

Interview with William Dimon

By: Richard Killblane and Wesley Michael

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Killblane: Sir, will you please start out and tell us when you arrived to the 159th [Transportation Battalion] in Vietnam, what your duty and rank were?

Dimon: I reported in there in September, right after Labor Day, of 1967. I stayed in the resupply area, or the replacement depot down there in Cam Ranh Bay for about a week and a half with the orders to catch up, and I went north on the morning of the 6th or 7th of September on a C130, landed in Qui Nhon, reported to the battalion. I was a major at the time and met Bob Marsh who was then the executive officer. Captain Clay Lewis was the acting Ops [Operations]. I was supposed to take over the Ops job which is what I did. I reported in and was escorted around by Bob. The LTC [Charles] Sunder at the time was in the battalion command.

Killblane: He had already assumed command?

Dimon: Yes. He was there. We made a mutual decision that I was going to take the Ops job. I went down and met the people down at the Op [Operations] shack on the beach. The LOTS [logistics-over-the-shore] site we called it the LST beach.

Killblane: You had mentioned that they'd offered you the XO [Executive officer] position.

Dimon: Well, yes. By virtue of date of rank, I outranked Bob Marsh, but I didn't want that XO job.

Killblane: Why is that?

Dimon: I wanted to be in the operations side of the business. I'd been in operations down in the Dominican Republic when I was there, so I wanted to continue my personal career with the 159th in Vietnam. If I had to be there I'm going to be with the personnel I wanted to be with. That's why I wanted that job.

Killblane: Did you have orders for the 159th when you arrived in Vietnam?

Dimon: Yes.

Killblane: Tell us about Qui Nhon and the mission of the 159th.

Dimon: We had the outer harbor discharge. Ammunition, high lightering to include Mike boats [landing craft, medium (LCM)] mostly, and LARC [lighter amphibious resupply cargo] LX's. We brought the stuff into the beach, staged it, then trucked it out to the ammo depots or the food supply depots, that type of thing. The unique part about Qui Nhon was that the beach gradient was such that we could use the LARC LXs to go out to the ships, way out, retrieve the cargo, foodstuffs, and drive them right across the beach into the depot area. You didn't have to double-handle everything. It went right to the refrigerator containers.

They had 20 or 30 reefer containers. It think there were at least two Sea/Land and military reefers, also. They were just backed up into the discharge or loading area down the line. When they were loaded with cargo, they moved to a certain spot where they positioned the LARC LX. There was enough room in there to maneuver so that they could place cargo right into the reefer boxes then push the stuff in. They could rotate their stocks real easily.

When they brought the ammo in they had to bring that to the LOTS site. Beyond the point of entry into that beach site there was no smoking anywhere. It was a healthy environment, so you knew if a boat blew the whole end of that LOTS site was going to go up, too. Moving ammo was our main mission. We had lighterage, and would allocate lighterage according to the needs of what commodities the people needed inshore. If they needed bombs versus food or what type bombs, they would send us to the ships that had that cargo on board. And, sometimes we had to go right down through the hold to pull stuff from the lower decks to get things moving to the Air Force and to the artillery people, the right consignees.

We also operated a rail train out of there. It was a Vietnamese operated rail train that went from Qui Nhon to Phu Cat Air Base every night. We'd load it during the day and then ship it out and they'd put the Vietnamese guards on it and send it up there. Mostly 250 and 500 pound bombs, that type of ammo.

Killblane: What did you call the LOTS site?

Dimon: Yes, I guess we called it "LST Beach" by common name, but I called it a LOTS site because it had always been. That was the term that mans moving cargo across the shore.

Killblane: You guys also mentioned "Latrine Beach?"

Dimon: Yeah, that's where we had our living quarters. There was a big expanse of open water that you could see rolling in, the ships were way out in the harbor, so we were out of harms way pretty much. We called it "Latrine Beach" because I commissioned my operations officer, Clay Lewis, we got two flush toilets from the Navy Market Time Operation across the harbor. We got to know them pretty well because we used their boats as a daisy chain water transport up and down the coast to go to different ports. So, I told him I'll give you two days to get those things in and operational. Before, we were just on open holes and dropping it into the sea, you know, and water come up and washed the beach away. Instead of being so crude we decided we'd get a flushed toilet, so that's what we got. He put them in, but the drain was right there under the beach.

Killblane: Are you living in tents?

Dimon: No, we had built, I think the battalion had a trailer assigned to it. Sunder and Marsh stayed in the trailer. It was in a group of trailers. We built our own quarters. We made the best we could.

Killblane: Tell me about the taskings, how they came down. Because you mentioned in reference to the Air Force how there were changes on what type ammo, how'd you get those?

Dimon: The Movements Region went to customers and they controlled all the cargo in and out as far as the requests.

Killblane: Who did that?

