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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Brad Senter
March 11, 2003
Conducted by Steven Maxner
Transcribed by Mindy Moser

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 Steven Maxner: This is Steve Maxner, conducting an interview with Mr. Brad
2 Senter on the eleventh of March 2003 at approximately 1:10 Lubbock time. I am in
3 Lubbock, Texas, and Mr. Senter is in Texas City, Texas. Sir, why don't we begin the
4 interview today by discussing your early life and if you would, just tell me when and
5 where you were born and where you grew up.

6 Brad Senter: Well, I was born December 31st, 1943 in West Palm Beach, Florida.
7 My father was in the Army Air Corps and his family was from Tennessee so when I was
8 very young, probably a year or a year-and-a-half old, we moved to Tennessee and lived
9 in the middle of the Appalachian Mountains until I was about eleven or twelve years old
10 and due to some health reasons—I had asthma and pneumonia—we moved back to
11 Florida and I graduated from high school in Palm Beach and joined the Navy January the
12 twelfth, 1961.

13 SM: What was it like growing up in Tennessee?

14 BS: I loved it. I loved the mountains, loved the fresh, clean air. It was great. I
15 loved the seasons.

16 SM: Now, your dad being in the Army Air Corps, had he served in World War II?

17 BS: Right after World War II. The war had come to a close when he joined.

18 SM: Okay. Did you have any relatives or family members that you were close to
19 that had served in World War II?

1 BS: No. Well, I don't know about family members. I had an uncle that was
2 killed during World War II. He was a fighter pilot and was shot down but that's the only
3 one.

4 SM: Okay. What did your mom do?

5 BS: My mom was a housewife. She died at a very young age.

6 SM: I'm sorry.

7 BS: She died at age 39. I was about fourteen and she had a bout with cancer and
8 it just took her.

9 SM: I'm sorry to hear that. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

10 BS: I had a brother who...let's see. I was about six years old and he was one
11 month old. No, I'm sorry, six months old, and he passed away from back then what they
12 called Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, SID?

13 SM: Yes, sir.

14 BS: And then after that I had a sister who I still have but that's the only siblings.

15 SM: Okay. Now while you were growing up in Tennessee, did you spend a lot of
16 time outdoors?

17 BS: Oh yes.

18 SM: Any particular activities? Hunting? Fishing?

19 BS: Both. Both, yes.

20 SM: Was there anything in particular you enjoyed about school?

21 BS: Well, not really (laughs). I did have some of the same schoolteachers my
22 father had so that was interesting.

23 SM: What was it like moving back to Florida?

24 BS: Well, it's always difficult when you're certainly close to becoming a teenager
25 and having to relocate. It was interesting. Of course I made friends right away and living
26 in a tropical climate was a lot better, I guess it seemed like, and living close to the beach
27 was a plus and I enjoyed it.

28 SM: While you were in school in Florida, did you pick up any sports or anything?

29 BS: Oh yes. I was very active in track and on the swim team.

30 SM: Now did moving to Florida help your condition with your asthma?

31 BS: Oh yes. Yeah, once we moved to Florida, the condition disappeared.

1 SM: Wow! Okay. Let's see, you graduated from high school in what year?
2 BS: 1961.
3 SM: 1961. And did your dad stay in the Air Force after it became the Air Corps
4 or did he get out?
5 BS: Army Air Corps? No, he got out. I think he just served four years and he got
6 out. And he worked for the government. He worked in the postal department, I think.
7 I'm not sure; he was in their legal department of the U.S. Postal Service.
8 SM: While you were growing up, especially in the late fifties when you might
9 have been a little bit more cognizant of world affairs, did you pay very much attention to
10 the Cold War and major Cold War events that were taking place?
11 BS: Not really. No, I didn't. I was at that age when I was more interested in
12 girls, I think (laughs).
13 SM: Oh yeah. Was it something that was discussed very often at your dinner
14 table? Would your dad bring up subjects about whether it would be the Hungarian
15 uprising...?
16 BS: Not that I recall.
17 SM: No?
18 BS: No.
19 SM: Okay. Well, what do you remember about the launching of Sputnik?
20 BS: The what?
21 SM: The launching of Sputnik? The Soviet satellite?
22 BS: Oh gosh, yeah, I remember the first thoughts of mine were, "The Russians are
23 ahead of us." I really didn't know how that happened because I always looked at
24 America as the number one nation in the world and our country and here the Russians get
25 ahead of us. I was really shocked at that.
26 SM: Okay. What about—well, when you graduated from high school in 1961,
27 you made the decision to go straight into the Navy, is that correct?
28 BS: Exactly.
29 SM: What drew you to the Navy? What attracted you to the Navy?
30 BS: Travel.
31 SM: You wanted to see the world?

1 BS: Exactly.

2 SM: Okay. Well, you could of course see the world in most of the other branches,
3 regardless, the Air Force in particular or the Army or Marine Corps. Was there
4 something in particular you liked about the Navy?

5 BS: I always like the ocean.

6 SM: Okay.

7 BS: I always like the ocean.

8 SM: I take it you went to the enlistment office there in Florida and just signed up.
9 Did you discuss that decision with your dad before you made it?

10 BS: Oh yes.

11 SM: What were his thoughts?

12 BS: Well, he said as long as I can get back in June—then, you could finish school
13 mid-year if you had enough credits and come back in June for graduation. This is what I
14 did. I had enough credits in December to graduate, so I did. I chose not to continue on
15 until June. I went ahead and joined the Navy and then I came back in June for my
16 graduation. So yes, my father was a hundred percent supportive of me.

17 SM: Okay. Now, did you have any other relatives that had also served in the
18 Navy?

19 BS: No. I was the only one.

20 SM: Well, if you would—when you went down to the enlistment office and
21 signed up for the Navy, did they give you any options as far as what you might find
22 yourself doing or did they just tell you this is what you could—

23 BS: No, they give you a battery of tests and depending on your scores; they tell
24 you what you're best qualified for. It's clerical, mathematical, engineering, things such
25 as that. And my high scores was in engineering so they told me, "You could be an
26 engineman or a machinist mate or a boiler technician." Any [position] in the engineering
27 department on board ship, I would be well qualified for. And they explain the Class A
28 schools that were available, which I took advantage of, and that was the route that I took.

29 SM: Okay. Well, why don't you go ahead and describe your transition from
30 civilian life to Navy life where you went for your boot camp and initial training and all
31 that?

1 BS: Well, we enlisted in Miami, and I think there was a group of about six or
2 seven of us and they really gave us the red carpet treatment. I thought, “This is really
3 great.” They took us to a fine hotel to eat, put us on an airplane, flew us to Chicago. We
4 got off the plane and it was ten degrees.

5 SM: Oh my.

6 BS: So that was a shock. So they transported us up to Great Lakes Naval Base
7 and there we went from being a human being to a dog. I really thought I had sinned
8 when I joined the Navy. I would say, “Well, I’m not really sure this is really what I want
9 to do.” Because they were really tough and I guess that was their way of administering
10 discipline and things such as that. And probably after I would say probably two weeks
11 up there, I was at the point where I was ready to go home. I’d had enough. But slowly,
12 as the transition took place and I became more regimented and more disciplined and I
13 was able to see some light at the end of the tunnel and the closer we came to finishing the
14 recruit training, the better I felt. But I guess it was the first two weeks that they really put
15 the pressure on you. They marched you and they marched you in the snow and the ice
16 and it was a difficult time. It really was. I won’t lie about it.

17 SM: What were some of the bigger challenges, the bigger hurdles?

18 BS: The physical part. The physical part. Things such as working out on what
19 they call a “grinder.” That is actually a drill field. Working on the grinder for hours,
20 doing a physical manual of arms for not twenty or thirty minutes but for two or three
21 hours. And really, I thought I was in good physical shape. I really did. But much to my
22 rude awakening, I wasn’t. So yeah, it helped considerably getting there but that was
23 difficult. It really was.

24 SM: What was the attrition rate of your class? Did many people drop out?

25 BS: There was probably about sixty in our class. I would say we maybe lost ten
26 or fifteen.

27 SM: What was the ethnic make-up of your class?

28 BS: The what?

29 SM: The ethnic make-up?

30 BS: It was mostly—ninety-five percent Caucasian.

1 SM: Okay. How well do you think your trainers prepared you for moving on to
2 your next training assignment?

3 BS: Quite well. Quite well. We were able to accept discipline in a way that we
4 never knew we could.

5 SM: Now was there any weapons training involved with your boot camp?

6 BS: No.

7 SM: What kind of basic seamanship skills did they teach at that time?

8 BS: Basically, they taught us how to tie knots, how to march, how to drill, how to
9 wash your clothes by hand, how to fold them up, how to hang them on a clothesline to
10 dry. A lot of stuff just to get you regimented. I can still fold my t-shirts exactly the same
11 way I learned back then forty-some years ago. The things that they taught you that really
12 stick with you and I guess it was the constant repetition of everything. They taught us
13 about Navy traditions, you know, a lot of the history of the Navy. Things such as that.

14 SM: Was there very much running involved?

15 BS: Oh yes.

16 SM: Like on a daily basis?

17 BS: On what?

18 SM: On a daily basis?

19 BS: Oh yes, absolutely.

20 SM: Morning runs on PT (Physical Training) or whatever?

21 BS: Absolutely. We couldn't hardly march anywhere. We had to run.

22 SM: Did you spend very much time out on the water?

23 BS: In boot camp? No, not at all.

24 SM: You were a Machinist Mate. That was your assignment, correct? Your
25 eventual job classification?

26 BS: That's right.

27 SM: What is it called in the Navy? The specific—

28 BS: Machinist Mate.

29 SM: I'm sorry. Okay, for instance, in the Army they call it an MOS (Military
30 Occupational Specialty), in the Air Force AFSOC, I think. What would the classification
31 be for the Navy? Do you recall?

