

RESUME OF SERVICE CAREER

of

ROBERT CAMBELL TRIPP, Brigadier General

DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH: 19 October 1911, North Vernon, Indiana

YEARS OF ACTIVE SERVICE: Over 30 years

DATE OF RETIREMENT: 1 August 1963

MILITARY SCHOOLS ATTENDED

The Ordnance Field Service School , Motor Transport Course
The Engineer School, Advanced Course
The Command and General Staff College
The Industrial College of the Armed Forces

EDUCATIONAL DEGREES

United States Military Academy - BS Degree - Military Science

Massachusetts Institute of Technology - MS Degree - Civil Engineering

MAJOR DUTY ASSIGNMENTS

<u>FROM</u>	<u>TO</u>	<u>ASSIGNMENTS</u>
Apr 53	Aug 55	Chief, POL Branch, ACSLOG, HQ, SHAPE
Aug 55	Mar 56	Chief, Office of Planning and Intel, OCOT, HQ DA
Apr 56	Jul 58	A/Chief of Trans for Mil Ops, OCOT, HQ DA
Aug 58	Jul 62	CG, Trans Tml Cmd, Pacific

PROMOTIONS

DATES OF APPOINTMENT

2LT	13 Jun 33
1LT	14 Jun 36

CPT	1 Oct	40
MAJ	5 Mar	42
LTC	11 Dec	42
COL	10 Jun	44
LTC	1 Jul	47
COL	30 Dec	50
BG	1 Aug	56

US DECORATIONS AND BADGES

Legion of Merit w/Oak Leaf Cluster

SOURCE OF COMMISSION USMA (Class of 1933)

INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

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Interview with **BG (Ret) Robert C. Tripp**

The primary topic of discussion was "the difference between British and American concepts of transportation management during World War II." General Tripp explained that he had little contact with the British Movements Control Directorate with the exception of "Operation Overlord." He worked closely with the British during the re-supplying operations as a result of the Battle of the Bulge as well. His duties, in England during WWII, were principally those of a staff officer. The little contact he had with the British, none the less, gave him a perception of British operations to commanders. This is a major differences from American planning which allows for local commanders to be are flexible in the interpretation of guidelines. That flexibility afforded the Americans greater local control. He feels that movement control should be maintained at the highest level possible, but that level should only get involved in the movements if a problem arises that the local command couldn't address itself.

The second topic of discussion involved lessons learned during World War II in which the Army competed with the Navy for transportation facilities. Although General Tripp initially stated that he had no first-hand knowledge on the subject, he later admitted that he had coordinated movement control operations that required him to coordinate with

Navy personnel. He admitted that it was not always easy working with the Navy. One interesting point he brought up was the fact that the Army is getting away from specialization and that could lead to poor performance. The analogy he used was comparing military professionals to physicians. The medical field has specialized and prospered. The military should do the same, according to General Tripp. He said that too much emphasis is placed on the tactical mission and not enough on support.

This is the Army Transportation Oral History interview conducted with BG (Ret) Robert C. Tripp on 13 August 1985, by CPT Henry G. Zavala at **BG TRIPP**'s home in Oakland, California.

CPT ZAVALA: General Tripp, upon your graduation from the U.S. Military Academy in 1933, you were commissioned a 2nd lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers. Prior to WWII, you served with the 1st Engineers at Fort Du Pont, Delaware. You continued your educational growth and obtained a Masters Degree in Civil Engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. You attended the Engineering School at Fort Belvoir and served in the District Engineer Office in Washington. As if that wasn't enough, you went on to serve as Instructor in Physics at the U.S. Military Academy. Your engineering credentials are quite obvious. So how did you feel when in 1943, you were sent to England and assigned as Movement Officer in the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-4 Communication Zone for COMMZ?

BG TRIPP- Obviously, I knew nothing about what I was going to be doing. I found that to be true in many assignments in the Army. You seldom go into a job in which you have had experience that I think is a good thing about the Army service. You're always faced with something new and different, a new challenge. Actually, I had nothing to prepare m for this and I felt like a fish out of water to begin with.

CPT ZAVALA: I see. Did you have any formal training or at least on the job training prior to your assignment in England?

BG TRIPP: I had nothing that dealt with Movements except what I had studied in school and that being from a very academic standpoint.

CPT ZAVALA: So when you first arrived in England, you were given a new assignment that you had very little background in. It would seem to m that the British would have given you a lot of assistance in getting your feet wet and on the ground when you arrived. Was this the case?

BG TRIPP: No, at all. Since I was 'really assigned to a staff job of the G-4 of O3M, my principal assignment there was to develop or assist in developing the movements plan for the G-4 segment for Operation Overlord.

CPT ZAVALA: That was the invasion of Normandy?