Dimon: The Movements Region.

Killblane: The TMA [Traffic Management Agency]?

Dimon: Yeah. The Transports Movements assigned to the Qui Nhon Support Command. They would go to the group headquarters. They had an operations meeting every morning at group headquarters, which I outfitted. Their operations people would throw out that we need so much lighterage for this type cargo, so much lighterage for the ammunition, so much for the freeze and chill cargo of perishables. Then we would allocate what we had operational. We had to give an operations report the night before, for example, how many boats we had in the ready line, LARC LX's. And, when LCUs [landing craft, utility] came in they were under manifest, and when those things came in we just reported what was there and the Movements Region would allocate it and put it in the depot or ship it to whoever the consignee was. We were also responsible for the movement of the 101st [Airborne Division] a couple of times, too.

Killblane: Explain that.

Dimon: They came in, they wanted to move someplace so we cleared them across the beach into LSTs, LCUs, to get them moved where ever they had to go north and south along the coast to go on operations and missions. Mostly moving north all the time. That's were the enemy pressure was at the time.

Killblane: Tell me about Sau Hugynh and when did that happen and how you got the mission.

Dimon: That was the end of 1967. We needed a small lighterage port to get supplies into Duc Pho which was a support base for the operational region operated by the divisions or whoever happened to occupy the land at the time. They had small depots set up there and resupply points for fuel, ammunition, food, etc., mostly C-rations. Then instead of moving it over land, (they were losing a lot of vehicles along Highway 1) we brought it in by sea it wouldn't be any benefit at all. We would take the LCUs out of the fleet that came to us from Cam Ranh Bay or wherever and reload them to go into the support base at Sau Hugynh. Then the people would come down to retrieve it or we'd ship it to them by overland trucks and the local vehicles. I forget what units were supporting that area, but mostly, the Infantry and the people who occupied the ground would come in and pick up their cargo right off the LCUs at Sau Hugynh.

Killblane: Did you use anything else besides LCUs?

Dimon: Yes, we had LARC LXs also, four for awhile then ended up with two, but we had a reefer barge out there at anchor too, that we kept food supplies in a frozen state. I lost track of that place when we moved north with the 159th then the group headquarters was operating the small port.

Killblane: Tell me how you set up the operation, the process of going in there.

Dimon: We went in bare-based. The Infantry met us on the ground, we went in and selected the landing sites that we needed for LCUs and LARC LXs. We had 2 LARC LXs to start the port operation.

Killblane: You said "we". Who did the recon?

Dimon: I did.

Killblane: Okay, you went in.

Dimon: People from the 159th. Every time something came up that the CG of Support Command [Qui Nhon] needed in the way of Logistics-Over-The-Shore, they'd call up the 159th Battalion. They would say we need to get this and that done. Then they'd say, "Okay, Dimon go in and see General McBride and find out what he wants". And, they'd send me and a couple of people on a LARC LX or a Market Time daisy chain boat to go up there and find out what was going on and find out where the good sites were and they'd recon and we'd recon. The Infantry would recon, come in from the shore, and we'd recon the area and map, aerial at first then by sea to occupy the land and we went in by LARC amphibians.

Killblane: Now you still run the operations the LST beach at Quinyong so what do you use up there at Sau Hugynh?

Dimon: We had to strip the assets out of the battalion assets to take them up there to do the mission.

Killblane: So, you're just taking a few LARC LXs?

Dimon: And the LCUs when they came to us. We'd call the Movements Region and the Movements Region would task that LCU company or their battalion. It was a big circle. We didn't control the LCUs until they got on our beach. Once they were on our beach, we had to do what was necessary with the cargo: get it off, reload it. We'd take it off of one then put it on another, sometimes to resupply the northern area, but mostly it went into the depot.

Killblane: What kind of command and control did you set up at Sau Hugynh? I saw the pictures of the tent.

Dimon: When we went there it was a few officers and I think probably half, a little bit more, of a terminal service company. We took it right out of assets of the 159th Battalion.

Killblane: Do you know which one?

Dimon: I forget. I don't remember that, but those assets came with people and we had bulldozers to make up the ramp for the LCUs when they came in. We coordinated with the Infantry. They surrounded us with their own troops rifles and bangalore torpedoes anytime they

heard people coming in. They blew the whole protected mountainside away so they could see what was around us. Again, like I mentioned earlier, we were right at the south end of the salt flats where the Vietcong used to come in all the time, the Vietnamese, too, used that salt area to pull up the salt to preserve their fish. Sau Huygnh was a major east coastal fishing town. It was the efforts of a thousand folks in the area. They all came in together. A lot of them were out a sea for time and time again.

