

**INTERVIEW WITH M. COPPLEY VICKERS
CONDUCTED BY TOM SCOTT
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TS: Why don't we come in, Vick, talking about how you were a great runner at Fulton High School in Knoxville? What happens in 1960 when you start getting letters from different places wanting you to come run track in college? Maybe, just talk about your senior year in high school and what you accomplished that led to the scholarship offers.

CV: I guess the biggest thing was the mile run that I didn't complete.

TS: The year before that [1959].

CV: The year before, right. It's a long story, but I'll just say that I was told to get out ahead of a runner who was very good, and I did. We both knocked each other out of the state meet because we went through the three-quarter mile in 3:07, which was pretty good. I think that got the attention of some coaches in track. My senior year, I learned the value of pace. I ran the mile in the state meet just following the guy [in first place] and ran it just fast enough to win it because we were trying to win the state meet—our team was—and I saved everything I could just to run the half mile.

It turned out I got second in the half mile. I broke the state record in the half mile and got beat by about six inches. I ran a very tactical race. I was very conservative and ran back in the middle of the pack in trying to conserve everything I had. I pulled up on the guy on the back

straightaway. Being a little cocky, I tried to take him on the back straightaway, which wasn't very smart. We went stride for stride, all out, all the way down the back straightaway and into the curve. He held me out. We came out of the curve, and I came right back up beside him. Then he drifted away from me a little bit about six or seven inches, and I didn't win it, but I ran a good race and got the points. That was pretty much it.

I got scholarship offers or discussions from Indiana, Wake Forest, Auburn, Texas A&M, Florida, and Coach Rohe at Furman at that time.

TS: What were your best times in high school?

CV: I had a 4:34 mile. I figure I could probably have broken 4:30 if I had just focused on it. I had a 1:58.2 half-mile. These aren't particularly great times, but being able to double in those two was apparently significant.

TS: You got all those offers, and some from faraway places. I wonder how they heard about you?

CV: I know the Texas A&M coach heard about me from Johnny Faulkner, who was the fellow I ran against [in the 1959 race where both went out too fast]. He got his scholarship because of that three-quarter-mile time. He told [the coach] about me. I'm sure that's where it came from.

TS: So Johnny Faulkner went to Texas A&M?

CV: He did. He came back after two years, and I think he graduated from Cumberland College. Mr. [W.M.] Davis was an Auburn graduate. He was the reason they recruited me.

TS: Mr. Davis, the principal?

CV: Yes. My uncle—I don't know what his relationship to Indiana was—but he stirred them up. Back in that time, it was more of a hit-and-miss thing—who you knew, and what coach happened to read the paper. Coach Rohe was meticulous and had an index card system and post card system where he wrote just about every high school coach in the southeast—with a post card—to let him know about any athletes that they had that had potential in their eyes. That was way before the Internet, but he was really tuned in. I don't know how Coach Rohe knew about me. He invited me down to run in an Olympic Development meet. My good buddy Jim Giffin and I drove down there, and we ran some in some of those meets. But I'm not sure how he found out about me.

TS: Did you get the offer before the state meet your last year?

- CV:** No, it was after.
- TS:** So, maybe, he saw the results.
- CV:** That was probably it.
- TS:** Knowing Coach Rohe, he probably kept up with every state in the South—who won in the various state meets.
- CV:** That would be my guess. He recruited a lot of state champions from Florida and Georgia and all around.
- TS:** I understand that you got an offer from Florida, or at least you went down on a recruiting trip.
- CV:** I did. The coach for Florida was Coach [Percy] Beard, who was an Olympic hurdles champion in the 1930s [1932]. Apparently, Coach Rohe had taken the Florida state half-mile champion [David (Toby) Tyler] away from him, and I think that Coach Beard was aggravated with him. He decided that he would take me away from Coach Rohe. So, Coach Beard called me and said, “Why don’t you come down here?” I said, “Well, Coach, I already gave Coach Rohe my word that I was coming there.” He said, “Well, it won’t hurt. That really doesn’t mean anything, because people change their mind all the time.” Until it’s in writing, it’s not binding. I said, “Well, I’ve never been to Florida, and I would love to see it. But I’ve hold him I’m going to come [to Furman University], and that’s what I’m going to do. But if you want me to come down there, I’ll come down there.” He sent me plane tickets down there. I had to send a transcript. I got down there, and I learned that he had already got me accepted to Florida. He took me all around. I was very impressed with it. Had I not promised Coach Rohe that I was coming, I would have run at Florida. But I felt like when I told somebody something that that was what I ought to do.
- TS:** I think that getting into school was probably a lot more informal back then, even when coaches were involved. I saw in the paper this morning that the incoming class at the University of Tennessee—46 percent of them have a 4.0 average or better in high school.
- CV:** Holy Mackerel! That’s unbelievable! The scholarships now that are out have a way of raising that average up.
- TS:** The HOPE scholarship—it said that 99 percent [of the entering freshmen] are on the HOPE scholarship.
- CV:** Yes.