BG TRIPP: I had absolutely nothing to do with the day-to-day operation of movements in the UK [United Kingdom]. I didn't deal with the British on the day-to-day operations at all. That was the Chief of Transportation for COMMZ, General Frank S. Ross and his staff, that handled that. Mine was purely a staff planning function. I was, therefore, isolated from day-to-day operations. My only contact with the British was on joint planning. There were a number of such sessions that came under the control of General Charles S. Napier who was the British officer assigned as Director of Movements. He was, actually, the Combined Service officer responsible for getting a movement plan for Overlord. He would hold Joint planning sessions. He worked out of SHAEF Headquarters with the U.S. Movement people and the British Movement people.

CPT ZAVALA: I see. The research or the reference material has told us that the British and the Americans worked in close liaison with each other. But yet, you're telling me that that wasn't necessarily the case in your assignment. You had a staff function that was, I understand, primarily responsible for planning and executing operations and planning for Operation Overlord. But it seems to me that the British would have worked very closely with you on that.

BG TRIPP: It was only to the extent that our respective portions of the Overlord Plan had to mesh. We were planning the over-the-beach segment on our portion of the assigned beaches: Omaha and Utah. The British were planning their over-the-beach portion. The two, of course, had to mesh as much as possible because we were both drawing from the common pool of over-the-beach craft to offload people. We both had to draw on the available number of DUKWs [amphibious trucks] to take the supplies in. We had certain overlapping or meshing responsibilities of that kind and timing had to be coordinated. As far as your internal method of operation, that had nothing to do with what the British were doing.

CPT ZAVALA: That's interesting because I would have assumed that since the Americans and British were drawing from the same pool, as you said, 'from the common pool,' that they would have worked very closely with you to make sure you weren't competing for the same assets - the same available ports, and the same available Transportation facilities because that could have been a problem I would have assumed.

BG TRIPP: Well, to that extent, there was a problem. We sat down in joint planning session with General Napier who was known as the "Dome." He was an extremely intelligent officer and was completely bald. He sat up there with his baldhead shining. Everybody commonly knew him as the 'Dome'. He ran his sessions. He was the boss of everybody in that planning session. He really ran them! He would arrive at a consensus between the two groups on what facilities would be assigned to the U.S. and what available craft would be assigned to the British. There were times when there would be disagreement between the two sides. I always felt the British went there better prepared than the U.S.

CPT ZAVALA. In what respect?

BG TRIPP: Well, they usually ended up with a unified British position; whereas, the U.S. planners were not unified. There were about four or five elements involved in these joint sessions. We often would end up arguing among ourselves, not with a united front. When the British presented their united front against our disunited front, they usually got their way.

CPT ZAVALA: When you say that there was a disunity between the American planners, was that disunity between the different services (the different branches of services), or was it between the Army officers versus Army officers?

BG TRIPP: It was mainly the Army officers with different commands of the Army. For example, you had represented there some people from SHAEF (that was Eisenhower's command). You had 12th Army Group (that was Bradley's command) who were there. You had the Service and Supply COWZ (that was General Lee; he had his group). Then I represented the G-4 COMMZ (which was actually a subordinate of General Lee's). I was still there specifically representing the G-4 aspect of CDMZ.

CPT ZAVALA: How did your later assignment as a transportation officer of the Advanced Section, or ADSEC, in the COMMZ make you feel? What was your reaction when you moved from your Transportation assignment or movements officer assignment to Transportation officer?

BG TRIPP: Well, I felt that was sort of a logical extension; in as much as I had spent about eight months in London dealing with this movement planning. I thought it was only logical that I would be a part of the group that was to carry out the movement plan. That was one of the things about the U.S. system that differed somewhat from the British system. Under the Chief of Transportation over there, you had all the elements of carrying out your responsibilities provided to you. You not only set the movements policy and movement plan. But you had the truck companies and you had the railroad operation to carry out what you had set as a movement policy. The British didn't have such complete control. They were very strong on the Movements aspect, the planning, and the policy. But they didn't have the means to carry it out the way we did.

CPT ZAVALA: I see. So the Americans had all the assets to carry out these plans, but the British were better planners is what you're saying?

BG TRIPP: Well, I won't say they were better planners. They had had more experience at that type of planning. I wouldn't be amiss (I don't think) in saying that they outsmarted us in a lot of ways on the planning aspect.

CPT ZAVALA: But didn't the British work hand-in-hand with the Americans in trying to teach the Americans all that they had learned from their two to three years of prewar experience? Well, I'm saying 'pre-war' meaning prior to the American entry to the war. It seems that the British would have learned a lot during those two to three years and they would have attempted to pass this on to the Americans.

BG TRIPP: Well, I think they did. Of course, the British are not known for hiding their abilities under apparel. They felt that they knew more about this than the Americans did. Yes, they wanted to teach us. But they wanted to teach us to do it their way that they considered the best. To an extent, we did learn one thing from them. That was the importance of movement control and that it had to be controlled at the highest possible level. I think the British, perhaps, carried that a little too far. I felt, if anything, they over controlled from the top. They weren't as practical in operations as the U.S. people.