We had a few incidents, too, where the enemy took a few people out. They hit us one night and killed three of our people right there. That was the last time that happened because the Infantry got in and put up a perimeter around the north of us. We built a stilted guard shack right at the north end of the LCU beach, which was as you came in from the sea, made a right turn, and went around, then made another hard right turn to go into the beach. It was facing the shore and the discharge area was facing away from the mainland, so that we couldn't be spied on to let them find out what was coming off or going on. I think that method of operation provided a little security.

Killblane: That terminal service company you brought down there with you, the assets came out of the terminal service company that was organic to you?

Dimon: I can't remember whether it was the 159th Battalion or the 349th Battalion, but the crew after the Da Nang Support Command said, "We give you the mandate to do this and this. You take the assets you need to do it." So, they pulled it from different companies because they tasked the battalion and the battalion would come up and say Infantry company you do this, LARC LX Company you do this, give me two, give me three, whatever was needed to get the job done and the base opened up.

Killblane: How long did you operate that LOTS operation there at Sau Hugynh?

Dimon: It was still in operation when we left Qui Nhon in March of 1968. I lost track of it. It remained in the central area's jurisdiction and we went to Da Nang.

Killblane: Do you have any questions about the terminal operations there?

Dimon: No.

Killblane: Could you tell me about Wunder Beach. How you guys got the message. Tell me about the fact that Colonel Sunder was on leave and how that came down.

Dimon: We got the tasking again, I'm sure it came from higher up, but the Qui Nhon Support Command got the tasking to find me, it was probably General [William] Westmoreland or [Creighton] Abrams, a site in the northern sector, near Khe Sanh, and my orders or my mandate from General McBride was keep it at least three miles south of the gun line which was the northern border between north and south Vietnam. Not in the Three MAF [III Marine Amphibious Force] area because Three MAF had their own major problems. They had boats up there. The Marines were pretty solid in that area so that was a base that we did not and could not interfere with and could use. So I had a completely new site. I went with a quartermaster

officer, an engineer, and myself went to Danang. We checked in with the Marine Amphibious Force.

Killblane: You flew up there?

Dimon: Yes. I had friends in many places and I had friends who happened to have a couple of CH47s sitting on a ramp. So I said, "friend of mine", unfortunately he's now deceased, but he's saved my life many times. I said I need an CH47 or something to get me to Da Nang with my jeep and my driver and all my goodies. We loaded up one morning and they flew us to Da Nang. I didn't want to go up by road I can tell you that. When we got there the first stoppage we had was Marble Mountain. We stayed in the Marble Mountain area of Da Nang which was south of the depot complex which is a body of water from the main part of Da Nang. I had friends on the Red Beach area who had all kinds of helicopters because they were a maintenance outfit, too. Red Beach was an inner harbor logistics site, but there were a couple of aircraft maintenance units there, and a couple of operational units, support units for the Da Nang complex. We could go over there or call them and say can we have a helicopter for a recon and to do this and do that. They said, "Sure." So, we drove over to Da Nang at what we call the Red Beach area which was a small helicopter airfield, too.

We took off from there and had maps, aerial charts and the Sea Bee guy was along with us at that time, and we hooked up with them and flew north along the coast at pretty much a high altitude if we saw something that looked reasonable, looked like could be part of the operation. We flew over Hue-Phu Bai and East coast north of Da Nang about a day or so after it was taken by the Viet Cong. VC and NVA had taken all that area and some of those places were just overwhelmed and the populations were just run out. Then we saw this site and the water, you could tell the grey and by the depth of the water whether or not you could put the causeway in and that type of equipment. So, the Sea Bee said "This looks pretty good", so we just flew in and landed. We had an escort helicopter with us, with about three or four Marines, I think. I don't know if they were Marines or Sea Bees, but they were armed and so were we. And we kept the birds running even though we were in soft sand, they wanted to keep things running and fluid until we knew what we had.

We picked that site. We went up and down that beach several times, a couple of days after that, to reassure ourselves that we had found the right site. This was what we could report back to the support command with and say that this is where we wanted to go, this is what we had to do. The Sea Bees selected an area obviously with pretty solid land behind it so they could put a road out to Route 1 going north and south. They had to build a road virtually from pretty much scratch. It was an ox trail and they built the road that went from Wunder Beach out to Route 1 to go north or south, Three MAF or the other Infantry and the other people in the area that were living along that coastal plain to include Hue-Phu Bai and I don't think we ever went back into Da Nang. But, there were aviation maintenance outfits out there and units that had to be protected and had to be supplied. Then came a mandate, let's get a buildup going here, because we had a couple of Infantry battalions come in and occupy the ground with us. They were the ones that were designated to go in and relieve Khe Sanh from the ground instead of doing an envelopment by air. I know LTC Sunder can probably tell it better than I can who they were because by that time I was deeply involved in operations and getting things going on the

beach and he was getting queries from Da Nang. Through the Infantry how are we going to do this? The morning they made their assault into Khe Sanh they lost, I think, a couple of helicopters and three of their major commanders.

