Carl C. Hansen

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Part 1
Interviewed by Ed Sanderson
Transcribed by Unknown
Edited by Alex Swanson & Leah Cohen

Hansen: Ed, just a heads up: I'm on a cell phone connection out here, and so sometimes they drop. If you lose me, just call me back.

Sanderson: Alright, that we will do.

Hansen: Okay.

Sanderson: One of the things I always like to go over before we start is…roughly how much time do you have for us today?

Hansen: Rest of the day! [Laughs] No, I've got company coming at one o'clock. I've got a couple hours.

Sanderson: All right. During the course of this, we'll definitely do what we can to maximize your time, but also to make sure that…during the course of it, if I ask any questions or anything…please, by all means, let us…just say, "Hey, I don't want to talk about it." If you're feeling uncomfortable about anything, just let us know. Our biggest thing is we definitely want to make sure that we get the history…we get the story you want to tell. We greatly appreciate you spending time with us today.

Hansen: All right.

Sanderson: All right, and it is okay to record you, correct?

Hansen: Yes it is.

Sanderson: Thank you very much, Sir. I'll go ahead and start off. Today is August 24th, 2015, and today we are speaking with Carl Hansen, a member of DASPO -- Department of the Army Special Photographic Office. You're in the unit from 1967 to 1969, and during that time…

Hansen: Yeah, until…yeah, 'til January 1st, 1970. Yeah.

Sanderson: 'Til January, 'til January 1st, 1970. That's a nice little New Year's present, like, "Hey, thanks! You get to go home."

Hansen: [Laughs] Start the New Year off, perfectly.

Sanderson: There you go. New Year, and a new decade. So, what I like to do is start off with a little background information, and then we get into your time at DASPO. Once we get done with DASPO, if it's alright, we would like to talk to you about your activities afterwards, as well.

Hansen: Sounds good to me.

Sanderson: So, definitely looking at your bio from the Smithsonian, you got…looks like you got pretty storied career while you were there, and also when you left, as well.

Hansen: Yeah, it's been a good ride.

Sanderson: [Laughs] Yeah. All right. So we'll go ahead and start off. Where were you born and raised at?

Hansen: I was born in a little town -- Sidney, Montana -- in the very eastern…if we'd been across the river, we would have been in North Dakota.

Sanderson: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Hansen: I have two sisters and one brother.

Sanderson: And are you the oldest or middle?

Hansen: I'm the second oldest. I have an older sister.

Sanderson: Okay, and how was it like growing up in a small town? In Montana?

Hansen: Pretty ordinary, I'd say. It wasn't anything special. I remember we played football, and all the local things, and did my huntin', and stuff like that. But there wasn't anything real special. It's out there in almost the Badlands, on the Yellowstone River. I worked a lot of different jobs as a kid, and it was pretty normal. I had some interesting jobs as a kid.

Sanderson: What kind of different jobs did you have prior to…as a kid growing up?

Hansen: Oh, let's see. Well, one of them was I was part of a survey crew for USGS [United States Geological Survey] was surveying the state of Montana for the first time

totally. So I was what's called a 'rod man.' I would ride around in a little -- what they called a tote gote at that time -- a little two-wheeled, all-terrain type vehicle that would…I'd run ahead of the actual surveyor with a rod, and he'd send me to a point that he needed to get the get the elevation on, and I'd go taking off cross-country…and this is back in the badlands of Montana. It was pretty interesting. Other than that, let's see…I worked on farms; I worked on dockin' sheep and branding cattle, and I worked on a dry land farm for a real old couple one time, and that was really interesting. They lived in a…this…this is real back in the homesteader-type period. [Laughs] They lived on a little farm, and they lived in a two room shanty. They had a kitchen and a bedroom, and I would sleep in the kitchen. I'd work…we would work from sunup to sundown, which didn't sound too bad, but sunup in Montana is 5:30 in the morning and sundown is 10:30 at night, and we'd work seven days a week. Meals were…almost every meal was -- that I remember -- was side pork and beans, and for water, we drank from their well, but it was an alkaline well. I don't know if you're familiar with alkaline water, but it's a real salty type of water and we…she'd mix Kool-Aid with the water so that it was palatable, and it tasted like…I don't know…you probably don't…you're old enough you probably remember what Fizzies were. Tasted like you were drinking a Fizzie. So I did quite a few different things. I was a hotel desk clerk from when I was about 15 years old, did that for a year. The hotel…the rooms rented from $1.25 a night to…$5.50 was the most expensive room.

Sanderson: How long did you do that, then? Until you graduated, or…?

Hansen: Well, I did that the one year…no, I did that for a year, then I went…I decided I needed to make a little more. I was making $.50 an hour doing that, so I would work an eight hour shift and walk home with $4. So I decided I needed to make a little money. And that's when I went to work for the USGS, and actually made a little more money than that.

Sanderson: How was it…what was it like being part of that initial survey crew actually surveying Montana for the first time?

Hansen: Well, it was…yeah, it was actually fun. I just had a blast. I was running around on this little Tote Gote…and just as an aside, the surveyor was actually a midget, and so he was a character, too. He would drive around on his truck, and then I'd drive around on this Tote Gote, and I had no idea of the significance of what I was doing, participating in this thorough survey of the state of Montana -- that portion of the state of Montana -- so it didn't strike me as…it was a neat job. I

was out of doors all day long, and seeing different country and seeing different things, and so I just was…was enjoying it.

Sanderson: Outstanding. And during this time was it…would you guys just camp out, or were you staying in hotels during this time, or…?

Hansen: No, we…we actually…I stayed at my parents' house. I stayed at home, and we would just go out from there…from the town, every day. We didn't travel that distance from a…in Montana, you travel…you count distance in days, not in miles. [Laughs] How many days it takes to go someplace is how you count distance in Montana.

Sanderson: Outstanding. Are your…is your family still back in Montana?

Hansen: Yeah, my mom is still in Montana, and my father's dead. And my mom lives in Montana. She's 92 years old, and we'll have her 92nd this next month.

Sanderson: Outstanding, congratulations. Tell her happy birthday from us.

Hansen: Yeah, we're going to go and have…celebrate it with her.

Sanderson: Nice, and during that time, what did your dad do for a profession?

Hansen: He -- my father -- when I was a young kid, he was the chief of police of Sidney, then he went full time with the national guard…the Montana National Guard. He was an officer in the Montana National Guard, eventually retiring as a lieutenant colonel in the Montana National Guard.

Sanderson: Nice, so probably as a kid when his…police chief…kinda like how I grew up in the South, where you really…probably couldn't get into any trouble. [Laughs]

Hansen: I have one memory of …I don't know…I was about eight or nine years old, and I think I got in trouble, and my dad took me down to the sheriff, who was a real nice guy, but he was a hunchback, so for a kid he was a little scary. And my dad took me down there, and he told the sheriff throw me in jail because I had been a bad kid. [Laughs] So the sheriff walks me back into the jail and puts me in a cell and clanks the door…clanks as he closes it, and he locks it and walks back to his office where my dad is. I don't know how long I was there, maybe ten, fifteen minutes before they came out and got me. I never got into trouble again after that.

Sanderson: [Laughs] That's…that's definitely what you call a major wake up call. You're like, "Oh my God, all I did was talk back."

Hansen: [Laughs] Yeah, exactly. When your dad's the chief of police, you learn to behave yourself.

Sanderson: Oh definitely, real quick. If not, he takes you to his buddy. [Laughs] What did your mom do?

Hansen: She was an RN in the maternity ward at the hospital, the local hospital.

Sanderson: Growing up, you said you did…that you guys did a lot of outdoors stuff: playing football, hunting, fishing, and stuff like that. Was that the typical norm for…just, you know, growing up…growing up there in Sidney? Or was it…was it something you guys just did?

Hansen: No, I would say we were pretty darn normal for Sidney. It was…that's what all my friends did, we were about the same. A lot of my friends were farm kids, so they, of course, worked out on the farms, spent more time out in the farms…I grew up, actually, in the town, but a lot of my friends were farm kids.

Sanderson: They would…what Walt Whitman called…you were the city kid.

Hansen: I was the city kid.

Sanderson: What was the population of the town growing up?

Hansen: Oh my gosh, that's a very good question. I'm going to guess maybe 3,000 or 1,000.

Sanderson: Oh, nice. Definitely one of those…probably…I grew up in a small town in Alabama, connected to all the movers and shakers in the town. The old saying goes, "f I spit wrong, before the spit hit the ground my mom and dad knew about it and were on their way to come get me." It's probably the same way for you.

Hansen: Exactly.

Sanderson: Yeah, "Carl's doing this again!" You walk in the door, mom and dad sittin' there like, "What'd you do?" [Both laugh] So on that…what did you guys do as a family, just for relaxation and fun?

Hansen: Well, the one thing that my parents were very good about…every summer we would take a vacation -- a two-week vacation -- we'd go someplace. Of course, there were six of us, we'd be all riding in the car, but I can remember going out to New York City and Washington, D.C. and travelling through Canada and going…went to a couple of my dad's military reunions from his service in WWII. We would do trips to go see my grandparents in Nebraska, and go see family in California. So early on, my parents taught me this love…instilled in me this love of travel and of seeing different things. That's the main thing I remember from growing up. I just love to travel and see different things, and they gave us these opportunities. Now, six of us traveling in a car for long distances was not that comfortable, and it…but I have some very fond memories of the trips we made, and all my brothers and sisters have the same memories.

Sanderson: Nice. With that, did your father see any service overseas during WWII, or was it more stateside?

Hansen: No, he was…he spent five years, no four years…he was amongst the original people…troops in the South Pacific…he was with the Rainbow Division in the Philippines, and all of that. He was there three years. He was injured two different times. He got a battlefield commission as a lieutenant…he was quite the local hero back in our town. That's why he got the sheriff's job, or the chief of police job I'm sure. When he came back.

Sanderson: Was it…was he drafted into WWII, or was it…?

Hansen: Well, it was…before they were actually drafting. He was in the National Guard at the time, and they were called up, and they were sent to Fort Lewis, Washington, for training a year before Pearl Harbor. And so they were already staged and training…he went on the Queen Elizabeth, actually…was the ship that…they sent him over to Australia. And then from Australia they did some of the initial…his unit did some of the initial landings on the islands in the Philippines and New Guinea. They did…I don't know…they did four or five landings -- initial landings -- invasions on these islands -- Japanese-held islands -- it was pretty different to…they had been trained in WWI tactics, trench war tactics. And had weapons for trench war tactics. When they got over there, of course, the tropical fighting was, of course, not trench war, and they were trained poorly for what they faced, and they took pretty heavy casualties.

Sanderson: Yeah, definitely looking back at the Rainbow Division…those guys got basically thrown in the mix like, "All right, here you go." They did outstanding for what little training and -- especially equipment…that part was horrible during the island hopping campaign. And was it one of those when he got out he just decided that…was he still part of the National Guard while he was chief of police, and then just went full time?

Hansen: Yeah, yeah. And it's different things…he was still in the National Guard, and then he was chief of police, so then I think the opportunity came to be commander of the local National Guard unit full time, and so he took that opportunity. Another interesting thing I remember from the period -- this is once again back in the 1950s -- he was a volunteer lookout on top of the hotel there in Sidney…one of the hotels in Sidney, they had a lookout where all twenty-four -- I think it was twenty-four hours a day -- they had somebody up there with binoculars watching for the Russians to bring their bombers down from Canada, across from Canada, to bomb the United States. This is, of course, during the Cold War…so I remember him going off at night to go be a lookout on top of the hotel.

Sanderson: Nice. That's definitely something a lot of people have forgotten in…history-wise, that here in the States, we actually had stuff like that. A lot of people…No one has ever really remembered that during that time frame, it was almost like they had the home guard here, but it was with the National Guard, or with the even the [US] Army regulars or [US] Air Force.