1 BS: I think it was just job classification.

2 SM: Job classification, okay. Now, did you know what it meant to be a Machinist
3 Mate when they told you that?

4 BS: Yes. I learned this in boot camp, what a Machinists Mate's job was.

5 SM: What did they tell you?

6 BS: It's responsible for the propulsion of the ship.

7 SM: Okay. So you're working principally in the engine area?

8 BS: Exactly.

9 SM: Okay. So where did you go after you finished boot camp to conduct that
10 training?

11 BS: I went to Portsmouth Naval Shipyards and went aboard the *Saratoga*. She
12 was in the shipyards for some repairs.

13 SM: Now did they use the ship there for training purposes or was that your actual
14 assignment that you would then follow on and stay on?

15 BS: That was my actual assignment.

16 SM: What was that ship like? What kind of ship is that?

17 BS: It was the first supercarrier ever built. Eleven hundred feet long, crew of four
18 thousand, a floating city, and I was totally in awe when I saw it. I couldn't believe
19 something like that. I'd never seen anything like that before. It was three and a half
20 football fields long, displaced about sixty thousand tons, it generated two hundred and
21 eighty thousand horsepower, carried a hundred aircraft. I just couldn't believe something
22 like that was on the water. It was amazing!

23 SM: What kind of aircraft were on board?

24 BS: A3Ds, Intruders, Vigilantes, Phantoms.

25 SM: And what kind of propulsion system did it have?

26 BS: Twelve hundred pound steam. That was the first Navy vessel built with a
27 twelve hundred pound steam propulsion. All the ones prior to that were six hundred
28 pounds.

29 SM: What was the primary mechanism of creating that steam?

30 BS: Boilers.

31 SM: Running on...?

1 BS: Fuel oil.

2 SM: Fuel oil, okay. Well, why don't you go ahead and describe what it was like
3 asking permission to come aboard for the first time.

4 BS: Well, there was two of us there. We finished boot camp together since we
5 were from Florida, both of us were and the ship was actually home-ported in
6 Jacksonville, Florida or Mayport. You know, you fill out your dream sheet in boot camp
7 where you'd like to get orders to and we both got a ship that was home-ported in Florida
8 close to where we lived. We arrived there probably around midnight and went up to the
9 quarterdeck and requested permission to come aboard and presented our orders. The
10 Quarter Deck Officer called for someone, the duty person in the engineering department
11 to come up and pick us up and take us to the berthing area, gave us a bunk, and showed
12 us where to report the next morning, which was a two hour task. I got lost. I didn't know
13 where I was and didn't know where I was going. It was quite a learning experience for
14 me, going aboard that ship. It really was.

15 SM: Well, what kind of map system, direction system did they have on board to
16 help you navigate through such a labyrinth?

17 BS: Well, they give you a compartment number which could be an office or
18 berthing area or mess decks and from that compartment number, you can determine
19 which deck it's on and which frame it's on, on the ship.

20 SM: And how long did it take you to get used to that system?

21 BS: Probably about a couple of weeks. A couple of weeks.

22 SM: Scattered throughout the ship, are there any kind of maps, legends, anything
23 to help you navigate through the ship?

24 BS: No. (Laughs) You were on your own.

25 SM: Oh my. All right. And is it considered bad form to ask for help finding your
26 way?

27 BS: Well, yes it is because they will pull tricks on you.

28 SM: So yeah, they'll send you on a wild goose chase or snipe hunt or whatever
29 you want to call it.

30 BS: Sure.

31 SM: Was there a Navy phrase for that?

1 BS: Yeah, and I don't recall what it was. I don't recall it.

2 SM: What was your initial assignment when you got on board?

3 BS: I was assigned to Number Four engine room but at that point, I didn't have a
4 designation as a Machinist Mate. Up until you achieved the rank of Petty Officer, you
5 are either a Fireman Apprentice, which is a person just out of boot camp, or a Fireman,
6 which means you've advanced one grade. And after that you pick up your designation as
7 a Machinist Mate 3rd Class. So I went aboard as a Fireman Apprentice and I immediately
8 was assigned to Number Four engine room. Of course, the first place they sent me was
9 down in the bilges to clean up the grease and the oil and everything else that was down
10 there. This went on for quite some time, probably for about two months and then the ship
11 was repaired and we got underway and then I was assigned a place to stand a watch,
12 whether it be a generator watch or a main engine watch. They had probably about
13 fourteen different positions in the engine room and you were assigned to stand a watch
14 either first watch, second watch or mid-watch. First watch being four to eight; second
15 watch eight to twelve; and the mid-watch, midnight to four am and then start over again.
16 If you get the midnight to four am, you also stand a watch noon to four pm so you stand
17 two four-hour segments in a twenty-four hour frame.

18 SM: And when you were on watch, you were there checking specific gages or
19 mechanisms to make sure they were functioning properly?

20 BS: Exactly. Checking temperatures, pressures, flows, things such as that. Any
21 type of...what's the word I'm looking for? Process variable. Any type of process
22 variable where you see a change in something.

23 SM: And then you alert the watch officer or whomever is in charge?

24 BS: Right. Normally you have a Machinist Mate of the watch who is probably a
25 2nd Class or 1st Class Petty Officer.

26 SM: Now, while you're going through these various stages until you become
27 classified as a Machinist Mate, are you going through training, I assume, on the engine,
28 the function of the engine, all the various components?

29 BS: Right, you're assigned to someone and someone trains you.

30 SM: Okay. It sounds almost like an apprenticeship.

31 BS: Exactly. And that's what I was. I was a Fireman Apprentice.

1 SM: Right. But I mean, in the traditional sense that you think of in the civilian
2 world as well where you're taken under someone's wing and they train you until you're
3 confident in a particular area.

4 BS: Exactly.

5 SM: Well, how many engine rooms were there?

6 BS: There were four.

7 SM: There were four, and you were in number four. I would imagine there were
8 some rather significant hazards attached to that duty.

9 BS: Certainly. Heat, for one thing. The temperature in the engine room in the
10 summertime probably was a hundred and twenty-five to a hundred and thirty-five
11 degrees.

12 SM: Wow!

13 BS: The hazard of live steam was there. Twelve hundred pounds of steam is just
14 devastating if it ever gets loose. Fire hazard. Just before I went on the ship, they were in
15 Athens, Greece and they had a fire in Number Two engine room and I think about seven
16 people died. So that was just prior to me going on there. But yes, there were
17 considerable hazards down there.

18 SM: What would you do to keep cool in that kind of heat?

19 BS: They had blowers but they just blew hot air. (Laughs) But you sat under a
20 blower. Now there was a control room down there also where the throttleman was and
21 the Machinist Mate of the watch. They were in an air-conditioned, probably a twenty by
22 twenty room. You could go in there and get a cup of coffee from time to time and cool
23 off but basically you stayed out in the heat.

24 SM: Wow. Okay. And what else could you do besides just sit there?

25 BS: Smoke.

26 SM: Were you allowed to bring a book or something?

27 BS: Oh yeah. Just don't sleep. They really frowned on that.

28 SM: Yes, sir. I imagine so. What would happen if someone fell asleep?

29 BS: Well, you were usually put on report and you would go to what they called
30 Captain's Mast and you'd be disciplined for it.

31 SM: What kind of discipline?

1 BS: Restriction to the ship, a fine. Depending on your record, maybe a reduction
2 in rate. So it was a pretty serious offense to be sleeping on watch.

3 SM: Yes, sir. What was the relationship like between Fireman Apprentices like
4 yourself when you first started out and the higher-ranking individuals—the Machinist
5 Mates and what not that were working in your area?

6 BS: Oh they were very supportive. If they thought you had anything on the ball at
7 all, they were very supportive.

8 SM: Well how long did it take you to become a Machinist Mate?

9 BS: Well, I went aboard in Portsmouth, Virginia. The ship's repairs were
10 completed, we left there and went to Mayport, Florida and we spent several days there I
11 guess and then we went down to Cuba—Guantanamo Bay. From there we went back to
12 Mayport for a while and then we left and went to the Mediterranean. And during that
13 time frame, I advanced to the rank of Fireman, which is pay rate E3. And while I was in
14 the Mediterranean I put in a special request to go to Machinist Mate A School, which was
15 back in Great Lakes. It worked out that upon returning to the States, I received orders to
16 go to Machinist Mate [\[School\]](#), which was a sixteen-week school at Great Lakes and at
17 that point is when I advanced to Machinist Mate 3rd Class Petty Officer.

18 SM: Now, when did you arrive on the *Saratoga*?

19 BS: The first of April. Right around the first of April, I think.

20 SM: Of '60...?

21 BS: '61.

22 SM: '61. When did you guys steam down to Cuba?

23 BS: Well, we were down there numerous times. That was where they did what
24 they called Carrier Quals. All these squadrons aboard did all their qualifications down in
25 the Caribbean. We were involved in the blockade during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

26 SM: Okay, that's what I was going to ask you about, if it was during that period.

27 BS: Yeah, we were there. Yeah, we were right in the middle of it, in fact. It was
28 kinda scary. It really was.

29 SM: Well, why don't you describe how that unfolded, when you first received
30 word that this was a serious situation and what your role in the Cuban Missile Crisis was
31 in October of '62?

1 BS: Well, basically, we knew there was a crisis arising. We knew that the
2 President had laid down ultimatums and then when they came over what they called the
3 1MC—that's the announcement system on the ship—from the Captain, saying that we
4 were in route to Cuban waters and due to the fact that—apparently he said, "Air strikes
5 will be imminent." So the people in the squadrons, they had to make sure the planes
6 were armed with the highest technology missiles at that time and these planes were sitting
7 on the catapults ready for launch. They briefed us quite regular and it seemed the more
8 they briefed us, we just kept wondering, "Are they going to shoot at us?" (Laughs) It
9 was a scary time but they did keep us well informed about it. We knew when the Russian
10 trawlers—I think they were trawlers—we knew when each one turned around and headed
11 the other direction. They kept us posted on that.

12 SM: Did your ship itself come into contact or close proximity to any of the Soviet
13 ships in the area?

14 BS: Yes. There was probably one or two Russian submarines and I'm sure there
15 was a couple of the Russian trawlers that were hauling, that had the missiles aboard them.

16 SM: I would imagine that your ship was rather active in terms of the aircraft that
17 were probably conducting reconnaissance of the area.