Killblane: Who lost them, 1st Cav?

Dimon: The Infantry did.

Killblane: When you received the tasking who was the acting commander since Colonel Sunder was Stateside.

Dimon: I was. Of the 1-5 [Cavalry] Battalion. The XO was Bob Marsh, he stayed in Qui Nhon.

Killblane: Oh, so when you moved forward. When you were in Qui Nhon, Bob Marsh was the rear area commander. You got the maps. Of the beaches you looked at, did you land at any of the others besides the one you selected?

Dimon: We did a couple of sweeping, low passes, but mainly we didn't want to jeopardize the people that had given us the helicopter because that was a risky mission in one case because we didn't have Infantry support with us, we had no gun power support with us, we had no contact with anybody on the ground. So if we took small arms we knew it was not friendly fire. We hadn't coordinated with the Navy or anybody who had vessels off shore that could put fire power into the area to interdict any motion coming our way. I think we swept maybe two or three or four different site before we decided on the one where Wunder beach finally grew up out of the sand.

Killblane: So, Wunder Beach was essentially the obvious choice. So how long do you spend on the ground doing your recon?

Dimon: We were there for maybe an hour and a half to three hours the first day checking the land. We could land LARC LX with no problem. The main concern at that time was if we could put LCUs in there. The Sea Bee said, "Well, it looks like we can get a causeway ashore."

We did all this coordination standing there on the ground just looking at it and saying, "Well, here's where you can do this, and they can put refueling bladders out there, too, and run a jetty out around the causeway." That never panned out because the gradient turned out to be too steep. They couldn't put enough rocks and things in there to give us a sheltered harbor. And, we were going to use LARC Vs, too. They're not very sea-worthy, because this was open ocean on the South China Sea. We didn't have the protected area that we wanted. This was open ocean beach. Notwithstanding, the sea snakes out there were thicker than flies.

Killblane: You said as far as the beach gradient, I thought it was very shallow going out, then all of a sudden, it just dropped down. How far out did it drop?

Dimon: I'd say maybe 200 or 300 yards, maybe less than that, because they never could get a break water.

Killblane: That's the length of the causeway then, way out to where it dropped off.

Dimon: Yes.

Killblane: Where were you at when Tet Offensive broke out?

Dimon: Sitting in Da Nang over on what they called Marble Mountain area. It was a part of the depot, and they had some barracks there and the whole Army side of the Da Nang Support Command was in that area. It was on a two-story barrack building. We were going to try to get some sleep to do another recon the next day and then Tet hit.

Killblane: Oh, so you'd done the first recon, Tet hit that night?

Dimon: Then we were in a major panic because we had some bits of our people, just me and my driver and a few other people from the Qui Nhon area. I again called on a friend of mine to get me back to Qui Nhon. I got to report that things are happening here pretty fast. This friend of mine came over from Red Beach to Marble Mountain Airfield or Heliport. I climbed in the left seat and he got in the right seat and we took my driver. He said that I saved his life many, many times.

Killblane: What's his first name, do you remember?

Dimon: I always called him Husch Stanly.

Anyway, we took off out of there. This is a personal story, but I'll tell you. The guy by the name of Harry Hobbs had the helicopter, and he said just south of here last night they shot down a C130. We were just under the clouds, it was an overcast day and pretty sloppy as far as the weather was concerned. He said, "You set up a climb and I'll call for clearance because we're going to use instruments, we can't get out of here without it."

He didn't want to go down the coast. We didn't want to go offshore because if you lose site of land then you're vertigo already. So, we set up a climb, we went up to the clouds and we just got out of the clouds on top before we hit the mountains on the southside of the Danang area. We broke out on top. The Air Force gave us the clearance, and we were home free then.

We were on top of the clouds and we could see way, way on down the road. But, ironically we had to refuel at Duc Pho which was supported from Sau Hugynh. When we called for a landing at the previous airfield where we could have landed and gotten resupplied, they said be advised, our airfield is overrun, you cannot land here. So, we had to go on down to Duc Pho to get refueled again. We'd broken past the mountains then, the weather was stacked against the mountains. We got over the mountains and then down on to the coastal plain again. So, we landed a Huey, refueled hot, I mean running, with rotors turning, because they were under siege, too, and we didn't know where it was coming from.

Then we finally took off and I took the Huey back to Qui Nhon. And that's when it hit the fan. I said, "Okay, we got the beach recon, we got this done, we got that done, it's a go." General Abrams said I don't want to do this, because you know, during war in the Second World War, he had been clobbered Over-The-Shore operation. But anyway, to make a long story short, Then the Support Command told the 5th Terminal [Command], "Take the assets you need, get you the shipping, and we'll go from there."

