



## RESUME OF SERVICE CAREER

of

### **ALTON GUSTAV POST, Major General**

**DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH:** 26 December 1920, Zumbrota, Minnesota

**YEARS OF ACTIVE COMMISSIONED SERVICE:** Over 37 years

**DATE OF RETIREMENT:** 1 August 1978

#### **MILITARY SCHOOLS ATTENDED**

The Transportation School, Basic and Advanced Courses  
The Command and General Staff College (CGSC)  
The National War College (NWC)

#### **EDUCATIONAL DEGREES**

University of Nebraska (Omaha) - BS Degree - Economics

George Washington University - MS Degree - International Affairs

#### **CHRONOLOGICAL RECORD OF DUTY ASSIGNMENTS (Last 10 Years)**

<b><u>FROM</u></b>	<b><u>TO</u></b>	<b><u>ASSIGNMENT</u></b>
Jul 64	Jul 66	Avn Staff Officer, DCSLOG, DA
Jul 66	Aug 67	Short Mid-Range Plans Branch Member, OJCS
Aug 67	May 68	Student, National War College
May 68	Oct 68	G4, Military District Washington
Oct 68	Jan 69	CO, AMMC, USARV
Jan 69	Oct 69	CO, 34 <sup>th</sup> GS Grp, (AM&S) USARV
Dec 69	Feb 70	DC, USATSCH

Feb 70	Oct 70	AC, USATSCH
Nov 70	May 71	DCSLOG, HQ, USARV
May 71	Dec 71	Asst DSCLOG, HQ, USARV
Jan 72	Feb 73	J8, (Security Asst), HQ, PACOM
Mar 73	Aug 74	DCSLOG, HQ, USRPAC
Sep 74	Aug 75	DCSLOG, HQ, TRADOC
Aug 75	Aug 78	CG, USATCFE

### **PROMOTIONS**

### **DATES OF APPOINTMENT**

2LT	13	Nov	42
1LT	20	May	43
CPT	13	pr	49
MAJ	27	Apr	54
LTC	12	Sep	61
COL	13	Apr	67
BG	1	Feb	71
MG	14	Jul	73

### **DECORATIONS AND BADGES**

Distinguished Service Medal w/Oak Leaf Cluster  
 Legion of Merit w/Oak Leaf Cluster  
 Distinguished Flying Cross  
 Bronze Star Medal w/V Device and Oak Leaf Cluster  
 Air Medal w/6 Awards  
 Army Commendation Medal w/Oak Leaf Cluster  
 Combat Infantryman Badge  
 Senior Army Aviator Badge  
 Joint Chief of Staff Identification Badge  
 Army Staff Identification Badge

## SOURCE OF COMMISSION OCS

### INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

Interview with **MG (Ret) Alton G. Post**

**MG (Ret) Alton G. Post** discussed in depth his experiences as a Commander of the 34th Aviation Maintenance and Supply Group from 1968-1969 in the Republic of Vietnam. General Post recalled the mission and day-to-day functions of aviation maintenance and supply operations in the Vietnam War.

The "One-Stop Maintenance Concept" was also discussed by **MG POST**. This concept of aviation maintenance was one of the major innovations which grew out of the Vietnam War. MG POST discussed the use of civilian contact personnel in a Theatre of Operations such as Vietnam.

The "stovepipe" system of supply, another aviation maintenance concept coming out of the Vietnam War, was also discussed in the interview by **MG POST**

**MG POST** elaborated on supply lessons learned in Vietnam, such as the "rat holing" of parts and the 'surge' problem.

Vietnamese Army participation in the 34th Aviation Maintenance Group and the fact that we left an inadequately trained Vietnamese Army behind upon America's withdrawal are other subjects touched upon in this interview.

**MG POST** in summation, states that the most important lesson that needed to be learned out of Army Aviation Maintenance in Vietnam is the need for today's Army to be prepared and to train to support logistically a large fleet of aircraft in the next conflict. According to **MG POST**, the helicopter came of age in Vietnam and the Army today needs to realize that an organization such as the 34th Group will need to be established and working immediately in the next conflict.

This is the Army Transportation Oral History interview with **Major General (Ret) Alton G. Post** conducted on 1 August 1985 by **1st Lieutenant Charles D. Fletcher** at MG POST's home in Pacific Grove, California.

**LT FLETCHER:** Since you commanded the 34th General Support Group, Aircraft Maintenance and Supply, Republic of Vietnam, from 1968 to 1969, we will be discussing specifically the contributions of the 34th Group during that period and speaking in general about Army aviation maintenance in Vietnam.

U.S. Army aviation maintenance made many advances and underwent dramatic changes during the Vietnam conflict. Factors that influenced these changes in Army

aviation included, among others, development of the airmobile concept and the Red Ball Express supply concept. Th say that Army aviation contributed significantly to the way the U.S. Army conducted warfare in Vietnam is an understatement. Army aviation was, in fact, the cornerstone of military operations in Vietnam.

Army aviation, specifically the use of the helicopter, well-suited to the terrain and widespread battlefield conditions of Vietnam, and complemented the developing doctrine of combined arms warfare which began to emerge there. Because of intensified Communist activities in 1965, the number of Army aircraft in Vietnam increased from 1,650 in 1965 to approximately 4,200 in 1969. One of the significant milestones for logistic support during this period of increased American involvement was the creation of the 34th General Support Group, Aircraft Maintenance and Supply. The formation of the 34th Support Group changed the nature of Army aviation maintenance in Vietnam and continues to impact on it today.