Hansen: Civilians, yeah. That was the early warning system before they had the big radar setups.

Sanderson: So, during this time, did you guys ever move out of Sidney? Or were you in Sidney the whole time?

Hansen: Sidney. I was in Sidney 'til I graduated from high school, and then I enlisted in the Army from there after high school.

Sanderson: What year was this that you graduated?

Hansen: I graduated in '66.

Sanderson: You said you enlisted into the Army then?

Hansen: Yeah, yeah. If you remember, '66 was right when everybody was…they started drafting heavily, and I didn't have the money -- my family didn't have the money -- to pay for me to go to college, and I wasn't a good enough student that I was going to get any scholarships to get a deferment, and so my choice was to get drafted. I knew I was going to get drafted and not have any choices, so I looked into it and decided I would enlist for three years and get a choice of going to a school. I talked to the enlistment NCO there and a recruiter, and got a promise that they would send me to cinematography school if I enlisted, so I did.

Sanderson: Was that something you had always kinda envisioned you wanted to do, or was it just, they offered the job and it's like, "Hey, that's kinda a cool thing?"

Hansen: What I really wanted to do was be an architect, but they didn't have any schools for that. I enjoyed photography, I'd messed around with my parents' cameras through the years -- not a lot, but a little bit -- so that was…out of the things that they offered, that was the thing that seemed the most appealing to me. It wasn't something I had thought about…I hadn't ever thought about being a photographer, a professional photographer. It was just I was going to take the best schooling I could get. I wanted to come out of there with some schooling that would mean something to me, and that was the best one I saw on the list.

Sanderson: Well, it's definitely paid off.

Hansen: It did.

Sanderson: You were saying that you used to use your parents' camera and take pictures. During your time when you were doing surveys -- the survey with the USGS -- did you take it with you during that time frame?

Hansen: No, I didn't. No, I didn't carry any cameras. I didn't…I wasn't that interested, and back then, cameras were a little bit bulkier, too, than the cameras we got now. My folks had an Argus C3 and a Kodak folding camera that was a 616 film.

Sanderson: So yeah, looking back, those are definitely a little bit bulkier than what you probably want to carry through the forest, trudging through eastern Montana. Definitely like, "Yeah, I'll leave that at home."

Hansen: Yeah, and they were…go ahead.

Sanderson: Sorry, go ahead, Sir. Sorry about that.

Hansen: Oh, I was just going to say that they were fairly valuable to my parents, too. Taking them out and bouncing them around on a motorcycle-type thing was not something they would appreciate, I'm sure.

Sanderson: Oh, definitely. Don't mess up the good camera.

Hansen: Yeah, exactly.

Sanderson: Especially back in those days, those cameras were not exactly cheap, either.

Hansen: No.

Sanderson: So, when you joined in '66, where did you attend your basic before you did your did you specialty school?

Hansen: I actually enlisted in '66, but they sent me to basic on…I think it was January 3rd of '67 and I went to Fort Lewis, Washington.

Sanderson: And then when you finished your basic there, did you do any AIT [advanced individual training], or did they send you directly to Fort Monmouth?

Hansen: That's where my AIT was at. My advanced training was at Fort Monmouth; the cinematography school was there. 84C20.

Sanderson: 84C20. During your time at Fort Monmouth, how did you enjoy it?

Hansen: I thoroughly enjoyed it. I made some good friends out there. When we had time off we cruised the beach at Asbury Park and picked up girls and went out to Sandy Hook State Park and hung out on the beach up there, looking across at New York City. The schooling I thought was very good, and I seemed to have a knack for it. It seemed to be the kind of schooling I wanted. I did well, and I enjoyed the teachers. I thought they were very good, and I was…really, looking back, I'm even more impressed by the fact that they could instill the basics in us as far as photography from the ground up, which throughout my career has been tremendously helpful. Later on in life as I was hiring photographers that graduated from college with a degree in photography and I'd find out they had never used a camera other than one that was fully automatic, and they didn't understand the principles of depth of field and circles of confusion and all those different things I learned through the Army. I learned to really appreciate my education.

Sanderson: Was…are there any instructors that stuck out that you remember?

Hansen: None. Actually not. I'm pretty bad with names, anyway. All my life I've been bad with remembering people's names, so no, I don't remember any particular one. They were all quite good.

Sanderson: The reason I asked that…I was looking back, and we talked to Stewart Barbee -- he was there right when…a little after you were there, same time frame -- and he was talking about Joe Lipkowitz one of the instructors there. He had been around since the '20s, and started off in that time frame…was that pretty much the same with you? You had some military and civilian instructors during your time there?

Hansen: Yes. They were a combination of military and civilian, and some of them had been there a long time.

Sanderson: And during that time, what kind of equipment were you training on, there at school?

Hansen: Hoo boy…Now you're going…I don't know, I…I'm trying to remember. They weren't Arriflex, we weren't using…I don't know if they were Bach Auricons, or…Stew probably told you better than I could. There were some big old cameras we used, but they weren't the same cameras we ended up using when we got to Hawaii, to DASPO.

Sanderson: And that was one of the things he said…that it was definitely one of those where a lot of the equipment he was trained on…when he got out to Hawaii, he actually had to learn how to use a lot of that equipment just because he was used to using that stuff at Fort Monmouth.

Hansen: Yeah, and then that goes back to what I was saying earlier. The training at Fort Monmouth was, from my point of view, just some super basic photography training, and you used older cameras and stuff like that. We did a lot of studio training too, which…all of it helps things along, but it wasn't the same. It wasn't training on the equipment we were going to be using in the field; it was not that at all. It was all more studio oriented and basic instruction in storytelling and how to…you know, understanding the film, and how film and lenses and everything work.

Sanderson: What did your dad say about you being a combat photographer, versus him being in the infantry side?

Hansen: You know, he and I never talked about our service together. We never, together, ever talked about our services; he never was very much about talking about his time in the South Pacific, and I never was much about talking about my time either. [Laughs]

Sanderson: I've definitely seen a lot of the time, either the family is very interconnected, they talk a lot about it, or a lot of times it's like, "Eh, I was there, I was there." You kinda leave it at that, and just kinda have that mutual understanding of, "Gotcha."

Hansen: Yeah, exactly. You have that…you just know…I knew my dad didn't want to talk about it, and I guess he knew I didn't particularly care to talk about it.

Sanderson: When did you graduate from school at Fort Monmouth?

Hansen: Oh, God. I don't even remember the month it was. I went to Hawaii in November, so it was probably October or something like that. I had a couple of delays. I had to wait after basic training. I had to wait a little while before there was an opening in Fort Monmouth for me, and then after I got out of Fort Monmouth I think I had almost a month's worth of leave that they gave me before I was supposed to show up in Hawaii. So it was probably October or something like that that I graduated Fort Monmouth. But I don't remember exactly.

Sanderson: Did you…what did you do on leave before you reported to Hawaii?

Hansen: I came back to Montana.

Sanderson: During that time, did you take your mom and dad's camera and take more pictures during that…you know, kinda playing with it? Taking more pictures during that time frame, or was it just kinda kick-back and kinda help out?

Hansen: It was just…yeah, kick-back. I think it was just kick-back and hang out with some friends. And yeah, I don't remember…no, I know didn't take any pictures or…and I didn't have a camera of my own, at that time. I didn't buy my first camera until I got over to Vietnam.

Sanderson: So that takes us to November of '67, when you reported to Fort Shafter. What was your first impression of the unit when you first got there?

Hansen: Uh, that's a good question. It's pretty overwhelming. You're traveling by yourself. You jump on a military aircraft and fly over to Hawaii and somebody picks you up there. You go up to the Fort Shafter barracks and find a bunk that's vacant and I was impressed by the First Sergeant Bridgham and Major O'Connor and …I remember really liking them and their welcoming…it was pretty intense. You get there, and you have guys who are just getting back from Vietnam or Thailand or Korea, and you got guys who are just going. So you're trying to fit in and figure out who's who and what to do.

Sanderson: What kind of training did you receive when you got out there?

Hansen: Well, they started…they took us aside and get us working with the Auricons and the other cameras we would be using, so familiarity is what it was. It wasn't like we did…and then we would do some kinda training things, they'd get us out doing a little pseudo film or something like that so they could see how we shot stories and how our technique was and stuff like that…where we needed some more instruction. But basically, it was just familiarization with the equipment. I was sent off to Vietnam in December, so I was there just a very short period of time and then I was off to Vietnam for my first trip.

Sanderson: Yeah, I was going to ask you about where your first assignment was. So you went to Vietnam first?

Hansen: Yes.

Sanderson: What was one of your first assignments in Vietnam?

Hansen: Oh, you know…well, I've got a couple pictures that I've…[Laughs] that I've…my memory is refreshed by pictures that I've got, but there was a couple of…that was the time of Đắc Tô and some of those things. So there was some combat that I was sent out on patrols with units -- 4th Infantry Division a couple of times -- so those are the ones that stick in my mind, as the first ones. It was not long after I got…actually, as soon as I got to Saigon, they cross trained me as a still photographer too, because at that point they needed a still photographer more that they needed a cinematographer. They basically handed me a Rollei camera --Rollei 2 and 1/4 camera -- and told me, "You're now a still photographer, so go out with this motion picture photographer into the field and document it." But the beauty of having them trained as a cinematographer was you really learned how to tell a story, so you learned all about film and lenses and stuff like that, more so than I think you would've as a still photographer. So I truly felt like I had

the best of both worlds. I'd been trained to tell stories with film, not just to take pictures, one picture. Most of my time, the first -- let's say half of my assignments -- the first three months I was in Vietnam were still photography assignments. I was out with a still camera.

Sanderson: Nice, the reason why I was asking that was that also during that time frame -- after talking with Dick Durrance and Stewart Barbee -- a lot of times it seemed like they would send people to either Thailand or another area before they ever send them to Vietnam, but it sounds like they sent you directly to Vietnam first, in the early days. Versus later on, they'd send you to a less combat area first to…I guess to get our bearings before they sent you out there.

Hansen: Yeah, I think I was a little unique in that in my two years with DASPO -- I had little over two years with DASPO -- I had three tours to Vietnam. I guess that's more than most of them had. My first tour was to Vietnam, my second was to Thailand, my third was back to Vietnam, and then my fourth was to Korea for a short period of time. And then my fifth trip was back to Vietnam for my last few months I was in the service.

Sanderson: Are there any photographs you took during that time frame that really stand out to you, or…?

Hansen: Well this one that's…[Laughs] yeah, there's a couple that I'm rather proud of. There's one that's been the cover of a number of books, and it's been used in museums. As a matter of fact, it's kind of a funny story…as my career evolved, I ended up with the Smithsonian…natural history photographer with the Smithsonian…and one day…eventually became the director of photography for the Smithsonian Photo Services. I was in charge of photographers for the major three museums and the administration and everything at the Smithsonian. One day, I had a new director of information services, I was taking around to the different museums, and we went out to the Hazy Center, which is the air and space museums -- the Hazy Center out in Dulles in Virginia -- and was taking her out to give her a tour of the facility and show her…just introducing her to the museum. And here we walk around, and all of a sudden here's one of my photographs, big, on display for the Vietnam-- of a helicopter landing in purple smoke. It's the same picture that's been in the covers of a couple of maga-…a couple of books. So I'm walking along with her, and go, "Whoa, there's a picture I took when I was a nineteen year-old PFC [Private First Class]." That just kinda blew me away.

Sanderson: What did she say about that?

Hansen: She didn't seem that impressed. [Laughs] I don't know. I don't know that she believed me, actually. But anyway, it was just kinda a shock to see it there.

Sanderson: Would that…with that picture, did you…what was going on during that time frame?