Killblane: When you got to Quinyong, what was going on? Was Qui Nhon attacked?

Dimon: Yeah, they had taken it out in Cha Rang Valley. I don't think they ever got into or captured the city of Qui Nhon. We just knew from the airfield on out we were pretty safe. From the airfield on in to the LST beach and the other deep water harbor with the DeLong pier, we had to make sure that that stayed secure.

I know there was a Korean division out of the force because we had Korean soldiers as stevedores. They'd come down to Qui Nhon, and they'd be port operations people for 3, 4 or 5 months at a time. Then they'd revert to soldiers and they'd report right back to the Tiger Division or whatever security force they wanted to be or were assigned to. We knew we had a double force of soldiers, Korean soldiers anyway, either discharging the ships and handling cargo, or out in the valley protecting us from any insurgents from the hinterlands back into Qui Nhon.

When I got back the battalion was under full movement. We were moving cargo and day and night. We had record days of discharge and all that good cargo information. Then the port commander of the group said, "Okay, here's what we got to do and here's what we're going to do it with." So they called for an LST. Then we loaded up most of the stuff from there on four LARC LXs. We put the vehicles on the LARC LXs and put the LARC LXs on board the LST. I want to say *Comstock*, but it could have been another, because I've operated in the Dominican Republic and Vietnam with the same vessels. The same LSDs showed up in both theaters. So, I'm getting my ships confused, I have other pictures I think.

The Navy came up with a pretty good fleet of support boats. Market Time came up with their escort and patrol boats. The Navy had already zeroed in on the coordinates and the targets and anything else that they had to do and do interdiction along the coast up north of Da Nang. Then I think after a two day load out they said, "Okay, that's everybody's that's going get on board." To tell you the truth, those three days I was up most of the time. It was such a blur to me that I woke up one morning and I'm on the Lykes line with my jeep and another driver going up there. That blurs into the fact that I got back, I got on the LSD, and we headed north, and went into Da Nang Harbor. The Marines, the Sea Bees, the Navy, and everybody else coordinated their movements and the next day we steamed up to the LOTS site.

When they said, "Land the landing party," that was it. They said put them ashore, and of course that LSD turned aft in and got anchored. Then they were swinging on the hook and lowered the back end and we took the LARC LXs out of there. We rolled ashore on a misty, cold, and if you can believe it, rainy day in Vietnam. "Miserable." It was the worst day we could have had as far as my recollection, because we knew we had

to get hunkered down and hopefully the Infantry was there on the ground waiting to protect us. That was when we were scrambling to build our bunkers in the CONEX containers because I had a picture of Sunder and Bob Marsh holding the first NVA rocket that ever hit the beach. I don't know how many we took after that, but they said that was the first one. It didn't explode, by the way. That's why they had pieces of it. They would hit us with mortars. Because the sand was so soft and deep and they didn't know how to set their fuses or didn't set them properly or didn't have a way to set them quick, when they would hit and go into the ground you'd hear a mortar go "bfft", that was it. There was no shrapnel, there was just a puff of sand.

Killblane: How long after you had made your landing did you first start taking inbound fire?

Dimon: To tell you the truth, I don't remember. All I know is we'd wake up in the morning and somebody said they hit a LARC V last night, ineffectual. The Sea Bees would get things moving, as far as if when they'd see a break in the wall. We had an [14th] engineer battalion, too, that went up there with us later on. They came up, I think mostly by roads but they had major escort. By the time we got there the Sea Bees had already put the roads through after they got the mandate to do this thing from the Da Nang Support Command.

Killblane: You said the Sea Bees put the roads in, would you tell us again how they put the road in?

Dimon: They took their own little dozers and trucks and built it. They'd take what good dirt they could find or sand, and they expanded an ox trail until eventually it became about a two-lane road.

Killblane: Is this the slurry mix?

Dimon: No, that was on the beach itself. A lot of our 2 ½-tons were just bogging down in the sand it was so deep you could not get any depth for traction. You know how a 2 ½-ton will just lunge along and try to find its traction and then get up on the sand once it gets rolling that's fine, but you could never stop in that stuff and expect to get going again if it was loaded. It was just too much, so the engineers brought this big machine in and it would pick the sand up from the beach and mix the cement and the water around somehow and out of the backend of that thing came an eight-foot wide ribbon of cement. They'd let it dry and cure for two or three days and you could run 2 ½-tons on it all day. The cement was almost eight to twelve inches thick when it was done, and it was fine, but there was just too much activity to get a good hard stand in there to keep a motor pool up off of the sand. It was just too much. But they did help us and got the trucks moving from the boats to the depot, from the causeway to the storage area. We spent a few months in a CONEX container with C-rations.

Killblane: Tell us about how you task-organized, because you did not take but maybe one or two organic units with you.