- TS:** So, you got all these offers. What was it about Rohe that attracted you to Furman? Furman is a great school, but what did it have—1500 students, compared to the University of Florida?
- CV:** It is a great school. It's a small, liberal arts school, and I loved it. I, obviously, didn't go there because of Furman. I went there because of Coach Rohe. He's just a terrific salesperson—positive and energetic. At the time, you have these ideas of wanting to be a fireman or policeman or Indian chief. I thought I wanted to be an engineer. I really hadn't given it much thought. I found it cool. I made A's in math and science and everything, but my intellect wasn't really at a high caliber. I had mentioned to him that I thought I wanted to be an engineer. He said, "Well, Furman's got pre-engineering. They don't have engineering; they have pre-engineering." I never thought too much about it, and I really didn't pursue the engineering question. I just went in and signed up for my courses and everything.
- TS:** That sounds like Rohe [and his skills as a salesperson]. You obviously couldn't have gotten an engineering degree from Furman.
- CV:** That's true, but you don't take many engineering courses your first two years to get your standard [general education] courses. So, I got my pre-engineering out of the way.
- TS:** Enough to decide that you didn't want to be an engineer.
- CV:** Right. I was lucky that they had pre-engineering.
- TS:** So, you get to Furman. You run there one year. Were freshmen eligible at Furman?
- CV:** They were not eligible.
- TS:** I knew they weren't in the SEC. I didn't know at other places. So you ran on the freshman team, I guess, that first year [1960-61].
- CV:** Yes.
- TS:** And that was Rohe's last year, I guess.
- CV:** No, next to last year.
- TS:** So you were there two years and the fall of the third year [1960-62]?
- CV:** Yes, and my roommate was David Tyler, the half-mile champion from Florida that Coach Rohe took away.

TS: Who is Toby Tyler?

CV: Toby is David. That was his nickname.

TS: You've told a story about your first workout after you showed up [at Furman]. Do you want to talk about that? And you might reflect—Rohe talks in his interview about the lack of facilities at Furman when he first got there. Now, maybe they had improved by 1960 when you arrived.

CV: Yes. They had put in a very nice cinder track at Furman. Apparently, they promised him a track, and they had a very nice cinder track.

TS: Oh, yes, I ran on that track once in a summer meet.

CV: I've forgotten now what I was saying.

TS: I confused things by asking two different questions. First workouts?

CV: Okay. In high school my memory is that we would jog about two miles, and then we would have a workout that's called a passing 440, where you would be in a line of six or seven guys, and the person in the back of the line would sprint really hard to get up to the front. And then they would settle back into a pace, more like the fartlek workouts now [Swedish/Norwegian "speed play" that combines interval and distance training]. I think we would run about six quarters, and then we would jog a little bit, and that was about it. The first workout down at Furman, Coach Rohe took us ten miles out of town towards Spartanburg on a four-lane highway that had a grass median, and he told us that he wanted us to run ten miles in a six-minute pace. And I said to myself, "Oh, my God! What have I got myself into?" He would be at each mile marker, giving us our times, and urging us to pick it up. I just remember being overwhelmed with that and saying, "Oh, what have I got myself into?"

TS: I think you have said since then that Coach Rohe has said he didn't really expect anybody to complete his workouts, but we didn't know that at the time, of course.