You were not the first commander of the 34th Aviation Maintenance Group, were you, sir?

**MG POST:** No, I wasn't the first commander. The Group was formed in November 1965, and I didn't arrive there until October 1968. For the first two months I was in Vietnam, I commanded the Aviation Material Management Center (AMMC) while COL [Bob] Shephard commanded the 34th Group. That interim experience of commanding the AMMC first was beneficial in that it gave me a firm basis for taking command of the 34th Group. (The AMMC had two depots under it: the parts depots and the computerized inventory control point. We had the old computers, just banks of those huge things). I took over the 34th Group about December of 1968 and commanded it until the end of October 1969. When I came from the States after graduating from the National War College, the newspapers had caused everyone to believe that the war was winding down and that the time had come to get out of there.

**LT FLETCHER:** This was your first tour?

**MG POST:** It was my first tour in Vietnam, though I had visited there in 1964. The Army had a program at that time which provided one- to two-week orientation tours for certain officers from the 25th Division in Hawaii. One of those tours was my only experience in Vietnam. When I got there, I had the change of command for the 34th Group and, like many others, I thought the war was winding down. So, at my change of command, I remarked that we shouldn't relax simply because the war seemed to be winding down. Much was still happening and a lot of work lay ahead of us. MG [Bob] Williams, who was the 1st Aviation Brigade commander and the aviation officer for the US Army, Vietnam, came up to we afterwards and said, "My gosh, Al. Where'd you get that information? You certainly know something we don't know. I wish you'd tell the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese that this war is winding down." I soon found out, however, that the war was far from over. As a matter of fact, 1968 through 1969 was probably the high tide of the war. It was at this time that the greatest number of personnel and the most aircraft were over there. The 34th Group provided the supply and maintenance

backup for- all 4,200 Army aircraft in Vietnam. The vast majority of these were helicopters; I think about 4,000 helicopters versus about 200 fixed-wing aircraft were in use. Each company had its own maintenance detachment to provide its first echelon user maintenance. The 23rd aviation maintenance and direct support companies and supply companies of the 34th Group provided the backup, all the way to depot maintenance.

**LT FLETCHER:** Did the divisions have their own maintenance?

**MG POST:** Each division had its own general support maintenance companies.

**LT FLETCHER:** Is it correct that the 34th Group consisted of four battalions?

**MG POST:** The Group consisted of four battalions plus the AMMC and the Floating Aircraft Maintenance Facility (FAMF). I think that was called the First Battalion. And plus, of course, the AMMC was under that. Then the AMMC had those two supply depots.

**LT FLETCHER:** Where were the depots?

**MG POST:** One depot was located at the Tan Sun Nhut Airport in Saigon, and the other was at Qui Nhon. So we really had six battalions and, as I recall, these battalions had 23 companies. What we called an Avionics Electronics Company (AVEL), also supported each of the battalions.

**LT FLETCHER:** Did the companies consist entirely of military personnel?

**MG POST:** The companies were, of course, entirely military, but civilian contractors augmented each company. At one time, we had more than 2,000 civilian contractors with the group.

**LT FLETCHER:** Do you mean with the 34th Group?

**MG POST:** Yes, with the 34th Group and the AMMC. Contracts with Dynalectron Corp., Lear Siegler, and Lockheed provided civilian personnel who were important because they were the source of skills and longevity that the military could not provide.

**LT FLETCHER:** Did you have any problems maintaining control over civilian contractor personnel?

**MG POST:** We had no problem maintaining control over them. These people were well-organized and augmented the capability of the 34th Group to provide maintenance and supply support than it could have done otherwise.

The nature of the war in Vietnam made traditional front lines nonexistent. Each unit, outpost perimeter and base, was like an island and therefore required total perimeter security.

So, besides working as helicopter mechanics and supply personnel, our military personnel also had to stand the regular perimeter guard at night. It just wasn't feasible for them to work on aircraft during the day. The civilian contractor personnel performed this necessary daytime maintenance and supply support.

**LT FLETCHER:** Do you think these duties should be tasked the same way in the next conflict?

**MG POST:** I don't see how they could be arranged any differently. The Army personnel base could not support the number of people needed for this type of operation. Using contractor maintenance personnel proved highly successful in Vietnam. As a matter of fact, none of the people we had with us from the three companies (as I recall, at least a half-dozen or more were killed in action) ever left their base units because of the war. So, the operation was highly successful. We (the Group) had about 5,000 military personnel and I think, at the maximum, probably 2,000 or more contractors. Furthermore, the 34th Group wasn't the only activity that employed use contractors; for example, many contractors worked in heavy construction for the Engineers.

**LT FLETCHER:** Were the civilians there for only one year?

**MG POST:** Some civilians were there for 10 years.

**LT FLETCHER:** Getting back to the Group, can you sum up its overall mission and operations and the services it was intended to provide?

**MG POST:** The 34th Group was formed to provide backup maintenance for approximately 4,000 aircraft in Vietnam. Before activation of the 34th group, all that was available was a supply point and some maintenance service in Tan Son Nhut. This setup was sufficient until 1965 because we had less aircraft in Vietnam at that time than we had later. As I recall, we probably had only 600 or 700 Army aircraft up to the time the 34th Group was formed. Then, the rapid buildup which followed made the organization that was in place totally inadequate to provide the support needed. So the 34th Group was formed in November 1965. The 34th expanded and was highly successful in support of operations from the far north up in Quang Tri, all the way down to Soc Trang in the Delta, and even down below that.