The Americans have a command philosophy that just clashed with that. All through our military history, we've sort of felt that if you gave a guy the responsibility and the tools and said, 'All right, that's your area, your job, do it. I don't care how you do it. But you do it.' You give him that complete responsibility. You don't mess with him any more than you have to. Any commander resents somebody from above telling him how to do it. Now a movement is something that, by its very nature, requires you to have some control from the top. My philosophy is, in controlling a movement, if it's all within one area, you can let that area commander control it. But the moment it becomes a movement into an area from another area, then that commander can no longer exercise full control. He has to give way to the next higher control level. The British like to control movements from the top anyway. In other words, they always believed in high-level control.

CPT ZAVALA: You're saying that wasn't the problem with the British. But it was a problem that the Americans had with the top-level control?

BG TRIPP: When you do that, you get into impractical situations because the higher you go, the less you know about the local situation.

CPT ZAVALA: That makes sense. Of course, it's logical that the higher you go ...

BG TRIPP: The higher you go, the less you know about the problem. Therefore, you're going to make mistakes on the local level. You're going to have stupid orders that don't apply down there. Look at the Club system. I think that your Club should come under the local commander. He knows what is wrong with the Club; therefore, he should set the policy. If he wants to have drinks at a certain hour and not at other hours, it's his decision based upon the local situation. He knows better. Instead of having an ironclad policy set back in Washington, it should be locally set. I am just against policies set from above that don't have to be set by above. I think practical control should be at the lowest possible level so that it doesn't interfere with the next higher command.

CPT ZAVALA: You're saying policy should be set at the lowest possible level. You also said that it was important; furthermore, because the lesson learned (as far as movement control) was that it was set at the highest level.

BG TRIPP: Yes, because our philosophy in the past has been that the Commander down there didn't care about what was going on behind him. He wanted full control in his area. He resisted any kind of movement control from above. All right, we learned

from the British that you had to have certain things controlled from above when it was applicable. As long as it isn't applicable, you don't have control from above. If he's mining his own truck companies around in his area, he doesn't have to ask a higher level if he can do it or can he use this road or that road. As long as he's not interfering with something that's set from above, then your control has to go right back. The British tend to keep it all the way back anyway. So we, the Americans, are a little more flexible in that regard.

CPT ZAVALA: I see. The British were pretty stringent in their top-level control - They wouldn't bend and allow the local commanders (or the lower units) to set their own policy (or deviate from the policy given) even though it might have made the movement much easier for the local level. Now the Americans, on the other hand, allowed a deviation from policy (because of their ingenuity or their flexibility). This allowed for greater ease of movement control on the Americans' part. It seems that the British could have learned from the Americans as well.

BG TRIPP: Yes, I think they should have. I don't know that they did really. I've really had very little operational contact with the British all during the war- I was on the U.S. side. We ran our own show without regard to what the British were doing. The only times (in my own particular situation that I came across any British control at all) were during the Battle of the Bulge and that was only very nominal. When Montgomery took over part of the U.S. Forces there, the 1st and 9th Armies were put under Montgomery. The 3rd Army was left under 12th Army Group. ADSEC, at that time, was in "The Muir", Belgium, which fell in the sector that passed over to the British.

CPT ZAVALA: That was your only contact with the British as far as your assignments in Europe? So if I were to ask you how did the British movement control organization of 1942 and 1943 treat the Americans, would it be possible for you to answer that?

BG TRIPP: No. I can't even remember. I went over in '43 (September or late August). I dealt with a number of people on the staff of the Chief of Transportation who had been there for some time. They had dealt with the British. If they had a lot of trouble, chances are there would have been enough talk that I would have gotten the feeling that the sons of bucks can't get along with you. They gyp you from the start to finish, all that which I don't recall hearing at all. So I think, frankly, they got along pretty well. That would be my impression.

CPT ZAVALA: Did they get intimately involved with getting you trained to your new position when you arrived in England?

BG TRIPP: Oh, no, not in the slightest.

CPT ZAVALA: Was that because of the American position of maintaining its own staff (as you were a member of this particular staff)? Was it because of that particular reason that you didn't have much contact with the British?

BG TRIPP: The only ones who would have had contact were those on the staff who had to deal with the British Movements people in moving our own forces around Britain. Yes, I'm sure they received a lot of help from the British because the British didn't want anything to mess up their setup. They had a pretty good setup. They got the most out of their transportation system. So they had to have those U.S. people, who managed the movement of U.S. forces in Britain, working smoothly with them. Those fellows I'm sure got good experience and good help from them.

CPT ZAVALA: Were you aware of the fact, General, that the British initially wanted to absorb the American personnel into their own movement control?

BG TRIPP: - I didn't know that. But I can understand that they might have.

CPT ZAVALA: How do you think that would have worked if that had occurred?

BG TRIPP: I think it would have worked while in Britain - no problem. But I think it would have deprived us of the experience of managing our own control setup. It would have been necessary when we got to the Continent. So from that standpoint, we would have been less prepared than we were.

CPT ZAVALA: This, of course, was the thinking of the American high command at that time. That was the reason why the Americans set up a separate control movement from that of the British. If you were to pinpoint important lessons learned from the British, what would you say were the most important lessons that Americans learned during WWII from the British?