Dimon: No, we didn't. I think we took half of a LARC V outfit and I don't think we got any LARC XVs out there at the time. Although, I do remember seeing some in the area before I left.

I think we took a half of LARC LX Company, because they still needed them in Qui Nhon, too. It was a regular dogfight across the table. "I've got to have this. I got to have that. I've got to have a fuel tanker. You can take a fuel tanker. I need to refuel my LARC LXs. I need to refuel my dozers. I need to refuel a lot of equipment that were taken out of there. You know we only have three. If you take one that's a third of our assets."

Killblane: Who were you arguing with at this time?

Dimon: I'm arguing with the 5th Terminal Commander and the operations people. They're trying to protect their assets and I'm trying to beef mine up. To tell you the truth, the taskings were done at the 5th Term. They were telling me what I could get and I'd tell them what I needed. They'd tell me what you need, and I told them it was fact. And, then we'd strip that out of a unit. So, when we finally got a tanker truck, we didn't think it was going to be such a big operation. They didn't know it would be internationally known by the time it finished. As a result of the logistics support, help from the Infantry, the Air Force and everybody else, to get the equipment and the stuff they poured on to Khe Sanh and get them out of there, Khe Sanh was eventually liberated.

Killblane: When did Sunder arrive. Tell me about that.

Dimon: The day of the landing. We were going north. He was probably in telephonic contact with the people at the Da Nang Support Command or maybe with the 5th Terminal Group. I know he was anxious to get back, his father had passed away. He was anxious, and I guess he got to Da Nang after we had left there to go north to the beach site. Radio contact being what it was, "Where are you? This is the Navy helicopter calling advance force and the landing force, where are you?" "Well, we're ten miles offshore." "Okay, I see it, we've got the battalion commander with us, we'll bring him in, or whatever." And they brought him onto the tail end of the LST going north.

Killblane: But you said they could only land one wheel.

Dimon: They didn't have a flight deck. It was operational, and they didn't go the flight quarters. But the helicopter just showed up, and there it was. So, he flew up the aft end of the ship, turned the helicopter, got kind of sideways into the wind and put his right landing gear on the top of a container. Then out jumped Sunder from the hold of the H34, I call H34, I don't know what the Navy's designation was. But anyway, that's how he got back to his battalion. Then, we sat around and told him what had happened, what was going on, and who did what to who, and what we had and what we needed. Then, of course, he was taking notes like mad because he knew we had the bare minimum to exist.

It finally worked out that once we got ashore and everybody started scrambling around and talked what we got to do and here's we got to do it, first we've got to live, and that's when the CONEX containers went under the sand. That was a day and night's work. We got most of the troops settled and behind small arms berms whatever they could, and sand bags were going up like mad. We set up an operations tent right on the beach and staked out the helicopter cross right alongside it, which was a stupid thing to do

because every time a chopper came in, it blew all the stuff out of the operations shack. But we had to have a place for General Westmoreland to land when we came to see what his taskings had wrought.

Killblane: Not just him, you had a lot of VIPs out there.

Dimon: Yeah, a few showed up.

Killblane: When Colonel Sunder arrived, did he make any changes to your operations?

Dimon: It was too late for changes. We were committed with what we had. He and I both knew it was going to be bare minimum until we got more support out of Da Nang. We were then committed to the Da Nang Support Command for any support at all. They became our taskers from then on. We transferred allegiance or transferred command and control from the Qui Nhon Support Command to the Da Nang Support Command. That made it easier because you could get back and forth to Da Nang a lot quicker than you could be to Qui Nhon. We used to use the Market Time patrol boats. They had a mortar sitting on the back end, and a couple of .50 caliber mounts. They could go up and down the beach and just strafed anything you wanted strafed. They would come up and cruise up along the beach from Da Nang, and I made a couple of trips from the LOTS site on Wunder Beach all the way to Quinyong on a market time boat. They were fast. They called them swift boats. They'd get on the water and they'd get up on a plane and they were doing 35, 40, 50 miles an hour when the seas were good. We could get back and forth in a day, day and a half.

Killblane: Why did you have to do that?

Dimon: Make liaison with the people and report in. We didn't have a telephone that you look into and see the other person talking to you in those days. I wished we had, but we didn't.

Killblane: Tell me about the first day's activities again.

Dimon: The first day was spent just getting all the equipment ashore, making sure we had everybody mustered. Fortunately we didn't have any casualties overboard or accidents. The main thing was getting hunkered down and then being operational by the next day or two.

When we went in we decided to stay inside the dune line. We dug CONEX containers in the dunes then covered them with sand. We left the door open, placed a blast break in front of them with sand or sand bags, so when you had mortars and incoming fire, you didn't take it all with a shock wave, you know, blow your ear drums out.

Killblane: When did you get the CONEXs?