**LT FLETCHER.-** So did the 34th Group provide direct echelon maintenance and general support maintenance to the non-divisions?

**MG POST:** We supported all facets of aviation -- non-divisions and divisions in Saigon. We had our four from up at Da Nang, where we had the 520<sup>th</sup> Battalion, and we had the

14<sup>th</sup> at Nha Trang. We had the 520<sup>th</sup> at Phu Loi and the 756<sup>th</sup> at Vung Tau. Their companies were spread out in a geographical area around the Battalion.

**LT FLETCHER:** Did you go out and visit them every day?

**MG POST:** The method of operation was very flexible and simple because I had a U-21 fixed-wing aircraft [the Beech King Air], a couple of H-model Huey helicopters, and a U-6 fixed-wing aircraft assigned to me and my headquarters.

Each day was about the same. I would get up and have breakfast, get in the U-21 (or whatever helicopter was suited to go the distance I needed to cover that day), and fly up to Da Nang, Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, or wherever I was headed. I was either on the road or in the sky headed to one of the units just about every day. I often stayed for a day or two to observe their operations and spent much of my time visiting the (Group customers. I'd go to the 1st Cavalry, the 25th Division, or to the "Big Red One" (the 1st Division). Essentially, that's the way I maintained command and control of such a far-flung unit. I doubt if any other unit in Vietnam was spread out as far geographically as was the 34th Group.

**LT FLETCHER:** One of the missions of the Group was to provide one-stop maintenance. Can you explain what that means?

**MG POST:** One-stop maintenance was developed in Vietnam. I think that General [Jack] Norton, who had been the commander of the U S Army Vietnam [USARV], Aviation Support Command, first conceptualized the idea. Later, he commanded U S Aviation Systems Command [AVSCOM] in St. Louis, which is where he was when I took command of the 34th Group. The premise behind one-stop maintenance is essentially that a unit can bring in the helicopter or components and have everything done in one place. For example, the AVEL Detachment was with the direct support company. If they needed engine repair, sheet metal, or avionics or weapons repair, it could all be done at one place.

**LT FLETCHER:** Would the crew stay with the helicopter?

**MG POST:** Yes.

**LT FLETCHER:** So you'd put them up?

**MG POST:** We sometimes put the crew up, depending on the situation. If the helicopter was severely battle-damaged or had some problem that required several days to fix, they wouldn't stay. However, the crew chief would always stay with the helicopter. Usually, the necessary maintenance could be done in a matter of hours or one day at the most and, yes, the crew would stay with it.

**LT FLETCHER:** How does this arrangement differ from maintenance procedures before the formation of the 34th Group?

**MG POST:** Before the 34th Group was formed, the crew had to have their engine or avionics repaired in one place and then travel what probably amounted to several miles to get their guns or armament fixed. So, one-stop maintenance saved time, money, and parts.

**LT FLETCHER:** When you got there, hangars and other- facilities had already been constructed. What were they like?

**MG POST:** Well, the facilities were practically complete when I got there, but construction was always going on. We built maybe half a dozen parts warehouses while I was there.

**LT FLETCHER:** Were civilian contractors doing this construction?

**MG POST:** Yes, civilian contractors, usually constructed those buildings, specifically architectural engineers. Several contractors were there.

**LT FLETCHER:** Were the facilities of good quality?

**MG POST:** They were very good facilities. They were not just jerry-built. They were put there to stay and some of them lasted 10 years. In fact, I'm sure quite a few of them are still there (not for our use, of course).

**LT FLETCHER:** Did the 34th Group support the Vietnamese Army?

**MG POST:** We did a lot of backup support for the Vietnamese helicopters. You see, the Hueys that they had were part of the Vietnamese Air Force. The Vietnamese Army units didn't have any helicopters that were an integral part of the ground forces. But we had an ongoing program that did supply them with a number of helicopters for which we provided some backup. These were primarily based at Tan Sun Nhut and down in the Delta. We also had a program to train some of their mechanics.

**LT FLETCHER:** Did the Vietnamese pilot their helicopters?

**MG POST:** Yes.

**LT FLETCHER:** Did we leave the 4,000 or so helicopters in Vietnam?

**MG POST:** We didn't leave all 4,000, but we left some of them. I don't recall the number of helicopters that were left there and turned over to the South Vietnamese, but we shipped back the bulk of our Army helicopters.

**LT FLETCHER:** Did the Vietnamese know how to run general support [GS] and direct support [DS] maintenance? Did they have a supply system that worked?

**MG POST:** They had a supply system and a computerized supply system. We turned over to them huge depots at long Binh and one depot at Tan Sun Nhut. We didn't turn over another depot at Qui Nohn. When we left, we had totally stripped that depot and closed it down. I hasten to add that by the time we had turned them over, not many parts were left at those depots.

I must honestly say that we probably didn't leave the Vietnamese with a very highly-trained force of helicopter maintenance people. Their supply people were much better trained because they not only handled aviation supply, but all the other supplies and depots that the US Army had there as well, especially the big depot at long Binh. So, they had sore training and a lot of parts, but nothing comparable to what the US Army had.

**LT FLETCHER:** Sir, if they needed a part, would they order it through the American supply system?

**MG POST:** Yes, they would order it through our depots.

**LT FLETCHER:** Let's talk about Army personnel working in Army aviation in Vietnam. You had personnel who were drafted and others serving one-year tours. Did that situation cause any problems?