CV: That's something that one of his assistant coaches related to me that Coach Rohe had told him, "Make the workouts really tough, so that you can't really accomplish them." So, yes, that was apparently part of his philosophy.

TS: So, you're thinking, "What did I get myself into?" So, what followed after that?

CV: Well, I ran my freshman year, and I really improved, significantly. We went down and ran in the Florida Relays, and our relay teams did extremely well. He had a lot of state champions there. My sophomore year, I won the Southern Conference cross country meet. I got to run in the ACC non-conference meet that ran at the same time as their conference meet. I won the two-mile in that. I won the Richmond Relays two-mile. I placed in the Mason Dixon two-mile. So, I was really beginning to come around.

I think it was the end of my sophomore year, and Furman was cutting back on its athletic budget. I was sitting out, talking to Coach Rohe, after a workout at the track. It was just he and I sitting there. I don't know how the reduction of athletic support and the cutting back on programs came up, but I said to Coach Rohe, "Coach Rohe, you need to find a large university that really wants a good track team and will give you plenty of scholarships and support." And I said, "Like the University of Tennessee." Tennessee didn't have a track program to speak of. He looked at me with the most bewildered look on his face. He didn't say anything, and then I think he must have changed the subject or something. It was a week and a half after that that it was announced that he was coming to the University of Tennessee. I never will forget the look on his face though.

TS: He obviously was negotiating already.

CV: Yes. And he couldn't figure out how in the world I knew. Well, I didn't know. I just said, you should do something like this.

TS: Oh, he suspected.

CV: He had to suspect that I knew something because I was from Knoxville.

TS: So, maybe he assumed that you knew somebody in Knoxville that knew somebody.

CV: Yes, but he didn't say a word.

TS: You know, I don't know that anybody in Knoxville knew. I think it was a pretty big secret until they announced it. I don't know of anybody who knew it ahead of time.

CV: No. That's another story. Dean [L.R.] Hessler, who was head of the athletic board, and Andy Holt, the president of the university, had told Bowden Wyatt that he was going to be the interim athletic director, but they wanted a full, well-rounded, track program. Bowden Wyatt was the one who contacted Coach Rohe and Ray Mears and [Ray] Buzzard. I think it was Mears and Coach Rohe [in 1962] and Buzzard after that [1968-89].

TS: You have a recruitment story from the University of Tennessee back in 1962 that is a pretty good indication of just how out-of-touch they were at that time.

CV: When I was in high school, I got a call the last day or two from Coach [Ralph] Patterson, who was the assistant basketball coach and head track coach. At that time, there was a feeling across the board that UT didn't really pay much attention to Knoxville athletes. But he called [the high school], and Mr. Davis called me into the office and said, "Coach Patterson wants to talk to you." So he dialed him up and got him on the phone, and Coach Patterson said, "Don, you've really been running well here lately. I'm the track coach at UT. I would like for you to come to UT." I said, "Well, Coach, I've been talking with several universities." He said, "Well, I'm willing to give you books." It kind of offended me, but I was nice about it. I said, "Coach Patterson, I have several full scholarship offers." That might have been fudging a little bit. "And I've already committed to go to Furman. So, I'll probably have to just go ahead and go to Furman. I appreciate it though." But to call somebody up and offer them books was not a big offer.

TS: No, no. So, you, basically, had all your way paid to Furman, part of it from the athletic department and part of it other?

CV: Yes, Coach Rohe, in working on a low budget, was always a genius in figuring out how to get money for scholarships. They had a thing called a General Excellence scholarship at Furman. You had to be halfway bright, but you also had to be involved in lots of things. They wanted active people. I was class president at Fulton, and I was involved in a lot of activities. We started the Most Loyal Falcon Fan Club and had a lot of fun with it. I think a full scholarship was \$1,500.00, and they gave me \$250.00 as a General Excellence scholarship. Then, the next year he got me to be an Argonaut—David Tyler, my roomy, and I. It didn't occur to me at the time that with the Argonaut we got a free suite. It was a nice room on the end of the dormitory hall.

TS: So, you are supervising a floor?

