free and open and wild and crazy and it was a different kind of place.

Taylor: At that point you were an assistant athletic director or athlete?

[0:04:34]

Seiple: I came back as an admission officer. I worked with Charlie Debbler[DOEBLER], who was the dean of admission when I was an undergrad. He is the closest thing I ever had to a mentor, and not the closest thing. He was my mentor. I am very fond of him and kind of worshiped the ground he walked on. Charlie was class of 1948 and an amazing person, amazing vocabulary, amazing mind. I enjoyed him. We spent a lot of time together. So I started out when I came back—he had just left to start his own program. He was a little bit upset, I think, that the traditions were being lost at Brown, so it was time to go. So I started under Jim Rogers as an admission officer and a year later, a year and a half later I became assistant athletic director and then a couple years after that Andy Geiger left to go to the University of Pennsylvania and at the age of thirty-two I became athletic director. Something that pertains to the Vietnam experience, when we had all this time on our hands, which you do when you are flying/not flying in Vietnam—we would sit around and basically go through the exercise of what do you want to be when you grow up and I decided that probably the highest thing that I could attain and would enjoy would be an athletic director of a Division One school, and then it happened at the age of thirty-two. And by the age of thirty-five I realized, sitting up in the stands on a Saturday afternoon watching an activity being played out on probably three thousand campuses on the same day, knowing my emotional highs and lows would be determined for the week by what happened to a bunch of nineteen years olds I realized, intellectually I realized that this had some shortcomings and I went and talked to Howard Swearer about three years into my time there, and by the way, one of the best jobs I ever had was athletic director, but talked to him about coming to work in development, fundraising, which is something I vowed I would never do, and I had a great experience there. We raised a lot of money for Brown, at the time, and set a new course. I became the vice president, on the way, of development and the head of their capital campaign, which was the thing that kind of propelled me into other positions the rest of my life because if you can raise money you are never unemployed.

Taylor: And now you are the head of the Global—?

Seiple: Well I am retired but my wife and I started, after I left the state department—started something called the institute for global engagement.

Taylor: State Department came after—fill in that gap—director of development, then—

Seiple: I was the vice president for development at Brown, from which I went to Eastern College and Seminary and became the president of the college and the seminary. I was there for four years and then got a call through another Brown alum, Chuck Coulson, to candidate for the position of president of World Vision, which was and is today the largest private relief and development agency in the world, and obviously accepted that when it was offered to me. Did that for eleven years and then went to the State Department, became the first Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. I did that for two years. I wanted to get out before the end of the Clinton term. I didn't want my time to be associated with a political party, basically [A POX…] on both their houses and so I left when I thought we had a critical mass in place and started with my wife the Institute for Global Engagement which works in the area of religious freedom. It's a think tank with legs, which is to say we do a lot of reflection and

writing and so on—presenting the points of view—but also it's tied to operationally how things happen in the field. And we wanted to make sure that our faith would work in difficult places so we went to work in places like Laos and China and Vietnam, Uzbekistan, Pakistan—all the tough places, and had enormous success at it, primarily because we were willing to spend as much time as it took to develop relationships of trust. Politicians can't do that.

Taylor: Give examples of what you actually did in these countries to manifest religious freedom.

[0:09:57]

Seiple: Every one of these countries would have a religious affairs bureau, especially the communist countries. They all follow the same model and for the most part you can tell a great deal about a country's attitude towards human rights by how it treats it's minorities and religion is a minority. In Asia you have Buddhism and Hinduism but the Christians would be the minority. In other places, like in India, the Muslims would be the minority. And of course you get smaller groups, like Jehovah's Witnesses and so on that are minorities regardless of where you go. And our job was to try to get folks to initially grab onto their own vested interest and realize why this was important for them to embrace. And it basically came down to security issues. If a minority or person in a society feels their government has their best interest at heart, a lot of times that is portrayed as allowing them to worship as they want to worship, believe what they want to believe. If they have their best interest at heart they will be loyal to the government and when there is loyalty there is stability. When there is stability there is security. In the Maslow system of what comes first for the communist it has always been security and especially after 9/11 and the rise of the global terrorism—security. So we had peoples' attention that way. We built the trust between them. An example is Laos. I have been going to Laos since 1989. They know our kids. They have stayed at our home. We used to have a Lao day where we put up the Lao flag and we told the Embassy in Washington, you know, this is your DACHA]. You don't have what the Russians have down around the corner but this is your Dachau. Over time those relationships create the kind of trust where they will try to take you at your word. I have spoken at conferences, at keynoted conferences of religious freedom. They have asked me to speak on why this is important to Americans, religious freedom, why it is important internationally, and they have written their own religious freedom legislation that we have been asked to input to. Major strides have taken place. Now it's never easy and it's easy for people to fall back into a secular, communist, authoritative mindset but we have had great success in those parts of the world and I think it's a methodology that works. We essentially work top down and bottom up, which was a methodology that we discovered. When I left World Vision, we had spent all our time in the grassroots, the trenches, in the churches. When I went to work at the State Department we spent all of our time with ambassadors and presidents, and so on. So the question was how do you steward the relationships that you have? You had them uniquely in the bottom and at the top, and we decided, well let's work top down and bottom up concurrently, and it turned out to be a fantastic methodology that has gotten that organization where it is today.

Taylor: Good. Now I want to come back full circle to any final comments you want to make about what Brown was like at the time and then just narrate for us the evolution into training as a pilot in Vietnam and your experiences there.

Seiple: Well let me answer the question my happiest memory, since I still remember it, but my freshman year we couldn't play varsity football then and the varsity lost all nine games and the big cheer was everybody up for the kickoff because they were always kicking OFF] and it was a tough, tough year to watch the varsity. My sophomore year our first game was at Colgate and as a sophomore I had to make the traveling squad and I wasn't sure I could make it because they only took the top three people at each position. I worked hard to do that, never expected to play—long and short of it, we got up to Colgate and played a game that I was in, maybe, for four or five minutes but I was part of the scoring drive, caught four passes, including the touch down pass and we won six to two and I got the game ball, which is still on my desk at home. I was walking on air. This was something that you cannot script. This is just—I remember the next Monday going out, working out. I felt fantastic. Of course I only played a few minutes but felt fantastic. I started, after that, every game.

[0:15:15]

We had people going—we had riots on campus. We had people going down the tunnel the wrong way.

Taylor: Celebrating.

Seiple: Celebrating. When the buses came back, maybe it was the airplane came back, but anyway, there was a great celebration on campus.

Taylor: This is fall of 1962?

Seiple: '62. Yeah. So that was the happiest memory here. I didn't have any sad memories, except perhaps the fact that no one liked my writing style. They always thought I was sermonizing, which I probably was. My faith was and is important and I never had to argue it into existence until I came to Brown. So the articulation and the formation of faith to someone else, the real skeptic, was not something I ever wrestled with in Harmony, New Jersey. We all read the same Bible, underlined the same notes, went to the same church, and—

Taylor: So did your studies at Brown complicate your upbringing, the thinking of your upbringing, or did it solidify the struggles with the writing, moving from sermonizing to whatever?