**MG POST:** Well, of course it did. You see, our enlisted mechanics and maintenance and supply people were all school-trained when they arrived. However, they were really journeymen because they had been drafted and had gone to a one-month or six-month course in the States. They were in Vietnam for one year, but they required at least three to four months orientation because they were not experienced. A training process was necessary, but I hasten to add that they were quick learners. They were high-quality people, many of whom extended for a second tour. Others came back for a third tour after returning to the States for further- schooling. So those who did that provided a hard-core of very well-trained people.

The situation regarding our pilots and officers was different. Almost all of our officers and senior noncommissioned officers [NCOs] were career people who had been in the Army for a long time. Although the pilots were well educated and highly trained, they had to go through an orientation period for the type of flying we did in Vietnam. I was singularly blessed in the 34th Group, especially in our Group headquarters and battalions, and so was every commander there. In all of my 37 years of active service, I have never seen or worked with a group of such highly qualified, energetic, and loyal individuals as we had running the Group and the various staffs and the battalion commanders and their staffs.

**LT FLETCHER:** You're speaking of your NCOs and officers?

**MG POST:** We had very good NCOs and officers, no question about it. If we did have any serious disciplinary problems, they were so minimal that I don't recall them.

**LT FLETCHER:** We've discussed some of the successes of the Group and the implementation of one-stop maintenance. Still, there must have been sore problems. What would you say was the major problem?

**MG POST:** Of course, problems did arise. In every war we've been involved in, we've always experienced problems with parts supply. In Vietnam, we had a 5,000-mile supply line from CONUS [Continental United States], and we never could completely overcome a surge problem.

One time a shortage of main rotor blades on the Hueys caused us to start ordering them through the supply system. I remember realizing one day that we were being inundated with main rotor blades, like alligators in a swamp. They were stacked up everywhere. We tried shutting off the system to reduce the number of excess blades, but it took too long. By then, we needed more rotor blades and had to start the system again.

The aviation supply system in Vietnam wasn't nearly as bad as it seemed to be in some other- systems. Aviation had a direct supply line back to AVSCOM [Aviation Systems Command], which was the inventory control point for CONUS, so we didn't have to go through a number of in-country processing or inventory supply points. Our supply lines were direct. About 99 percent of our aviation parts came by air, not by ship. Although this was very expensive, it was the only effective way to keep the aircraft flying. A helicopter sitting on the ground was of no use to anybody and would have had to be replaced by another helicopter.

**LT FLETCHER:** Somebody must have considered helicopters to be important enough to fly in the parts, or at least 99 percent of them.

**MG POST:** Absolutely. We always strove for 100 percent flying availability. Of course, 100 percent availability is unrealistic, but we did considerably better than they did in the States or in Europe.

We should have done better since we got the bulk of the parts, and we certainly had the highest priority. On the Hueys, for example, we maintained at least 80 to 85 percent availability (which is a rather fantastic record). We had in Vietnam the R--d Ball highway system, which was in Europe in World War II. A red ball painted on a box indicated red ball items, which had number one priority. That priority was so high, it could shave people off an airplane coming to Vietnam. We also had our stovepipe system, with a stovepipe going from Vietnam to St. Louis and to depots in the Continental United States.

**LT FLETCHER:** What do you mean when you say "stovepipe?"

**MG POST:** Well, stovepipe is the term for the system. If you can envision a stovepipe or a pipe reaching from Vietnam back to CONUS, then you have an idea of how the system works. The requisitions would be shoved into this stovepipe and the part would return through the stovepipe.

**LT FLETCHER:** How would a requisition go out? Would you fill out a requisition and deliver it by hard copy method or would it go out telephonically or in a message?

**MG POST:** We would send it out electronically and follow up with a hard copy. our computers produced these requisitions, and, usually, back in CONUS, they acted on the hard copy because it would arrive before the electrical transmission. We never trusted those transmissions because they would stop sore place or would arrive incomplete. The hard copy was the thing. Much of the procedure took place by telephone from AMMC at Tan Sun Nhut. All of our requisitions from in-country went through the AMMC inventory control point and on to our computers. But the nature of the operation was such that much of it had to be instantaneous. So my supply people or I would have to call St. Louis or the Pentagon. Our man in the Pentagon was Mr. [Joe] Cribbins. Joe Cribbins is undoubtedly Mr. Army Aviation Supply and Maintenance.

**LT FLETCHER:** Is he still in the Pentagon?

**MG POST:** Yes, Joe Cribbins is 71 years old and sits at the some desk. No one in Army aviation has the institutional memory of Mr. Cribbins. I could pick up the telephone at 6 PM at Tan Sun Nhut (about 3 AM in Washington) and get Joe out of bed saying, "Joe, we're in a real bind here for some main rotor heads." Joe would answer, "You'll have a dozen or half a dozen of whatever you need on the first plane out in the morning." And it would be there. The system we enjoyed in the 34th Group was exceptional. The 1<sup>st</sup> Logistics Command, on the other hand, had nothing comparable to our system. They were responsible for all of the other supply and maintenance in Vietnam. The 34th Group was separate because it was so special. Some elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> Logistics Command and other support personnel in Vietnam tried to integrate the 34th Group into the 1<sup>st</sup> Logistics Command. I successfully fought that as did the people who followed me. It's good that we did because the 34th Group would have been swallowed up into the 1<sup>st</sup> Logistics Command and would have had to depend on their priorities and use their system. In plain language, it would have been disastrous for the Army aviation effort in Vietnam.