Hansen: With that…with that picture? I was out on a patrol out with a unit, and they had set up kind of a temporary base and were being resupplied, and the helicopter was…in the caption I wrote that it was a resupply coming in, so I guess they were getting rations and water and stuff brought in. I remember that particular outing -- that particular combat situation -- we lost a couple of guys, and they brought in a medevac, too. I thought that that might have been when they cleared the clearing for the helicopter to come in for the medevac. But I think this was just a resupply so we could continue on our patrol.

Sanderson: I believe…while you were talking, I put it in Google -- thank God for Google, right? -- And it looks like a Huey coming in. The area being cleared…you can see where people were kind of hunkered down when the helicopter was trying to land. Looks like just from the smoke, not much wind was going on with the way the smoke was rising.

Hansen: Yeah, the purple smoke, yeah.

Sanderson: Now looking back, I've seen that on a couple books I've read. I've seen that photograph.

Hansen: Yeah, it's kinda funny that that particular picture…I don't think it's the iconic picture for Vietnam. I think I've seen other pictures other people have taken that were more iconic for Vietnam, but that picture is also in one of the big books on the history of photography, and you know the coverage of…you've got Edward S. Curtis, and you know, all of the big names, and here's my picture representing the Vietnam photography…combat photography. [Laughs]

Sanderson: Nice. During that time, what were some of the other assignments you were given for a…like a…you had said, during that time… you said you did the three tours to Vietnam, one to Thailand, and one to Korea. Was there any specific assignments that really stand out to you, or…?

Hansen: Well, I saw Vietnam from the DMZ [demilitarized zone] to down into the Delta, so I was lucky enough or whatever that I got to see all of Vietnam. The highlands…I worked with the Hmong and the tribes there, and worked with the Special Forces in different places. One of the…down in the Mekong Delta, I did a story on the…the cinematographers did a story on the riverine patrols, and the guys with the riverine boats and the air cushioned vehicles and the miniguns on them. That was pretty exciting; we had a little contact there. Then I did a lot of story on…we were doing a long story in '68 about the AFVN -- Armed Forces Vietnam Network -- and we…so we were flying around, doing…going to all the different places. I was at the Huế just before Tet started, I think just a few days…maybe a week before Tet started in '68. We did a…photographed the aerials of the stations and the people on air and stuff like that, documenting their…what they were doing. And when Tet came, when I was in a different location, the Huế station was totally overrun, and all the people…I think they were all killed but I'm not sure. I don't remember exactly. I know that their aid station up on the DMZ was totally overrun, so things like that. Things like that. Then a little bit of combat here and there, and some sweeps. Going through some villages and stuff like that. One of the things I do remember is a with a unit…and we were on patrol…we'd go out, we had orders that gave us access to almost any military aircraft and could get us on anything, so if something was happening we jump on a helicopter and go out there, or if we were on a base and we heard about a patrol going out, we'd just go to the commander and say, "Hey, we want to go out on a patrol with these guys." So one time I went out with this patrol, and they went out, and the second night we were out, we were expecting to get hit, so they told the guys to dig, you know, firing pits or foxholes and well…we traveled…because we weren't assigned to anyone, we carried all our own food, rations, and water and film and cameras, but we didn't carry some of the things they carried, like entrenching tools and stuff like that. So when they said to dig foxholes, we had nothing to dig…not even a knife to dig a foxhole with. So my buddy and I just kinda scraped the ground with our hands until we got down as far as we could. As I remember, it was about three or four inches down that we dug…kinda a trench we could lay in. During the night there was what they called an Arclight [i.e., Operation Arclight, where US B-52's from Guam, provided air support to ground forces in Vietnam] on a mountain near us -- across the valley from us -- which is B-52s dropping 500 pound bombs -- as many as they could -- and apparently one of the bombs got hung up in a bomb bay door, and as they were flying back to their base they shook it loose or

something and it came down on top of us…on our perimeter, and killed a couple of guys that were on the perimeter, and of course, shook us up pretty bad 'cause we were laying there…laying there in the little trenches. We were uninjured -- my buddy and I were uninjured -- but that was one of the things I remember. We later on went on another patrol in the same area, and this was a brand new unit -- I think it was a National Guard unit that had never been in combat before -- and the thing they did the first night out they were using C4 and det[onating] cord to blow trees so they could bring in helicopters to resupply, 'cause when the first…one of the first nights…anyway, they blew a tree, dropped it on some of their own guys. Next, couple of days later, we were still going through. There was some…an ambush I guess, up at the head of the column -- we were like a platoon going through the jungle -- and so the -- I was, for some reason, in the back and the middle of the platoon when it happened, so I wasn't up there at the front when they started shooting. Apparently, one of the guys who was an M79 grenade launcher fired one of his rounds, and I don't know if you're familiar with them, but they have to rotate seven times before they're charged, and apparently this one round rotated, and hit a tree, and bounced back, and by the time it hit its seventh rotation, it was back amongst our guys and injured a couple of our guys. So, things like that. Pretty memorable. Still there?

Sanderson: Oh, yes. During that time…you're kinda going back. You said it was a National Guard unit, was that the…in your bio, it said that you were there during the arrival of the first National Guard unit. Was this the same unit, or was this another National Guard unit?

Hansen: I'm not absolutely sure. I would guess…I documented the arrival of the first unit on the shore, when they came onshore, or off the planes, I'm not sure that that was the same unit I went out with.

Sanderson: During that time, did they ever try to…did they ever want to or try send your father over, or was he already retired at this point?

Hansen: Oh, no. My father…no. They never called up the Montana National Guard for service over there. I think because they served so fully in WWII…they never did call them up.

Sanderson: When did you father retire from the National Guard?

Hansen: He retired…I'm going to guess…it would have been…it's going to be a guess, but it was in the '90s. 1997, '98?

Sanderson: He was in for quite a while, then.

Hansen: Yes, he was.

Sanderson: I joined the Navy in ’97, so as I was coming in, a lot of people…that was during the big push of basically, if you’d been in for more than thirty years as…at a specific officer rank and enlisted, pretty much, they were like…alright, if you’re not…that’s when they really started adhering to the higher tenure rates. When you hit a certain time, they were like, “Okay, you’re retired.”

Hansen: Yeah, that’s basically what happened to him, too. They moved him from Sidney, to Billings, to Harlowton, actually. Then eventually it’s time to retire. Bring new people in.

Sanderson: Definitely hear you on that one. We were losing a lot of guys who we definitely could have learned a lot more than we actually did from them…just from all their experience.

Hansen: Yeah, exactly.

Sanderson: Also, according to your bio from the Smithsonian…it also said that you were there when President Nixon first visited the combat zone. Now were you there--

Hansen: Cam Ranh Bay.

Sanderson: What year was that…that was in ‘69?

Hansen: Oh, you got me. I would guess it was ’69, but I’m not positive. I have, actually…I have a cover of a magazine with a picture of him on it and me in the background. An Army magazine. But that’s not here. I’m out in my cabin in Montana, western Montana. I don’t have my stuff here to look at for reference.

Sanderson: Did you actually get to meet him, or was it just you followed him around?

Hansen: No, I…we were part of a…we were documenting his visit there to the [US] Army team, so no, we didn’t actually meet him.

Sanderson: What was that like, following the president around?

Hansen: You know, actually I photographed most of the presidents, from Johnson on. I photographed Johnson when he was in Hawaii, and I photographed Nixon when he was in Vietnam. I photographed…At the Smithsonian I documented a couple

of the presidential…was on several of the documentary teams for the presidential inaugurations, so it was just another job, as far as I was concerned. I worry about…I have a tendency to focus on my work an awful lot, and so I don't think a lot about other things. I'm just trying to make sure I get my exposure right, and hold the camera still, and all that kind of stuff.

Sanderson: Definitely one of those…taking care of more the actual job versus the subject, so to speak?

Hansen: Right.

Sanderson: Now, looking back at that, was that one of the things that – did it help with your coping of what was going on, or was it just…was there any type of problems later on from that?

Hansen: Yeah, to be honest that's probably part of my coping ability. I block things out that -- I look at the good things. I block things out, or I remember the best things. I remember the good times, and the…I remember the other things pretty much too, but don't focus on them. I kinda just…the details I let go, and just kinda the overall view of everything is kind of what I focus on and remember.

Sanderson: It's also one of those where…looking at it like I said from your bio, there's one of the ones where you shot a documentary on boots— the best boots to prevent jungle rot?

Hansen: Yeah, yeah. [Laughs] That was one of the more strange examples of it. They had…jungle rot was a big, big problem early on, in the 1967 era, 1968, and probably, the whole time because your guys were going through the jungle and rice paddies and everything. They were trying to come up with a better jungle boot. They never did, so they sent a bunch of samples over for us to take out in the field and have these guys wearing them in the field and seeing how they were workin'. The strangest one -- and I actually have a pair of them that I saved -- was a mesh…a total mesh, and so the water could go in and go out. And basically, it was just a neoprene sole, or regular jungle boot sole with this mesh, green mesh. It gave your foot absolutely no ankle support. There was just zero support, and I kinda equated it to the Ho Chi Minh sandals that the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese wore, because all it was was a sole and then something to hold the sole onto your foot. There was no ankle support, at all. But they apparently worked out successfully…they weren't happy with them because they didn't issue them to anybody…any of the troops.

Sanderson: I was going to say, wearing a boot like that that wouldn't be very good.

Hansen: No. [Laughs] And like I said, I've got a pair and I've worn them a few times, and it's kinda neat, but it's not what a boot is normally meant to do: protect your ankles and such.

Sanderson: Right, probably good. Sounds like it was good on the drawing board, but practicality was like, "Uh, no."

Hansen: Yeah, and I think that's why they sent them out for field testing with us guys.

Sanderson: The finished product -- God knows I still have my original jungle boots that I got when I first joined way back when -- they're still by far the most comfortable pair of boots I've ever owned.

Hansen: [Laughs] Yeah, I still got a couple pairs, too. I wore out several pairs.

Sanderson: Thank you for field testing them for us.

Hansen: [Laughs] Making sure you didn't have to wear those things.

Sanderson: Amen. Neoprene…that makes my feet hurt just thinking about it. During that time, you…how much of the Tet Offensive did you actually document during that time frame?

Hansen: Well, it's…I got…during the Tet Offensive, I was out in the field with another photographer, and we were at a…you know, I don't know…a camp, an LZ [landing zone], and we came under…well, when we went out -- we of course didn't have anybody we were assigned to -- so when we would go to an LZ or a place, we would go and just introduce ourselves and, you know, try to find out who we were going to go out with or whatever. In this instance, we needed a place to stay, so they put us in this tent -- that was a platoon size tent -- and they had two bunks empty from guys that were in the hospital or gone or something. Anyway, they just happened to have two bunks empty, so they put us in that tent. And then during the night, a rocket came in…the rocket attack started. All the guys in the tent jumped up and jumped into a bunker that was just outside the tent. Well, my buddy and I -- I was at one end of the tent and he was at the other end, towards the bunker – so I jumped out of bed and I ran towards the bunker, and I stopped to tell him -- he was putting on his boots -- I was telling him, "Don't put on your boots, let's just go!" And a rocket hit and landed just at my end of the tent that my cot was at and blew me to the ground,

and injured him…he got some shrapnel in his wrist. So then we dove into the bunker after that. The next morning, we went out and looked at where the 122 -- I think it was a 122 millimeter rocket -- had hit, and the canister was there, and actually, I have pictures of it. My bunk was totally obliterated with shrapnel. But, apparently, what had happened is the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese, when they would have slaves hauling all this equipment down, they figured out that if they took these rockets apart and took out some of the powder out they were lighter, so they didn't have to carry as much weight. So this rocket had a minimal amount…it was, basically, a dud. The tube was supposed to have been filled with powder, and it didn't explode, just the head of the thing exploded. So that saved our lives, but we were stuck there, trying to get back to Saigon, and of course, it was not easy to get back to Saigon at the time. We got back to Saigon after a majority of it was over, and of the initial Tet…and I, at that time was…when I was sent back to Hawaii. My time was up, and somebody…another crew was coming in. So at that point, right on, almost during the middle of Tet, but not really, I was sent back to Hawaii.