Dimon: They came in with us. They were the shipping containers that we brought our equipment to the beach and they were on the LSD.

Killblane: Did you have to shut down the operations that day for any reason? You took what you had already loaded then you would run the LARCs back to pick up more cargo.

Dimon: They went in to get stuff off the LSD. We had a forward portion of the LSD which was loaded drywell. Then the LARC LXs would go back out after they were discharged with our rolling equipment and the troops that brought that stuff in. Then the LARC LXs would go back out and pick up the equipment that was in the dry section of the well deck of the LSD.

Killblane: You don't remember any problems with the weather?

Dimon: Like I said it was miserable weather that day. I know it because it was my birthday. It was March 6th. We just kept on going because we knew that was it. We made the liaison and the Sea Bees came in then, too. They started their fuel resupply for the Navy equipment. They got a bakery going and got this going and a laundry set up, a regular little "city" right there on the beach. But, lost most of the amenities of the troops back in Qui Nhon so to speak. It was never a fun day at Wunder Beach.

Killblane: How long did it take before all these amenities showed up?

Dimon: Within days a gradual build up of the equipment and the supplies, they tried to set the shower points up early to keep the troops washed down. After the rains left and the monsoons quit, it got hot there, too. The 1st Cav [Cavalry Division] liked the beach because they could come visit. They thought they were on R&R [rest and recuperation] when they came down there. We told them, there are sea snakes out there and they are poisonous. They are deadly, but the soldiers would strip down and go into the water anyway. They couldn't have cared less. I had seen the snakes swarm around our place. We had to drop lights over the sides of the ships, just swarming under the lights hoping to get something to eat. It was an interesting time to say the least.

Once we got the cargo moving, the lighterage and the causeways in, the LCUs could start discharging cargo. They needed lumber, they needed tonnage, they needed everything that you ever needed, because there was no indigenous labor to come in and help us do this or do that, or take your laundry like they did in the garrisons down in Qui Nhon or Da Nang. It was all self supporting and self sustaining, and that's the way it was.

Killblane: How many causeways did they establish?

Dimon: One.

Killblane: Did they form that out at sea?

Dimon: Yes. LSDs and some LSTs have these rails on the side of them. They call them causeway rails, and they pull the causeways up flat against the side of the ship. When they come in and get to a site where they're going to put a causeway in, they just cut them loose and let them flop into the water. Then they had these warping tugs and little pusher boats go out and marry them up, put them together, bolt them, get them all pinned together and they're hinged so

they can go up and down and warp this way. Then once they get the causeway made up with an approach ramp and a push end they just line up the warping tugs on the north, south side of it and push the thing right ashore, pushed as hard as they could to get it as far ashore as they could to get it solid on the ground for that was the anchor. Then they'd throw out, I guess you'd call them causeway anchors. They'd take them out and drop them and tighten up on the thing. The currents go one way one day, then one way the next, so they had to anchor them both sides all the way from offshore to inshore with their anchors. Then they finally pulled them in and put dead man in, and drive the stake in the ground to hold the causeway in place. But, when we had a storm, it went out a couple of times, though. They didn't like that.

Killblane: What was the surf zone on this beach, how far out?

Dimon: I'd say the beach was sometimes 100, 200, 300 yards wide. We lost a LARC LX out there, too. Did they tell you about that?

Killblane: I'd like to hear it again.

Dimon: They put too much lumber on a LARC LX off of one of the resupply ships. A LARC LX is rated at 60 tons. The Coxswain told me later, I think we had about 100 tons on there. I don't know how they got it in. I'd seen them loaded with ammunition with 100 tons on them at Qui Nhon, of course it was a safe harbor. We at times had to guide them ashore because it gets foggy at night, "Turn left, turn right, you're headed to the beach, turn left, turn right." You know, we worked 24 hours around the clock. They did not stop. When nighttime came we put another crew on the same LARC LX, refueled it, did the greasing, and sent it on back out there.

Well, this one got off course. They didn't follow the daisy chain coming back off the ship. It was foggy and I think it was dark, too. The coxswain got disoriented and he went too far up the beach. I don't know whether the surf got him or what, but they started taking on water and once they started taking water the bilge pumps could not keep it out, and they just went down. Of course, once they got down to where the lumber could float free, the vessel itself had sunk by the stern when it went to the bottom. It was upside down. There's a LARC LX with a pocket of air in it holding the bow off the bottom. The copula was on the bottom holding the vessel in place. The lumber had all floated free.

So, here we had a LARC LX, which was just kind of bobbing in the water with its curved front end sticking up to where the salvage crew could see it. We went out there and the salvage tug finally got some lines on it to where they could maneuver sufficiently to pull the LARC LX over into a wheels-down position. In other words it was floating, then it sunk and went to the bottom, but it was wheels-down so it could roll. Then we threw some lines on it. This was outside the perimeter, too. It was north of where our small arms was. So we told the Infantry we've got to have protection here on a daily basis or we're going to lose something if we go up there and try to do repair and retrieve the LARC LX. They said, "Okay," and sent a couple of platoons and a couple of recoilless rifles with us.