**LT FLETCHER:** You think aviation maintenance and supply in Vietnam was that much more important than the other supply systems?

**MG POST:** It certainly was. For the ground forces, Vietnam was a helicopter war. With 4,000 to draw from, helicopters soon became the primary method of mobility in Vietnam. Our fire bases were out in the jungle and totally supplied by air. Medical evacuation was by air, and the medical dust off in Vietnam is legendary and comprises another whole other chapter about the war. The helicopter was the most important piece of equipment for conducting the war in Vietnam. It moved. It shot. It communicated. That was the whole package.

**LT FLETCHER:** Did you use supply priorities (for instance, 01, 02, or 03) or was everything high priority?

**MG POST:** We did use priorities to a great extent. We tried to do enough legitimate planning to stay within a priority system of ones, twos, and threes. I don't know how high we went -- six or eight, I guess. We employed usage factors to stock the necessary parts in our warehouses and to avoid overstocking them. But the battles in Vietnam surged back and forth from ebbs in the fighting to periods of intense activity which made planning difficult. So, we had problems in Vietnam with overstockage and understockage. Because of difficulties encountered in the early stages of the war (and even as late as 1968 and 1969), it was also hard to develop credibility so the user would feel that he could depend on us. Users, such as the 1st Cavalry Division, needed to feel that they could depend on us to provide parts when they needed them. Well, that credibility was lacking, especially in the first half of the war .

Rat holing was also a serious problem. For example, a supply officer in the 1st Cavalry or 25th Division would, in effect, overstock because distrust of the system made him think, "When I need it, it won't be here." This overstockage wouldn't be discovered until a unit had to move. It was just astounding how much they had to move when the time came.

A case in point was the movement of the 1st Cavalry Division to the Second Field Force area north of Saigon. As I recall, this movement was executed or ordered about the second or third day after I took command of the Group. (It was on a Sunday). I was in my office in Tan Sun Nhut. My operations officer, executive officer, and several others were flying to visit the units. My hardworking staff could usually only get out to visit the units on Sundays, so they normally went then, and I would remain to keep everything in order at headquarters. Well, GEN [Robert R.] Williams, who was the USARV [United States Army, Vietnam] Aviation Officer and the Brigade commander called me and said, 'Al, get your staff and come on up here to headquarters right away. We're getting ready to start a rather important meeting.' Fortunately, I was able to locate by radio all the key people on my staff. We assembled at Headquarters where it was promptly announced that the entire 1st Cavalry Division Airmobile was moving from the far north (around Da Nang) to an area north of Saigon. That was a major move which had to be completed in about two days.

**LT FLETCHER:** The whole Division?

**MG POST:** The whole Division, including about 600 aircraft, had to move. Part of it was going by sea, with much of the heavy equipment going on some baby aircraft carriers we had over there. But the helicopters were going to fly down. That was certainly a major operation, much of it taking place over enemy territory; and from Da Nang to Saigon was at least a four-hour flight by helicopter. We had to set up refueling points along the way with critical parts stocked along the route of flight. We had a few hectic days, but the move was very successful. The point is that we uncovered all the rat hole supplies they had stacked up on their landing strips in the general area of Quang Tri and where the 1st Cavalry had been. One might have thought that it was one of our depots.

**LT FLETCHER:** Did you have to turn the supplies in?

**MG POST:** They turned them in to us, and we hauled truckloads of those parts down to Da Nang.

**LT FLETCHER:** I think I read that these trucks hauled parts for something like 30 consecutive days?

**MG POST:** Yes, getting those parts back in the system took that long! But then we began to gain more credibility concerning our capability to supply these parts. That revelation of how much had been squirreled away helped to instill some supply discipline in the user. Furthermore, all of those parts were returned to the system, thus re-establishing credibility. The way we established credibility was by placing liaison personnel at our depots for all of the customers. So, when a requisition came in from one of their units, these liaison personnel could follow up on it until we delivered or they picked up the part. That worked very well. Almost every major user unit in Vietnam had liaison personnel at the depot. We fed and billeted them, and they became almost an integral part of our unit. Although that might have seemed to be an excess of people, it wasn't. The units liked it and we liked it. We didn't have enough of our own people to dedicate to establishing this kind of credibility, so the liaison people did that for us.

**LT FLETCHER:** Did you say there were two depots?

**MG POST:** Yes, one was at Tan Sun Nhut and another at Qui Nohn.

**LT FLETCHER:** Wasn't there a third depot on the floating ship?

**MG POST:** The Floating Aircraft Maintenance Facility wasn't a depot. It was stacked with critical spare parts, but its personnel performed mostly maintenance, like engine overhauls and major sheet metal work. Their ability to fabricate new items for the battlefield was also greatly beneficial. For example, the FAMF designed, fabricated, and manufactured a flare-dispensing system. I don't know how many of these we produced (probably more than a thousand). These flare dispensers were attached to the helicopters and were used as part of a system for dropping flares over the battlefield. That's just one item that they created for us.

**LT FLETCHER:** Putting a facility like that on a ship is a pretty interesting concept, don't you think?

**MG POST:** It is interesting, especially because we could move the FAMF. If the bulk of its work was centered in the Delta, it could be anchored offshore.