Sanderson: Definitely, thank God…thank God those guys got lazy.

Hansen: Yeah, it's kinda one of those little bits of historical information that you don't hear about. Yeah, they figured out how to…they were forced laborers going down the Ho Chi Minh trail carrying all this extra weight, and they figured out how to make it a little easier for themselves.

Sanderson: It's good that they did, 'cause…I always thought…I always thought the reason why a lot of the mortar attacks weren't as successful was because, you know, just inferior powder, inferior weapons. I know they were even using a lot of the stuff that was left over from the French beforehand, just really old technology. Well, as they always say, you learn something new every day. That's something…that's something, I'm like, "Hey! Now, I know why." If someone mentions it.

Hansen: It makes a lot of sense.

Sanderson: Especially…God knows if I was being forced into forced labor, I'd be like, "What can I do to ease the burden?" Well, that's a…I always liked the little tidbits of history. Chalk that up, that's the next part coming. And also during that time, kinda getting into some of the stuff that's a little bit darker, I guess you would say…you said that at one point you had to record some of the daily tasks of the

combat field mortuary. Now, was that there in the field, or was that back in Saigon?

Hansen: That was the Saigon mortuary. Yeah, I think there were about 380 bodies a week going through there at the time. I spent -- I think, I was --once again, I think it was at the end of a tour -- I was getting ready to leave…I did the still photography, and Stew Barbee was doing the cinematography of it. I think I spent about two weeks there in Saigon going every day, over there to the mortuary with Stew.

Sanderson: Just from talking with him, I know that was one of the things that pretty much…that was his primary assignment almost all, regarding most of the time he was there. And I know Bryan Grigsby went with him, as well. You spent a couple of weeks with them doing that?

Hansen: Yeah, it was at maximum a couple of weeks. It was a week, going on two weeks, yeah.

Sanderson: What would you do to decompress after a day like that?

Hansen: Well, there was a lot of beer drunk at the villa. Stew and I used to go up on the balcony… on the roof and eat, he had a…we'd drink beer and…drink beer. He had a harmonica, and he'd play it. He tried teaching me how to play the harmonica.

Sanderson: What kinda songs would he play? Just whatever he could?

Hansen: Oh, you got me. [Both laugh] I don't know that I recognized any of them. I don't know that he was much better than I was [Both laugh] He probably was. I was pretty bad. I'm not musically inclined at all, but it seemed like a good thing to do. Sit there, watch the people down on the street, drink beer.

Sanderson: What did you think of the villa?

Hansen: It was a great adventure. Here we are, basically living on the economy, in civilian clothes in the middle of the war zone. We were living in this three story villa that, you know, that for Saigon or for Vietnam -- was a pretty nice place. We just jumped on the jeep, and would go anyplace we wanted. And at night we'd go out and hit the bars, and I…you know, it was pretty interesting. We had, of course, this gated thing, and it had barbed wire around the fence. But of course Bryan Grigsby got the opportunity to capture one guy that broke in and was robbing him, and…but it was it was all right. There were funny things about it.

We had, you know, maids who took care of us and fed us, and with the couple of things I remember…we had a cistern up on top that held the water. The water would be pumped up to there, and had this big tank -- I guess it had…aluminum or metal sheets over it -- that held our water supply. Got to the point that, at one point, you go to take a shower and the only thing that would come out of the showerhead was green slime. So a buddy and I went up there, climbed up on the roof to see what was going on with the water. We got up there, and here the whole thing was covered in slime and…mostly slime and a couple of rats…dead rats floating in there. A floater. [Laughs] I also remember that…. whenever…I learned that whenever the maids got mad at us, they would make our Kool-Aid out of the tap water as opposed to the bottled water, and all of a sudden we would all have the shits. I went and accused them, and they said, "Well, I don't know what's wrong. We drink that water." But I knew it was whenever they got upset with us, that's what they do.

Sanderson: Definitely brings a whole new meaning to the something funny in the Kool-Aid.

Hansen: Yeah, yeah, yeah. [Both laugh] But it was a…we were a tight group. We had some…I was there for…I think, two Christmases, so I two had two Christmas dinners there.

Sanderson: During that time frame, Stewart Barbee had…did done audiotape of the one girl…Deeb From the bar across the street.

Hansen: Okay.

Sanderson: She was a…he was telling the story of…she was always dressed in traditional Vietnam clothing, and he came to find out she was actually a Vietnamese Opera singer. He had actually taped her there at the villa. Did you ever see her when you went to the bar across the street?

Hansen: No, as a matter of fact, there was no bar across the street that I used to go to. But then, I used to go down…well, I did quite a bit of wandering around Saigon, all by myself. Once again, one of the strange things. But anyway, at night, most of the guys…I would do a lot more wandering by myself, just exploring the city. But no, I don't remember a bar right across the street. That might have been a different…a later time or something like that.

Sanderson: What was some of the things that you…you're saying you kinda went on your own and was checking things out…what was Saigon like? What was some of the things you saw, that probably the rest of them didn't get to see?

Hansen: Well let's see… [Both laugh] I guess…that's a very good question. I mean, I just took in the sights, and I would go eat in at a little side restaurant or something like that. The people, and…I don't know, I guess I…at times, I had a girlfriend in Saigon so I'd go once or twice. I would get away and spend the night with my girlfriend, so that was a little different than some of the other guys. I was really living on the economy. [Laughs]

Sanderson: Right. Sounds like you got to see more of the everyday life versus checking out the sights versus, you know…?

Hansen: Yeah, yeah, you know. I tended to go to the smaller, less militaristic bars and stuff, if I went to them.

Sanderson: How well were you received when you would go into places that weren't frequented by the GIs?

Hansen: Very well. I never sensed any hostility. Once again, I wasn't in uniform though, but I never sensed any hostility when I would go out. You know they'd hustle you a little, but not badly. I've been hustled a lot worse in a lot more places than there. No, I was received very well; I felt very…I felt very comfortable. I would wander all over Saigon…well, actually all over Vietnam. [Both laugh] When we would go out in the field we'd drive in a jeep sometimes and just take off and go. One time I jumped in a jeep and went down to Biên Hòa by myself to visit my cousin who was serving down at Biên Hòa. It's kinda funny when you think about it, you just jump in a jeep and go driving across Saigon…in a combat zone…just take off…that's what I did.

Sanderson: What was it like, going to visit your cousin and to see him in Vietnam?

Hansen: It was strange. I found out that he was there, and I found out what unit he was at. I couldn't contact him and tell him I was coming, so I just jumped in the jeep and drove down there for a couple hours' visit. We sat around in his barracks, and I don't think we even had a beer or anything. We just sat around and talked. And then I jumped back in the jeep and drove back to Saigon.

Sanderson: What was his reaction when you come driving up, just like, "Hey what's up?"

Hansen: [Laughs] We weren't real close. We weren't real close cousins, so he hadn't seen me in a long time. It was kinda…I really took him by shock. I mean, he was kinda like, "Wow, how did you find me?" But we had a good time, just sitting around, talking. He was in the Air Force.

Sanderson: Kinda going…do you feel that being part of DASPO not only allowed you to do stuff like that, but also by having that freedom that you were really able to really do your job versus being stuck, being just part…just a regular combat photographer in a fixed unit with a fixed set of…basically, a fixed set of rules? Do you think that would have hindered anything?

Hansen: I think it was a totally different setup, situation, yeah. We did…Yes. None of the guys in 221 or the other units we knew of did what we did, though they did their own thing and they were in probably more combat than we were because they were there being stuck in combat more often. We were doing things like the mortuary and the boot thing and the documenting the AFVN. We were doing some different things like that, and then we were documenting the units coming in. So we were doing a completely different kinds of things from what they were doing. Whereas they would go out and get stuck in a unit and spend, maybe weeks with them, whereas we would go in and we would be there for…like in a combat situation. We would go in, and when they got…when we'd run out of film and run out of food -- like I said, we carried our own food -- we'd have to get out. So the first helicopter that would came in to resupply or something, we had orders that would get us on that helicopter and get us back. So we weren't out there for -- at least, I was never out there for -- weeks at a time in the same unit. We just…we were limited in the patrols we would go out with. They weren't supplied to support us; we were on our own. And they didn't know us; the guys there didn't know us. We'd drop in on them, would spend four or five days with them in the field, and then we'd get out…go out. You know, it was a real…kinda weird situation where you didn't have the support…you didn't have a bunch of buddies around you to support you…to have your back when you're in combat. I remember one time…we carried a .45 pistol that was our only weapon we could carry. You could carry it on your hip. I had a shoulder holster that I carried mine on, I never…I remember only once pulling that pistol in self-defense. That was…I was on a…we were doing a patrol through a village, clearing a Viet Cong village…and the patrol was…and the Viet Cong were popping up from underneath haystacks and holes and shooting at us. I stopped to reload my camera and the next thing, I looked up and none of the guys were around me. I

was all by myself, and, you know, I heard shooting here and shooting there. That was the only time I ever pulled my pistol, and started looking for some of the other guys to get back with that had guns, so it was different. I mean, being with DASPO was way different than any other units. We weren't assigned to anybody, which was wonderful. We could travel all over the country…our orders gave us the ability to travel all over. Our orders gave us the ability to travel on almost any aircraft to go someplace…just show your orders and they were pretty broad. But I did…I do remember getting bumped off a couple of times -- off of aircraft, twice -that I remember that the aircraft I got bumped off of never made it to its final destination. So I considered myself pretty lucky.

Sanderson: Definitely. During that time frame, did you ever have any problems with any of the units…where when you would go to them, the commanders would be like, "No, you don't need to be out here," or "We don't want you coming out this way?"

Hansen: No, I never did. We were pretty well accepted, except that we weren't…they'd tell us, "Okay, you can come with us, but we're not looking out for you. You're on your own." I would generally carry a couple extra cans of peaches or pears -- big cans of peaches or pears -- in my backpack so I could share them with the troops and kinda make friends with them, because those were the choice things. But if a resupply came in and dropped some C-rations in for the guys, the guys would…the guys knew what part of the C-ration…which were the best C-rations, and they come in…in these cardboard cases, and they'd rip through them pretty fast to get the choice rations out of there. We didn't have access to anything left over -- if we were running out of food -- we could take, but I used to just try and butter up the guys a little bit and make friends with them by bringing along some fruit that I could share with them.

Sanderson: Did you ever make friends -- good friends -- with any of them, or was it during that time, just a…you kinda had a good working relationship with them while you were out there, but when you left, did you keep in contact with any of them?

Hansen: No, I didn't. Never made any kind of tighter relationship with any of them.

Sanderson: During your time did you…was there anyone specifically that you went out with a lot, or was it just generally, every time you went out it was someone different?

Hansen: It was generally just pretty much somebody different, yeah. Because I would bounce between cinematography and still photography…it's even different. So

sometimes it would be a still photographer I was with, or sometimes it would be a motion picture photographer I was with. But there was nobody I partnered up with the majority of the time.

Sanderson: Was that pretty much standard in DASPO, or was it just more in your situation going from cinematographer to still?

Hansen: I think it was a little more in my situation. I think they worked as teams a little more…you know, the other groups -- the other guys -- because they were…none of them…I think…as far as I know, I was the only one who cross-trained in still and cinematography. There were some of the guys who did sound and still photography, too.

Sanderson: Now, looking back, how would you, basically, say that the war was different for you from behind the lens of a camera versus, say, your cousin, or someone else, through the sight of a gun?