I had a LARC LX with, I guess, a 6 or 8 inch halyard on the stern, coupled on a yoke, then I had two dozers, one on each one of the LARC LX coupled to the yoke in front. It was full of water at that time. They get pretty heavy. We were pulling on the LARC, the dozers pulled on the LARC. The LARC LX was fired up, too, all four wheels grinding. And we started moving that thing up out of the water, and it gradually came clear. I kept saying "take it slowly, take it slowly," because it's got to drain. We've got to get the water out of it somehow. About half way through this evolution that nylon line that the Navy salvage people had given us had gone from about a six inch diameter all the way down to about three inches. That thing was so loaded with kinetic energy that it was beginning to steam. It was hot because of the contractions. It parted just below the water on the yoke from the sunken LARC LX that the Navy had rigged on the thing. I was standing on the back end of the pulling LARC.

I'll never forget this day in all my life because the two or three people with me were watching this thing going. When this coiling line came up out of the water it looked like a monster serpent with a great big puff of steam. It looked like a steamed up snake coming right at us. That's 300 yards of this stuff and it was so full of energy, I said, "Everybody jump to the well deck." And, we all did. Of course the guy in the couplo was stuck in the cockpit anyway. He couldn't do anything. He just ducked. And we heard it rumble when it hit the back end of the LARC. It sloped like this, and thank God, it pushed the line down. Then the line went down underneath the LARC LX and splayed out almost 100 yards beyond. One hundred yards beyond the LARC that it was attached to. I mean it was so full of kinetic energy alone, it could have pulled that LARC out of there. We had it about half out of the water then the Navy said, "We're done, you get it and do what you have to do. It's on the water line, you can have it". It was number 44. I said, "Okay, thanks a lot." The Infantry stayed around and we could get things squared away.

Killblane: So you finally got it out?

Dimon: We finally pulled the thing up out of the water. We didn't know what to do with it. We had to take instructions all the way from St. Louis as to what to do with this monstrous asset. So they left it outside of the perimeter. The Infantry would go up and check it once in a while. Three or four weeks, or maybe a couple of days later, the Infantry found out that there were close to ten or twelve North Vietnamese living in it, in the underneath compartments.

Killblane: Did you get the numbers of how many were in there?

Dimon: No, I just know that they had found some Vietnamese.

Dimon: You know what the Infantry did? Once it was released for free-fires, they got their 105 recoilless rifles, their 37mm and anything else they could and went up there and just blew the hell out of them. The LARC 44 became a relic on the beach. Because they didn't want to go up there and fight those VC off, they blew them up but they came out of there with their ears bleeding because they'd blown their ears out. I don't know what happened to it after that, but I know what happened to all the rest of the LARC LXs. When I came back from Vietnam, my job was the commander of the Rio Vista Rebuild facility out of Sharp Army Depot in Rio Vista,

California, right on the Sacramento River. I got every one of the LARC LXs back and we had to rebuild them and put them back in the fleet in a year's time in Rio Vista.

Killblane: Tell me about Colonel Sunder and how you guys came up with Sunder's Wunders.

Dimon: Well, when I got there they were already, the battalion was Sunder's Wonders.

Killblane: He'd already started before you got there.

Dimon: Yeah, the guys in the little club house I showed you, came up with the song, "We are Sunder's Wunders."

Killblane: I could get you to sing it sometime.

Dimon: Oh, no you're not. I have the words, and so does he, probably. There are several raunchy versions of that song.

Killblane: We don't have those.

Dimon: Oh, you don't? Well, you're not going to get them from me, I don't think. That was the motto, "Sunder's Wunders."

Killblane: What was the tune to it, do you remember?

Dimon: The song about New Orleans, "We are Sunder's Wunders."

Killblane: "The House of the Rising Sun".

Dimon: Yeah, "House of the Rising Sun," not New Orleans. I guess it's a kind of a camaraderie rally, anyway, that's how that started.

Sunder was on the radio. You knew it was Sunder on the radio because when he was done, he wouldn't say, "This is so and so, out." He'd say, "Nothing further," and that was it. Everybody knew it was Sunder's voice anyway, but you could hear him all over Qui Nhon during the day and night, too.

Killblane: So, how did you get the name Wunder Beach?

Dimon: Wunder Beach, Sunder's Wunders, Wunder Beach. It was just a follow-on. They didn't want to call it "Dimon's Dilemma," I can tell you that, no way. Another name we got was "Dimon's Dugouts," but that's another story.

Killblane: This will be a good point to end then. Thank you.