CV: Supervising a freshman group. It was supervising a floor, but it was also a counselor position to freshmen to try to help them.

CV: Well, I don't know. I cared a lot and tried. I don't know how much a room cost, but it had to be a significant part of the scholarship.

TS: So, did Coach Rohe call the track team together at the end of the year? This was in May, I believe, when it was announced that he was coming to Knoxville. That must have been right about the time of your conference

championship. Did he just call everybody together and say, "I'm going to Tennessee"?

CV: He did. It was a real shock to everybody. I elected to stay at Furman in fairness to the new coach, Jimmy Carnes. Coach Rohe selected him and recommended him. He was a Druid high school coach [in Atlanta]. He was just a fantastic guy, and was just really nice.

TS: Oh, he was a high school coach!

CV: Yes. And he went on to continue the championships at Furman and then went on to be coach at [the University of] Florida, and he was an Olympic coach about the same time that Coach Rohe was an Olympic coach.

TS: I guess that Druid Hills area in Atlanta would have been pretty affluent at that time.

CV: Yes, but I ran cross country [in the fall of 1962]. One thing is Coach Carnes came in from high school and didn't know exactly what we were used to running. He would come to me and ask me what kind of workouts we did and get me to help figure out the workouts. That caught me the wrong way. In hindsight, it's perfectly logical....

TS: From his perspective, but from your perspective, you're the athlete. You expect the coach to know more than you do.

CV: And coming from experiencing Coach Rohe. I really missed him. I missed his drive, and his chewing my bottom, and [the University of Tennessee] was at my home [town]. So, I said, "I'll just go home." I came home and asked him if I could come there and [whether] he could get me a scholarship and if he would like for me to come. One thing about him, he did not try to haul his trackmen away from Furman, which I respect. He said he couldn't give me anything for a year because I had to sit out a year. So, I stayed home a year and ran for the Knoxville Track Club.

TS: So, you didn't live in the dorm?

CV: No, not the first year. Then, I went into the dorm after that.

TS: So, actually, it was really a financial sacrifice to come back to Tennessee.

CV: Oh, absolutely. I had to pay for a year of college, but I just missed him so much.

TS: He took us over to Furman to run a cross country meet that fall while you were still there because I remember, I was in the race, and I was wondering,

“Well, where’s Vick?” You were so far ahead of us, I didn’t ever see you. Of course, I ran without my glasses. I couldn’t see anything anyway. But I never saw you in that race. You finished, I guess, a minute or two ahead of everybody else.

CV: It was dangerous running without your glasses. That was a fantastic cross country course, but they had a part of it where you came through these pine trees that were maybe ten feet tall and a narrow trail down a hill, and all of a sudden you pop out on a stone dam that was about a yard and a half wide, and it startles the heck out of you.

TS: I think I remember that, but I guess I must have been in a pack and followed someone else. I used to count how many people were ahead of me and divide by two because I was seeing double vision. You didn’t have to worry about that. You were way ahead of everybody. Okay, you come back to Tennessee after that fall quarter, which would have been of your junior year. I guess you would have had one year of cross country eligibility left, and two years of indoor and outdoor track after you sat out a year. But you did get to be almost our coach at the [1963] SEC cross country championship.

CV: I did. Coach Rohe had his appendix out and had me take the cross country team down there [to Atlanta]. I didn’t remember him making it down there, but, apparently, he did. I was so caught up in being the coach, I guess.

TS: Trying to supervise us all.

CV: Yes.

TS: Were there any difference in the workouts compared to what he was doing at Furman?

CV: Not a lot. I think they got a lot tougher. One of my favorite workouts was a 440 workout with a one-minute interval. I got the idea from a fellow named Braithway, who was a good distance runner who was up at VPI, I believe. He was a good two-miler, and I was telling him that I wanted to break 9:20. He said, “Well, the way to do that is do....” And I don’t know if it was twenty 440s, with a one-minute interval, on pace, 70 second ones. I don’t know if he did them in sets or did them straight twenty. I tend to think it was straight twenty.

TS: So, a 9:20 is 70-second quarters, isn’t it?