18 BS: Oh yes. Exactly, exactly.

19 SM: Now at this point, had you already been through the Machinist Mate School?

20 BS: Yes.

21 SM: Okay. So you were back on board the *Saratoga* after you went through the
22 Machinist Mate School?

23 BS: Right.

24 SM: What did they cover—let's take a step back then—what did they cover at
25 Great Lakes Machinist Mate School?

26 BS: Well, working in the Navy as an engine room person, regardless if you're a
27 boiler man or a machinist, your job is not only to stand watch on the equipment you're
28 responsible for, but it's to maintain the equipment maintenance wise, overhaul it if
29 necessary, repair it if necessary, wash it, paint it. That is your equipment. It's not like it
30 is in today's world where you have people working on a piece of equipment or they're
31 watching a piece of equipment and if it breaks, they've got to call someone to come fix it.

1 If they need it washed and painted, they call a laborer to come wash and paint it. In the
2 Navy, you do it all. The whole ball of wax is yours. So in Machinist Mate A School,
3 they taught you a lot of control systems, a little bit of physics and there were some other
4 things on board the *Saratoga* that I had not been exposed to prior to going to school
5 which was distillation of feed water and fresh water. They had distilling units aboard the
6 ship—five triple-effect evaporators that made about five thousand gallons of water an
7 hour and it made twenty-five thousand gallons total. And this water's used for the
8 showers, the cooking, it's also used to for feed water for the boilers and that's a very
9 important job because if the ship runs out of feed water or fresh water, you're dead. So
10 many times we got low on water and we took a lot of salt-water showers. But basically,
11 A School taught you, if memory serves me correctly, more of a maintenance type area as
12 far as repairing stuff that...what's the word I'm looking for? I can't think of it right now
13 but basically how the stuff runs on board ship. I knew when I was supposed to be
14 standing there watching the temperatures and the flows and so forth. I knew if there was
15 a variation then I needed to report it. But when I got into school, I knew then what
16 caused the variations, what caused the flows to drop off or the temperatures to rise or the
17 vibrations to pick up or whatever. So basically, it was a more in-depth training at the A
18 School.

19 SM: Were there specialized paints that you had to use, given the heat involved?

20 BS: Not really. Not really.

21 SM: And when you were—you described the situation how the ship had to
22 manufacture and maintain this flow of fresh water. This was basically like a
23 desalinization process where you take in the seawater and produce fresh water from it?

24 BS: Exactly.

25 SM: What would happen to the elements that were taken out of the water? Would
26 they just get pumped right back in the ocean?

27 BS: Yes.

28 SM: The engines themselves, they had to run on fresh [feed] water? You couldn't
29 put salt water in them, correct?

30 BS: Well, the boilers did.

31 SM: The boilers, yeah, I'm sorry.

1 BS: Right.

2 SM: How fast would this engine system propel the ship?

3 BS: We would have make what they call full-power runs. The ship was designed

4 to run at thirty-three knots, which is about thirty-seven or thirty-eight miles an hour. But

5 we would have full power runs on occasion and I would see as high as thirty-six knots.

6 SM: Wow. So over forty miles an hour.

7 BS: Yeah. It would move it pretty quick.

8 SM: Yes sir. For an aircraft carrier, I would imagine that part of the system, the

9 boiler system and everything else, the steam system was also to work with the catapult

10 system.

11 BS: Exactly. We knew the people on the flight deck. They would call us...

12 determine how much steam they needed—what they referred to as a drag—and say, “We

13 need a four hundred pound drag.” Well, we knew that they were launching a Phantom

14 aircraft; because that’s the amount of steam it required to launch a Phantom. If they

15 wanted a three hundred pound drag then we knew that they were launching an Intruder.

16 And this information was relayed down to us in the engine room and we would in turn

17 pump up the boilers, kick in some extra burners or pick up the force draft fans to generate

18 more heat and then we’d say, “Okay, pull it,” and they would launch the aircraft and they

19 would pull the boilers back down again.

20 SM: Now from the time you got a call like that, depending upon, of course, how

21 near you were already to that level of steam, how long would it general take to increase

22 say a couple of hundred pounds of steam for that kind of a call?

23 BS: Probably a minute to a minute and a half.

24 SM: Okay. So not very long at all?

25 BS: No.

26 SM: So if you were starting cold, you could get there within a couple of minutes,

27 like four hundred pounds of steam.

28 BS: What do you mean, starting cold?

29 SM: Well, not cold cold, but very low.

30 BS: Yeah.

1 SM: If you were starting fairly low, you could build up an awful lot of steam very,
2 very quickly?

3 BS: Well, when you're operating a twelve hundred pound system, that stuff
4 increases very rapidly.

5 SM: Were there any accidents on board while you were on the *Saratoga*?

6 BS: There were some flight deck accidents, yes.

7 SM: Involving aircraft?

8 BS: Right.

9 SM: Anything in particular that you recall?

10 BS: Yeah, one, he was probably fifty yards coming in landing and he lost power
11 and did crash into the back end of the ship.

12 SM: Did he survive?

13 BS: No, no.

14 SM: What kind of damage would that cause to the ship?

15 BS: Not a lot. That was four-inch plate steel back there. Basically it was just a
16 lot of burned stuff, burned area.

17 SM: But no engine room accidents like you had described previously?

18 BS: No, not while I was aboard there, no.

19 SM: How long did you stay on the *Saratoga*?

20 BS: I left there in July of '64.

21 SM: Some key events that occurred during your time with the *Saratoga*—of
22 course President Kennedy had been assassinated in '63. Where were you at that point?
23 What do you remember about that?

24 BS: I was on my way home. I was going down US 1 in Florida on my way to my
25 home and I heard it on the radio and it was really a shock. I just couldn't believe I was
26 hearing it. And then I thought, "Well, should I turn around and go back?" I was
27 undecided on what to do so finally I was around Daytona Beach somewhere and I pulled
28 in and I stopped and I called back to the ship to see if I needed to come back. They said,
29 "No, just give us a phone number where we can reach you if we need you."

30 SM: When you did finally get back to the *Saratoga*, what was it like on board?
31 What was the atmosphere like?

1 BS: Not what I thought it would be. It was—people were really upset about it,
2 about the President but they really weren't concerned about a threat to the country, I
3 don't think.

4 SM: What surprised you about that?

5 BS: Well, I don't know that I was surprised, because like I said, I always had in
6 the back of my mind that we were the number one nation. Nobody's going to mess with
7 us. But I guess I was proved wrong. No, I really didn't feel threatened either at that
8 time.

9 SM: Well, up to this point, what had you heard about Vietnam? Had you heard
10 anything?

11 BS: Not a lot. Not a lot. This ship had never been to Vietnam. I knew that most
12 of the vessels over there were off the West Coast and I really wasn't concerned about
13 going over there. It wasn't a foremost thought in my mind.

14 SM: Now, did you have any sailors get assigned to come on board the *Saratoga*
15 who had been to Southeast Asia, who had been to the Gulf of Tonkin or something?

16 BS: No, not that I recall.

17 SM: A couple of quick questions about the living conditions on board the
18 *Saratoga*. What were the living quarters like, what was the food like, entertainment, and
19 stuff like that?

20 BS: Well, entertainment, there really wasn't any unless you had a portable radio
21 and you could go up on the flight deck and listen to it. The food was adequate except
22 when you were out at sea for an extended period of time. Then you went from fresh
23 vegetables to powdered vegetables, fresh milk to powdered milk. The berthing area and
24 living compartments were great. It was air-conditioned. There was probably a hundred
25 and fifty of us in a compartment and it wasn't crowded. It was laid out, the racks were
26 stacked—the beds were stacked—three high and it was quite comfortable.

27 SM: How much space between you and the rack above if you were in between
28 them?

29 BS: Well, I'm fairly tall and if I would lay on my back and raise my knees up, I
30 would get very close to touching the bunk above me.

31 SM: So you couldn't sit up in bed?

1 BS: Oh, no, unless you were in the top bunk. If you were in the top bunk you
2 could.

3 SM: Was it a choice?

4 BS: Not when you're a junior man. (Laughs)

5 SM: (Laughs) Okay.

6 BS: You just take what's available?

7 SM: Right. Was there seniority attached to getting a top bunk?

8 BS: No, no.

9 SM: What about recreation? What did you do besides if you had a radio, listen to
10 a radio or whatever?

11 BS: We played cards, lost money playing poker. Basically, when you're
12 underway, like I said, when you're working midnight to four and noon to four, the rest of
13 the time you're sleeping. The bulk of the time, yeah. And you've got to stand in the
14 chow line for twenty or thirty minutes to eat because they're running four chow lines
15 through there but you put a thousand people in each chow line, it still takes a while to get
16 through there.

17 SM: Yes, sir. When you were working, I guess it was, you said it was the mid-
18 shift? Would they have food ready for you like if you're working late into the evening
19 and early into the morning?

20 BS: Right they had what they called—when you got off at midnight if you had the
21 eight to midnight watch, they would have food, what they called mid-rats and you could
22 go in there and get not a big selection—maybe eggs and bacon and pancakes or
23 something. But that was the only time. If you got off the midnight to four am, they
24 weren't open at four am.

25 SM: Oh, okay. So they didn't even have exercise facilities or anything like that?

26 BS: No.

27 SM: Where did you go on the *Saratoga* besides the Caribbean? You did go to the
28 Med?

29 BS: We went to the Med, yes.

30 SM: On a Med cruise? What was that like? Where did you go? What did you
31 see?

1 BS: Well, we went there on the '61 and '62 Med cruise which was over the
2 Christmas holidays of '61. It was fantastic! The Cannes film festival was going on. It
3 was just great. I loved it. We pulled into Cannes, France; Marseilles, France; Barcelona;
4 Naples; Genoa; Palermo, Sicily; Istanbul. It was great! I loved the Med. We stayed over
5 there right at six months, I think.