Seiple: I think the real component in the background of all this is that I went to school—like a lot of schools in the country, a hundred and seventeen in our class, which was large for some, I guess, but not for most. And if you compare the kind of teaching I was getting and responding to, to someone who went to Scarsdale or something like that, its just—you had to play a lot of catch up. If I had gone to Blair Academy maybe it would have been different, but my family didn't send their kids to boarding to school, didn't send their kids to different high schools—and we were the first ones to go to college in the family, so my mom and dad never went to college.

Taylor: So any other academic experiences at Brown that you remember pushing you in a new direction or in a way that confirmed how you had been raised?

Seiple: Well I thought about religious studies but I didn't find anybody in religious studies that believed in the Bible so it was very much an academic approach to religion as opposed to one of personal embracing the god of history and the Christ of Calvary. It was very different so I didn't do that although I had an advisor from religious studies, and ultimately gravitated towards American literature because if I am going to get through this place I am going to have to do something that I like. I liked to read. I liked the reading lists that these courses had. So then, you know, I did well in my major and I was a dean's list student, but boy it didn't start out that way. It was—

Taylor: So you were an English major?

Seiple: American literature, yeah.

Taylor: Yeah. Great. Okay. So were you in ROTC while you were here or was that a choice after Brown?

Seiple: We still had a ROTC program here. I wasn't in it but there was a Marine major who was just a very good salesman and I went to see him when I had decided to—I graduated. I went to Europe for the summer and met my wife on a boat coming back, my wife to be—but also was met with a letter from my draft board saying that—

Taylor: This is 1965?

Seiple: This is 1965, the summer of '65. So I didn't want to be drafted so I decided I would go into the service on my own. The choice of the Marines were because they seemed to be the best. It's not just because they have great uniforms. They just took things seriously and anybody can go into the Army and the Navy. So I decided to go into the Marine Corps. I called home and told my folks. My brother was there and he said, "Well, I'll go to." And that was probably his—it basically came down to this major at Brown. And they give you a test and then they tell you—and I am sure they used the same line for the last thirty-five years—

Taylor: This is after you have graduated you come back to speak with the major or you had already spoken with him while you were on campus?

Seiple: I came back at the end of the summer of '65 and worked for four months in the Brown admission office.

Taylor: That's when you came back.

Seiple: Yeah.

Taylor: Okay.

[0:20:08]

Seiple: And Charlie Debble[DOEBLER]r knew that he wasn't going to have me here long. I went over and talked to the major and they gave us this exam and he told me how spectacularly successful I had answered the questions. The only reason I mention that is because my youngest son, you know, thirty years later was told how spectacularly he had answered the questions. So the recruiting persuasion hadn't changed for the Marine Corps.

Taylor: Do you remember what kinds of questions they asked on that exam?

Seiple: No, no.

Taylor: Was it an academic or a military or—

Seiple: It was basically an academic test. It was a test of knowledge and I don't know what you needed to pass but I think everybody—they were looking for people in the Marine Corps at that time. I went through OCS, Officer Candidate School, at Quantico starting in January of '66 and was commissioned in March of '66. My first lieutenant promotion was backdated ultimately to 1 July '66, so I essentially was there in grade for three months and then made captain when I was in Vietnam and all this happened quickly because people were being killed and people were getting out so they needed people. It's not that everyone felt—made us feel like we were needed, your drill instructors and so on. They marched to a different drummer. There was a lot of turmoil in the services then because they were upgrading to five hundred and some thousand in Vietnam and they were putting new airplanes on line and new squadrons on line and ours was relatively new in the A-6. It was a new airplane at that time.

Taylor: Can you give an example or two of the turmoil when you were in the service? It's a transition time. They are gearing up for war.

Seiple: Well in 1968, for example, depending on what figures you use, somewhere between ten and fourteen thousand Americans were killed. That's a figure that is not often thought of.

Taylor: So the turmoil you are referring to is the 1968 and beyond. Veterans often talk about that as a watershed year, that the military experience before then is different than the military experience after 1968. This turmoil you are referring to is similar—

Seiple: The turmoil that I am referring to is tied to the fact that people who could get out so they didn't have to go to Vietnam got out. People who went to Vietnam died in substantial numbers, relative to what's happening in Iraq or Afghanistan today. So that turmoil was obviously taking place and at the time the United States was trying to build up its forces. If you were remember between Lyndon Johnson and General Westmoreland it was always a few more troops, a few more this, a few more whatever and we will bring the bacon home or the crews can head home. Well Tet changed all that, the Tet Offensive of '68. Psychologically it was a major, major change, and then ultimately they went to an all-volunteer—I don't know what the year was for that but that was, in my mind, a major change. When you got to an all-volunteer service you

had different kinds of people with different kinds of skill sets staying much longer and it was much healthier. We were trying to create an armed force in the middle of the drug culture, the late 60s, and they were fragging incidents and all kinds of negative spillover in the—

Taylor: Well when you first went in in '65, '66, '67, that had not really yet happened.

Seiple: No. It was basically towards the—I think a combination of Tet and the increase in these incidents, especially with troops that were stationary. Now we had a couple hundred enlisted folks servicing our squadron. They stayed in one spot in Da Nang. Stationary people began to find ways to get what they needed—their drug of choice or their woman of choice or whatever while they were stationed there.

[0:25:18]

Taylor: So lets come back to some of your very specific memories of training, of going, of affect on young wife, babies being born. Just try to get back into your own personal journey in those years.

Seiple: Well the Marine Corps OCS program at Quantico was ten weeks and then you get commissioned. I, interestingly or stupidly, gave a way all of my electronics gear, anything that had a plug on it, because I thought that if you joined the Marine Corps then you lived in a tent until you got out. I didn't realize that there was some modern conveniences. I also didn't realize how tough the transition would be and I would say for the first three days I felt that I had made a huge mistake and it was irreparable. And it was very depressing. And then I began to enjoy the cadence of it all, the emphasis on discipline, the physical things, which were very easy for me at that time, the marching, which had a nice structure for a [TYPE A PERSONALITY…], and I enjoyed that and ultimately finished those ten weeks as platoon honor man. I finished third out of a class that started at two hundred and forty eight. Unfortunately the person who finished second was from Harvard, but enough of that.

Taylor: Now that's exactly the kind of specifics we like.

Seiple: He was a nice guy.

Taylor: That says it all.