CV: Yes. So, I brought that home to Coach Rohe, and he liked it. So, we started doing it.

TS: Yes, he liked it big time, and doubled [the number of repetitions] didn't he?

CV: He doubled it. By the time I got up to UT, he had doubled it. We were running forty of them with one-minute intervals and no breaks in sets. It was a pretty tough workout.

TS: This was back in the day when we actually had the two mile run. I guess that's gone with the carrier pigeons nowadays.

CV: Yes.

TS: But, how fast did you get in the two mile run?

CV: I got right down at nine minutes. I may have broken nine. I got second in the Chicago Daily, which was a national meet. I ran it a couple of times. I bounced around the nine-minute mark. At that time, Coach Rohe decided I ought to be a steeplechaser. I was fairly agile and everything.

TS: Long legs to clear the hurdles.

CV: Long legs. We didn't have a steeplechase facility [at UT]. As you know, in the steeplechase, you have barriers that are solid. He put hurdles up. I couldn't step on the hurdles. I had to hurdle them. So, I trained hurdling them. To qualify for the NCAA, at that time, you could qualify with a two mile time—which is kind of interesting. So, I qualified with my two mile time, and the first steeplechase I ever ran was in the NCAA [outdoor championship meet].

TS: Was that where you landed in the water jump?

CV: I was sitting in 3rd place with about a lap and a half to go, and my mind drifted or something. I hurdled the water jump and landed about knee deep in the water. By the time I sloshed out of it, I was back in about 13th or 14th place. I think I got back under 10th place. I can't remember for sure. But that really inspired me because I knew I could do it. I worked really hard that next summer, running about fifteen miles every morning. At about six o'clock, my dad would take me out. He went to Oak Ridge, and he would put me out at the bridge out at Oak Ridge, and I would run back to West Haven. I trained really hard for that.

TS: I guess that fall for cross country was your last really good season before you got sick. Wasn't there a year where the first team went to the NCAA meet, and the second team won the SEC.

CV: No, in 1964 Coach Rohe tried to get the SEC to change [the date of the meet] because it was scheduled at the same time as the NCAA. That year,

Tennessee did not go to the SEC. I only had one year [of eligibility] for cross country [after transferring from Furman]. So, 1964 was my only year in cross country.

TS: So, it's the spring of 1965 that you get mononucleosis?

CV: Yes.

TS: So, you really had only one good spring and one good fall at Tennessee and that's all 1964?

CV: I had a decent indoor season until the end of it in 1965. [At the SEC indoor meet] I won the two mile [9:11.6] and the mile [4:19.9] and ran on the winning two-mile relay [with Mike Tomasello, Melvin Maxwell, and Rocky Soderberg in 7:58.6]. So, I had three medals at the SEC indoors. I went to the NCAA indoor in 1965.

TS: So, you were still feeling good?

CV: I was feeling good, but I was having a touch of it. I remember running in the [tobacco warehouse] and running 4:09, and just going through that tape like a bull. Just so strong: 4:09 and like a bull! At that point, I got the flu, we thought. I rested a little bit, and went to the NCAA at Cobo Hall in Detroit. I think that was [the year] when I ran in Winnipeg and ran another 4:10 or something. I was ahead of the pack by five or ten yards. Then, I started feeling [sickly]. It was a banked board track. I looked over my shoulder, and I was ahead by close to ten, maybe five, yards. I was way ahead of the pack. I stayed down low, and did not go up on the curve. As we came to the finish line, I heard all this roar. I looked over, and Jim Irons, who was the Canadian national champion, had gone high on the board bank and came down on it. Just as we crossed the finish line, he just barely beat me. I've had a couple of dumb tactical races, and that was one of them.

TS: Well, your legs were too long for indoor track anyway back then.

CV: Then, I went to the NCAA, and I was leading the mile in one of the qualifying rounds, and two guys came up on either side of me and leaned me out. We ran a 4:10, but I couldn't stand up at the end. The difference between that 4:10 and the barn 4:09 were just night and day. I basically just crumpled to the ground.

TS: You weren't feeling well.

CV: No, and that was the downturn.

TS: Well, the glory days were the 1964 SEC championship when UT won for the first time.