6 SM: Anything interesting happen while you were there as far as visitors or things
7 that you were able to do?

8 BS: Yes. Well, I was involved in something. In fact, it's documented in a book.
9 (Laughs) A couple of my friends and I bought some civilian clothes. Back then you
10 couldn't wear civilian clothes on the ship so we went over in town and we bought slacks
11 and shirts and we went to a party that a bunch of celebrities were there. One of my
12 friends spotted this lady sitting over by herself in this booth of this huge hotel and he told
13 me he thought it was Sophia Loren. And I said, "No, no, no, it can't be." So I got a little
14 bit closer and I looked and sure enough it was! And they said, "Well, just go ask her to
15 dance." So I did and she did. We got up and we danced two times. It was fantastic.
16 And one of the other guys, he kept a diary of some sort and they published a book here.
17 Turner Publishing Company came out with a book, I think about five or six years ago and
18 they interviewed a lot of the people on the *Saratoga* and this information was in this
19 guy's diary and it's in this book. I couldn't believe it. I thought it was quite interesting.

20 SM: That is.

21 BS: The *Forestall*, another aircraft carrier, they had a major oil spill right on the
22 French Riviera. They took about five hundred of the sailors off the *Saratoga* and we
23 went over there and we worked the beach for two weeks, cleaning up this oil spill.

24 SM: How would you clean it up?

25 BS: Shovels. As soon as the oil would wash in, we would shovel it up and put it
26 in barrels. And somewhere, I don't know, maybe further down the French coast, they
27 brought in more sand to put out there. But we picked up I don't know how many
28 hundreds and hundreds of barrels of oil-soaked sand on the Riviera. But it was our sister
29 ship, the *Forestall*, who had the oil leak. So that stuck out in my mind pretty much.

30 SM: Did they have quite a few of their men out there doing that too?

31 BS: Oh yes, it was a joint effort. It was a joint effort.

1 SM: What was the reaction of the French public to that?

2 BS: Well, of course immediately they were up in arms about it. They said, “Get
3 out, get out.” But when they realized that we were going to fix the problem that we had
4 created, they were a lot more acceptable to us and there was a lot of support there from
5 the French people. They really treated us good. They brought food out to us, they
6 brought drinks out to us and it was a real smooth operation. It really was.

7 SM: How long did that take to clean up that oil?

8 BS: I think we were there between two and three weeks total.

9 SM: Wow.

10 BS: I don’t know how many hundreds of thousands of gallons of oil was leaked
11 out but it was a considerable amount. It was black fuel oil. It was nasty stuff.

12 SM: And when you left did it look like nothing had happened?

13 BS: Oh they were still—the French were still bringing in sand to replace what we
14 had shoveled up.

15 SM: What was Sophia Loren like?

16 BS: Oh, delightful. Absolutely delightful. A very pleasant person to talk to, very
17 sexy! Of course we were all younger back then but she was a very, very delightful
18 person.

19 SM: Anything else interesting happen on your Med cruise?

20 BS: Let’s see. No, not a lot, just a lot of good times. A lot of drinking, a lot of
21 partying. Of course you can imagine, here I was, eighteen years old, just out of school
22 and here I am in Cannes, France with all these loose French women. It was quite
23 enjoyable; it really was. (Laughs) I won’t lie to you.

24 SM: (Laughs) Okay. Was there an active shore patrol keeping you guys in line?

25 BS: Oh yeah, we used to work shore patrol, also.

26 SM: Okay, you would do it yourselves as well?

27 BS: Right. We were usually on what we called port and starboard duty which
28 means one night you had to stay aboard the ship and work in the engine room. You
29 know, stand a watch or something and the next night you could go on liberty and the next
30 night after that, if you were a Petty Officer, then you were assigned shore patrol duty. So
31 it kind of alternated.

1 SM: What would you do when you had shore patrol?

2 BS: Just walk around. (Laughs) Just walk around, really. The sailors then, there
3 wasn't a lot of problems. I saw a lot in later years in my time in the Navy where the
4 sailors seemed a lot more resentful or whatever. I don't know the word I'm looking for.
5 As the years progressed, the sailors seemed like they got more wilder. I guess that's the
6 word for it. But back in the early sixties, we really didn't see a problem.

7 SM: Was the reception at the various ports of call, where you went, was the
8 reception of the civilian population there fairly positive?

9 BS: Oh, all of it was. All of it.

10 SM: What was your next assignment after that?

11 BS: Well, in early 1964, let's say in June of 1964, I reenlisted on board the
12 *Saratoga* for six more years. And I was involved in a car accident where another
13 gentleman was driving and someone was killed. So the *Saratoga* was getting ready to
14 leave for the Mediterranean again so they took me off the *Saratoga* and kept me at
15 Mayport until this guy's case got to trial because I was a witness for it. It ended up that it
16 was declared a mistrial or the charges were dropped or something. I don't recall really
17 what the situation was or the circumstances. But anyway, after it was about two months
18 of staying there waiting for this, they said, "Okay, we're going to put you up for another
19 set of orders." And they sent me to the *USS Independence*, which was another carrier out
20 of Norfolk. I went aboard there and probably within three months, we were headed for
21 the Tonkin Gulf off the East Coast. We were the first ship off the East Coast to go to the
22 Pacific. We arrived over there in Subic Bay, Philippines, to take on arms and stuff like
23 that—weapons, rockets, missiles, whatever they carried—and we would go out and stay
24 anywhere from forty-five to sixty days on Yankee station in the Tonkin Gulf, launching
25 air strikes against Hanoi and North Vietnam and so forth.

26 SM: If you don't mind—if you have reservations about it, I understand—what
27 was the cause of the accident that you were in with that gentleman in the car?

28 BS: Well, there was four of us in the car. I was in the back seat. The other guy
29 was driving and we were going to St. Augustine, Florida and we had been drinking and
30 we hit a motorcycle head-on.

31 SM: Oh, goodness.

1 BS: And I think, I really don't know and I couldn't say for sure, because they
2 were able to determine that the guys—there was two of them on the motorcycle—one
3 died and one lost his leg at the hip. But they were able to determine that they were
4 intoxicated also, so there was no determine really who swerved over into whose lane.

5 SM: Wow. Okay, okay. Well, the *Independence*. What were the differences
6 between the *Independence* and the *Saratoga*?

7 BS: They were basically identical. The *Saratoga* was number CVA60 which was
8 the order in which it was built and then there was another ship, the 61, which was the
9 *Ranger* and then the *Independence* was 62. So they were real close in proximity as far as
10 construction time and they were virtually identical.

11 SM: But it was slightly newer?

12 BS: Do what?

13 SM: It was just slightly newer?

14 BS: Yes, yes.

15 SM: Okay. Any difference in the compliment of aircraft or weapon systems on
16 board?

17 BS: Yes, we picked up probably around a thousand more crewmembers. We
18 went from four thousand to five thousand and I think that probably had to do with having
19 the larger squadrons on board because we were having [launching] air strikes over in
20 Tonkin Gulf.

21 SM: How did that affect the living situation, the living quarters, food?

22 BS: Not really. Well, the extended periods at sea affected everything. It affected
23 your water reserve, it affected your fuel. We had to take on fuel out of sea from [oil]
24 tankers. Food, we ran out of food. Not ran out of food. We had to go to the powdered
25 stuff, you know, after so long a time. If you have an incident where maybe a person gets
26 sick or a person goes AWOL (Absent Without Leave) or something like that, it creates a
27 shortage in your operating group and so consequently, you're not able to work four hours
28 on and eight hours off. You're put on what they call a six and six rotation schedule,
29 which you work six hours, you're off six hours, you work six hours. So probably that
30 happened quite often over there. It probably did because we pulled into some good ports.
31 Yokosuka, Japan; Hong Kong; Subic Bay. I noticed that the Asian countries were a lot

1 different than the European countries as far as cost of living, things such as that, cost of
2 everything, and we did have several people that did go AWOL over there, some people I
3 knew. And consequently it created a shortage in our operating group and we had to work
4 extended hours with hardly no time off and it just created a lot of internal friction
5 between the people. Of course you work six on, six off for a month, no days off or
6 anything and it gets pretty tiring.

7 SM: Yes sir. Well, these people that went AWOL, did they eventually come back
8 or were they caught?

9 BS: They were caught, probably, yeah. I think some did come back. Some were
10 caught.

11 SM: You mentioned AWOL was a problem but also sick, people becoming sick.
12 How was public health handled on board the aircraft carriers? Were there any special
13 programs or special procedures to try to make sure that communicable diseases were kept
14 in check?

15 BS: Well, they would have the medical people come to your operating area where
16 you were, say down in the engine room and they would bring a small slide presentation
17 and show you pictures of what your genitals could look like if you catch this stuff.
18 (Laughs) That was basically it.

19 SM: So they did that for venereal disease but what about just your general types
20 of illnesses that might be a problem with so many people being confined to such a small
21 area, whether that be the flu, colds, whatever?

22 BS: Nothing.

23 SM: Nothing?

24 BS: Nothing.

25 SM: Okay. Was that common? Was it common for various things to go around
26 the ship quite often?

27 BS: Just one case in particular. Somebody brought a dose of crabs back aboard
28 the ship.

29 SM: Oh no!

30 BS: And all hundred and fifty of us had them. (Laughs) So that was the only
31 case that it really spread to the whole division.

1 SM: Oh for crying out loud.

2 BS: Yeah.

3 SM: Now how did that happen, do you know? Did the medical personnel figure
4 out how that happened?

5 BS: Well, someone got them over there in either the Philippines or Japan at
6 Yokosuka or Hong Kong or somewhere and they came back aboard the ship and who
7 knows? They just spread throughout the berthing area.

8 SM: Okay, the sleeping quarters.

9 BS: Yes.

10 SM: For crying out loud. Okay.

11 BS: That was quite an experience. (Laughs)

12 SM: How did they handle that?

13 BS: Well, they had to bring all new stuff. They didn't wash the linens and so
14 forth. They had to bring in all new mattresses. They had to empty our whole berthing
15 area out. They had to fumigate it and they brought in new mattresses, new sheets and
16 blankets and so forth. And then of course then made us all stand in line up beside the
17 restrooms and they'd hand us this tube of blue ointment and they'd make you put it on.
18 Some of them had the crabs in the hair on their chest and their eyebrows. I mean, we
19 really had a good dose of them.