BG TRIPP: Well, from the standpoint of Movements, it was the same thing that we discussed at some length before. It was the level from which you exercise movement control and the necessary flexibility at which level you operate movement control.

CPT ZAVALA: You would say that the most important lesson learned was the level and flexibility of movement control. General Tripp, we've discussed basic differences between the British and American concepts of transportation movement during WWII. We've concluded that there were major differences. We've also arrive at some important lessons learned.

I'd like to go on to a second topic of discussion. This is a topic that you felt was equally important for discussion. That was the lessons learned from the Army versus the Navy competition for transportation facilities during WWII. What instances do you recall whereby you were directly involved in competing for transportation facilities for the Navy, General Tripp?

BG TRIPP: Actually, during World War II, I don't recall any real conflict. My first brush with control facilities occurred on the beaches there in Normandy and later when we opened up the Port of Cherbourg. But at that time, the Army requirements so overshadowed any Navy requirements that there wasn't any question whatsoever that

the Army was the dominant user. Therefore, there was no question of the Navy controlling any facilities.

CPT ZAVALA: The Army was the dominant user. But the Navy controlled the facilities. Is that what you're saying?

BG TRIPP: No, they (the Navy) didn't. By facilities, do you mean the terminal?

CPT ZAVALA: Yes, I mean the terminal facilities, the port facilities, and all the ports of embarkation.

BG TRIPP: I'm speaking of on the beaches on the receiving side. I'm not getting into the argument that Gross had that you addressed yourself to. So I said that the only time I was exposed to it was on the beaches that the Army controlled.

CPT ZAVALA: I see. So you had no exposure to this problem of interservice competition per se.

BG TRIPP: Later, when I had command of the Pacific Terminal Command out here (stateside), I was directly involved. But the same basic problems existed out here that have existed from the beginning in this competition between the Army and the Navy for control of terminal facilities. It was very strong out here. It was only through cooperation and personal friendship between myself and the commanders of the Naval Supply Center that we got along without any real difficulties. One of them happened to have been at the Naval Academy the same year that I was at the Military Academy. We roomed together at the Industrial College when we attended that together. So we knew each other very well. We played golf together all the time. So we cooperated very well.

CPT ZAVALA: But not everyone in the Army could say that they maintained such a close relationship with their Navy counterpart.

BG TRIPP: That's right. The same time that that was going on, the commander of the Naval Supply Center up in Seattle and I had nothing but a battle. He did everything to undercut the Army control of cargo movement into terminals. Of course, he had the only military outloading facility in Seattle.

CPT ZAVALA: So how were those problem resolved? Problem with those Army and Navy officers who worked hand-in-hand would have been minimal, of course. But those officers in the Army and those officers in the Navy could not meet eye-to-eye or toe-to-toe on certain Transportation issues, how were those resolved?

BG TRIPP: Well, it usually ended up in studies going back to Washington and taking endless manhours and some of the best minds in my command. My best planners were busy showing why the Army should retain control of the open Army terminal and control the movement of supplies into it. The Navy was saying that they had the Naval Supply

Center with its piers; therefore, there was no reason to use the Army terminal. The Navy insisted that they could handle it all.

CPT ZAVALA: You said that your best planners, some of the best minds in your command were utilized to help support the argument as to why the Army should retain controlling command of these ports. It seems like such a waste. Why wasn't a change suggested setting up some type command or high authority with approval from the Joint Chiefs of Staff in coordinating this between the Army and the Navy? If any other branch of the service became involved in Transportation, to have ultimately control and say as to who would get what?

BG TRIPP: It's a tremendous waste. That's what finally evolved. It was recognition of this waste of time and effort that was counterproductive. It gave rise to the formation of what you have today. It is a step in the direction of an overall control of cargo into and out of your terminals and operation.

CPT ZAVALA: This is something that came into being considerably after WWII. I don't understand why this wasn't recognized during WWII and (as with the British) corrected much sooner? Why didn't the Americans pick up on this much sooner and try to remedy the situation back when it could have done a lot more good?

BG TRIPP: Because neither the Army or the Navy wanted to give up what prerogatives they had. The Navy, because terminals are next to the ocean or on the ocean, felt that anything sitting on the ocean belongs to the Navy and they just didn't want to give it up. They held on to it as long as they possibly could. I think the Army had a stronger argument throughout the whole time. You can see that from your research on General Gross' efforts. He recognized that the Army had the predominant requirement. Therefore, it was logical that if there was going to be a consolidation of any kind, it should be a consolidation under the prime user, not under somebody else. It was not the tail wagging the dog. But it was the dog wagging the tail. But the Navy never gave up until years later.

CPT ZAVALA: That's true. I just don't quite understand why the Army wasn't able to convince the Joint Chiefs of Staff or the Transportation Committee that the argument was a valid one. Do you have any insight into that?