Hansen: Well, I guess…I know…I've got friends who are Vietnam veterans, and I know…that were in combat much more than I was…that they were in combat weeks at a time. I know how much it affected them. Whereas we got a bigger overview by going in and out and in and out…we got a bigger overview of the whole thing. It was a totally different experience, and I wouldn't equate them at all the same. Some of our guys got into some pretty heavy shit, and obviously, it affected them a little bit, too. Some of them were…got purple hearts, got injured…and then, Rick Rein, of course, got killed, and…but we got a real overview. I knew the country from the Mekong Delta all the way up to the DMZ, and it felt -- as odd as it sounds -- it felt almost like my home territory. I could…I felt like I could go anyplace I wanted to. But I also knew in a couple months, I was going to be leaving, going back to Hawaii. And it got harder, like the second trip and the third trip, going to Vietnam…I was going…the third trip, getting on that airplane was a little harder than the first two. But it was just really different. I really can't equate our experience to the guys who were out in the trenches their whole tours.

Sanderson: You said the third trip was harder than the other two? What was the third…why was it harder for you on the third trip?

Hansen: The odds. Having spent six months there, and then going back for three more months there, the odds were -- and this was after Rick had been killed and some of the other guys had been wounded -- it was just the odds were…I figured the

odds were getting worse. [Laughs] The odds of getting back to Hawaii again were getting less and less.

Sanderson: What was it like when you'd get back to Hawaii?

Hansen: Well, I had an apartment and a car. And the first thing I would do every time I got back was jump in my car and drive all the way around the island. And I don't know if you have ever been to Hawaii, but it's not that big. Oahu, the main island…and I would drive around the island and see all my familiar places: Hanauma Bay, North Shore, Sunset Beach, Waimea Falls, and the highway across. I'd do that, and it just made me feel like I was back…you know, back safe. Then I would just settle in and work with the guys there at the post.

Sanderson: You did say that…they quoted you saying that when it came down to…when you'd get the final product back, that a lot of times it would be such a long period of time by the time you actually saw what you had done…it was hard to go out and reshoot…was it something that, over time it got easier? As when you saw the footage you're like, "Okay, next time I'm making sure I use this kind of lighting, or next time use this kind of exposure?" You know, was it something that kinda helped you learn in hindsight, but you kinda wish you would have had it faster beforehand?

Hansen: You obviously learned when you got your critique prints back and watched them and looked at them, but it was such a long time frame between…the learning process is…one of the beautiful things about photography -- and I worked in newspaper photography and stuff -- is you go out and shoot, and you process the film, and you see it. Or now, in the case of digital, you shoot and then you do, you look at the image immediately to see if the exposure was right and everything. Back then, you're shooting film, and it's slow, film. The cameras weren't that fantastic; and you… [Laughs] wouldn't see your work until a month or three months later, and it was really hard to learn from your experience. That was the biggest critique I have of the whole experience with DASPO…was the setup where you didn't see what you shot for so long. And then you'd sit in the critique room with an officer, and an officer would critique your work and, of course, you didn't argue with them, because they weren't there when you were shooting it. But yeah. So that was the negative of the whole situation. If we had been able to process our own film, or get our film processed in Saigon and look at it there…but it didn't happen that way.

Sanderson: And looking back, other than the photograph that you did of the helicopter coming in with the purple smoke, is there…do you have a favorite photograph, or a series of photographs?

Hansen: You know; we didn't get to keep much of our stuff. So I've got a couple of critique prints of that particular picture and another picture I particularly like. But I basically stole…we weren't supposed to take the critique prints ourselves. They were supposed to stay, for some reason, with the company, you there at the headquarters. So we would just get to see them…so there's a couple of prints that I liked so much I managed to get ahold of the critique prints. But no, there's not anything. You know, I've had a whole career afterwards. I've done so much photography since then. I'm proud of a couple of those pictures, pretty proud of actually, but my career has gone on and I've done a lot of other things. It's a learning experience. I keep learning…getting better, I think, all of the time. Was getting better. Now I'm an amateur. I'm a retired amateur. [Laughs]

Sanderson: Was going to say, you have a very storied career. I wouldn't want to say retired amateur…you're a retired professional that does it for fun type deal, or something along those lines. I definitely wouldn't say amateur. Especially looking at some of your photographs. You have photographs in the Smithsonian, like, "Wow!"

Hansen: Thank you.

Sanderson: One of the things…before we move on from the DASPO and move on to your civilian career…when you look back at it, how would you contextualize your service, or summarize your time at DASPO?

Hansen: Well, it was a life-changing, career-making experience. The whole Army thing was. From the training…I think that we got excellent training. Then we got super experienced. We were…you know, just really got…all the professional experience is incredible. After I got out of the service, my resume was good enough that I got jobs no matter where I went. I got the best jobs no matter where I went or what I wanted to do. The DASPO thing…and the travel…you know, I loved the travel. Before the travel, we got to do living in Thailand, living in Korea, living in Okinawa, living in Saigon. Just living in Hawaii, just was an incredible experience for a young person just starting out a career. It was as good as it could get, as far as I'm concerned. I consider myself extremely lucky to have either fallen into it

or worked my way into it or whatever…however I got where I got, I find myself extremely lucky.

Sanderson: Looking at…with Thailand and Korea, was there anything that really stood out while you were there?

Hansen: Oh god, I loved Thailand. I still love Thailand. The people there are just fantastic. We'd go out in the field, and we'd be covering some area thing in the field. We'd fly in in a helicopter in some remote village where they were doing civic action or something -- the green berets -- and we'd pile out of the helicopter. I can remember this one time…we'd' piled out of the helicopter, had all this baggage all this expensive equipment and cases and stuff like that, and we had to put it together real fast, and we just left everything there in the middle of the field. Came back a couple hours later and this old gentleman had gathered all of our stuff together and was sitting there, guarding it. The people were wonderful there in Thailand, just fantastic from…the country's wonderful too.
Korea…there's some funny things I remember about Korea. We had a villa there, too, and this is Korea…what, forty years ago? A little different from Korea today. For one thing, they still had the honey bucket trucks…and maybe they still do, I don't know, in parts of Seoul. What they do…they have a cistern in the back of every house, and they go…they'd have this truck with a…kinda like a milk…big milk tanker truck that we have nowadays…they would go down the street, and two guys would have to jump off of it and they would have a pole across their shoulder and a bucket on either end of the pole, and they would run in the backyard and dip their one bucket in the cistern and pull out the cistern and pull out the stuff -- the honey bucket stuff -- and they dip the other bucket in, pull it out, and then they come trotting back out to the street, sloshing that stuff, and crawl up on the truck and dump it back into the truck and then go back. And that's how they would empty the septics, 'cause they didn't have any drainage, so they just were emptying it. One time, we were coming back from a job on the streets of Seoul, and we got behind a honey bucket truck, and the street was so narrow you couldn't pass it, and so we were behind it for ten to fifteen minutes. We finally said to heck with this, the smell is so bad…and of course they're very slow, because they stop at every house. We found a bar and parked and went into the bar and just stayed there. [Laughs] And another experience was that we found out that there was this bathhouse down below our…from the villa down below. And we decided we didn't have an experience…a group of us decided -- maybe there were three or four of us -- decided we'd go experience this Korean

bathhouse. So we go down there, and we -- stupid Americans that we were -- we go in and we talk to the girls there, and they giggle and say, "Yeah, yeah." And so they take us back into this place, this back room, and there's this big tank -- open tank of water -- heated water. And then there's these faucets at the base of it. So what we do is, we all strip off and jump in this tank of water. Well, after a while the girls come in and say, "Oh my God, no, no!" That's the community's whole supply of hot water for bathing, and what you're supposed to do is sit underneath and turn the tap on and rinse yourself off and wash yourself a little bit, and soap yourself up and rinse yourself off. Well, here we had jumped into their 500 gallons of hot water for the whole community. [Laughs] But things like that…the people were really nice and everything was real nice about it, and it was just these dumb Americans that didn't know what they were doing, experience.

Sanderson: Yeah, I was going to say that some places they probably wouldn't have been as hospitable as that.

Hansen: Oh yeah, you make a cultural mistake like that, yeah.

Sanderson: Have you been back to Korea since then?

Hansen: I have not been back to Korea. I've been back to Thailand several times working for the Smithsonian.

Sanderson: While there in Thailand, did…is there any of the…well, kinda going back, looking…do you keep in contact with a lot of the guys from DASPO?

Hansen: Not a lot. I go to the reunions…I'm going to this reunion. I've gone to a few of the reunions. Yeah, I don't really keep in touch with a lot of the guys in DASPO. They go their way; I've gone my way. We're on Facebook -- a bunch of us -- and we kinda see what guys are doing on Facebook and stuff like that. No, it's kinda interesting. You don't…everybody just kind of goes their own way there. We've all evolved differently; we're not the same people we were back then. We live all over the country, of course.

Sanderson: One of the reasons why I was asking that was… Tom Mintier…did you work with him while you were DASPO or did you…?

Hansen: Well, Tom…Tom was in the same class as I was at Fort Monmouth. He and I graduated and went to Fort Monmouth together in cinematography. I knew Tom

from the beginning. I did not have any assignments with him. So, I was never in Vietnam, or Thailand, or Korea with him. His schedule seemed just to be totally juxtapositioned differently than mine.

Sanderson: When you did get…you said you left the Army January 1st, 1970?

Hansen: Yeah.

Sanderson: That's when you left Hawaii, and you returned back to Montana during that time frame?

Hansen: Yeah, yeah. Well, I ETS'd [expiration of term of service'd] from out of California, so they shipped me back to California and that's where you actually ETS -- some clearing depot there or something like that. About December 28th…29 December of '69, I flew to California, Fort Ord, I think, and ETS'd out of there.

Sanderson: So what was…now that you were back in the civilian world…your bio said you attended the University of Montana?

Hansen: Yep.

Sanderson: Did you graduate from Montana?

Hansen: No, actually I…my intention was to graduate from the University of Missouri, but I wanted to go knock the first couple of years out at state tuition levels. So I did the first two years in Montana, and then I got a job offer in Denver with NBC. A job offer with, you know, a top ten network station. Who wouldn't…what college graduate gets that opportunity? So I went ahead and took that job.

Sanderson: Nice. I hear you on that one. That would be like, "Hey, do you wanna go back…" How long were you with NBC?

Hansen: Three years.

Sanderson: Three years?

Hansen: Yeah.

Sanderson: And then, also…you said you worked for a couple of the newspapers…was that before you worked for NBC, or…?

Hansen: No, that was after…what happened with the television news was I went there…when I went there with…we started out with Bach Auricons. We were

shooting Bach Auricons, which were big, heavy, 16mm cameras…sound-on cameras. Then, they eventually transferred, moved over to a new camera called a CP16, which was an all-in-one, on your shoulder. It was about thirteen pounds, I think. It really reduced the size. Then, all of a sudden, they decided to go digital in 1975, and they came out with these thirty pound cameras with thirty pound recorders that you had to haul around on a little luggage cart. And you had a wooden tripod that weighed thirty pounds…my shoulders at that point were giving out on me and I just said, "No, I'm done. I'm not transitioning into digital, this digital stuff…carrying all this heavy equipment." I ended my career there, and I decided I wanted to go work in still, so I came up to Montana and worked at a couple of newspapers up here.

Sanderson: Nice. Then in…you said in '85 you were offered the position for the Tropical Institute in Panama for the Smithsonian, how did that come about?