CV: That was.

TS: You won the two mile, which I guess was early in the meet.

CV: I did, but I ran the mile first. I was saving for the two mile. I had beat Redington at the Orange Bowl meet by about six inches. When I was in top shape, I think I could have handled Redington, but at some point in time we were crossing. Coming out of the curve on the back straightaway, I told Bob, "Go ahead and get you a good time. I'll hold off back here." I don't know if I could have stayed with him or not. Bob was really coming into his own. I feel like I could have. But, rather than waste myself on the mile, I held back for the two mile run.

TS: No sense in going all out when it was one of your teammates. You were worried about the points.

CV: That's true. We needed those points.

TS: Those two races were all you ran in that meet. And then you won the two mile [9:39.5]. Didn't we come in 1-2-3-4 in one of those races?

CV: In the mile run we came in 1-2-3-4 [Redington 4:16.4, Vickers 4:19.8, Don Pinkston 4:20.6, and Rocky Soderberg 4:20.8]. That was the statement right there. We swept the mile. That was the statement.

TS: And I guess in the two mile Pinkston was again right behind you.

CV: Yes. I had some kind of injury or something, and I wasn't in top shape at that point. I had run the mile, and that takes a little out of you. That's a tough double, the mile and the two mile. I was way out ahead of the pack. I was just running a long and not paying much attention, and Pinkston snuck up on me. I heard a noise, and all of a sudden he was on my shoulder. I had to lunge for the finish line. It was a lunge, just a leap forward. That stinker snuck up on me like that, and I don't want to say what that would have been like if I hadn't of won that.

TS: That's the year that you ran the steeplechase at the NCAA, I guess.

CV: Yes.

TS: Then, the next school year, the NCAA cross country championship in the fall of 1964—where did you place in that?

CV: That's another one of those regrettably things.

TS: Was that the snow?

CV: That was the snow. Elmore Banton [Ohio University] came down here, and he was the champion. He later won it. We had a dual meet, and I was as cocky as I could be, and didn't know much about Elmore. We came through in 4:32 in the first mile. We got into what we called "death valley," and we usually blew teams away in that thing because they just couldn't [stay up]. I had learned that I could really let go going downhill. That's how I won the Southern Conference against a teammate, Dennis Patterson, who generally dominated me. So, I let go going down that short hill into "death valley," and Elmore Banton was a short fellow. So, we hit that big hill up there, and my long legs—I got ahead of him about ten yards, and then he just chopped up that thing, and he ate my lunch. By sprinting into the valley and wasting myself, he got way ahead of me coming out of there. Finally, I gathered up and started that long downhill. By the time I was at the finish line, I had caught back up within a couple of yards of him.

Then, we went to the NCAA [November 23, 1964 in East Lansing, Michigan], and again we felt really strong and cocky. I decided that the best thing to do was to go out front in the snow—it was about six inches of snow—and decided that it would be better to get out front than to stay in the pack. I got out front, and you would think I would have learned my lesson about trying to get out front in a big race, but chomping in that snow, I don't think I got much better than 40th or 50th [50th in 21:16.4 over the 4-mile course; Banton won in 20:07.5]. I just really had a terrible race. [Tennessee placed 11th. David Storey finished 58th in 21:21.3; Bob Barber was 66th in 21:28.0. Bob Redington was 86th in 21:40.0. Rocky Soderberg was 104th in 21:52.5. Don Pinkston was 161st in 22:48.0. And Mickey Shelton was 177th in 23:54.5].

Three days after that, we ran the USTFF meet—the United States Track & Field Federation—in Chicago, and I got 3rd in that. But I didn't lead out like that. And our team won the national USTFF cross country meet.

TS: Did you graduate in the spring of 1965?

CV: I did.

TS: You didn't do ROTC beyond the required two years did you?

CV: No, I finished my ROTC at Furman.

TS: So, how did you end up in the Marines?

CV: I kept trying to come back, and the doctor at UT didn't diagnose me with mono. I kept trying to come back, and was getting weaker and weaker. The last time I ran the mile, I ran a 4:20 and thought, "I'm on my way back now." But it got to the point it was hopeless to even think about it. So, I didn't compete in the SEC, and I didn't compete in the NCAA. That was just devastating because I had focused so hard.