BG TRIPP: I don't think the Army, per se, was thinking of its logistical requirements. I'm speaking now of the thinking of the Army which is governed more by its tactical side than its logistical side. The tactical side is usually the driving force in Army thinking. They never realized the importance of Movements. They never realized the importance of Transportation. Very few of your tactical commanders really knew how to use Transportation and Movements. I think that your Army Chief of Staff never fought to get this because it never entered his head to make it a strong fight. He was willing to give in on that to get something else perhaps from the Navy. It was just something that wasn't a vital fighting point for the Chief of Staff over the years.

CPT ZAVALA: It seems that during WWI and even during WWII, Transportation, indeed, was important. But it would seem to me that it would be even more important today with flare-ups in the Middle East, an occasional flare-up in Latin America, hot spots in Africa, and all over the world. It would seem that tactical commanders, who have to respond within 24 or 72-hour notice, would need to have a very detailed handle on Transportation or movements.

BG TRIPP: But what have they done? They've gone away from specializing in Transportation. The Army on the logistical side has gone general. They generalize instead of specialize* What is the U.S. as a whole proving? What do doctors prove? You don't have general practitioners anymore. You have specialists because medicine is too complex to have generalists. Medicine is too complex to have them good in everything. Well, transportation and logistics is the same thing. In the Army today* you want specialists because it's too complicated to have generalists.

But what are we doing in the logistical side? You're making people go towards general skills rather than specialized. They've done away with the tight control of Transportation that you used to have. Now, I'm just speaking from my impression. I may be a little off base on that. But I think your Engineers are about the only ones and maybe your doctors and Signal Corps, perhaps. But those are the only ones who have retained true control of their people. Maybe the Engineers haven't kept it the way they used to have it. Isn't that true that you don't have the direct, positive control of your Transportation people under a personnel officer in Transportation? Your assignments are made by somebody other than a Transportation specialist, aren't they?

CPT ZAVALA: Well, MILPERCEN, the Military Personnel Center, is slotting Transportation officers into Transportation assignments or is attempting to do so anyway. Transportation staff officers are normally Transportation Branch qualified officers. I think that you're right in saying that some of the specializing or specialty is gone from these tactical commands. But I believe that some of the Transportation officers and Maintenance officers are well qualified. But I think that the higher command probably loses sight of its importance.

BG TRIPP: As I say, I'm speaking with some years away from direct contact. But I know that the trend, right after I retired, was definitely away from the tight control of your logistics personnel that the Army used to maintain. You started your maintenance command. I can remember just before I retired, we did some studies for the Supply and Maintenance Command. They wanted a study saying where should the terminals be located, under the Supply and Maintenance Command or somewhere else. I said they should be under the Supply and Maintenance Command. It was too important a function to be put under just Supply and Maintenance. They had responsibilities to the Air Force and to some extent to the Navy. If they're going to have them anywhere, they should be under a Department of Defense committee. That was my final study. I almost got crucified. If I hadn't been retiring in the next month, I'd have been sent to Siberia.

CPT ZAVALA: One of the interesting points that you brought up is the need for specialists. I tend to agree with you. We assign Transportation officers to transportation assignments. But we find that many of those Transportation officers have received actually more classroom instruction hours in tactics or in leadership than in Transportation. He may have received more hours in Military History than he would have received in logistics. Although all these things are important, above all, that officer is a Transportation officer. He should be first schooled and qualified in Transportation. I think we tend to be going away from this. Did you find when you were involved in Transportation as a Transportation officer or in Movements Control, that most of your peers or most of your colleagues were school-trained Transportation officers?

BG TRIPP: Are you talking about WWII? My Chief of Operations (speaking when I was Transportation officer) was a Brooklyn lawyer. My Chief of Personnel was a Philadelphia lawyer.

CPT ZAVALA: What happened to all the individuals who had worked in railroad stations, or who had worked in shipping yards, or who had worked for trucking companies or truck lines? What happened to all these individuals? It seems that they could have logically been slotted into these positions.

BG TRIPP: I had some good experienced trucking people; although, I had a lot of them who weren't involved in truck operations or who hadn't had any truck experience. Those were in the staff. In your truck companies, you had experienced people, yes. You had people that knew trucks. That's where they were used. But in the staff control, I had to use whatever was available.

CPT ZAVALA: Staff control is going to be more responsive to the wants and needs of the higher command. It would seem logical that they would be more concerned with staff functions and staff duties as opposed to the actual movements control or the actual transportation of stores or personnel. One could see where possibly these officers could be Brooklyn or Philadelphia lawyers. But it seems that it would be extremely important to have a Transportation officer who was going to be on line and intimately involved in Movements Control and be a Movements Control expert. It seems that he should have come from the civilian sector directly into the military sector working still in his line of expertise. But you're saying this was not the case?

BG TRIPP: You don't have very many Movement Control people in civilian life. Where would you get experience in anything that's comparable to military movements?

CPT ZAVALA: Sir, I think it would be comparable to the movement of civilian freight throughout the continent. They would be brought in from the shipping yards, both ports or sea shipping yards, and railheads or rail shipping yards. Movements would be of a greater magnitude, of course. But it seems that there would be some folks who would be experts in movement of freight. These would have been logically the folks who would be experts in movement of freight. These would have been, logically, the folks to pull and use in the military sector as well.