**LT FLETCHER:** Was it moved around?

**MG POST:** It was moved around, probably not as much as it could have been, but it did go north a couple of times. It went North during Lam Son 719, which was a big

operation that began in February 1971 when the U.S. Army supported the South Vietnamese Army in their incursion into Laos. We supported them with all of our helicopters, which was a major undertaking in Army aviation. At that time, I was the Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics [DCSLOG] for the USARV. The 1<sup>st</sup> Logistics Command was no longer there, but their numerous depots remained. This operation was highly secret and the support people were the last ones to be told about it. I was informed one morning that it would begin that afternoon. About the first information we received was that we should not allow this operation to fail logistically. It involved rapid replacement of both parts and equipment. Overnight, we needed twice as many trucks in Vietnam and about fairly large aircraft refueling points, which used huge fuel bladders. Before that time, we had only required in Vietnam two of these refueling points with rubber fuel bladders. Suddenly, we needed about seven more. Altogether, about 400 more trucks plus all types of additional equipment had to be operating up north immediately!

**LT FLETCHER:** Do you mean within 24 hours?

**MG POST:** Yes. We also had to increase the ammunition supply the next day, which was like doubling it within a short period of time. This operation was slated to last at least three months, during which time we were supposed to rely on the supply system. According to the system, you put in your requisitions and punched them into the computer, which should have sent these requests to CONUS, Okinawa, and various [other] places for return to us within hours or minutes. However, we realized that we couldn't depend on the computer system and that we had to provide this instantaneous requirement ourselves. GEN [Richard] Thompson, who is now the four-star commander of Army Materiel Command (AMC), was serving under me (remember, I was the DCSLOG, USARV) at the 14th Inventory Control Point at Long Binh. Well, GEN Thompson is the quintessential brilliant man. So, rather than rely on the inefficient computers, we relied on the computer stored in his brain to locate this equipment. From our little operations center in my office, we sent messages by telephone. We'd call Okinawa and say, "we need a hundred trucks tomorrow," and everybody responded. Trucks were in depots in Okinawa, and a large depot maintenance and repair rehabilitation facility was located. There, the trucks were quickly put on a roll-on, roll-off ship so that they would arrive within one or two days.

As I recall, we couldn't tell anybody why we wanted the aircraft refueling points with their huge bladders. The operation was still highly classified.

I think one of the depots in CONUS controlled these bladders. We would call and request 10 bladders or 10 refueling points with all the necessary equipment, and they might reply that only 7 remained in the system. We would say, "All right, send the seven" They would arrive by C-130 aircraft (maybe even by C-124s at that time), and we'd assemble them and make them functional. As a matter of fact, a couple of more plants and shipping points had to be opened up in CONUS to supply the ammunition that we ordered.

Well, fortunately or unfortunately, that operation ended after about six weeks instead of three or four months. A multitude of ships were on the ocean hauling ammunition and supplies, but by the time they arrived, we didn't need them anymore. Our soldiers weren't firing the ammunition, so the depots and supply points were jammed with it. Some time afterwards, GEN [Joseph] Heiser, who was the Army DCSLOG in the Pentagon at that time, came to Vietnam. He and LT GEN [William J.] McCaffery, who was the USARV commander, [Dick] Thompson and I were sitting in the conference room one day when GEN McCaffery said to GEN Heiser, "By golly, Joe, you know, that system really worked. We were able to support the operation logistically and had the parts there whenever we needed the equipment." GEN Heiser said, "I'm sure pleased at that -- it sure did." Well, Dick Thompson and I just looked at each other because if we had had to depend on the system, that operation wouldn't have lasted a week.

**LT FLETCHER:** That's somewhat unique. It sounds like you had an open checkbook to get whatever you needed. Is that true?

**MG POST:** Yes .

**LT FLETCHER:** Was this true both times you were in Vietnam?

**MG POST:** Yes. If ever a war was supported logistically, it was the Vietnam Conflict -- in some cases, maybe too much.

**LT FLETCHER:** Do you mean turning it on and turning it off?

**MG POST:** Turning it on was easier than turning it off. If GEN Heiser has written his memoirs, which he has probably already done, I'm sure that a large chapter concerns telephone poles. GEN Heiser had more telephone poles in Vietnam than were strung by the sides of all the roads in the United States. You couldn't shut the things off.

**LT FLETCHER:** Getting back to the 34th Group, in the one year you commanded, what event impresses you as being most significant?

**MG POST:** I have to say that the absolute professionalism of the troops of the 34th Group impressed me the most. Their dedication, knowledge, and hard work were some aspects of that command that really satisfied me. The 34th was a unique group anyway. The whole concept had never been attempted before and the breadth and scope of this operation made it a unique command that very few colonels in the United States Army had the privilege and experience of leading.

**LT FLETCHER:** Did one particular exercise or event strike you more than any other?

**MG POST:** Well, I'll always remember the first event that occurred after my arrival. The 34th Group was essentially responsible for successfully supporting the movement of the 1st Cavalry Division. Big battles would often shape up to be lengthy operations that required intensified support. By lengthy, I mean a week or two weeks. Those operations

were always exciting. We would break off detachments from the Group and provide direct support to the operation wherever it was taking place.

The day I left is also a significant memory. I hated to leave. I was privileged to command the 34th for the entire year I was in Vietnam. Our commands were usually only six months long.

**LT FLETCHER:** Did you need even a group command?

**MG POST:** Yes. The other aviation group commanders completed six-month tours, as did the brigade and battalion commanders. That time period wasn't long enough and caused inefficiency.