TS: Especially after that summer and all those long workouts.

CV: Yes. I didn't stand tall and function as the captain of the track team. I pulled into a shell and let a lot of people down, which I regretted very much. Besides that—this is another of those Coach Rohe things—I said some ugly things to Coach Rohe. He took me down to a Chattanooga meet too early, and I told him what I thought about him half way through the race when I just pulled off. Again, there are some things I'm not proud of. But in spite of all that, he put his arm around my shoulder and got me to go down to the North Carolina camp in Brevard [Camp Carolina] and let me recover and build my strength back.

From there—Billy Mills won the 1964 Olympics 10,000 meters, and he was a Marine, an [Oglala Lakota (Sioux)] Indian and Marine—I was inspired by that and signed up in 1964 for the Marine Corps Officers School two years ahead of time. I did a nice trip across the United States, camping for a month, and then came back and went into the Marine Corps at that point with Charlie Ennis. Charlie was a hurdler. We rode up there and went into the Marine Corps.

TS: So, this wasn't a spur of the moment thing. You had signed up the year before.

CV: Oh, no.

TS: And you think you are going to run track in the Marines?

CV: Yes, I did, and that was my road to the Olympics, because I was sure that I was going to be on the Olympic team.

TS: Like Billy Mills.

CV: Yes. Once I made it through [Officer Candidates School]—that's kind of like the basic school where they weed you out—at that point in time you become an officer, and they send you to Basic School to teach you how to be an officer and lead a platoon. Every officer, no matter what your MOS [Military Occupation Specialty] is, even the pilots, had to go through infantry training, so that every Marine officer can lead an infantry platoon. So, they would let us off in the afternoons to run track. I got to run track

while I was in school there, and I graduated from there in six months or however long it is. Then, I went into artillery and went out to Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, which is an Army base, and trained artillery for the Marines. We had a colonel there who was one of the instructors who was a collegiate swimmer. He tapped about three of us that he knew ran on the Marine Corps team and talked us into coming out to compete for the Army Triathlon team. Since we were stationed there, they decided that we could run on the Army team. Just having fun, I won the National Triathlon, which at that time was running, shooting, and swimming. The screening event that qualified you to go to the Olympic Pentathlon Camp, which was running, shooting, swimming, fencing, and equestrian, and they would teach you fencing and equestrian....

TS: Oh, you maybe had a new Olympic event.

CV: I had a door to the Olympics having fun in the Triathlon for the Olympic Pentathlon. Of course, I had orders to Vietnam, so, I didn't get to do that—and I wouldn't have. I was a Marine at that time. I volunteered to go to Vietnam. I would probably have been going to Vietnam anyway. So, when I went to Vietnam, that was fourteen months of no sleep and a lot of things that didn't help with your conditioning. I went to [Marine Corps Base Camp] Lejeune, and it took me two and a half months to get my orders changed up to Quantico so that I could run.

TS: Quantico had a pretty good team, didn't they?

CV: Oh, yes. We had a couple of guys that made the Olympic team, so I had January until June to try to get back into shape.

TS: What year are we talking about?

CV: I went to Vietnam in September of 1966 and got back in October of 1967 before the first major Tet offensive.

TS: So, you had the winter and spring of 1968 to try to get back to where you were.

CV: I may have trained a little bit in the late fall of 1967, but I don't recall training really hard. It was after I got to Quantico that I started training hard.

TS: Did you have coaches in the Marines?

CV: A senior officer. I was a captain, and our coach was a captain. He was just one of the other runners. He was just the officer in charge. So, we made our own workouts.

TS: This is where you met Denis Flood, right?

CV: It is.

TS: And you got him down to Tennessee.

CV: Yes. Denis had gone through some really rough stuff in Vietnam and had several purple hearts. He was back in the States at a hospital recovering, and I think it took him six months to recover. He gradually got outside and walked the hospital grounds and started walking a circle and eventually progressed to jogging a circle around it. By the time he got to Quantico, he was running and was a good half-miler. I called Coach Rohe and said, "There's a young half-miler here that you may want to look at. When he gets out of the Marine Corps, he will be on the GI Bill. So, that might help." They sent Thad Talley up there to talk to him, and Denis wound up coming down to UT.