Seiple: He was a nice guy. I have no idea what his name was but at the time I got to know him a little bit. We reminisced. But then, in the middle of that, I had a chance to apply for the aviation side of things and I was always a physical person, a runner, those kinds of things, and I think I would have done fairly well as an infantry officer but I saw the aviation aspect as another education that I would be stupid to give up on or not take advantage of if it were offered. I took a test and took some eye tests. The long and short of that is that my eyes weren't good enough for a pilot. I had something from birth on one of the eyes [A TERGIUM] or whatever they call it and so I was told I could go in but I would have to be a Naval aviator but it would be either in the F-4, the Phantom jet, which is what I wanted—sitting in the backseat—or the A-6 where you sit side by side. The Marines, for being what it is, everything I asked for they gave

me something else. I wanted to go to the west coast, they gave me the east coast. I wanted F-4. I got A-6, and so on. And my wife came to graduation. I had met her on that boat coming back from Europe and she liked me enough to attend graduation and we spent the next week together in a district of my folks—their home in Harmony—and we decided to get married. And we had been together a grand total of thirteen days when we got married, which is not something that I would recommend for anybody but we just celebrated our forty-fifth wedding anniversary and it seems to be working. She came to that and then I went to pre-flight at Pensacola Florida, the Naval air station there, which is a five week course and a navigation course which is sixteen weeks happened the weekend after. So I had one free weekend, which was basically a Friday night til Sunday night, and we got married down there. We had a military wedding and we had cross swords. I made a lot of friends in a hurry, made them come to the wedding. I think there were thirty-three people at our wedding. We just returned to NAS Pensacola and went to the chapel and took some pictures and so on—where we used to live, our first place. So we were married. There was a war on. I was in training and there was no question in anybody's mind, my wife or mine, that as soon as the training was done I would get into a squadron and be sent overseas.

[0:30:05]

Taylor: Did she have any responses to knowing this? She obviously was walking in open eyed, clear eyed.

Seiple: You know, one of these things we didn't know—you don't know.

Taylor: But didn't you—you knew you were going to go to Vietnam.

Seiple: Yeah. We knew we wanted to get married. We didn't know what going to Vietnam meant. I wanted to go to Vietnam. I wanted to go the first chance I got and I did. I got through the training command, through the steps, and I was one of the first in that class of OCS guys to get orders to Vietnam on the aviators' side. This was about, let's see, this was October of '67, so we had been married a year and a half and she was pregnant. The memory of going to Vietnam was saying goodbye to her on the tarmac in Moline, Illinois. She is an Iowa girl, but flew out of Moline six months pregnant, pouring down rain, waving at these little windows of an airplane that was taking me first to the west coast, then to the Philippines, Okinawa, and then—. I think for the first time I had a sense of what thirteen months would mean. Our son was born, January the 5th of '68, Chris. He ultimately went in the Marines for nine years. The Marines are very important to him, both professionally and also, I think, in terms of the father-son relationship, but he was born when I was there, had a little note from the Red Cross, "Mother and child doing fine," and he was ten months when I got home. So we did meet for R & R in Hawaii. We weren't going to do that. We were going to save all of our money and enjoy each other when we got home, and I think I was over there a week and decided that no, we would have an R & R together, somewhere, sometime. So she brought Chris, who was three months old at the time—three or four months old. She brought him with her and—

Taylor: So that was the first time you had seen him?

Seiple: Yeah, yeah. So that has been one of those long going sagas. He was in Vietnam—he went to Vietnam with the Institute for Global Engagement and came back with a piece of the runway. He brought me a piece of the runway that they are tearing up to restore and he has always thought of himself as kind of a child of that whole part of history. I hate to say like Patton—used to think back to the 1066 and all that—but that's just the way he thinks. I remember we were—I was working at Brown and living up here at 12 Keene Street, working in the admission office, and when we told him—he was three or four at the time—that when he was born I was ten thousand miles away he cried and cried and cried. I thought, "Gee, we are bad parents. These are things we—." I don't know why it tripped that. I don't know what came over but that was a very meaningful thing to him that I was not there when he was born and Vietnam became a big thing. And interesting, as part of this Institute for Global Engagement—he is now the president—and I asked him to take that role because he is smarter, much more of a scholar to say the least, and much more energy than I ever had, and he has done great things. But one of them is going back to Vietnam and he is basically the Vietnamese ambassador, with a portfolio but no credentials except trust, representing them in Washington D.C. He basically said, "If you want to get out of this morass that you are in, if you want to get rid of the black eye, because you have got a lousy human rights record, you need some supporting cast, some help people, help mates in Washington, and you need to trust me enough that when I tell you to do something to do it." That's the role he plays. He plays that role with a number of countries.

[0:35:08]

He is not paid by those countries to play those roles. That's just part of working top down, bottom up. So the Vietnam thing never ended. I went back—I am jumping ahead here then, but I went back in 1988 for the first time with World Vision and we began a ministry there of—started basically in healthcare and over the next ten years just put tens of millions of dollars worth of healthcare into that country.

Taylor: So these are all donations or funding grants?

Seiple: Donations. Some of them from the government. The first grant that the government ever gave to Vietnam came through World Vision to work on artificial limbs, arms, legs, so on.

Taylor: Prosthesis.

Seiple: Prosthesis. And the—is shining in your eyes. Yeah, that came through World Vision, so I started going back in '88, went to Hanoi and Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City, and then in 1989 we went back for the first time to Da Nang, and that is all chronicled in the book, my—reflections, the book that I wrote called *The Mission Piece*.[A MISSING PEACE]

Taylor: Let's go back to going to Vietnam the first time around.

Seiple: Yeah.

Taylor: --And memories and what your jobs actually were.

Seiple: Well again, I was excited. My mother was very unexcited and a lot of this I write about but the day that we left for Quantico—this was not Vietnam. This was just to go down to join the Marines. She did something that we never really did too much of. She wanted to read the Bible before we left, after breakfast, and she was reading from Psalm 91 and she got to that place, "a thousand will fall at your right hand and ten thousand at your…but it will not come nigh," and she just broke down. And she was a very strong, just a wonderful mother. So I said, "Mom, you look terrible when you cry. You cannot do that to us." We were depressed for about a week down in Quantico, but to her that was—we were—by the way there was also a brother-in-law in this same OCS class—became a brother-in-law we fixed up with my sister, my older sister. He became an infantry officer, was over there at the same time my brother Bill was. I overlapped just a little bit, maybe, my brother basically stayed a couple extra weeks so he could meet him. When I came in I had a longer training program than the grunts had and then he came home and then, finally, I came home, and I remember coming back to the house and the first thing she said to me, " Can I cry now?"

Taylor: Did you say, "Yes, it's okay"?

Seiple: It's okay. If mothers had the deciding vote we would never go to war. We would never go to war. She had—there was twenty-six solid months where she had someone she loved in harm's way and I know World War Two mothers can top that but in Vietnam, normally you were there for thirteen months and that was it, but there was—so twenty-six months and three purple hearts later, there was—my brother got a purple heart, my brother-in-law got two purple heart—we were all safe home. And I understand this. We have a son in the Marine Corps now who is thirty-five. He is on limited duty because he got his shoulder out of whack, but as soon as the shoulder is fixed he gets deployed and I can see the impact it is having on my wife. We just watch these things unfold with lots of memories, as the generations seem to repeat themselves.

Taylor: So it is almost inevitable he will go to Afghanistan or Iraq?