**LT FLETCHER:** Was there a particular reason your command lasted a year?

**MG POST:** I suppose tenacity and convincing my boss should have influenced it. If I could have stayed with the Group, I would have gladly extended for another year. But the time had come for somebody else to have a chance at it. So very reluctantly I left after a year, but that's the nature of Army life.

**LT FLETCHER:** In your debriefing, you made several recommendations. You talked about something called an "intensified vertical management system. Can you explain that?

**MG POST:** Yes. Major components like engines, transmissions, and rotor heads were taken as specific items to be intensively managed. Each piece of equipment required a manager. Aviation managers were located at the Aviation Systems Command in St. Louis.

**LT FLETCHER:** Were they like commodity managers?

**MG POST:** Yes, like commodity managers. For example, each engine in Vietnam was managed by serial number, which might seem to be an impossible task, considering the thousands of engines we had. We also kept track of trucks by serial number, but they, unlike our engines, were not critical item and were not intensively managed. Our system required that the engines be packed in Vietnam and shipped to Corpus Christi, for instance, where they would be overhauled and returned according to serial number. This constituted intensive management of the item. We also had actual commodity managers in Vietnam. AVSCOM placed their liaison people, about four or five at a time, right at the 34th Group headquarters to help intensively manage the items there. It had never before been done, as I recall, and it wasn't done for any other commodity in Vietnam. The Engineers might have done it for some of their major items, but if they did, I wasn't aware of it.

**LT FLETCHER:** Was this management system invented specifically for Vietnam?

**MG POST:** Right. It was.

**LT FLETCHER:** Another thing you mentioned was that customer delivery was a goal which you say was never implemented in Vietnam to the degree envisioned or desired?

**MG POST:** Yes, the goal was that the customer be able to requisition item through the AMMC. The items would be selected from the depot and then placed on dedicated aircraft or trucks and delivered right to the customer -- to that direct support company in the 1st Cavalry Division, for example.

**LT FLETCHER:** Do you mean that they were delivered to the customers instead of them coming to pick them up?

**MG POST:** Yes, the customer did not have to come to any depot or supply point. Well, we were never able to fully implement that because we didn't have the dedicated aircraft. Now, if we had had the Army Caribou, which we lost to the Air Force in 1965, that aircraft would have been perfect for customer delivery.

**LT FLETCHER:** What is the Caribou, sir?

**MG POST:** DeHavilland of Canada built the Caribou, which is a small cargo aircraft that resembles the C-124. I don't remember its carrying capacity, but it was a short field-landing, short take-off aircraft well suited to operations in Vietnam. The 14th Battalion up at Na Trang had one Caribou, which enabled the 1st Cavalry to provide some of the direct support and delivery. This situation worked extremely well. But we were never able to get the dedicated Caribou or C-124s because they belonged to the U.S. Air Force and we could never guarantee that they would be available to us on a total basis. So, unfortunately, the divisions and aviation groups had usually to come to the depot to pick up their own parts. That system is inefficient because having to pick up parts for use in a logistics role wastes aircraft flying hours needed for troop or gun support. Unfortunately, we didn't have the assets which would allow us to deliver the parts.

**LT FLETCHER:** Were you able to deliver some of the parts?

**MG POST:** Using our CH-47 and Huey helicopters to deliver critical parts would have been highly desirable, but we couldn't do it on a day-to-day basis.

**LT FLETCHER:** You said in your debriefing that contingency plans for a theater of operations should reflect early cognizance of the presence of expensive or critical weapons systems. What did you mean by this?

**MG POST:** Well, the statement is fairly self-evident and indicates a procedure that always should be followed. My experience spans three wars (World War II, Korea, and Vietnam). No previous war required as much expensive and critical equipment (like the

4,000 helicopters) as did Vietnam. If we had enough time and foreknowledge for this type of contingency planning, we could have the equipment in place in CONUS, for example, ready to be moved to the theater of operations. Then it would be there at the beginning of the operation and would provide immediate support. This scenario is preferable to having fits and starts or crash programs, which are extremely expensive, not only in money, but in time and human effort. Unfortunately, the contingency planning for Vietnam was not enough in this respect, but we expected to stay for only a matter of months, not for 10 years. Therefore, too much crash basis in Vietnam wouldn't allow dependence on prior planning. Contingency planning is a necessity in any war, but how much prior planning could have been done before Grenada, for instance? No one knew that it was going to happen.

**LT FLETCHER:** That leads me to my next question. What were some of the growing pains experienced in Army aviation maintenance in Vietnam? Can you reflect on that and elaborate on some of the developments?

**MG POST:** Yes, I suppose one of our biggest growing pains was computerizing the AMMC in order to reduce the requirement for pencil-work. Until the computers became operational (and getting those things working was difficult), we had to be content with the "stubby pencil" method. A problem was getting trained personnel to operate them and maintaining the proper operating climate. Another problem was bad input and output. Many people worked with the computers to check and edit output to ensure that it was what was expected. The situation gradually improved as we gained experience, but I was always surprised at the number of people, including dozens of editors, we needed to back up those computers so that we got what we thought we had ordered. Unlike our first-generation computers, we would probably have needed only one-tenth the size and number of modern computers to accomplish the same tasks. Today's models are more dependable, and chips which were in their infancy at the time of Vietnam, are now so small that they might allow computers one-hundredth the size they were then. Our computer system in Vietnam was not very dependable, and we always had problems keeping track of supplies in the depot.