BG TRIPP: I know the Chief of Transportation Office there in London had a lot of shipping people. Of course, they were involved in the receipt of supplies in the U.K.--big terminal operations and all. My experience with movements control was more on land after we were ashore. I had some very good movement control officers. But they got their experience in the U.K. dealing with the British Movement Control people. They got their experience that way. They were in these units. The U.S., at that time, had Movements Control. I've forgotten the exact name of the organization.

CPT ZAVALA: This is one of the things that bears in mind when we were speaking about the British and American transportation management, We've touched on some issues that are relevant to that particular subject. One of the things that I recall is that the British, early in WWII, had instituted a strict control of all transportation--both military and civilian. On the civilian side, to attain more effective coordination of the port management and inland transport, the British Ministry of War Transport was formed. Also the British found that it was ideal to combine both the ministries of shipping and transport, fuse them together, and utilize both the civilian and the military experts in Movements Control. So basically, what the British did was draw from their civilian sector and fuse them with their military personnel. It seems that the Americans could have done that as well, yet, it doesn't seem that that was the case.

BG TRIPP: I'm only speaking of a much lower level. You're re speaking on a national level. Perhaps in General Gross' office back here, you would have much more similar situation, a parallel situation.

CPT ZAVALA: I see. I was a bit confused because I thought you were speaking on a broader level. Getting back to the Army and Navy competition for transportation facilities, I was curious if you felt we learned anything about those competitions.

BG TRIPP: In WWII, I really can't say . I wasn't in a position to know one way or another.

CPT ZAVALA: You had occasion to work, at sometime while you were assigned in England, with your British counterparts, did you not? I was curious as to whether you may have heard some of your colleagues' consent as to IX)w difficult it was working with the British. Was it easier working with the British or was it easier working with the Navy?

BG TRIPP: I don't know. I guess maybe it was easier with the British.

CPT ZAVALA: You had some experiences with the Navy. You found that, on occasion, some of those were good and some of those were not so good.

BG TRIPP: There's extreme rivalry between the Army and the Navy. Neither one wanted to give up any of its prerogatives.

CPT ZAVALA: We've discussed two issues. One is on the differences between the British and American concepts of transportation during WWII. The other was the

competition between the Army and the Navy for transportation facilities during WWII. I'd like to, if I may, go on to a third issue that you felt important to discuss. That was the lessons learned from the massive glut of supplies and ships committed in the Vietnam buildup. You've had the opportunity to read the background information on it. I've got just a couple of questions about that, I was curious as to, first of all, what was your participation in the logistics issues of Vietnam? You said that you had been called back as an advisor after your retirement.

BG TRIPP: Yes, I had retired in '63. When we started to build this backlog of ships there in Vietnam, the Army called back several retired Transportation people to serve as consultants. I went back as a consultant. I had the possibility of going back in uniform or just as a consultant. I chose the latter.

During that time, I had the mission of studying this problem and coming up with any suggestions that I might have to alleviate that situation. Since we had a tremendous backlog of ships on the hook in Vietnam and there seemed to be no possibility of them off-loading those ships fast enough to break the glut, something had to be done, or it would just become completely unmanageable. So I went to Okinawa and surveyed the situation there with respect to available depot facilities. We came up with the idea of establishing a forward depot setup where your bulk supplies would be formed from the U.S. to Okinawa, off-load into depots. Then the urgently needed supplies could be called forward on a shuttle basis from there.

CPT ZAVALA: This would be from Okinawa? Did you feel at the time that it was close enough to get the logistical support to Vietnam if it was needed in an emergency? Would you say that the distance wouldn't have hindered the delivery or the speed of delivery?

BG TRIPP: Well, it was a lot closer than Continental U.S.

CPT ZAVALA: Yes, but do you think that it wouldn't have been easier from the onset to have it in Vietnam?

BG TRIPP: They didn't have it there. That was the problem. There was no prospect of them getting it there in very short order.

CPT ZAVALA: What was the problem? Was it getting it off-loaded in short order?

BG TRIPP: It looked as though our supply setup there was trying to prove that the CONUS could outload supplies faster than Vietnam could receive them and they succeeded admirably well. Behind that flip answer was the supply system that had been built up by McNamara. He was the principal architect of this.

As you recall, he was the one who started the use of computers by the military in a big way. He computerized the whole system of supply to the extent possible with the

computers available at that time. They achieved a supply system that was supposed to be very responsive to the man in the field.

When a unit went overseas, an automatic supply amount was triggered. It was sent from various depots. There was a prefigured amount of supplies that went with that unit. When a unit went over and triggered this activity on the part of all the various depots to support supply, there was, more or less, an automatic response. So there was an initial burst of supply activity. If all of those supplies were needed and were off-loaded immediately, it was fine. But if they, for one reason or another, couldn't be offloaded as fast as they arrived, or if they weren't needed and weren't called forward, you started to build up a backlog. When this unit, perhaps later on, needed some of these supplies that had been caught in the back-log, the system was set up so that that supply sergeant up there in the front could send back a requisition.