Seiple: Unless he gets out first, depending on how long it takes him to—

Taylor: Heal.

Seiple: --heal from the surgery, which will take place in about four months. Anyway, I said I wanted to go and I was glad to go. We stopped in Okinawa for a few days of orientation. I remember there was a big battle up at the DMZ at that time, at Con Thien. It was called the 'Rock Pile' and there was just intense shelling on both sides of the DMZ.

[0:40:17]

Taylor: So this is 1966?

Seiple: '67.

Taylor: Seven.

Seiple: '67, early fall of '67, and I looked at these guys getting off the airplane. They were just basically flown out of the warzone in a battle and ultimately, as quickly as possible, back to San Francisco, which was part of the problem. There was no decompression at all and they all had this half-mile stare, this vacant stare, and they were dirty and grimy and their utilities were faded. Mine were all starched and brand new green. You felt like a real rookie but you began to get a sense that this was a different kind of conflict and it was going to take a toll on a lot of people. And it did. The war cost us fifty-eight thousand dead Americans but there have been a whole lot more Americans vets who have committed suicide since that time. So there was pathos almost like the Civil War in our country and one of those lingering things that everybody dealt with the way they could deal with it and did what they had to do to get through it. I had people in my squadron, field grade officers, who made rank in peacetime and never considered what would happen when the first shot was fired at me in anger and some of them just transformationally in twenty-four hours were different kinds of people, didn't hold up very well, weren't ready for this kind of a conflict and it wasn't made easier. The first three weeks I was there we had two planes shot down, lost two crews, and I lost two roommates. And we had fifteen crews for thirteen months. If you do the math losing two in three weeks—the pucker factor was very, very high, and it was—

Taylor: Which factor?

Seiple: The pucker factor, the fear factor.

Taylor: Okay.

Seiple: The fear factor. So, you know, I hate to say this but we had people that would fly up north and drop their bombs in the ocean and we had people—one of my jobs there, my primary job was in operations and the guy I flew with, myself, we wrote the schedule for the whole year. That's one of the reasons I got three hundred missions, because I wrote the schedule. But we would write the schedule and post where the missions were. There was something called 'Rolling Thunder,' they were the deep north missions and they were the scariest and we would have people who would see the flight schedule, go over and look at the target information, and then go to the doctor and get a down slip because they said they had the sniffles and it was nothing more than just inability to face our fears. So everybody handled that differently and you knew who the gutsy ones were. You knew who the chickens were. War is a very honest environment. It just strips you and you get a chance to tell the world, as an emperor without clothes, whether you are going to make it or not.

Taylor: How did Marines respond to each other as they saw these differences?

Seiple: Well they were mostly, the sad thing, they were mostly with the field grade officers, major and above. They were the hardest ones to get into an airplane. And this wasn't universally true, but you only needed two or three or four and it seemed like, "my goodness. Why didn't you ask the basic questions way back when? What happens if I have to take part in combat?" But I think like most wars, on the enlisted side you have the PFC and the lance

corporals. They are the ones who go down the spider holes and do all the dirty work. And then on the officers side the lieutenants and the captains. Certainly if we didn't have lieutenants and captains flying we wouldn't have flight plans.

Taylor: So give some more stories and examples of your actual work besides scheduling—that's a good example—and does it include a close proximity to combat or were you organizing the flights?

Seiple: We were in Da Nang which is a close proximity to combat because we had an awful lot of rocket attacks at night and we lost, ultimately lost more airplanes on the flight line through direct hits than we lost over north or south Vietnam. And during Tet, of course, there were battalions of North Vietnamese marching down Da Nang streets, and we lived in—they called them hooches, but they were kind of elevated, wooden structures with screens for windows and tin roofs and you just heard the bullets go over us and through those tin roofs.

[0:45:59]

Taylor: So you were there in Tet?

Seiple: Yeah, yeah.

Taylor: So bring alive Tet. What was that like?

Seiple: There was lull before Tet, just a couple of days. And the big battle going into Tet was at Que Son[KHE SAHN], and I happened to be at Que Son[KHE SAHN] probably the only day when it wasn't bombarded with rockets and artillery and so on, around the 30th of the month of January, putting in a offset radar device that we could use to bomb in bad weather, because Que Son[KHE SAHN]—if we had lost Que Son[KHE SAHN] it would be like losing the Dien Bien Phu. It would be just—our Waterloo. And so there is an awful lot of pressure on that and we were flying round the clock trying to keep the enemy's heads down, at least. But the real thing was this Tet Offensive, which, basically, caught the entire country by surprise. And one day—I mentioned a battalion of North Vietnamese troops marching down Da Nang, but we had troops, as you know, at the walls, the embassy walls, in Saigon, and pitch battles being fought on the streets of Saigon, but we had five hundred thousand people, Americans, over there and we were all immediately in defensive positions. And I think this was the psychological change. Tet was a huge defeat for the North Vietnamese because they had to amass large quantities of people and B-52s and planes like the A-6s were great against large masses of people. And they lost an awful lot and General Giap has often said, in fact it is in their war museum, "We were defeated. We didn't have morale. We didn't have resources and yet we won. How did that happen?" Well it happened because of the political scene back in the states, but at the time we were wondering, "What in the world is going on here with a half a million people and all the South Vietnamese guys," many of whom would not fight to protect. This was always an open question. "Why aren't you as good a fighter as the North Vietnamese who is invading your country. You are protecting your own country but he seems to have an edge. Hue, the imperial city, was a huge battle. We used to fly many, many of our missions there, and still in Que Son[KHE SAHN]. It never got to the point where they allowed us to bomb the

dykes[DIKES] in North Vietnam or allowed us to bomb the ships in the harbor. There was concern for Chinese ships and Russian ships. And I think the dyke[DIKES]s were a humanitarian decision, although if we had bombed them we probably would have, in the classic sense, won the war. By the way—winning and losing—I never felt there was winners and losers. I thought there was just victims on all sides. We had, of course, people like myself there, spending a productive year of life somewhere other than Wall Street or teaching school or whatever one does after Brown. We had South Vietnamese and the Amerasians that were born to many of the people in the South, which were probably the most pathetic of the victims. The Viet Cong spent ten to twenty years living in the jungle and about three or four months after the North captured Saigon they pushed all those folks out. So they were victims and of course the North. The North lost maybe a million three or two million people, a lot of civilians. When I first went back to Hanoi in '88 I wondered how we lost the war. The bridges were still down. The bomb craters were still there. They had filled up with water and they were raising ducks on them. This was the Vietnamese who can do a lot with a little but it was just—Hanoi was a poverty stricken town of five million people.