Hansen: Well, I was working for a newspaper in Naples, Florida, and I'd been there five years. They had a thing -- the man of the year award -- that they'd give every year, and I and my staff were all required to go there in a suit and tie and photograph this social event. And that was always around some swimming pool in the heat of Naples, Florida summer. And the fifth year I did that, I said, "That's the last time I'm going to do that. I want another job." So, I was an early adopter of the internet, and there was a blog site called 'photo net' at the time. I got on my Commodore-64 on the internet, on my dial up phone, and was checking that out one time, and there was an ad for a one-year temporary employment for the Smithsonian in Panama. This was a Friday when I saw this ad. Luckily, it had a phone number there, and it said…the ad said we're looking for someone who can work in a foreign country, independently, can do aerial photography, can work in the jungles, can do underwater photography, da, da, da, da. "Man, I though, this thing is written for me." It was a Friday, and I called the number there -- who happened to be Jim Wallace, the director of photography at the Smithsonian -- and I said, "Hey, I just saw this, but I see it expires today. This job opening expires today. Can you hold it? I'll work all weekend to get a resume and a portfolio together and get it in the mail to you on Monday." And he said…he told me, "Sure, no problem. I'll do that." And so I worked all that weekend putting together my portfolio, and I remember I got it express mailed out on Monday. I don't know if it was Tuesday or Wednesday, I called him, anxious, and I said, "Did you get it, did you get it?" And he said, "Yeah, yeah, we got it, and you're under consideration." By the next Friday I got a call back saying, "You got

the job, how soon can you come up to D.C. for your introduction?" And I said, "Two weeks. I got to give two weeks' notice." So I rented out my house, sold my boat, sold my motorcycle, and two weeks later I was up in Washington D.C. getting introduced to the Smithsonian institution. And then, a week later I was in Panama, all by myself, working for the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama City.

Sanderson: How was it working down there?

Hansen: I loved it. I absolutely loved it. Working with the scientists…those are some of the best scientists in the world. You've got just incredibly intelligent, knowledgeable, interesting people that you're working with, and the scientists at the institute are from around the world. There's Greek and Australian and American and Costa Rican and Ecuadorian scientists, and Panamanian scientists, and, of course, American scientists, and working in everything. Natural history had always been my thing, and back in 1980, in 1979 I had gone and gotten my -- well, it's called PADI [Professional Association of Diving Instructors] Gold Underwater Instructor, now it would be a PADI Master Scuba Diving Instructor certification -- so I was really interested in underwater photography. I got to do a ton of that, and after a year…oh, after about eight months there, they said…they called me and said, "Well, Carl, we like what you're doing. Do you want to become a permanent staff member at the Smithsonian?" And I said, "Sure, sign me up." So I became a staff member, a full-time Smithsonian staff member.

Sanderson: Oh, nice. And you were in Panama for a year, you said?

Hansen: Seven years.

Sanderson: For seven years?

Hansen: Yeah, it was a one-year temporary contract and they changed it to a full, permanent status. I stayed there, actually seven years, in Panama.

Sanderson: During that time frame…so you would have been down there during the time…during Noriega…did they have you do anything along those lines, or was it just more sticking with the natural history side?

Hansen: Well, it was natural history stuff. The invasion was another adventure. In the meantime, I'd gotten married and brought my wife down there. That was 1989, and we were…it was before Christmas, and we had scheduled to fly up to the

States to spend Christmas with her mother, in Texas. So we'd emptied out the house, and didn't have any food in the house. All we had was beans, dried beans and rice. About one in the morning, all of a sudden, we hear APCs or motorized vehicles pulling up underneath our apartment. Our apartment was…I'm not sure if you're familiar with tropical apartments -- you got the apartment, and underneath is an open area where you can park your car and have your laundry and stuff like that -- they had pulled up APCs underneath our apartment, and started shooting .50 caliber machine guns into the police headquarters, that was just across the street from our apartment. So we're hunkered down there for a while. We didn't know whose side was underneath us…what side was underneath us. We knew it was the invasion…we knew the invasion was coming. Everybody that lived there at the time knew it was going to come to the invasion. After a while, my wife said, "They're speakin' English! They're speakin' English!" So we knew it was our troops that were underneath us. During the night, we were bunkered…then in the morning there was a knock on the door. I went to the door and there was a GI. He was shocked to see that I was American, I think. They were collecting all the males eighteen or over in the neighborhood, all the Panamanian males. So I stepped out and I vouched for my neighbor -- next-door neighbor -- when they were taking him away. I vouched for him and said, "No, you don't want to take him, he's a good guy. He's [unintelligible, 1:48.30]". So they, then…so we didn't…I didn't try to get involved in the shooting or anything like that, that wasn't my responsibility though I did have diplomatic status. When you're with the Smithsonian down there…at the time you had diplomatic status…what they called 'mission international status.' We had a scientist…some scientists that were captured by Noriega's people on an island, a research island the Smithsonian had. Amongst them was a lady with her…I think her daughter was five or six years old. They were captured on this island, taken to the mainland, and forced to hike up this mountain. By the time they got up to the top of the mountain and over the other side, the people there were telling them, "You'd better release those people. Do you realize that Noriega is done, and the United States has invaded, and you're going to get killed if you hang on to these hostages?!" So they were released and the American military went down and picked them up. So when I found out they had been picked up, I jumped in the vehicle and flew down…drove down to the Air Force base -- Albrook Air Force Base -- where they were dropping them off, and met them and got some pictures of them… this little girl in her night gown that she had been wearing when she…when they were kidnapped. That was my main involvement

there. Then when we ended up…since our plane was cancelled -- of course, the airport shut down -- the commercial airport was shut down, so we…our flight was canceled, so they offered us evacuation, emergency evacuation for Americans. My wife and I discussed this, and said, "Yeah, let's take our vacation now." And so we went out to Albrook Air Force Base and were waiting there for space-available on these flights. What they were doing was they had C-141s that were supposed to be loaded with coffins for dead US soldiers that had been shot during this invasion, but there weren't any. So they had these C-141's that were going back anyway, and so we were scheduled on one of these flights. Then we were told…then it was announced that, "Nope, the flight's going to be cancelled or delayed." The pilot comes walking by, and my wife asked him, "Why is the flight delayed?" and he said, "The plane broke." [Laughs] And so eventually we got on a C-141, and I don't know if you're familiar with C-141s, but they've got those web seats on the side…the middle was empty, 'cause it was supposed to be filled with caskets. But we rode on these web seats, and C-141 is my wife's favorite plane. Now she would just as soon fly in a C-141, those web seats as any airplane there is.

Sanderson: Surprisingly they were quite comfortable. I flew on one when we went into Iraq. At first I was like, "Uh, this is going to be a long flight." But…probably by far the most comfortable seats. Better than a lot of the modern airlines, [Hansen makes noises of agreement] where after a two-hour flight, your back hurts, your knee, your hip hurts, whole nine yards. Whereas those…you gotta love the good webbing seats, right? [Laughs]

Hansen: Yeah.

Sanderson: Yeah. Would the pictures that you took of the scientists being returned from during that time frame…was that just more for your personal use, or did you ever turn those over to the Smithsonian?

Hansen: No, they're in the Smithsonian collection.

Sanderson: So you were there for seven years…was that when you went up to…and actually, became director of the Smithsonian Photographic Services, or…?

Hansen: Well, after seven years they transferred me up to natural history, and I took over the Museum of Natural History's photography department. I did that for…I don't know how many years, and then about the last six years of my career I was the director of photography. I was there with the Smithsonian twenty-four years, so

I'd have to back up on the years…I don't remember. I retired in 2008, so it must have been 2002 or 2001, 2002, I was made director of photography.

Sanderson: Now, looking at the natural history museum, how was it, working there at the museum?

Hansen: Oh, once again, just like…just like in Panama…working with scientists, working with history -- natural history -- that's my forte. I mean, I love history and sciences and stuff like that, the scientists there are just…what people don't understand about the Smithsonian is that all those museums…only ten percent is dedicated to exhibits and stuff, the rest is all research. Ninety percent of what goes on in those museums is research, and that's the part I was involved in. I just enjoyed the heck out of it, working with fantastic, world-class scientists.

Sanderson: During that time, Panama and there…were there any type of assignments that you went on that just really stuck out?

Hansen: In Panama?

Sanderson: Uh, yeah.

Hansen: Oh, let's see. Well, yeah, we went out to Isla del Cocos …anyway, it's a little island [342 miles southwest off the coast] of Costa Rica. We went out there on a research vessel to do underwater photography, underwater research. And that was just a great trip. Rough trip over, but…it's an island that the pirates used to hang out at, and there's supposedly a pirate treasure buried there some place. People go on the island and tear it apart looking for the pirate treasure. Yeah, and one of the things that I remember…the island is fantastic, the island is tropical, as tropical can be. It…the closest thing to the Galapagos, it's very similar to the Galapagos. The trees there are gigantic trees, but they're totally encased in moss, an inch deep, three inches in moss, and leaves, everything is covered in moss. And then the rocks -- the boulders on the river -- when the river comes down are carved with the names of ships that had visited there in the 1500s. Just fantastic, the history there. I was lousy with my Spanish, but there were two Coast Guard guys -- two Costa Rican Coast Guard guys -- who protected the whole island, and I got to talking with them, and I asked them if I could spend the night there with them, on the island with them…there on the island. They said, "Sure" and so we sat around the campfire, talking in my real bad Spanish and their non-English -- they didn't speak any English -- but we communicated pretty well. When it was time to go to bed, I said, "Well, I'll sleep in this

hammock out here on the front of their shack." And they said, "Fine. Here, take this." They handed me an AK-47 and said, "There's a big pig that comes in every night, and we want to shoot it so we can have a big Christmas party." I said, "Okay," and it was loaded and the safety was off and I thought, "Well, I'm not going to sleep on this hammock with a loaded weapon with the safety off", so I put it on safety and I fell asleep. Sometime, I hear this…obviously the grunt of a pig -- feral pig -- and I can see it in the moonlight. I barely click on the safety and, man, it's gone. I thought well, okay. I'll put the safety back on and go back to sleep, and I do. And pretty soon, I hear the pig again and I click the safety off, and it's gone again. Finally, I said, "Okay, I'm going to go to sleep with the safety off." [Both laugh] Well, then he never came back. But the whole island…these feral pigs just uprooted everything. Just like everything is plowed…the whole island, any bit of dirt is plowed up by these feral pigs. It's really doing a lot of damage to the island, but, you know, they have is these two guys on there to protect it from, you know, treasure hunters and all that.

Sanderson: Be interesting to see if they could ever find the treasure there.

Hansen: There was…at some point in time, there was a family or something that lived on there and spent their whole lives looking for the treasure and never…supposedly, never found it. If anybody's ever found it, it's never been declared.

Sanderson: They probably didn't want to have pay the taxes or something like that.

Hansen: Yeah, share it with the government, yeah.

Sanderson: So what were some of the things that you really enjoyed when you were at the actual museum itself in D.C.? How was that? Like…anything really stuck out there?

Hansen: There's lots of things. I spent a month down in Brazil with an anthropologist and with an Indian tribe called the Canela tribe, and in order to live with them for that period of time I had to be inducted into the tribe. I went through this induction ceremony where they shaved part of my head and painted me and tarred and feathered me, and then they had a ceremony in the center of…they marched me into the center of the village and named me…my name is Pun Hee, which means macaw bone. And so, I'm actually an inducted member of the tribe. I joke with my friends, I say, "Yeah, you have a lot of friends who have been tarred and feathered and run out of town, I'm the only friend who's been tarred

and feathered and run into town." [Both laugh] So then another incident there…another interesting story is I spent several…I made several trips to Burma, Myanmar, back when it wasn't open, really…this was back in the late '90s, middle and late '90s. And the first trip there…at the end of our trip, we were going up into the northern country, where…and because we were Smithsonian, and doing research there and training their people in how to do research and manage their national parks…we were allowed to go into areas that most people aren't allowed in the northern part. The trip there is an incredible trip, that's another story all by itself, but this…my first trip there, when we were getting ready to leave -- one guy and I, one scientist and I were the first two to leave -- we went back to Rangoon and we got called before the junta -- the generals -- because we were these Americans that were way up north, and they wanted to know what we were doing. So we got there and we're in this military compound and there's this big dais platform up in front, and then there's all these tables with all these generals and colonels and whatever in uniform sitting in front of us. We're sitting up on this dais with the big head general, I don't even remember his name, but he's sitting in the middle of us, the scientist on one side and I'm on the other, and sitting there, and he's interviewing us and asking us what we were doing and how we got there and all this information. I'm sitting there going, "Ooh my gosh, are we going to get out of this?" But anyway it turned out to be very congenial, very interesting, and we were able to leave the next day, so…but kinda interesting, because I don't know if you remember back then, but US relationships with Burma weren't that good.