TS: When did you get out of the Marines?

CV: I extended six months to go to Naval Justice School. I got out in the summer of 1969.

TS: So, you were thinking about law school when you went to the Naval Justice School?

CV: Yes.

TS: So, you were in a little over four years. I guess that's what you signed up for.

CV: I was there four years and six months because I extended it to get to go to Naval Justice School. Coach Rohe made so much impact on our lives. He is the one who planted the seed in my head to go to law school. He said, "Coppley, you need to go to law school when you get out of here." I had never thought about that, but he planted that seed. When we came back here [to the University of Tennessee Law School], my wife [Betty] worked for the World Bank. She had a degree in economics, and there wasn't too much for her to do around here. Coach Rohe got her a job with the Business [and Economic] Research Center. Jim Cotham [James C. Cotham III] was in charge of it [from 1969 to 1971]. [Coach Rohe] was always helping us out one way or the other, and looking after us about things.

TS: So, you went to law school and graduated about 1972, I guess.

CV: Yes. Back in the All Service Meet in Los Angeles [in 1968], if you win the All Service Meet, that got you into the Olympic Trials. I was out there and running the steeplechase. I did not have a good base, but I was in decent shape. I was 4:10 mile and 9:00 steeplechase time. At the All Service Meet, I was running with [Pat] Traynor who was the Air Force, and [Bill] Reilly [US Marine Corps]. I was running in a pack with them out front of everybody with about a lap and a half to go. I had just been married for about a month. My wife was back in Quantico, and we had been out there training, and I was missing her. I thought, even if you qualify to get to the Olympic Trials, you're not going to do anything. You just don't have the base. I looked over my shoulder. I checked because I wanted to get the points for the Marines. We were way ahead, and I remember right where I hung up my track shoes. It was right there. I went on in and got the points for the Marines, and I hung it up. Law school was so demanding for me that I couldn't run—didn't have time. When I started practicing law, I didn't have time. So, my running career was pretty much over.

I did make a bet with a fellow that I could walk out on the track and run a five minute mile on my 40th birthday. We had a \$200 bet. I trained for about a month and a half at lunchtime. We went out to the track at the high school. Danny Brown was out there, and Hugh Faust was there. Hugh paced me. He was in good shape, and he was running a lot. He paced me and tried to help me hold my pace. One of the lawyers there started it with a shotgun. We had people on each 110 with my splits trying to keep me on the pace. I dropped back, and then I sprinted in, and there were three watches. One had me at 4:59.5. One had me at 5:00.1. The other one supposedly had me over five minutes. So, I lost the bet. They put the \$200 out under a rock on the track. We used the \$200 to buy a couple of kegs of beer, and we went out to my house and had a big party. That was a lot of fun. There were about forty people in the stands over this bet.

TS: And that was the end of your running career?

CV: That was the end of the running career.

TS: Well, I guess, after Vietnam, and getting married, and graduating from law school, and all that, that track probably took on a little less significance. But that's a great story. Is there anything you want to add to it about Coach Rohe or anything else?

CV: Well, just the influence that Coach Rohe had on my life and everybody else's life—he was a mentor, and he had the most influence on my life path of anybody. I was so fortunate to be acquainted with him and have him be my mentor over those years. The life lessons that we learned and the expressions—I don't know how "No pain, no gain" goes in it, but it has to do with the work ethic and hard work and every day is "What a day!" "If

you can do better, good is not enough.” Such a positive attitude about things—it has just been a real impact in my life. I think about him and what he said many times—probably every other day. I’m prone to holler, “What a day!” when I walk into the office. When I walk over to the Register of Deeds office, I’ll walk in the door, and I’ll say, “What a day! What a day!” I think a lot of people do that. When I was speaking at my daughter’s wedding, I wrapped it up with, “What a day!” That’s a great attitude if you can maintain it. That’s about it.

TS: All right! Well, thank you very much.