20 SM: Oh my.

21 BS: But anyway, they gave us what they called Blue Ointment. You put it
22 anywhere you've got hair and you had to let it sit for like fifteen minutes and you go in
23 and shower off and you're crab-free. So we were very fortunate to get rid of them that
24 very first time.

25 SM: Yes, sir.

26 BS: But that's the only thing that I remember where we had maybe what you
27 might call an epidemic. But it was a good one.

28 SM: So what kind of pranks resulted in this? Anything? It seems like it was a
29 ripe situation for people to tease an awful lot of you.

30 BS: Well, there was. There was. There was a lot of game playing that went on
31 with it. They would say, especially down in the engine room, just prior to being able to

1 disinfect the area and disinfect us, they would find their crabs and pick them off and put
2 them on a thread and tie that thread between two valve wheels and watch them go across.
3 It was a game for some of them.

4 SM: (Laughs) Oh for crying out loud. Oh wow. All right. Well, what was it like
5 transitioning from the *Saratoga* to the *Independence*? Anything interesting or different?

6 BS: Very smooth. No problem at all. I was a 2nd Class Petty Officer at that time
7 so I got pretty much the pretty easy treatment. It wasn't a hard transition at all.

8 SM: About how long were you on the *Independence* until the ship got orders that
9 it was going to the Gulf of Tonkin?

10 BS: We went over to the Tonkin Gulf in August. Either July or August, I think it
11 was.

12 SM: Okay, so right after the Gulf of Tonkin incidents?

13 BS: Right, right. And so in December—we were there about five months—and in
14 December we were in Japan and I received a set of orders for two years shore duty at
15 Great Lakes. So I left the ship at Yokosuka, went out to Tachikawa Air Force Base and
16 flew back to report for my two years of shore duty at Great Lakes.

17 SM: Well before you steamed out to the Gulf of Tonkin, what was the scuttlebutt
18 going through the ship about the incident, what happened out there with the *Maddox* and
19 the *Turner Joy*?

20 BS: Well, believe it or not, there wasn't a lot. We weren't really briefed on what
21 had actually happened. We knew there was an incident over there but they didn't really
22 go into any details and tell us what was going on or what the threat was, really. They just
23 told us that we were going over there to provide air support. So we weren't really
24 worried or scared at that point. We did have a couple of times when one or two of our
25 planes were chased back by some MiGs. The ship went on full alert when that was
26 happening because the pilots would radio back that he had some MiGs in pursuit and they
27 would come so far and then they would turn around and go back.

28 SM: What kind of anti-aircraft systems were on board?

29 BS: They have five-inch 38 guns. They had seven of them and then they had some
30 SAM missiles, Surface-to-Air Missiles.

31 SM: Were these radar guided or heat seeking?

1 BS: Radar.

2 SM: Were there any other special preparations that you undertook after you got
3 your orders for the Gulf of Tonkin besides getting the additional personnel aircraft
4 munitions?

5 BS: Constantly drills. Constantly general quarter drills, constantly fire drills,
6 constantly nuclear activity drills. They prepared us quite well.

7 SM: What was a nuclear activity drill?

8 BS: We basically had to—they would say we had taken a nuclear hit. We'd have
9 to put on what they called Oxygen Breathing Apparatuses and we would have to go in
10 with these meters, I think what they call Rankin meters and read the measure or level of
11 radioactivity in compartments.

12 SM: Now what kind of nuclear attack was that designed for?

13 BS: Probably any type of—I really don't know to be honest with you. Probably
14 just any type of nuclear hit we would take. Maybe a nuclear missile or maybe it was one
15 of our aircraft that could have been carrying something nuclear on it. I don't know.

16 SM: It sounds more like a nuclear accident.

17 BS: Probably.

18 SM: I mean, if you guys were hit with a nuke missile in any proximity, I would
19 imagine that.

20 BS: Right, that's what I would think.

21 SM: That would kill most of you. How long did it take you from the time—
22 because you were in Norfolk, correct—when you got your orders?

23 BS: Right.

24 SM: So how long did it take you to get from Norfolk? I assume you went down
25 through the Panama Canal and then into the Pacific.

26 BS: No, we went around the Cape.

27 SM: Oh, you went around the Cape?

28 BS: Yes.

29 SM: Describe that trip. What was that like?

30 BS: Well, we were going to go through the Canal and they were having some
31 racial problems in the area. We were going to pull into port there in fact, somewhere, and

1 they were having some racial problems. They took us and went around the Cape and of
2 course we had to cross the Equator and that was quite a ritual.

3 SM: Right.

4 BS: I had never had been beaten so hard in all my life. (Laughs) It was a learning
5 experience for me.

6 SM: Because it's your first time.

7 BS: Right, exactly.

8 SM: Do you remember what they called that?

9 BS: Well, if you've never been across the Equator, you're called a Pollywog and
10 the ones who have been across, they're called Shellbacks. And then you have a small
11 percentage on board the ship who have probably been across. They're the guys who have
12 been in the Navy a lot longer than the majority of us. They were Shellbacks and of
13 course they put us through the initiation type tribute.

14 SM: What did that involve?

15 BS: (Laughs) Well, probably the worst thing is they would come down in the
16 middle of the night and take you out of your bed, drag you up on the hanger deck and
17 they would have the biggest, the fattest, the hairiest Navy guy they could find with grease
18 and mustard and everything rubbed all over his stomach and he would be sitting there in a
19 diaper and he would be called the Royal Baby and you'd have to kiss the Royal Baby's
20 belly.

21 SM: Oh gosh. (Laughs)

22 BS: They would cut our hair with hedge trimmers, they took us up on the flight
23 deck, they saved all the slop in the galleys for a week prior to getting there and they had
24 them in these huge bins. It was a one-foot high bin. You had to crawl through this
25 garbage that was rancid and stinky and it had been saved for all this time. You get out of
26 that and then they hit you with a hundred pound water pressure fire hose, knock you
27 down on the flight deck, wash you off, and then they put you through probably a sixty or
28 eighty [person] belt line where you crawl on your hands and knees between two rows of
29 people and they're hitting you with these cut off fire hoses. So yeah, it was a painful
30 experience.

31 SM: For crying out loud! Okay.

1 BS: So that was my initiation and I'm sitting here looking at my certificate right
2 now as we speak.

3 SM: Oh, are you?

4 BS: It was well earned, yeah. It was well earned.

5 SM: All right. So when you went around the Cape that must have been quite an
6 experience too, though. That's not done very frequently, is it?

7 BS: No, no.

8 SM: How long did the total trip take you then?

9 BS: The trip? I think about twenty-one days if I'm not mistaken.

10 SM: So within twenty-one days you were in the Gulf of Tonkin, on Yankee
11 Station and your aircrafts were flying missions?

12 BS: Well, no, we stayed out on Yankee Station probably about forty-five to sixty
13 days at a time. But the twenty-one days was the trip from Norfolk around to when we got
14 into Subic Bay or wherever it was we pulled into.

15 SM: Subic Bay, okay. How long did you stay there just to refit and get what you
16 needed?

17 BS: A week or ten days. Something like that.

18 SM: And what was your first experience like getting out to the Gulf of Tonkin?

19 BS: Well, I really didn't know a lot. I was stuck in the engine room. Of course I
20 could hear them launching aircraft and so forth but I really didn't know what was going
21 on, to be honest with you. When you went on a six and six rotation, you slept, eat, and
22 work. That was basically all we did.

23 SM: Okay. Did anything in particular occur? Anything striking happen while
24 you were there?

25 BS: Well, I do remember going up a couple times when they announced over the
26 loud speaker system that we were recovering a—they referred to it as an "injured bird"—
27 a damaged aircraft. We'd go up and we could see the bullet holes and stuff and the
28 fuselages in the wings and so forth. But that was basically it.

29 SM: Now how far off the coast were you?

1 BS: We were there probably a hundred miles maybe. Something like that. We
2 could hear the *New Jersey*. We were close enough to hear the *New Jersey* pounding
3 them.

4 SM: And what did you think the United States was trying to accomplish then?

5 BS: Stopping Communism. That was all they'd tell us—"Stop Communism."
6 That was basically it. That was word that kept coming to mind—"Communism,
7 Communism." So we were trying to help a country that didn't want the Communists to
8 take over. Which, I found out later, they really didn't care. That was basically what I
9 thought we were doing.

10 SM: Okay. Well, we've been talking for an hour. Let's take a quick break.

11 BS: Okay.

12 SM: We're back from our break. Why don't you go ahead and describe—what
13 was your...well, is there anything else you want to talk about with regard to your time
14 out there with the *Independence* in the Gulf of Tonkin?

15 BS: Let's see...no, not really. It was fairly uneventful. Like I say, we were so far
16 off the coast we really didn't know what was going on. The only time we could hear
17 anything was when the *New Jersey* was firing. But other than that it was a fairly
18 uneventful trip.

19 SM: Well why don't you go ahead and describe what your—you said it was a
20 two-year assignment?

21 BS: Two years, right.

22 SM: Why don't you describe that assignment there at Great Lakes? What did you
23 do?

24 BS: Oh it was probably one of the best duty stations in the world. I was put in
25 charge of the auto hobby shop where all the people stationed there could bring their
26 vehicles to work on them. There was a huge converted hanger where you could probably
27 have forty stalls for automobiles. It had an extensive tool room where they could check
28 tools out, wash bays, and anything with the exception of paint and bodywork. That was
29 my duty station. I was in charge of that. I had about twelve people that worked for me
30 and it was good. It was good duty. I still never got used to the winters up there. I stayed
31 in an old barracks that was probably built during World War II but after a certain period

1 of time I got a place out in town. I got an apartment and stayed out there and that's when
2 I met my wife and got married.

3 SM: That's a really sweet assignment.

4 BS: It was good duty.

5 SM: Do you know how you came upon the assignment? Did it just come out of
6 the blue?

7 BS: No, not really. I don't know why they sent me back to Great Lakes because
8 really there's not job for a Machinist Mate on land other than to be in law enforcement or
9 what they call Special Services. It was excellent duty. It really was.

