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## Interview with O. Lynn McCotter

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Interview  
1300 hours, Monday, 12 March 1990, by telephone

**O. Lynn McCotter**

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I served with 18th MP BDE at the time that Col. Nelson was at the stockade. I was at BDE staff level. I had nothing to do with the daily operation of it but I handled all the staff actions at BDE level, and that's where I became very familiar with Col. Nelson. Later he was PM at Ft. Sill, OK and he selected me to run the stockade for him, 1972-1973. I worked in the Operations Section; responsible for inland waterway security operations, the confinement operations, POWs.

I got to Long Binh in November 1968 after Nelson took over in August. It was my second tour in Vietnam. I had the pleasure of working with him until he left and then Bill Keyes took over. A tall black-headed LTC was Nelson's deputy for awhile. I had a lot of respect for him. Last I heard he was in Atlanta. Nelson would know him. He might help you considerably in the history of the place. A lanky black officer. He was a MAJ then.

I didn't know the commanding officer at the time of the riots. He had been hurt and had been evacuated prior to the time I got there. I was the guy who brought back some of the inmates to LVN some months later who had been involved in the riot. They were tried in Vietnam and some of them were convicted. The only one I remember by name was Beauchamps (?) who was the guy they think attacked Col. Johnson. I escorted him and 16 others who had said they'd never make it back alive. But they did!

I will tell you this. I have never seen a better run prison operation than what Ivan Nelson did, which is a miracle in itself. He was exactly what was needed. I know Bill Keyes and was there a short time after he took over from Col. Nelson. From a historical point of view, Nelson is the guy responsible for cleaning up that whole operation. You couldn't do a history of LBJ without Nelson. My personal perspective is that he's the turning point. Without him they could have had a major disaster on their hands. I think he's one of the finest people I've ever known, despite his reputation as Ivan 'the terrible.'

Work hard and do your job. If you did that there wasn't a finer person in the military to work for. If you weren't doing your job you didn't want to be anywhere close to him because he would eat you alive. I think he was the guy who saved LBJ--I tell you that up front. He's sort of a legend. During WWII he was a stay-behind guerrilla and an advisor to Chiang Kai-shek. He started as infantry and later became MP. He was also involved in the military's airborne operations, particularly in arctic experimentation. An absolute genius and one of the best people

I've ever known. He was tough but if you worked hard and did your job there wasn't a finer person to work for. Totally dedicated to the military. The army was not only his occupation but his hobby.

When I got there the place was a lot of steel and barb wire; immaculate, absolute discipline. The burned stuff was pretty well cleaned up. The conex containers were in place. We called them 'Steel City', 'Silver City'. So well groomed you could eat off the ground. Spit and polish. Discipline. Respect. He put the place back together and on its feet. And you know? The inmates liked it. Say what you want. Those inmates had total respect for Ivan Nelson as an individual and soldier. He commanded respect. He treated everybody identically by the book. It didn't matter what your color was, what your rank had been. No favoritism. Discipline the best of any place I've ever been. Everything run by the book.

Norwood Jackson's a big bull in a china shop. I never worked with him, didn't know him personally and only heard a lot of war stories about him. He's just a big guy. A lot of rumors floating around.