Of course, your front line supply sergeant automatically felt that his requirements were emergencies. So he'd sent a first, high-priority requirement. It went all the way back to the depot by electronic means. Depot automatically rushed it out. So it started backlogging. This stuff might have already been out there or it might have been in the pipeline anyway. So he had something on top of something he already had.

This thing just continued. It magnified many times over. It kept building and building. The more it built, the more difficult it was for these high priority things to break through and get to the people that needed it. So they were continually sending back are high priority requisitions. It was a unique system. We called it a system that was untouched by human hands or human minds. There was no attempt to screen out this flow of requisitions and pick out the stuff that was already there or enroute. It was like the Sorcerer's Apprentice (a famous Walt Disney cartoon). Once you got it started, it just kept going and going and going. It built up a massive glut.

It was McNamara's system. He wanted this quick response. He eliminated the old office that used to sit in every part of embarkation. An extremely important element of your port of embarkation was this office that screened requisitions. When all of the requisitions funneled through there, it formed a bottleneck. But it was a needed bottleneck. When they found that a requisition was a duplication, they questioned the top supply people back in Vietnam to look at this requisition. Is it really an urgent necessity? Do you have it available somewhere else out there? In other words, question some of these requisitions. It would have slowed down this automatic response and helped that situation tremendously. That was another thing that we came up with as a suggestion. We suggested that they had to reinstitute this screening of the emergency requisitions that kept flowing back.

CPT ZAVALA: McNamara wasn't listening to this?

BG TRIPP: Of course, he was gone by that time. He had already done his dirty work.

CPT ZAVALA- His successor wasn't listening to this as well, was he?

BG TRIPP: I remember a session with a four-star general who was head of the command that had all the depots under it. I don't remember whether that would be the Supply and Maintenance Command or some other command. I've forgotten because it went through some name changes. Basically, it was a supply and maintenance command because he was in charge of all these depots.

CPT ZAVALA: Do you remember the general's name?

BG TRIPP: No. I met him at Fort Mason (Spanish soldiers first fortified this area in 1797. In 1850, Fort Mason was proclaimed a United States Army military reservation. Fort Mason was closed as an Army post in 1963 and was transferred to the National Park Service in 1972. Fort Mason is located near the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco.) We spoke for about an hour or two. He was on his way out to Vietnam.

CPT ZAVALA: What did your meeting with this particular general involve? What topics did you discuss?

BG TRIPP: It was just this. We pleaded with him to screen these requisitions that were flowing back (these emergency requisitions) and to set up some way of tempering the flow and to make sure that what came back was really needed. We wanted them to give it a chance to slow up back here and let them use what was already out there. A lot of needed supplies would be on the hook out there for five or six months before it could get unloaded. Yet these supplies were on emergency requisitions to be rushed out there.

CPT ZAVALA: One of the interesting points of the Vietnam conflict was that it took so long to unload some of these supplies from the ships that were docked there in South Vietnam. It wasn't until considerably later into the war (actually into the Vietnamization phase of the Vietnam conflict) that the Americans felt that it would be logical to unify the four logistical commands. It wasn't until February 1968 that anyone proposed to unify the four logistical commands that the U.S. Army had in South Vietnam into one major command. I was curious as to why that wasn't done sooner. That was well into the Vietnamization period. It should have been done prior to that when the first American advisor arrived in Vietnam back between 1955 and 1968. It should have been instituted back then. That stems back to what we said earlier - that it was important to have high level movements control. This wasn't done in Vietnam. I'm curious as to why this wasn't seen earlier.

BG TRIPP: I don't know. I would think that that could have helped the situation. They could have exercised some dampening effect which could have stopped this buildup.

CPT ZAVALA: Absolutely. It would have become continually harder to offload and to get those end items to the user units. There were so many supplies that trying to pinpoint where anything was would have been a major task.

BG TRIPP: I don't know whether they had a major breakdown in their manifest system. You'd think they would have been able to locate those things but they could not.

CPT ZAVALA: Could it have been because several different civilian contractors were used? There were from thirteen to twenty different private or civilian contractors who moved the bulk of the supplies from the Continental United States to ports in Vietnam. It seems that it could have been a major problem. Do you think that it was one reason for the large glut of supplies? Working with so many different contractors and each contractor having its own system or manifest procedures could have caused a problem.

BG TRIPP: It shouldn't have been the problem. But it's possible that it was a problem.

CPT ZAVALA: When you were called back as an advisor, you said that you chose not to wear the uniform. Basically, you were recalled as a civilian advisor during the Vietnam conflict. Did you have an opportunity to work with some of these civilian contractors who were involved in the movements control of supplies to Vietnam?

BG TRIPP: Not too much. I dealt more with the military terminal that dispatched them. For example, I dealt with those here at Oakland Army Terminal. One of the major contractors that you're thinking about was Sealand. That's what really put Sealand on the map. They started out with almost a monopoly on the movement of containerized freight. They made a killing on it. They operated right out of the Oakland Army Terminal. Their piers were part of what was under the control of the Oakland Army Terminal at the time; subsequently, they took over those piers themselves.