[0:50:44]

Government officials barely dressed in uniforms, all of them filthy dirty, riding bicycles back and forth from the government buildings to wherever they had to go. You just wonder how a country like that could have withstood as much bombardment and war and not cave in. When I first went back to Da Nang, just to complete the theme of winners and losers and so on, as I say, I never thought we had lost. I just thought we had become victims like everybody else, but we were landing in the same direction that we would always land when we came in after a mission. And halfway down I could see my old hangar and it was one of the few buildings that was still—this was 1989—still standing. And the revetments where we parked the airplanes, were still up. But in those revetmants were baby blue MiG-21s, and the visual of that basically confirmed the fact that at the very least we had finished second in that conflict. They had essentially taken over everything that we had left in a hurry.

Taylor: So within the experience of flying, were you dropping bombs or part of crews? Were there any particular moments when things didn't work or they worked really well? In terms of just the job that you had—or you were on a flight where people were lost—just any stories that would help bring alive what it felt like to be—

Seiple: I'll mention three of them. One was flying a basic standard flight over the DMZ and dropping bombs on hard targets that had been previously identified and we were given radar vectors and told when to drop our bombs. It is a very simple mission but we were at twenty thousand feet with twenty-six five hundred pound bombs and in the A-6 you had two lights on either side of the cockpit that said "SAM" on them and when they lit up that was your SAM warning system. At the same time that they would light up, you would get a warble in your headset and it would start low, Pulse Repetition Frequency, PRF, and then it would go high when the SAM was fired. We were being painted by C Band radar, and C Band radar is a pencil beam radar so when someone is painting you it is a very personal thing, it is your airplane that they are looking at. And then we saw the lights in the headset, trying to decide "Well is this just bad gear or should we take evasive maneuvers?" And finally, finally, I guess about ten seconds later we

said, "Hey, let's go for the deck." And we put the plane a hundred and thirty five degree, came down and basically pulled the nose through to fall out of the sky. We were at twenty thousand feet with a full load of bombs and basically full fuel tanks, because it was early in the flight. At about eighteen thousand feet this huge telephone pole with big rocket thrusters on the side went over our nose and if we had waited another five seconds we probably—you and I would not be having this conversation. And then we pulled up behind it and again we had all this weight. Instead of pickling the bombs, kicking them off, dropping the fuel tanks, we pulled up behind it and the plane just shuddered because it was going through these G forces that were uncommon to us. But we got back to the base. There is a G meter in the tail end of the A-6 and it registered eleven Gs. And every rivet in the tail section had popped. So then we got back and we got back up to altitude again and we were being directed back on this SAM site and they said, "Well you need to be careful because there has been some SAM activity in the area." We said, "Yeah, we know. We just had one shot at us."

[0:55:37]

Taylor: What does SAM stand for?

Seiple: Surfaced Air Missile[SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSLE]. Surfaced Air Missile[SURFACE-TO-AIR]. And I think they were SAM 7s. I think that was the proper nomenclature. But it was like a sixty foot telephone pole fired by a guy—and I always thought in my elitist kind of thinking—somebody down there who can't speak English, pushing a button to knock this seven million dollar airplane out of the sky. How dare they. And anyway, we went back and ultimately dropped our bombs on the suspected SAM site but it was the longest thirty second run into the target that I had ever experienced. Anyway, they gave us a medal for that. There was a mission we flew to Vinh on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day and it's a mission where we were all set up, found the target—it was a petroleum POL, petroleum depot—and was locked on with radar, which feeds into your ballistics computer and does all these machinations and you get a new bombing formula at about four hundred miles an hour, about one every seven feet. And we are flying and flying and the master arm was on for the bombs to come off. We had twenty-six, five hundred pound bombs. The shutter drop, which said that the bombs should have come off—and nothing came off. The computer failed. And I realized the computer failed and I told the pilot 'hot pickle,' he can manually override. But a few seconds had gone by, so the bombs came off and we pulled up and I looked off to the right and watched the bombs explode and they all exploded in the city of Vinh.

Taylor: As opposed to at the target.

Seiple: At the target. Yeah. And there was no joy in that, no joy at all. The third mission that I would mention was a mission to drop three, two thousand pound bombs on Radio Hanoi. Radio Hanoi was a hundred square foot blockhouse in the middle of Hanoi. I had been to it in the early 90s. It is in a residential area and it was where the signal was launched that launched the Tet Offensive in 1968. So the military [MIND, BEING] what it is—we were going to do this symbolic thing and bomb the radio station where the signal was sent from and this is the only time this happened to me but when I heard of the mission I immediately kind of froze because I didn't think we could get there and get back and I thought—

Taylor: Because it was so far north?

Seiple: It was defended so well by—I mean this was at this time, probably still—Hanoi was the most heavily defended city in the history of modern warfare and I had a friend who had gone up there two weeks earlier and had fifteen surfaced air missiles[SURFACE-TO-AIR] fired at him and went back to a base in Thailand with fifteen holes in his airplane, and he came to be in the planning stages and he said, "Bob, don't go. You are not going to be able to get there and get out." And that's the way I felt. I thought maybe we could get to the spot, but as soon as those bombs left the aircraft we would be mincemeat for all of the [FIRING] on the ground. Peer pressure is kind of a strong thing and so we make a lot of it, especially in wartime. And we were going to go. Essentially there were two planes preparing the mission and we would fly side-by-side for the first hundred miles and whoever had the best air frame at the time and the best avionic sphere[GEAR]—because sometimes these things just get wacky—would go forward and the other one would come back.

[1:00:09]

So when I get in the airplane that night after assuming all day that by 10:20 over a target tonight I am going to be dead—and it challenged my faith, worse than Brown ever challenged my faith because I used to rise up on my spiritual tip toes and tell anybody "I am not afraid to die. I know where I am going—to be absent from the bodies[BODY], to be present with the lord." Well I realized the reason we are not afraid to die is because God never told us wha[WHEN IT] is going to happen and if he did, if he kind of said, "You know 10:20 over Hanoi, dunzo," It would challenge every shred of faith that you had. And it did. By the time we got in the airplane that night I felt ready to fly that mission and when I got in to test the gear I was just hoping something was broken. I would take the radar back and forth and wham it against the sides of the shudders and it was just perfect. The whole system was perfect. Anyway we got to—we got up to the point where we are supposed to make our 'who's got the best and who goes forward,' and we had electronic counter measure aircraft that was going to go stay offshore and jam the enemy radar and that had a problem and had to turn back and that tipped the risk against the mission and we all got to drop our bombs a little over part of North Vietnam and come back.

Taylor: At safer targets, so to speak?

Seiple: At relatively safer targets, and this doesn't say much for me but I remember being so grateful, we came back and found a bottle of whiskey and probably with three or four minutes we just drank it and got totally, totally sloshed. I mean the world was spinning around but that was kind of our celebration that we didn't have to go and die. It was not very spiritual but hopefully God forgives us.

Taylor: It was human.