10 SM: Okay, so you did that for two years?

11 BS: Right.

12 SM: Anything interesting happen while you were there?

13 BS: Got married, became a father.

14 SM: That's neat.

15 BS: That was significant. (Laughs)

16 SM: Yes, sir.

17 BS: No, nothing really earth shattering. No, it was just a real, real good duty
18 station.

19 SM: Well, while you were there were you tracking what was happening in
20 Vietnam?

21 BS: Not a lot. Just what I would see on the news. That was basically it.

22 SM: For those two years—I guess you left in late '64 or early '65 to that
23 assignment?

24 BS: Right.

25 SM: So which was it? Do you recall?

26 BS: Let's see. I'm trying to think. I got to Vietnam just prior to the Tet Offensive
27 so that would be...that was '67, '66, '67?

28 SM: Right, it was January of '67.

29 BS: I arrived in Vietnam in December of '66.

30 SM: So it would be about December of '64 then when you went to the Great
31 Lakes again?

1 BS: Right.

2 SM: For that two years, from December of '64 to December of '66 before you left
3 for you next assignment there in Southeast Asia, what was the atmosphere like there in
4 the Great Lakes region of the United States and how was, from what you saw, how was
5 the public responding to the war?

6 BS: Well, of course I'm sure you recall there at the time there was a lot of racial
7 stuff going on and a lot of it was—we were seeing a lot of the negative input from that.
8 You know, the flag burning, the draft card burning, stuff such as that and there were
9 people that we worked with, friends of ours, where they would get orders to report to
10 Vietnam. It was slowly becoming a real major reality to us. But I think what stuck in my
11 mind more than anything was what I was seeing going on in Chicago and Milwaukee
12 with the racial problems. In fact, that even went on in the town there at Great Lakes.
13 They were burning cars and stuff. I think that was having more of an impact on me than
14 what actually was going on in Southeast Asia.

15 SM: What did you think?

16 BS: I really didn't know what to think. I really didn't. I'd never been exposed to
17 anything like that before. I couldn't believe what I was seeing, to be honest with you
18 because the car dealerships were having to bring in all their new cars and put them in
19 warehouses at night so they wouldn't be vandalized by people. It was a bad situation up
20 there. It really was.

21 SM: What was the relationship like between whites and blacks on base in the
22 Navy there at Great Lakes?

23 BS: It was good. It wasn't a problem. The people that were creating most of the
24 problem were civilian people.

25 SM: So anything else interesting or anything else stand out in your mind in your
26 two years while you were there at the Great Lakes?

27 BS: No, not really.

28 SM: Okay. Well, what did you think when you got your next assignment? This
29 was again with the *Independence*, is that correct?

30 BS: No, from there I went to Vietnam.

31 SM: Okay. This was 1967?

1 BS: Right.

2 SM: I mean, late December of '66? What was your assignment?

3 BS: When I went to Vietnam?

4 SM: Yes, sir.

5 BS: Naval Support Activity, security intelligence, Da Nang.

6 SM: What was involved in that?

7 BS: Well, I was really scared then. I really was. I would always think in my
8 mind, "As a Machinist Mate, what could I do? I'm not a trained fighter or infantryman or
9 anything like that. I'll never get orders to anything like that." And then when I did get
10 them I really was shocked. I was scared. We'd just had our first child and I really, really
11 didn't want to go, to be honest with you. (Laughs)

12 SM: Well what did you think you were going to be doing?

13 BS: I had no idea. I didn't know what that meant—security intelligence, Naval
14 Support Activity—I had no idea what that even was and nobody could tell me.

15 SM: After you got your orders did you go through any kind of training or
16 briefings or anything in proportion?

17 BS: Oh yes. Oh yeah. After I moved my wife and my child to Baton Rouge
18 where she could stay by her folks I had temporary orders to Coronado Amphibious Base
19 in Coronado, California, where I went through some counterinsurgency training,
20 minefield training, Language School, I spent a week at Camp Pendleton with the Marines
21 with firing weapons and maintaining weapons, disassembly, assembly, and things like
22 that. I went through SERE (Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape) School at Whidbey
23 Island for ten days, which was probably the most intensive training I've received in my
24 entire Naval career. And then from there we went back to Coronado and then from there
25 we flew out of San Diego to Vietnam.

26 SM: If you would, please describe that training if you can in whatever order you
27 recall it, starting with the counter-insurgency training. What did they cover? How long
28 was that training? What was the purpose of that?

29 BS: That was a real fast course. It basically taught us what we could expect, what
30 the enemy was doing, basically who the enemy was. And that was a real fast course.
31 The language training was less than a week. It taught us pertinent phrases, pertinent

1 words that we needed to know to where we could just mumble through or jumble through
2 a conversation with a Vietnamese. Not carry on a good, sensible conversation but we
3 could at least make a point. The minefield training, if we detected that there was an area
4 that had been mined; we were trained on how to cross that minefield without getting
5 blown up. Thank goodness I never had to because I probably would've gotten blown up.
6 (Laughs) That was basically what went on at Coronado. Now from there they sent us to
7 Camp Pendleton, California where we were assigned to the Marines for seven days and
8 they trained us on 45s, M-16s, M-14s, M-60s, M-79 grenade launchers. Basically it was
9 a lot of physical training and a lot of familiarization training with the weapons so by the
10 time we finished that time there we could take a gun apart in the dark, we could fix it if it
11 was broken, we were trained on how to shoot and things such as this. And then from
12 there they flew us to Whidbey Island, Washington where I went through the Survival,
13 Evasion, Resistance and Escape School which is actually put on by the Air Force for Air
14 Force pilots but it was on a Navy installation. But we were probably in about a two
15 thousand acre forest and we were dropped in there with nothing but a parachute and we
16 had to survive for seven days. No food, no water, no nothing. There had been so many
17 classes through there prior to us there was no wildlife left. There was no berries left on
18 the bushes. The surrounding farms, when they found out there was a class coming
19 through, they would bring in all their livestock and their dogs and stuff. So basically, we
20 didn't eat for seven days. The training involved moving from one point to another using
21 compasses and maps and then on the last day of the survival training then we were
22 captured by I guess what was supposed to have been North Vietnamese. We were put in
23 a Prisoner of War camp, which was—after about an hour there, you knew you were a
24 prisoner. I mean, there was no make believe here. They actually slapped us around and
25 mind you, this is in probably the first of the December, the end of November and it was
26 cold up there and they made us crawl around on the ground in our under shorts, they
27 poured ice water on us, they interrogated us. They put me in a box where I was doubled
28 up on my hands and knees for like four hours. You couldn't stand up when they pulled
29 you out of it. It was a very intensive training, it really was, and we had a lot of people
30 that broke, a lot of people that didn't make it through there and they were really ridiculed
31 and belittled. Some of them were junior officers in the Navy. They made them march

1 around the compound carrying a Communist flag. It was quite an intensive training
2 experience for me.

3 SM: What would happen in those instances?

4 BS: I don't know. I don't know if they didn't get sent to Vietnam, I don't know if
5 they had to come back and go through a later class. They never told us what went on
6 with them.

7 SM: They didn't graduate the class with you, though?

8 BS: No. They weren't awarded—it really wasn't a graduation. They just sent us
9 a certificate. So I really don't know what happened to them. The interrogation was
10 extremely hard. Once again, like I said, we hadn't eaten for about seven days. The
11 interrogators would take us in and offer us fruit or oranges or apples and a sandwich and
12 of course you know, name, rank, and serial number is all we ever gave and we wouldn't
13 talk and they would get up and they'd slap us in the face, knock us down, and it was for
14 real. It really was. So anyway, that was back there. (Laughs) We left there on—I think
15 we were in the Prisoner of War camp about seventy-two hours. At the completion of it,
16 they brought in big burlap sacks full of onions and potatoes and carrots and so forth and
17 big chunks of beef and we had a huge fifty-gallon pot where we were cooking this stuff,
18 making a stew. And mind you know, we still hadn't eaten for a week. So they had an air
19 raid drill where everyone had to run in the bunker and while this stuff was cooking, these
20 simulated Vietnamese came out and kicked the stew over on the ground. So anyway,
21 after the air raid was over, we came out and we washed our stuff up, put it back in the
22 pot, cooked it again and ate it. (Laughs) We went back to Whidbey, I ate at the airport
23 there, we stopped at Alameda flying down and I ate at the airport there. We landed at
24 San Diego; I ate at the airport there and then went over to Chula Vista, California [and
25 ate]. I probably ate five meals that day.

26 SM: Wow. You didn't get sick?

27 BS: What?

28 SM: You didn't get sick?

29 BS: No. The training did what it was supposed to do. It was good training.

30 SM: You mentioned the counterinsurgency training taught you who the enemy
31 was. Do you remember what they said in that respect? Who was the enemy in Vietnam?

1 BS: Well, they kept using the phrase, “The guys in the black pajamas.” The
2 immediate thought was that anybody in black pajamas was going to be the enemy but
3 when you got over there, everybody wore black pajamas. So basically it was to tell us,
4 “Well, you could have kids that are going to bring grenades in, you’ll have women.
5 They’re not choosy on who they use to assault you with.” So it basically was teaching
6 us, “Don’t trust anybody over there.” And we came to find out that we actually did have
7 a Vietnamese that worked for us that we found out was actually a Viet Cong and was a
8 sympathizer to the North Vietnamese cause. So that part was pretty good but I think
9 actually what we learned when we got over there was a lot better. It just kind of briefly
10 prepared us for maybe a little bit of what to expect, not what really to expect.

11 SM: And so after all that training, did any of it cover intelligence work?

12 BS: Interrogation work.

13 SM: Okay, from your SERE training.

14 BS: From the language training they taught us how to do some interrogations, not
15 to put a hand on them, not touch them. If you have a female, make sure you’ve got more
16 than one person in there. A lot of stuff like that, which when I got over there it didn’t
17 amount to a hill of beans. You just did what you want to do anyway.