Sanderson: Yeah, that was sticky at best.

Hansen: Yeah.

Sanderson: So then, when…you became director of the Smithsonian…of the photographic service in 2002?

Hansen: I think it was 2002. Yeah, to the best of my knowledge.

Sanderson: During that time, what were some of the things that you were able to do specifically with…I mean now being over…that you're over every single one of the museums…and there's what, ten total now, I believe?

Hansen: Eleven, yeah. Eleven and the National Zoo.

Sanderson: What were some of the things…?

Hansen: Thirteen research. Go ahead.

Sanderson: Thirteen research facilities?

Hansen: Thirteen research, thirteen museums and the National Zoo, and I think five or seven research institutes and stations.

Sanderson: What were some of the things that really stuck out for you when you became director?

Hansen: How much I disliked being an administrator! [Laughter] During that whole time, I did no photography, just administration. It was not my forte. It was not fun for me. I went in with high hopes of really making a difference and really shining, and we did really well but it was at a terrible time in the Smithsonian's history. We had a secretary that's a guy by the name of Larry Small, and he was totally destroying the Smithsonian at that time. He was trying to turn it into a commercial venture. A lot of good people were let go or quit just to get out of there.

Sanderson: Glad he didn't…glad he didn't succeed, 'cause God knows every time I got to D.C. I think…think I spend ninety percent of my time at the various museums. I think I spend more time at the museums than anything else.

Hansen: Yeah, it's the crown of the continent as far as museums, and it means you don't have to pay a penny to go in there. Though the food is very expensive. [Laughs]

Sanderson: That was probably the only down side, but that's one of those things where you're like, "I'm going to find the places around it." The last time I was there, I was there for my reserve weekend…well, not reserve weekend, but reserve two weeks…and a couple of guys had never been to D.C. before, so I'm basically the D.C. tour guide for a lot of folks. I'm like, "Okay, we're going to go here and eat." And they're like, "Let's just eat here in the museum." I'm like, "No. We're going here." [Both laugh] I take them to the different spots, and they're like, "You know all this stuff!" And I'm like, "Well, I've been here multiple times." I'm kinda like you; I like to wander off into the other areas. I like to find…living here in Chicago, I don't hit any of the mainstream areas. I go to the little neighborhood places.

Hansen: Exactly, that's the best.

Sanderson: Oh yeah, definitely. Best food, best conversations, and you learn more about stuff in the "back-alley" pubs than you do in the mainstream area.

Hansen: For sure.

Sanderson: One of the times while you were there…also that was, of course, 911 had just happened. During the process of the exhibit that they did at the American History Museum, did you have any say, or did you have any type of input into that exhibit?

Hansen: No, not in particular. I mean, I assigned photographers to go work there, but yeah. We had a really good relationship -- my office was in American History at that point, basement of the American History Museum, at that point -- we had a really good relationship with the exhibits people at American History and Natural History and Air and Space, where we had crews all the time.

Sanderson: Now, looking back and kinda going…this may be a double-pronged question. When specifically, with the DASPO, when someone looks or goes to an exhibit featuring photographs or video that was done by DASPO…if there's something that you would want them to take away from that, what would it be?

Hansen: Hmmm. I guess…that this is the work of young boys…young men…from possibly their hometown. Up there, trying to convey what it was like, what was really happening. You know, people haven't [unintelligible 2:08:16] just show what's really happened.

Sanderson: You started to break up there. I'm sorry; I didn't get that last part.

Hansen: It's just that there are young guys that are out there trying to do their best to document what's happening…what's going on out there.

Sanderson: What about with your time at the Smithsonian?

Hansen: I think it was how good the research was, and how good the experience was, and how interesting…

Sanderson: Carl, I was going to say, you're breaking up pretty bad now.

Hansen: I wonder if…I think I'll trade phones. This phone may be losing its battery charge, hang on.

Sanderson: Okay.

Hansen: Can you hear me better now?

Sanderson: Ah, yes.

Hansen: I think that phone was losing its battery charge. We've been on for a long time. Anyway, what I do at the Smithsonian…what I always tried to do was show the fantastic research and work that the Smithsonian does, and how interesting it is, and how interesting science is and history, American history is. So you know, using photography to get people involved.

Sanderson: And they always say pictures are worth a thousand words, and definitely looking at some of those various photographs I've seen over the Smithsonian it definitely inspires people to want to do stuff.

Hansen: Yeah.

Sanderson: Outstanding. Well, I've actually ran out of questions at this point. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to talk about?

Hansen: No, I think we've done a pretty good job. Big conversation, more than I thought we could cover. [Both laugh]

Sanderson: Oh, definitely, and I greatly appreciate your time. You know, just looking at it, 'cause there for a minute it was taking me a little bit to find anything on you, and I'm like "Okay. Carl Hansen has done something." And then eventually I started clicking through stuff, and I'm like, "Whoa!" When I saw your bio from the Smithsonian, I geeked out a little bit. Like I said, I'm a huge Smithsonian fan, so it's like every time I go to D.C. I spend multiple hours there. I can honestly say, I think I'm the kind of guy you don't want to go to a museum with, because I will go to every stinking exhibit. I will sit there and read every little placard and I will stand there look at every single picture and artifact, you name it. I can honestly say I've been through every single exhibit in there, and it takes me almost an entire day just to get through half of one museum.

Hansen: Yeah, then you get people who say, "Well, we went to the Smithsonian last weekend and went to the museums." And we go, "Which one?"

Sanderson: Right, and all of them…I'm like, "Huh?" You physically walked in the building and walked through, but you did not go through the actual museum.

Hansen: Yeah, one of the things we say when families come is the kids want to go to the Natural History Museum to see the dinosaurs, the fathers want to go to the Air and Space Museum to see the airplanes, and the mothers want to go the American History Museum to see the first lady's gowns.

Sanderson: That, and everybody loves always to go stand in the line to see the Hope Diamond. I can honestly say I'm like, "Eh." I was probably the only person…the first time we ever went when I was in high school, I was the first one to beeline straight to the Fonz's jacket. I was the only one to do that, everybody else was like, "We're going to go do this!" I'm like, "See y'all I'm going to see the Fonz." [Both laugh]

Hansen: Yeah.

Sanderson: Well, Sir, we greatly, greatly appreciate your time, and we definitely look forward to seeing you when you come here for the reunion. Thank you for the chat, I can't wait to physically meet you. It's one of those where…the guys in the office have been laughing at me. I've been geeking out with you guys.

Hansen: I'm looking forward to meeting you, too, and I hope you have something you can use out of all this.

Sanderson: Oh, definitely. Oh, definitely. And what we'll do is have all this transcribed, and once we do the transcriptions, the editing, and the audio, there is some stuff we would like to use for the audio tour and for, to go along with the exhibit. It's one of those that… 'cause pictures help, pictures do a very good job of telling the story, and sometimes, having that explanation of the story, of what it was…especially looking back, there's never been another unit like DASPO. Almost to the point where I kinda wish the modern military would have something like that, especially with the fact that you guys had unfettered access to an area that, nowadays, if you were to mention this in the Pentagon, someone would look at you like, "What are you talking about?" Like almost want to freak out a bit about it.

Hansen: Yes, exactly. Yes.

Sanderson: Well, I greatly appreciate it. And are there any other questions or anything you can think of?

Hansen: I guess that's it for me. Like I said, I hope you get some use.

Sanderson: Oh, definitely. Well, thank you very much, Sir. Hope you have a wonderful day, and definitely enjoy Montana.

Hansen: Will do, will do.

Carl C. Hansen

Sept 22, 2015
Part 2
Interviewed by Ed Sanderson
Transcribed by Leah Cohen
Edited by Leah Cohen

Sanderson: Today is Sept. 22, 2015. I'm Edward Sanderson, the Oral History Intern, here at the Pritzker Military Museum & Library and today, we're talking to Mr. Carl Hansen, member of the Department of Army Special Photographic Office. He's in the DASPO, from 1967 to 1969. Thank-you for coming out and seeing us. This is also for a part of our exhibit that we're going to be doing on the Faces of War and like I said, thank-you very much, again, for speaking to us over the phone as well as agreeing to sit down and talk to us for a few minutes. One of the things that I kind of, looking back, we did a pretty extensive over the phone …

Hansen: Mmhm

Sanderson: In looking back at it, you'd joined the [US] Army in '67 and then part of that, you'd went and became part of the DASPO and then you went to Vietnam, specifically to the Pacific detachment and while in the Pacific detachment, you went to Vietnam, Thailand, multiple times.

Hansen: Korea.

Sanderson: And Korea.

Hansen: Okinawa, Japan

Sanderson: Okinawa and Japan. They, definitely, had you all over the place during that time frame. Looking back on that, specifically, you have a picture in the exhibit. Can you talk a little bit about the photograph that you have in the unit and based off the caption?

Hansen: Yeah. That particular photograph with the purple smoke and a helicopter coming in is pretty representative of what it was like in the field. You would go out on patrol – we would go out on patrol with the unit that we knew nothing about. We would just say, "We're going out with you, today." And they would go out for, maybe, a week at a time and they would… when they needed resupply, they would cut a few trees in the jungle and then a helicopter would come in to resupply them or to take out the wounded or dead and so that picture represents what that was like and the amazing thing that, at the time, and still, today, impressed me so much was these skill of these helicopter pilots that were able to bring these helicopters in, in such a small space because as for blowing out a few trees in the jungle just big enough for a helicopter to come straight down in and quite often, there was just feet between the blades of the helicopter and the trees around. In that particular picture, I'd been out with a unit and they were doing a search and destroy and it…they encountered a little bit of resistance but there was not big battle that took place. So…

Sanderson: What unit was that?

Hansen: I'll have to look again but that was, I think it was the Company B, 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry Division. It was near Đắc Tô during the battle of Đắc Tô. Around the time of the battle of Đắc Tô.

Sanderson: How many days were you embedded with that unit?

Hansen: We would …. I went out with them when they went out from the base camp and then I would stay with them until I ran out of supplies, which you have to understand, is – we were self-reliant. We had to bring our own food and everything. They didn't support us, at all, the troops. They had to support themselves and they were. We were just kind of a, an addendum to 'em and they didn't know us or anything. So, we were out there just – there'd be a photo still photographer and a motion picture photographer and we would just attach ourselves to them and whatever food we brought that's the food we had. When there was a resupply, they may share some of their resupply if they had plenty of it, they may share some but they may not. When we ran out of film or anything, so, in a case like that, if usually, I was there four days, maybe, five days at the most and then, when a resupply helicopter would come in if there was space on it, we would go back to the base. I never, I don't remember ever staying out for a whole patrol just because we ran out of film and ran out of supplies and stuff. I used to carry because we came in, we lived on their economy, we had access to the PX and stuff. I would carry extra cans of peaches or fruit in syrup and I'd trade with the guys for a C-ration meals because they didn't get all this… They didn't get the sweet stuff like that. They loved their sweet stuff and so I would try to trade a meal for a can of sweet peaches or something like that for a C ration meal.

Sanderson: Nice! Specifically, in that photograph, was the purple smoke just to mark the landing …

Hansen: Landing zone. Yeah, there was a landing zone sign and that's… the purple smoke was the color that they used in that unit at that time. They would change that, I'm sure from time to time. It was meant that, you know, when the helicopter's coming in, that it was safe to come in and that's where exactly they were supposed to come down and you'll see in the picture, there's one solder out there, kinda guiding them in.