CPT ZAVALA: Was it, in your eyes, wise to use so many civilian contractors and count on civilian help as the Americans did during the Vietnam conflict? Do you feel that it was wise for American military to do that? We let civilians control the bulk of the supplies and the movement of supplies. Do you think it would have been much wiser to retain that in the hands of the military -- either the Navy or the Army?

BG TRIPP: When you figure the type of movement that we had (the type of capability that the enemy let us have), it was the cheapest, most efficient way to do it. Had we been forced to unload under unfavorable conditions where we were being shot at, we'd had a far different type of operation. Then we would have had to make it a much more militarized operation. But in this case, this was essentially just a movement of supplies from one place to another almost without enemy hindrance. We were doing it the cheapest ways that we could.

CPT ZAVALA: It might have been the cheapest way. But it seems to me that much control was lost as well as accountability.

BG TRIPP: Yes. But it shouldn't have been. After all, these big shipping lines like Sealand ship a lot of stuff by containers now. Those big container ships go out just loaded down with containers. They know where everything is on those containers.

CPT ZAVALA: So the problem really wasn't with the civilian contractors in getting the supplies across the Pacific to the Vietnam Theater- The problem was on the other side with the logistics control?

BG TRIPP: They didn't know what they had or how to get at it. They didn't have the capability to getting at it fast enough. Perhaps our own manifesting procedures over here left something to be desired. But those were under the control of the military.

CPT ZAVALA- Do you feel, possibly, that was one re there was so much material left in Vietnam when the Americans pulled out?

BG TRIPP: I suppose so.

CPT ZAVALA: It's tragic when one thinks back to the experiences that were felt in Vietnam by the Americans. You compare them to the experiences that the French had. The French, with their military defeat in Dien Bien Phu in 1954, were able to pull out everything from their Quonset huts to their dead when they left. They left nothing at all behind. The Americans, who did not lose a battle in Vietnam, were not able to return with all of their dead - let alone, their depots that were left fully stocked. I was wondering if you could comment on what your feelings were about that.

BG TRIPP: There were just so many things wrong with the way we waged that war. I think our whole concept of that war was wrong. We didn't go in it to win. We were hamstrung by politics. It was too political from the word GO.

CPT ZAVALA: I see

BG TRIPP: Everything stemmed from that. Everything went sour.

CPT ZAVALA: I see. As a civilian advisor, did you see that the South Vietnamese were going to be given an open door to the warehouses and were going to be told, "This is all yours and you handle it anyway you see fit?"

BG TRIPP: I had been given the mission of getting the supplies moved in and unloaded as efficiently as possible. What was done with them after they got there is something that I wasn't paying any attention to. That was beyond my scope. There was nothing I could do to affect that one way or the other. I wasn't even considering that aspect.

CPT ZAVALA: I see, You had no input into that area whatsoever.

BG TRIPP: No. From our standpoint, General Besson's (General Frank S. Besson,, Jr.) problem was to get those supplies where they were needed. To do it, he had to reduce that backlog of shipping. He just wanted help in that regard.

CPT ZAVALA: I see. It was, of course, important to support our boys in Vietnam. But it seemed that it would have been equally important to train our ally at the time in the logistical procedures. Was that being done? Do you recall?

BG TRIPP: I haven't any idea.

CPT ZAVALA: When you think back about the massive glut of supplies and the ships that were committed in the Vietnam buildup, what lessons do you think were learned?

BG TRIPP: I think I've touched on what I considered the very vital things. To ensure that you have some means of monitoring this flow of requisitions so that it doesn't get out of hand is important. In other words, have somebody looking at the overall supply picture from the standpoint of: "Are they asking for more than they need? Are they asking for it too fast? Are we sending more than they need, more than they've asked for?" In other words, keep the thing on balance flowing smoothly. That overall monitorship was not being exercised. But it is vital that it be exercised in another conflict of that type-

Of course, another thing that has bothered me is that we tend to fight any war in the same way we fought the last one. We don't look ahead as we should. I hope that we don't let the ease with which we were able to nine massive quantities of supplies to Vietnam blind us to the possibility that it would be far different if we were fighting a different kind of enemy.

The offloading - we've got to pay a lot of attention to that. We even cause a massive glut where we had absolutely no problem from the enemy. It was our own doing over there, not the enemy action. Just think how much more important it will be to watch the thing where you have enemy action in addition to your own shortcomings. We cannot be lured into a false sense of security. This idea of just loading big containers and putting them on a big containership and sending them off blithely to the far shore is for the birds.

CPT ZAVALA: Do you have, in concluding General Tripp, anything to add that you think would help today's logistical and transportation system function better than what it has?

BG TRIPP: Take a look at the civilian economy and realize that this is a world of specialization not generalization. We can go too far in generalization. That's one general lesson we can keep in mind. I don't see, if the world in general is finding it necessary to specialize, why the military should be any different.

CPT ZAVALA: Thank you, General Tripp.