18 SM: Well, what was the trip like over this time?

19 BS: Well, let’s see. I think we flew from San Bernardino to Guam or Okinawa
20 maybe. I don’t know. I don’t remember. We stopped there and then flew on to Da
21 Nang. We got there about ten o’clock at night and it was raining and really, I didn’t
22 realize but when they landed the plane, they didn’t shut the engines off. They just
23 unloaded us and took right off again. And I didn’t know why until a few days later why
24 they did that. Because that air base was under constant rocket attack, almost on a daily
25 basis. If not daily, weekly for sure. So all the commercial flights that came in there, they
26 didn’t stay. They just unloaded and left. It was kind of scary. My assignment was outside
27 of Da Nang, on the east side of Da Nang, probably about thirty miles from there, Camp
28 Tien Shaw which was a base that the French had built years and years ago. One
29 particular incident that night, we were going from the air base to our camp. They had
30 sentries on bridges who would shoot at stuff in the water because a lot of times Charlie
31 would put a mine [in the water] and float it down river and let it hit a bridge and blow up.

1 So any time the sentries would see something floating in the water, they would shoot it
2 and try to blow it up if it was a bomb or a mine before it got to a bridge. Well, they
3 seemed to know when new people arrived in country because when we started across that
4 bridge, all those sentries turned loose shooting in the water and just absolutely scared us
5 to death because we knew we hadn't been here two hours and we're already under attack!
6 (Laughs) That stands out in my memory quite well. We got over to our camp probably
7 around midnight or so and checked in. The first few days of orientation was pretty
8 smooth and I was really shocked at how lax the military was over there as far as rules and
9 regulations. You basically did what you wanted to do when you wanted to do it.

10 SM: Okay, now did you fly into Da Nang?

11 BS: Yes, we flew right into Da Nang Air Base.

12 SM: And that's where you stayed for your year?

13 BS: Right. Well, not there, I was about thirty miles from Da Nang.

14 SM: The first couple of days of in processing and briefings, do you remember
15 anything in particular about that as far as the briefings in particular?

16 BS: Basically what they centered on really was our behavior, how we represented
17 the military over there. A lot of our job was involving security of the surrounding
18 military installations. They had deep-water piers where tanker ships came in, cargo ships
19 and so forth, and we were responsible for that. Amphibious compounds, different areas
20 probably within a forty-mile area around us. We were responsible for that security. My
21 particular job ended up being a roving patrol where my job—I actually patrolled the
22 surrounding villages at night and in the early morning hours, looking for any Viet Cong
23 activity and if we picked up someone, a Viet Cong suspect or so forth, we would bring
24 them in and try to interrogate them. If we could get anything out of them then we'd turn
25 them over to CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). They were based in Da Nang there.
26 And it was someone that was really strong or we felt really strongly that they had
27 information then CIA would come down on them pretty hard.

28 SM: When you arrived there to the unit, this was just before the Tet offensive of
29 '68. Or wait, you arrived in December of '66?

30 BS: Yes.

31 SM: So it was just before '67.

1 BS: Right.

2 SM: January of '67.

3 BS: Right.

4 SM: What was the atmosphere like at the base there?

5 BS: Well, it was very easy to tell who were the people that had been there a long
6 time and who were the people that were just new. An awful lot of drinking going on.
7 You could smell marijuana all the time. Of course, houses of ill repute were quite
8 plentiful over there. Even though the area outside military installations in the Da Nang
9 area was all off limits, the people still got involved in that stuff. I don't know, it was a
10 very lax area where I was. There wasn't a lot of worry; there wasn't a lot of concern
11 about the Viet Cong at that time.

12 SM: Was the base under consistent attack by rockets or mortar rounds or
13 anything?

14 BS: Never, never. Sniper fire, we had a considerable amount of snipers and I
15 think that was basically just harassment. But as far as any—the closest rocket that ever
16 came by our base was maybe ten miles away.

17 SM: What were you told about your assignment? What was the specific unit to
18 which you were assigned?

19 BS: Well, they basically told us that everyone was a suspect and we had an awful
20 lot of Vietnamese working on our installation and in our clubs and our laundry and our
21 PX (Post Exchange) and our chow hall and we were assigned to—when they had their
22 shift change or they got off work, we had to be there to conduct a physical search of them
23 and their bags or clothing or whatever they had. We usually had a Vietnamese police and
24 policewoman assigned to us who basically went on patrol with us all the time and when it
25 would come time to check the girls when they left the clubs, you know, the waitresses
26 and so forth. We had to be there when they came out and we searched them before they
27 got on the bus. And when their physical search was required then the Vietnamese
28 policewoman would conduct that.

29 SM: So initially, principally, you're responsibility involved a lot of security?

30 BS: Right.

1 SM: And was that the name of the—it's not like ship where you're assigned to a
2 ship by name. What would be the assignment by name here?

3 BS: Tien Shaw Peninsula Security.

4 SM: Okay. While you worked there did they have any kind of special training or
5 classes to help educate you about the appropriate way to conduct this business or was that
6 just hands-on, on-the-job training?

7 BS: Just hands-on.

8 SM: How many other Naval personnel were involved in this process?

9 BS: There were probably about two hundred in our department.

10 SM: If you encountered someone, a Vietnamese person, were they required to
11 have specific types of identification?

12 BS: Oh yes, oh yeah. They had to have an ID card and there were an awful lot of
13 fake ones. A lot of fake IDs over there and we were able to determine—we were trained
14 on how to detect a fake one from an actual issued one.

15 SM: So when you started this job, how did the Vietnamese respond or react to
16 these kinds of security issues?

17 BS: Well, it was going on before we got there. It never was a problem because if
18 you have like one of the girls, for example, who worked in the NCO (Non-Commissioned
19 Officer) Club, they made more money in a night than their families made in a month so
20 there was no problem at all with them. They really accepted the fact that this is one of
21 the stipulations to work here and this is what you'll have to do. So we never really had a
22 problem.

23 SM: Okay. What were the things that you were principally looking for in terms of
24 your searches, on their persons and then their bags or whatever?

25 BS: Well, I don't know what we were basically looking for but basically what we
26 found most of was contraband, things they would steal. And they would steal anything.
27 Anything from a pencil to a bottle of aftershave lotion to a pack of cigarettes. They
28 would steal anything. Very seldom did we find, in that aspect, in that particular part of
29 our job did we find anything that raised any suspicion as far as being the enemy. Most of
30 what we found—really, what we found most of as far as Viet Cong and North
31 Vietnamese sympathizers were people that were reported to us and we would go on a

1 short surveillance or something or we would maybe get intelligence reports that they
2 were going to have a beach landing which was right next to our compound. They would
3 take a portion of our unit and they would set in down on the beach and any activities or
4 anything going on up there, we'd set off flares. We really never saw anything but it was
5 intelligence reports that we received that this is possibly what could be happening.

6 SM: Did you ever find someone who was carrying or bringing in something that
7 would be considered threatening to the security of the base, whether it be a weapon or
8 explosives or anything?

9 BS: Yes, we did. This very good friend of mine, in fact he's still a good friend, he
10 was my driver. When we were on patrol, we would check the various security points in
11 our surrounding area, which was in about a thirty-five to forty-mile area from around our
12 compound. And like I say, everything in the Da Nang area and I Corps—it was referred
13 to as I Corps—was off limits outside of military installations. So sailors or GIs, they
14 would have to go from point A to point B via a bus or a military vehicle. And we were at
15 the main gate of our camp and across the road was a bus stop and my driver was talking
16 to the sentry at the gate and I was sitting in the jeep just watching the GIs waiting on the
17 bus and a little girl came up with a basket of flowers and she got within six or eight feet
18 of these GIs and I saw her reach into the flowers and I saw her jerk a pin and I knew it
19 was a hand grenade pin. I yelled at Jack, my driver, and he had his M-16 in his hand and
20 he shot her, right there on the spot. He killed her right there. And sure enough, it was a
21 frag grenade, one of ours. So needless to say, each and every time we had sniper fire
22 coming into our compound, the next day they'd send out a team to sweep the area. We
23 would always find rifle brass and stuff and it was all GI brass. Carbine brass, M-14 brass
24 and they were shooting at us with our ammunition. So no doubt, they had a source of
25 getting our stuff from us out from underneath our noses. But that incident with that little
26 girl is one that stands out most in my mind.

27 SM: How old would you guess she was?

28 BS: Ten to twelve maybe.

29 SM: And then I take it the grenade did not go off?

30 BS: Oh, it did go off.

31 SM: It did go off?

1 BS: Yeah.

2 SM: Anybody hurt?

3 BS: I think maybe one or two of the guys may have gotten a piece or two of

4 shrapnel in them but it wasn't anything serious.

5 SM: Was there anybody there that knew the girl? Any Vietnamese people?

6 BS: No, we never did find out who she was, didn't find out where she came from

7 or anything. So maybe she was from a different area and they brought her in and dropped

8 her off or something. I don't know. Those Vietnamese jitneys, when they come through

9 they'll have thirty thousand Vietnamese hanging off the side of them so you don't know

10 where they came from.

11 SM: Any other similar incidents where Vietnamese civilians seemingly were

12 attacking Americans?

13 BS: No, not really. That was the one that was the closest call that we had while I

14 was there.

15 SM: Did you ever catch anybody in the base itself doing something suspicious

16 like pacing off a specific area or that kind of stuff?

17 BS: Yeah, we did. Can you hold on just a minute? Somebody just rang my

18 doorbell.

19 SM: Sure. All right, go ahead.

20 BS: Probably, yeah, like I say, we had these people—I don't know if they were

21 actually police or just people that were working for the police department. We had these

22 Vietnamese, what they called "Quan Congs" (we believe he means Cong An, aka

23 Vietnamese Police) work with us and they were actually our authority to go into a

24 Vietnamese residence if we suspected something. But anyway, this particular one that

25 worked for us, his name was Koi, one of the guys I worked with caught him drawing a

26 map, walking around the perimeter of our compound drawing a map, showing where the

27 towers were, the mess hall, the NCO club, the EM (Enlisted Man) Club, and he thought

28 this was suspicious which it quite was. He questioned him about it and he became very

29 nervous and so forth and so [phone rings]. Let me see who that is. Hold on. I'm sorry.