Seiple: And it was memorable. So my most memorable mission over there was one that we ultimately didn't fly and then we had it all planned and I thought, "Well, we are going to be flying this thing until it goes," but that was the last time anyone had—any of the orders came

down for that, to take your target. In March—that was in late February, I think—by the end of March we had all of the missions deep North curtailed in a bombing haul and the day that I left to come back, the 1st of November '68, all the missions North were stopped. These were all enticements to the North Vietnamese so they would do something similar and I think they became manifestly unilateral actions that were never met with the same degree of pulling back on the other side. They just moved people under the safety net of no planes in the sky. My goal over there was to fly three hundred missions because there was no other way to keep score and you have to have activities which keep score. I used to not only count the number of missions but count the tonnage and whether or not we get fired on or not. And of the three hundred missions, one hundred seventy seven were flown over the North, not all of the rest over the South because as part of the secret war in Laos, and flew maybe twenty-five missions over Laos. And I saw fire at our airplane sixty nine times. I don't know how many times that they fired without tracers and shot at us but sixty nine times at least you could see the things coming. And after three hundred missions we had one hole about AS BIG AS A SOFTBALL] in the airplane for all that time, so I felt—

Taylor: So you are always flying the same plane?

Seiple: Not always flying the same plane, but we never got hit. We got ours to the point we flew, except this one time.

Taylor[SEIPLE]: Yeah. In one flight, yeah.

Seiple: And we didn't even know it until we got back and examined the airplane.

Taylor: Wow.

Seiple: So infantrymen and pilots often describe that their wars are very different from each other. Any thoughts from your own experience?

[1:04:56]

Taylor: Yeah, I think so. And I think it's a whole lot easier being in the air. First of all, you are fighting an antiseptic war. I am looking at moving targets. We had a capability in the A-6—a bicycle going eight miles an hour and you could pick up on radar, theoretically. So I was looking and putting crosshairs on things. It was kind of like a training mission, only you flew them faster so that you could get out of there if they started shooting at you. If you are on the ground, especially if you are the point person on the platoon, hacking your way through the jungle, I think that would be, from a pucker factor, I think that would command a great deal more anxiety. I can't imagine doing that and some of them did it for thirteen months. Helicopter pilots flew into those areas and at the time I was there I didn't know one helicopter pilot who had not been shot down. My bunkie at OCS was killed the month I got in country—helicopter. Interesting—next week, the nineteenth of May, whenever that is, going to a reunion from that OCS class and we were asked by the heads of the reunion to write if we knew anything about some people who were killed. Well I knew something about this person, so I did that. And a

number of other people have written about the KIAs from our OCS class, so there will be some honors paid to their memories, remembered by those who did come back.

Taylor: Did you know some other Brown alums with OCS or within your time in Vietnam?

Seiple: Not in OCS but the ones I knew is Charlie Pickett, who I think was killed, right?

Taylor: Yes.

Seiple: And was he killed in hostile fire or was he killed because there was an air-to-air collision?

Taylor: I don't know his whole story. I have contacted his wife but haven't had a chance to interview her yet.

Seiple: Yeah. I remember when that happened.

Taylor: This is just a list of—

Seiple: [BILL PETERS]. He was a gutsy guy. John Perry[PARRY] never went. He was my roommate and didn't have to go. I didn't know Anderson. Billy Peters was a ground officer and got shot. When I ran into him in Iwakuni, Japan sometime during that period and he was recovering and then he came back and took flight training. I don't know if he stayed in or not but he would have been in for awhile.

Taylor: Yes. I have been in touch with him.

Seiple: Jimmy[JAY] Fluke, of course. He was my roommate my junior year, good man. Charlie Pickett, I thought, had a—he was in the backseat of a plane that got hit by another plane and it might have been one of ours. An A-6 and an F-4.

Taylor: We have also had Elaine Davis, the widow of Jerry Zimmer. Did you know Jerry Zimmer?

Seiple: Yes, yes.

Taylor: Okay.

Seiple: He was an A-4 pilot I think. I played lacrosse with Jerry Zimmer. I think Pickett was an end on the football team, I think. It's kind of sad, you know, I had roommates from the training command. I had people in my wedding who were killed but at each stop along the way you develop certain friendships and a couple of people here and a couple of people there and a couple there and we remember them. And we talk about them, and then, of course, with the Vietnam Memorial, with is something I couldn't go to for a long time.

Taylor: Yeah, but you have gone[NOW]? Yeah.

Seiple: Yeah. Here is a Brown connection. It was 1982, November, and Brown football was playing at William and Mary and I think it was early November, and we won the game. And we were all very happy and the next day was the unveiling of the Vietnam Memorial in 1982. And I was laying in bed watching this on T.V. and I just could not control myself. I get emotional and I don't understand it. I don't understand how it happens and it's so long ago. And certain things just trigger it. We didn't know anything about posttraumatic stress and I could hate to claim that because guys on the ground, they are the ones who would do it if anybody, but when you are under sustained pressure day to day to day to day and then you see your two roommates fall—I used to wake up in the middle of the night hoping that I would not see a bed that was still made because that meant that someone else was overdue.

[1:10:42]

They were never lost. They were always overdue. It was our euphemism to say, but basically they didn't have enough fuel to still be in the sky and so they were either shot down and captured or they were dead. I caught up with some of the paperwork later when I ran into a recovery team in Laos and this is a great thing to say about our country but they are still working those sites and they will not give up until everyone is accounted for and I said, "Well—" you know I had a really good friend by the name of Bob Holderman[HALDERMAN]. Do you have anything on him? I went to the computer and typed—some stuff came out and they had eight pages on him that I never knew about him. And then my best friend over there, a guy named Jim Fickler, who was shot down somewhere in the A Shau valley or Cambodia, who knows? And nothing. Not a thing. Not because they didn't try. Not because they didn't do due diligence, but could never find that kind of material that would have said, "This is how he died."

Taylor: Elaine Zimmer Davis is still actively searching. They have found Jerry's site and a team is still working, trying to—

Seiple: Is it in South Vietnam?

Taylor: It's a midsection, I forget the exact location. She has a website that explains the different trips as they have been trying to find—I will email that to you.

Seiple: That has become the cause of her life.

Taylor: One of them, yeah. And she married a man who is also a Marine after Jerry's death who has been very helpful. So coming back to—looking back retrospectively, clearly in your work since being in Vietnam you have had a chance to really enact your own personal sense of lessons from being there and build upon it in a way of reaching out to move on in healing kinds of ways. Do you see a direct cause and effect with the work that you have done later to your experience in Vietnam?

Seiple: Other people have. I have not thought of it that way. To be perfectly honest, I always wanted to go back. Most of our missions were at night and when you are flying at four

hundred miles an hour, five hundred miles an hour, you don't want to be seen. You don't want to see much except for the target, and I wanted to see this country that was so inextricably tied historically to the United States and I think with the pathos of so many Americans. And so I had a chance as president of World Vision—World Vision was there before '75 and in 1975, like everybody else, they had to get out. They lost—they had 42,000 sponsored children. They had a lot of churches that they built. They had a lot of pastor friends. All that had to be left behind. So in 1988 I went back for the first time with World Vision and had a chance to begin that ministry again. There was a personal agenda in all of that, which was one of just very intense personal interest in this place that had claimed so much of my mental attention and reflection. And the work was one of reconciliation and I would meet with former Viet Cong people. I would meet with former people who[FOUGHT] against us. I met with the base commander at the base commander at Da Nang who flew MiG-19s there in the war and he said he told me of how he shot down American aircraft.