Sanderson: Mmm. Kind of looking back, what was going through your mind when you, and more so, why did you want to take photograph, specifically?

Hansen: Well, from a photographic point of view, like I said, I was really wanted to document how the close space of the helicopter for coming in and then, of course, the purple smoke from a photographer's point of view makes a graphic element. There's a theory in photography that two great elements in a photograph make a good picture, three elements make a great picture. So, if you've got the purple smoke, the guy guiding at the end, and the helicopter coming in the trees, it's a better picture. [Laughs]. Take that picture and take away the purple smoke and it's not the same picture.

Sanderson: Looking back, during, we'd spoke over the phone and you had said that you had saw that a few years later. Can you tell that story for us, again?

Hansen: Yeah, that particular picture has been used on the cover of three books that I've stumbled across plus it's been used in several other books on photography, the history of photography, surprisingly, you know. I started lookin' for books but then one of the weirdest experiences was when I was working for the Smithsonian, I was director, at the end of my career, Director of Photography, and when I got a new supervisor over me, I was taking her around to all of the different museums and introducing her to the new museums, and we went to the air and space museum at Hazy Center in Dulles, Virginia and I was takin' her around and we came down the elevator and down the stairs, I guess, walked around the corner, and here's that particular picture, big blow up of it on the wall, documenting the use of Huey helicopters in the Vietnam War and you can, I don't think, I'm not even sure she believed me when I said, "My gosh, that's my picture from when I was a nineteen year old private!"[Laughter]. But that was one of the most unusual incidences when I ran into it.

Sanderson: Oh, nice. 'Cause it's, definitely, iconic photograph, definitely looking back, because just for the different publications it's been [in]. Did you ever receive an award or any got any recognition

Hansen: Got any recognition. It's been…usually, it doesn't receive any credit at all, sometimes, it gets the credit of a US Army photographer. The reason I knew it was one of mine was – we used to get critique prints back – and we would keep some of the critiques of pictures we particularly liked and so that's one of them. I had kept the critique print of – with the caption attached and everything like that so I was aware of it, being out there, and so when I encountered it, you know, I'd go through a book store and see it on there, on a cover of a book, it would catch my attention.

Sanderson: Mmhwm. What has your family said over the – you know – what's been your family's reaction when they walk by, "Hey, I'll take photograph" [Laughter]

Hansen: I don't know that any other member of my family has been there, when it happened but my wife is pretty proud of it when we go someplace where the picture is displayed.

Sanderson: It's, basically, concerning whether you work in the Smithsonian for all – for all the years that you did, God only knows, how many pictures are, you know, running around your accredited specifically to yourself. You did that for a while, You said, twenty-five years…

Hansen: You said, twenty-five years. Yeah.

Sanderson: One of the things, looking at and kinda going back to the interview that we did over the phone. Was there anything specific that you would like to add to it? Or anything that you wanted to elaborate on or--?

Hansen: Not that I can think of…. That's a long interview, we talked about a lot! [Both laugh]

Sanderson: I think it came out to almost two and a half hours, maybe?

Hansen: Two and a half hours, yeah.

Sanderson: It was a very enjoyable interview. One of the ones I did, just briefly go into. You'd talked about – one of your bios from the Smithsonian – that you had documented when one of the times that President Nixon had toured one of the combat zones. I think we briefly touched on it but we didn't really dive too much into it. Could you elaborate a little bit more about the scenario and which area he was in, if you…

Hansen: Yeah, it, he flew into Cam Ranh Bay, okay, and we were, our team, were sent out en masse, there were a whole bunch of us and we were sent out to document it from the Army's point of view and his visit. He didn't get off the Cam Ranh Bay Base. He stayed on the base but he was in a war zone and so we were documenting the President of the United States, visiting a war zone, which is not very common and so, we, you know. We didn't have great access to him, we were just, basically, around the perimeter, so much press and so much security that we just documented his presence, his feet on the ground and his addressing the troops, there.

Sanderson: It's always interesting to see if the commander-in-chief, actually, shows up to a war zone. I think besides Nixon, Johnson, and then GW Bush because I don't think that J? [unintelligible] ever made it out to the—

Hansen: No, I don't think so, yeah.

Sanderson: I think that besides George Washington, I think and Lincoln,

Hansen: Lincoln, not very many.

Sanderson: I think you can literally count on one hand how many presidents, actually, made it to a war zone…

Hansen: when they were president.

Sanderson: Whereas not so much on the other ones. [Hansen laughs] Like, yeah… we'll hang back. Also, just to briefly touch on – you also worked with the combat field mortuary and that was with Stewart Barbee, correct? In that time frame?

Hansen: The what?

Sanderson: For the combat field mortuary?

Hansen: Yes, that was one of the last things I did, actually, one of the last assignments I had. I did the still photography while Stewart Barbee did the cinematography. Stewart did – I worked with him in the Saigon mortuary. He did it in several other mortuaries, he put a lot more time into it than I did because I was leaving on the company, ah country but … we documented that… this is a time when over three hundred bodies a week were going through the mortuary and we were there documenting how to run a field mortuary and saw, I think I was worked at it, maybe a week and a half, two weeks, every day. Saw quite a bit… and like I said, there're were a lot of bodies going through at the time.

Sanderson: And during that time, was it you or Stewart Barbee that was talking about that there was a journal that they found in the trash can from one of the soldiers…

Hansen: It must have been Stewart.

Sanderson: Okay. Flipped them back through the notes. I remember—

Hansen: the discussion—

Sanderson: Right. 'Cause you all does interviews were very close by, close to each other. Lookin' back, do you feel that, you know, now looking back on the history of it and seeing the different photographs, do you feel that the Army should have, actually, made it a point to give you guys credit for that for later on, down the road?

Hansen: Yeah, I think – I'm not really sure how many World War II photographers got credit down the road. There weren't that many Civil War photographers and World War I photographers but yeah, I think, they've taken care of that, they've changed that, now, where they make greater effort to identify the photographers when pictures are released to the public. This is a crazy time, as I understand it, the media was invited in, at times, to look at our contact sheets and stuff like that and pick out pictures that they particularly wanted and so… maybe, it was the media that didn't want to know who took those pictures, maybe the names were provided and the media just chose, see, say – it's easier to say US Army photographer or nothing at all. You know, as a photographer you like to get credit for what you do and but and we took so much and we didn't always see the work that we did. We didn't always get a critique so some of the stuff that some of us did – some of the work we did might be published and we wouldn't even recognize it because what fifty years ago we don't remember what we were shooting?

Sanderson: Right. That's definitely -- yeah, I was going to say – very few people. I mean most people can barely remember what they ate for breakfast much less what they did fifty years ago. I'm, definitely, here on that one. This, hopefully, they can continue, hopefully, they can go back and give a lot of you guys, actual credit that you guys deserve.

Hansen: Yeah. I've contacted some authors when my picture was used on their books and they promised to give me credit in future publications, in releases of the book but I don't know that they were ever had a second printing or—[laughs]. So never was able to follow up on that.

Sanderson: Hopefully, they have a few more credit. This is by Carl Hansen.

Hansen: Right.

Sanderson: One of the things, we'd asked a couple of the questions on this but, specifically, 'cause I know during the interview, the phone started, your phone started dying on you, during the course of it, one of the things that we'd like to re-ask the question… When someone comes to an exhibit, featuring a photograph or, specifically, when they come to his exhibit, what is it that you would like them to take away from this exhibit?

Hansen: Umm, I guess to realize that there were young men, there weren't any female photographers, at the time, but young men in combat that were trying to document and show the actual life, what it really was like in, for these troops and our mission wasn't to aggrandize or make it more dramatic. We were told, instructed to document not just the peak action but everything that was going on and … for historical purposes. We considered ourselves the documentary crew, not a news crew. So there were a lot of guys putting their life on the line and trying to document different things in combat and outside of combat, sometimes but like the presidential visit, it could have turned into combat but it

didn't. So, you know, there were a lot of young men out there, doing their best to show what it was really like, day-to-day, in the military.

Sanderson: A photograph… they always say, "A picture is worth a thousand words", looking at some of these pictures, just… I've, literally, stared at some of them for a good thirty, forty minutes, just still, you know, like, what was going on in the person's mind, specific with your photograph, looking at … it still amazes me how it – here you have a helicopter landing yet the smoke is almost – it rises almost perfectly.

Hansen: Mmhm.

Sanderson: It's just kind of like – normally, it would be the exact opposite. You'd have debris flying all over the place but it was like when you close the shutter on it, it's snapped it just right as it was – it gives that kind of eeriness but, at the same time, the awe of the --- like you were talking about with the skill of how these guys were having to land in this small cleared area where you had mere feet and if the pilot was off by just a hair—

Hansen: --they were in.

Sanderson: Right and then that's a helo[copter] down. You're LZ [landing zone] is, now, completely fouled and you can't get anything in or out.

Hansen: Right, exactly, exactly. There are people on the ground that are trusting that they know what they're doing because they're in harm's way if it goes down.

Sanderson: Yeah.

Hansen: Those helicopter pilots were amazing!

Sanderson: And at this point, is there anything that you would like to add to the interview that we …

Hansen: Not that I can think of. It, we covered a lot. [Both laugh]. I don't know how well-spoken I was on some of the issues but…

Sanderson: Actually, you did very well and I've been looking forward to…everybody in the office has been laughin' at me, I've been geekin' out, especially the last week, you know, I was kind of walkin' around, you know, on the nervous side and everybody was like, "Are you all right?". It's like, now, I get to meet these guys that I got to talk to, that I've been doing research on, that I get to see. It's different when you're looking at it through a photograph but when you, actually, get to see these guys, shake their hands, talk to them face-to-face vs. over the phone, it's like night and day and …

Hansen: There's some pretty interesting guys, that's why I enjoy coming to the reunions because some of these guys who had both in the military and out of the military – but very interesting lives and it's interesting that, you know, how many of them, my fellow members of DASPO went out to lives, em careers in photography. Not everyone, not all of them but a lot of them did and it's really fun listening to their stories of their experiences, back in Vietnam, and Thailand and places… of Hawaii. But it's also fun listening to their stories of their life, afterwards and seeing how their experience in the military influenced their careers and their lives, where they ended up because – it's really interesting coming to the reunions for that purpose, in fact, that's why I come to the reunions [laughs].Happy to get the food or anything. [Laughs]

Sanderson: Oh yeah. Well, that's just the plus on it. Food and tasty adult beverages, right?

Hansen: Right.

Sanderson: How many have you attended?

Hansen: This is, probably, my fifth. Yeah. I don't go to every one. Normally, I'm pretty busy.

Sanderson: I, definitely, this week is perfect, you know, best weather…

Hansen: Best weather, yeah.

Sanderson: And it's good period in the city where there's a lot going on but not overly busy.

Hansen: Yeah, yeah.

Sanderson: Well, we greatly appreciate your taking the time speaking to us, in person, and like I said, we just hope that we live up to the expectations that you guys—

Hansen: It will be interesting to see what the exhibit is –how the exhibit looks, tomorrow, er, Friday or Thursday, I guess it is, and how the response of the public is. That's going to be… Are they going to have some media, do they expect media to attend?

Sanderson: Ah, I'm not sure. I think, I know that they're going to invite some public relations stuff but this, I think Bill San Hamel and Ken [Clarke] and all the guys and the public relations office have been working on that. I know I've been tellin' people left and right, I'm like, "Hey, swing out, swing out!" And, definitely, friends that I

know that are, you know, all my Reserve friends, and [? unintelligible] friends, I'm tryin' to get them to dive out here.

Hansen: That's good.

Sanderson: All right. Well, we appreciate it, Sir.