**LT FLETCHER:** I understand you had quite a large authorized stock list [ASL].

**MG POST:** The ASL was large, and it was difficult to ensure that the lists were in the right bins so that they could be located. The rapid turnover of trained people to manage the supply point caused part of the problem. Gradually, this situation improved, but that type of problem required constant attention. Maintaining and controlling an inventory of supplies so that parts could be easily found probably caused more problems than actual aircraft maintenance since maintenance cannot be performed without parts. The 1stt Logistics Command had even greater problems finding parts in the depot than did the 34th Group. Inventories were constantly being taken. Teams were constantly coming from CONUS to inventory the depots, and even before they could finish, somebody else had started on the other end again. It was sort of like maintaining the Golden Gate Bridge, year-round. That thing's being painted all the time. They start painting at one

end, get to the other end and then start back at the beginning. It was the same way keeping an accurate inventory in Vietnam.

**LT FLETCHER:** We left a lot of equipment and parts in the warehouses and depots. Who do you think is using them?

**MG POST:** Yes, we did leave a great deal behind, but that wasn't the case with aviation parts.

**LT FLETCHER:** Did they keep a fleet of our helicopters?

**MG POST:** Absolutely not. Very few of the helicopters we left there are still flying. I imagine they had a difficult time finding their parts than we did and probably sold them to Iran and other parts of the world where those types of helicopters are operating.

**LT FLETCHER:** In your opinion, what is the most significant lesson-learned in Vietnam concerning the field of Army aviation maintenance?

**MG POST:** One of the most significant lessons was the concept of three-level maintenance, which was fairly well defined and adopted in Vietnam and is still used today, although it has been modified and has undergone some organizational changes. The three levels of maintenance, which we define as user maintenance (maintenance performed by aircraft owners and operators), support maintenance (DS [Direct Support] and GS [General Support] level maintenance -- which was the 34th Group), and depot maintenance (maintenance performed in CONUS and on the FAMF) have remained viable.

**LT FLETCHER:** So, three-level maintenance was developed in Vietnam?

**MG POST:** Yes.

**LT FLETCHER:** Did they really have time for such a thing as operator or user maintenance?

**MG POST:** Yes, they did, if you define the user as the helicopter company itself. Something as simple as a gun or as complicated as a troop-lift company had its own maintenance detachment. They did a lot of this user maintenance because they **had to** and always will have to do it. In support maintenance, the concept was not to do much depot maintenance there. The idea was to take the depot maintenance requirements back to CONUS and not have big maintenance depots established in the theater of operations. That concept should also be maintained in any further conflicts.

**LT FLETCHER:** Are you saying that depot-type maintenance should not be performed in the theater?

**MG POST:** Yes.

**LT FLETCHER:** Would you like to add any final thoughts you might have concerning the 34th Group in Vietnam?

**MG POST:** To summarize what we've been discussing concerning the 34th Group and aviation support supply maintenance in general, I think that we were fortunate to have had forward-thinking commanders like GEN [John] Norton, GEN [Richard G.] Stilwel, and GEN [William] Westmoreland, who realize the need for a different, more specialized support system for aviation operators in Vietnam for both present and future contingencies. Their advanced concepts probably provided a blueprint for future operations of this type. Although the Army doesn't have a 34th Group or a FAMF now, I believe that another 34th Group would have to be activated in any conflict, especially one the size and scope of Vietnam or, heaven forbid, general war in Europe or elsewhere. Such a conflict would require about triple or quadruple the number of Army aircraft we had in Vietnam. We wouldn't be able to afford a replacement aircraft every time one went down for maintenance or supply, and would have to go up again immediately.

Nothing that could compare to the 34th group had happened in Army aviation until the Vietnam conflict. Helicopters weren't [generally] used in Korea, for instance, so it couldn't have happened there. We had advanced to the stage where we could use helicopters in Vietnam. In any future war, they will be even more essential. Cobras were used in Vietnam, but true fighter helicopters weren't introduced there until the later-stages of the conflict ('68 and beyond). Since the introduction of Apaches, LHXs, and other more sophisticated aircraft, maintenance facilities like those provided by the 34th Group will become a necessity.

What disturbs me is that the 34th Group doesn't exist now when we need it as part of contingency planning. Units like the direct support and supply and maintenance units that were in Vietnam need to be resurrected now so that they will be available to us when we need them. Neither the National Guard nor the Reserves have such units. Although our contingency planning includes the concept of units such as those in the 34th Group the transition from planning to actual being requires time. So, I suppose that my greatest concern for Army aviation operations in future conflicts is that we won't have the support which we will need instantaneously. Although we have the Corpus Christi depot, the Aviation Logistics School at Fort Eustis, maintenance units at Fort Rucker, and other installations, we don't have any that can readily be moved to Europe or to some place in the Pacific.

The 34th Group and other aviation maintenance and supply units in Vietnam enjoyed great success because of the support they got, but it was at great expense. Of course, war is expensive. However, prior planning and correct implementation of those plans can reduce expense. Actually, the privilege of commanding the 34th Group in Vietnam from 1968 to 1969 was one of the high points in my 37 years of active service benefited my career the most. The people who worked for me in Vietnam and who gave the 34th Group its great reputation. Achieving my star was due, in great measure, to the help of the people in the 34th Group. Serving with them was certainly a privilege.