[1:15:07]

We had a big argument. I wanted to go back to my hangar and he wouldn't let me. Finally he did. After talking with the guy for about an hour we got talking about our kids and everything changed. I think, basically, when the war nomenclature gives way to, "Do you have any kids? Where do they go to school? What do they major in? What are your hopes for them?" You get into an entirely different kind of discussion and you see people, Abe Lincoln, I think was the first person who said—he has been plagiarized many times—"If you wanted to destroy your enemy, make a new friend." That's basically what we tried to do, make them our friends. And I remember one of the last times I was back in Vietnam a few years ago meeting with the Vice Minister for Internal Security—these are always the head bashers of a communist country. He was a very articulate, well-educated, thoughtful, inquisitive intellectual. We had the greatest discussion about these things, kind of like from your perspective what were you thinking? From my perspective this is what I was thinking. But I was one of the fortunate few to be able to go back and to do something positive. When I was there I had a very simple sense of morality. I would rather have American kids with parents, even if it meant having Vietnamese kids who were orphaned. In other words, if someone has to die in this conflict that I didn't start and I am not going to stop, I am just going to be a pawn along the way because I happen to be twenty-two years old and my country is at war and I am draftable. If I am going to have a role here, I would rather make the world safer, first and foremost, to American kids and not have them be orphaned. So basically you shoot the enemy before they shoot you. Do you have any angst or anger with the enemy? No. You just shoot them before they shoot you. Why do you fly north? Because that's where the supplies are coming down to shoot Americans and you are trying to bomb them out of that particular behavioral pattern. But there is never any anger at all addressed to anybody in North or South Vietnam. So going back was easy and the needs were so great. You are there. You have a platform to be there. You are glad to be back, so how do you begin to go to work and put in place those things that would be helpful to a much better bilateral relationship. And I hoped that it would happen a whole lot sooner. There was the ambassador who just died suddenly, Brown class of '63, had his teeth on Vietnam. They did a big thing up in the Alumni Monthly. This is what happens when you get old. Your names fall off the memory gun every day.

Taylor: Class of ’63 ambassador, yeah.

Seiple: Richard Holbrooke.

Taylor: Oh yeah.

Seiple: Holbrooke. He cut his teeth on this and [BRENT SKOWCROFT], who was one of his mentors there, and they basically continued to put up the fist, even though the war was over. And so we didn’t bring closure to the war. And if they did bring closure on a political front to this conflict— until really late when Bill[JOHN] Kerry and McCain came together and said, “Now it has gone on long enough. We are going to have to do something to bring closure.” But all this other time we were just keeping them at arms length and continuing to move the goal posts. Well, if you get out of Laos, then we will do it or if you get out of Cambodia, then we will do it. Well, it never happened until the fatigue set it but it could have happened ten years earlier. We could have been much, much more productive much earlier. Anyway, there were a lot of war wounded, there were a lot of war orphans on both sides, and we worked both sides. We connected with the church. They expected us to come in and rebuild their churches and pay their pastors, which we weren’t doing anymore because developmentally it was unsound. But this is when I was with World Vision. We did more with the government, especially with the health minister, and began the development of friendships that lead to positive stuff going on.

[1:20:08]

World Vision is a Christian organization but there was always concern that if our Christianity came through it would be asked to leave and so when I went to the State Department in 1998 I found that this country that we had invested so much money in and so much of everything in, by way of resource, was one of the primary abusers, in the world, of religious liberty—had the worst record. I thought, “How could this be?” Here you have a Christian organization. Why couldn’t they leverage, somehow, in a positive way, the hundreds of millions of dollars that were being put there out of the kindness of peoples’ hearts and they just were too timid to say, “You know, if you want our very best work you will let us work with the church.” They were afraid they were going to be thrown out. So it was a tough lesson for me to hear and I think those kind of organizations need to be very careful that their true identity comes through early on in the process, otherwise it could come back to haunt them.

Taylor: Now, when we were walking in together and you were describing the letters that you’re donating to the archive I think you mentioned that they were to Mom and Dad and that in some of those early letters there were some times when you were wary of our mission in Vietnam, as a war. You didn’t say it quite like that. Am I putting words into your mouth? Was there ever a time that you doubted the war and its mission?

Seiple: I doubted the way we were being used. We bombed a lot of bicycle factories. I can see bombing a bridge, bombing tanks, bombing something like that. I always felt bombing anti-aircraft guns were stupid. Why not just let them rust. Leave them alone and they will rust. Why do we keep them active by trying to bomb them out of existence?

Taylor: So it wasn't so much the reasons for being in Vietnam, but it was—

Seiple: At that time.

Taylor: --the military strategy.

Seiple: At that time. And then, and the letters show this, but after Tet—I remember writing home. My brother was very upset with me because I had said that we are not going to win this. This is a lost war and it can't be won. Now, if you remember, Robert McNamara came to that decision in '67. And to know, in retrospect, that the Defense Department—Secretary of Defense, came to a decision before you went that it was unwinnable and then you went, and you lost this friend and this friend and this friend and shook the family tree a little bit, it doesn't make you feel very good. But my first exposure there was, "Gee, they are not very smart about how they are flying these things." My first roommate was shot down when he was the second plane going into a target. They had one plane go in, drop the bomb. Forty-five seconds later the second plane would come in. Well that sounds like a tactic dreamed up in someone's drunken stupor because after the first plane drops its bomb everybody with a gun begins shooting straight up in the air and the second plane flew into a [FLAX TRA]. That was the last time they used it, but we lost our crew and I lost a roommate. So I was questioning the tactics but when I realized that a half a million Americans and maybe three million South Vietnamese, all on defense, because of this Tet Offensive—I thought, you know, they just have more will than we do. It's their jungle, not ours. They know it better. They thrive better in it. Yeah, we can win it if we bomb Curtis LeMay, you know, "Bombs away with Curtis LeMay," and everything north of the border gets wiped out including their dykes and their harbors and so on, but if we are not prepared to do that, we are not going to win this. And the letters show that, an early and increasing skepticism turned to cynicism. I don't know if I ever said this in a letter but we would talk about it as aviators and say, "Is there any target in North Vietnam worth dying for?" And the answer was no.

[1:25:04]

Taylor: So any final thoughts on that era, Brown, Vietnam?

Seiple: Well I came back to work at Brown in '72. I came back in the admission office and I had these two A-6 pictures that were painted in Japan, cheesy things in retrospect. They can emulate anything. And they were pictures of A-6s in wartime, pulling off a target, flying at night—and I proudly hung them in my office.

Taylor: So this was 1971?

Seiple: '71, '71, yeah. I had to have something on the walls, why not just something you identify with? And it never really hit me until later that in the early 70s Vietnam was a closed story for so many and an open wound for the rest of us. And it was a bridge too far. It was a divide that wasn't going to be met. Some people, like these poor guys that came off the rock pile at Con Thien, and two days later were walking through the airports of San Francisco—and they got it the worst. They got spit upon. I came home and had a year at Cherry Point where I was an

instructor. Cherry Point, North Carolina. So by the time that I got out I remember the biggest thing to me was flying up—we took an airplane and we flew up to Boston and had an interview with New England Bell Telephone—and we had some time before the interview so the two of us—a friend of mine who is still a really good friend—we went over to Harvard Square and I was struck by the length of the mens' hair and the lack of undergarments on the women. That, in 19—whenever that was—that was 1969. That was shocking, absolutely shocking. So my point is I came home and was sequestered into this major military installation in North Carolina and I had my year of decompression. I used to get angry faster then. I used to have a very real anger. And I remember walking home from the admission office one day, in '72 or '73, and a car backfired and it was just like, you know, hit the deck. But for the most part, I think I—

Taylor: Did you actually throw yourself to the ground?

Seiple: I threw myself low. I never went to the ground.

Taylor: Well technically that would be considered a part of Posttraumatic wouldn't it—that kind of—

Seiple: I don't know. Again—

Taylor: Other vets have described those kinds of moments.

Seiple: Yeah. All I know is that we had a prolonged period of time when the pressure was very, very intense all the time. And everybody handled it differently. You'd get a drink of hard liquor for twenty-five cents at the O-club, and so for fifty cents you could be drunk, if you wanted to go that way. And we had some really high-ranking people go that way. But I would never want to claim Posttraumatic Stress when I compare it to what the ground troops went through.

Taylor: How about coming home and readjusting to domestic life. Family. You had little kids by then.

Seiple: I had one that was ten years old—ten months old.

Taylor: That's right.

Seiple: And he had no idea who the heck I was and every time we picked him up he cried and wanted his mother, and that took awhile to adjust. And then we had our second one at Cherry Point and we came to pick her up and take her home after birth and at the same time one of our training planes was sho[WENT] down and we lost a student. And I remember passing our flight surgeon in the hallway. We were taking this young life out and he was telling me about—we just lost a life. And the juxtaposition of all that was just very weird. And then I had a chance to come back to Brown and start up again but thought that if I come back to Brown, I will retire at Brown, and I better do something else for awhile. So I went to work with Boise Cascade, a building products firm, and I became a field sales rep for them and I had a great year in terms of selling stuff. I did not enjoy it one bit and I thought if I can sell, why not sell education, and

especially in a place you don't have to apologize for. By the way, I think that part of the goodness of life is to be associated with things for which you need not apologize and Brown, and the Marine Corps, and World Vision—I was very fortunate to have those kinds of things in my life.

[1:30:48]

And I really enjoyed working for the American flag when I was at the State Department, even though the State Department is enormously screwed up, bureaucratic and debilitated—

Taylor: It sounds like you were able to have some criticisms in a healthy kind of way. You mentioned the new curriculum and things that were lost, as well as perhaps gained—State Department now. There is never a perfect organization but perhaps it's an attitude that you bring to each of these experiences that helps you not have to apologize, because you can accept—

Seiple: Part of it is that—I mean I can tell you some really stupid bad stories about the Marine Corps, but you know, if an Army guy was here I would be bragging about the Marine Corps. I would never apologize for it. There were things that we didn't do all that well at Brown, including Brown athletics for a long time. I was fortunate to be part of at least a mini-renaissance there. But I think the attitude—I'm an optimist, and part of it is tied to my faith. Part of it goes, periodically, against my better judgment, but I have consciously made a choice to be an optimist and I like people. I like to be around people and I like to work with people. So all those things kind of help fit in, if it is possible to fit in.

Taylor: It is probably what also has helped you move on through each of those testing times in life.

Seiple: Well people ask me about my career and I say I don't have one. I never had one. I just walk through open doors or I try to open the doors. And I knew that if I was going to stay in the academic world, I better know how to fundraise and even though the thought of it at the time was an anathema, I found it very unique. People with money—some of them—are really interesting and to get them to share their money and the privacy of their wealth was something because they believe in you and they believe in what you represent. That's pretty tall cotton. So, you know, and once you can raise money—I never went to seminary. I do not have a graduate degree and I was president of a college and seminary. Why? Because I could raise money.

Taylor: And you had a business organization head. That's a systems analysis talent, to be able to run a college, a business, a small city, in a way.

Seiple: Yeah, a lot of it was personalities.

Taylor: Yeah.

Seiple: Faculty are not easy.

Taylor: I'm sure. I know.

Seiple: And a graduate school faculty or seminary faculty, even when they are doing a faculty meeting you know exactly who teaches what by their perspective on any particular subject. And seminary faculties take themselves pretty seriously, much more seriously than I take myself. We had some tension.

Taylor: So not taking oneself too seriously seems to be one of your takeaway talents.

Seiple: I would say that helps, yeah. That was a helpful thing.

Taylor: So any other sort of general universals that you feel like your life has added up to, an understanding?

Seiple: Well, I mentioned a little bit of sales. If you feel you can sell, then why not move into ever increasing, important, value laden things to sell? And so an education is more value laden than a piece of lumber. Christian education for me was more important than secular education.

[1:35:27]

Doing the kind of things that you have to do to make something work. I am not a manager. I don't think I have bad managing skills but I was more of the visionary that had managers to implement and I enjoyed crawling out on limbs and risking failure—and I have a real fear of failure, creative anxiety it is known as—but I would still crawl out on the limbs and try to make something happen so that I wouldn't fall off. When I was at World Vision I moved the organization from Los Angeles to Seattle and the vote on the board was eleven to eight and every night when I would wake up at 3:00, worrying about the things that go bump, and what happens if the computers, when you plug them in in Seattle don't work anymore? What happens if you lose the Hispanic community that you have cultivated in LA. What happens if this whole thing falls on your watch? I think one of the reasons I had lots of jobs is probably fear of failure—just one step ahead of the sheriff.

Taylor: Or get things going into the next stage and then pass it on to—

Seiple: I am not a maintenance guy. I am not a maintenance person. That is boring. And World Vision—I mean how arrogant of me to feel that this organization called World Vision got boring? But it got to a place where I knew I could coast.

Taylor: Where you had done what you needed to do.

Seiple: And it was time to do something else, another run up the hill.

Taylor: Good. Okay. Any final thoughts before we—?

Seiple: I don't know. You people have to put all these together and make sense out of them.

Taylor: Well you have made perfect sense. You are very eloquent and obviously you have become a writer. So thank you very much Bob.

Seiple: I write differently than I did when I was here.

Taylor: Yes.

Seiple: I think if I went back and saw some of those compositions, English Comp—One, Two and Three, for some of us—I think I would be aghast, but at the time it was painful.

Taylor: Well you speak like a writer. You are very eloquent. So thank you very much.

Seiple: Well thank you. Made my day.

[End of recording]