30 (Laughs)

31 SM: It's all right. Go ahead.

1 BS: This activity was reported as being suspicious so they took some of us, the
2 senior ones who were—I guess we could speak the language better than the bulk of them
3 and we had to do some interrogation and we were able to determine that he had direct ties
4 to the surrounding Viet Cong in the area. It ended up that we turned him over to the CIA
5 and then they took it from there and we never knew what happened from there. We just
6 heard some rumors trickle back that he was definitely a Viet Cong. And he actually
7 worked for us.

8 SM: Well, what was the relationship like between yourselves and the Vietnamese
9 people that you worked with?

10 BS: Good, good. Overall, I mean we were invited to their homes for meals; we
11 treated them to meals inside our compound. It was a very good working relationship.

12 SM: You got to meet their families and stuff like that?

13 BS: Right. Oh yes.

14 SM: And what was the relationship like between the Naval personnel, yourself
15 and your contemporaries, and the other people in Da Nang that were doing similar work.
16 In particular, you've already mentioned of course the CIA had personnel there. Were
17 there any other security personnel there and what was the relationship like between you
18 all?

19 BS: The only other type of security people were people that were Marine Corps
20 and there was constant friction there.

21 SM: Between the Navy and the Marine Corps people?

22 BS: Yeah, yeah.

23 SM: What was the cause of that?

24 BS: Authority. Who had the most authority, basically. They were not supposed
25 to come into any of the areas surrounding our compound that we were responsible for and
26 vice versa. We weren't supposed to go to any of the areas they were responsible for and
27 we didn't but occasionally our paths would cross and there would be some friction going
28 on and some reports made and I don't know. Sometimes it just seemed like there was...I
29 don't know. "I've got more power than you've got," basically.

30 SM: Turf battles.

31 BS: Yeah, exactly.

1 SM: What about between the Navy and the CIA personnel?

2 BS: It was a good relationship. Well, I only got to know two of them, two young
3 guys, but any time we had any type of information to give them or bring a suspect to
4 them, they were very [accommodating] to us. Anything they could do for us, they were
5 happy to do it because we were the ones out there beating the bush looking for them and
6 they were the ones sitting there in the hotel. Of course they were subject to as much
7 harassment as we got because their area did get hit by rockets and mortars from time to
8 time. It was a good relationship. It was good.

9 SM: Now you mentioned that sometimes you'd get information about suspected
10 Viet Cong or Viet Cong sympathizers. Was there a consistent flow of information
11 between the Navy security personnel and the CIA?

12 BS: Not really. Not really. Because anything we got we would act on first;
13 unless it was—for example, we would get intelligence reports that there was maybe a
14 movement of North Vietnamese coming down the coast. And of course we would get
15 them involved and they would bring out the 3rd MAF, which was the 3rd Marine
16 Amphibious Force. But any time there was any isolated instances where someone was
17 reported as being a sympathizer or a suspect or whatever then we would act on it and if
18 we thought that it was sufficient information there to pass on to them then that's what we
19 did.

20 SM: Now what were the rules about your interactions with the Vietnamese
21 people, in particular, the Vietnamese civilians?

22 BS: Well, really, none. We basically could do what we wanted to do. They
23 always told us, "Treat them the way you want them to treat you."

24 SM: Well were there any periods during that—how long were you there at Da
25 Nang?

26 BS: Right at twelve months.

27 SM: Okay. During that year, were there any heightened periods of alert or there
28 was maybe a warning given that something might happen?

29 BS: Oh yeah. Yes, quite often. And it was basically when they received reports
30 of North Vietnamese movement because to get south they had to come basically through
31 us somewhere in the Da Nang area unless they went by water. And they could get over

1 and maybe come down along the coast of Cambodia. I won't say it was a lot but
2 probably ten or twelve times during that year's period we had to go on really heightened
3 security alert and send out a lot of patrols and things like that which never resulted in
4 anything. And especially after the Tet Offensive we went on a real heightened security.

5 SM: Now when you went out on patrol, how many of you would be there? How
6 many would you go together?

7 BS: It would be anywhere from twelve to thirty or forty, depending on what the
8 report was.

9 SM: And were these foot patrols or were you in jeeps?

10 BS: Both. We were at the base of a huge mountain called Monkey Mountain and
11 normally when we would send a patrol out if there had been snipers from the previous
12 night, they would send anywhere from eight to twelve people out there on a sweep. If we
13 felt like maybe there was going to be a movement of North Vietnamese then normally the
14 Marines were really involved in that and we were just kind of there just to ride along.
15 They brought in the combat troops because we weren't combat people. But once again,
16 like I said, it never resulted in anything.

17 SM: And how were you armed?

18 BS: Each of us was carrying a—we were all issued a side arm and a rifle. We
19 kept a 12-gauge shotgun in the jeep for a riot gun. We also had M-16s and a 45
20 automatic or an M-14. You didn't have to take the M-16. You could take an M-14. But
21 a side arm and a rifle and of course we had grenades.

22 SM: You said you had grenades?

23 BS: Right. A lot of them were percussion grenades that we just threw in the water
24 and it just set off anything that might be in there. I think a few of them carried frag
25 grenades but I never did. I never saw a need for it. But basically what we had were
26 percussion grenades and a lot of flares. We had cases of flares because any time—there
27 was a lot of mountains around us and any time there was any suspicious activity, flares
28 were about the only thing you could use to see.

29 SM: Did you have a personal preference in terms of the rifle that you carried?
30 Did you prefer the M-16 over the M-14 or vice versa?

1 BS: No, M-16, yeah. I drew an M-14 when I first got there and probably—we
2 shot a lot. (Laughs) Just target shooting down on the beach or up on the side of the
3 mountain and I never fired a weapon on full automatic except when I was in Camp
4 Pendleton training and I think that was just an M-16. But I fired the M-14 on automatic
5 and it almost beat me to death. So I turned it back in and drew an M-16, which was a lot
6 more comfortable weapon for me. It was very reliable. I never had a minute's problem
7 with it.

8 SM: During your patrols, did you come up against any Viet Cong or small NVA
9 (North Vietnamese Army) units?

10 BS: Never an NVA unit, just some Viet Cong. We did capture some and really,
11 we didn't capture them. We came upon them and they surrendered to us. And that was
12 on the outskirts of a village, which was right next to our compound. They had come in
13 by boat. They were either coming in to pick up something or they were delivering
14 something, I don't recall. But there was either four or five of them. I'm not sure. I think
15 there was five of them.

16 SM: Did you and the other Navel personnel interrogate them or did you turn those
17 over to the CIA?

18 BS: Well we did initially interrogate them and of course our boss who was the
19 Security Officer there, he came in and said, "Definitely, this is something that is out of
20 our league. We need to turn them over to the CIA," which we did.

21 SM: Now was the perimeter of the base camp there probed very often or sappers
22 tried to get through, that kind of stuff?

23 BS: Yeah, we did have an assault one night. Probably about forty came down the
24 side of the mountain to our perimeter and I want to say at the most, ten of them had guns.
25 The rest of them didn't. I've got pictures of it. Some of them were just carrying sticks
26 and they were young kids, sixteen or eighteen years old. I think our towers were like
27 thirty feet tall and they were spaced about seventy-five feet apart on the perimeters and
28 they were sand-bagged towers so the sentries in the towers were well-protected and they
29 just basically, as they came off the side of the mountain, they just picked them off like
30 they were nothing. To this day, I don't know what that was intended for, but they did.
31 We had some 101st Airborne Army there and they wanted to take all the dead bodies and

1 put them outside our compound out on the main road and lay them out there all in a row
2 to sending a message, which they did. I think they were there like two or three days and
3 the stench got so terrible they had to come in and pick them up. I don't know what they
4 did. They took them and buried them somewhere, I guess. But the 101st Airborne, they
5 would come down to our area. They were up probably around seventy-five or eighty
6 miles from us. They were up around Qua Viet and Chu Lai and Hue and they were in
7 some heavy North Vietnamese populated areas. So those guys came down to our little
8 area for a little R&R (Rest and Relaxation) and then anytime we saw anything that we
9 thought was earth shattering, it was really nothing to them.

10 SM: Did you get to talk to many of them?

11 BS: Quite a few, quite a few. I played poker with quite a few. They were nice
12 guys. They were. Some of them were wild. There were some there that had been on
13 their third tour there. But over all they were a great bunch of guys.

14 SM: Did they ever go out on patrols with you?

15 BS: No. The only ones that came out if we needed a backup or something would
16 be what they call 3rd MAF, which was the 3rd Marine Amphibious Force. The Army,
17 they just came into our area just for a little R&R, come down for medical or come down
18 and try to bum coffee or something like that. But they weren't that prevalent in our area.

19 SM: Did you have any combined action platoons in your area? Marine Corps?

20 BS: Yes. With the Marine Corps?

21 SM: Yeah, the Marine Corps combined action platoons?

22 BS: Well, they had combine action groups but they were Navy.

23 SM: Oh, okay. Explain that to me, please.

24 BS: Well, basically they were a very select few people that were sent out to live in
25 villages to teach the people how to better do things, I guess, so to speak. And also they
26 were kind of a plant to feed back information to us if there was any activity going on in
27 that area. But they were all Navy people in our group, in our area.

28 SM: Did they do a lot of civic action?

29 BS: Oh yes. Yeah, helped them especially if any of the villages suffered damage
30 from any type of attack. They were out there helping them rebuild houses. We donated

1 an awful lot of what they call Dunnage, scrap lumber, wire, nails, hammers, all that stuff.
2 We really supported the surrounding area quite a bit.

3 SM: Did you yourself ever participate in that kind of activity?

4 BS: I did a couple of times. I helped—like I said, we were responsible for the
5 security for these deep-water piers. There were six of them where these huge cargo ships
6 came in and they would open up these great big wooden crates and they would just pile
7 all this what they call Dunnage—scrap lumber—up and I would take a group of guys
8 down there with a flat-bed truck and load on as many pieces as would fit and we would
9 deliver it down to the villages for the people to rebuild or add on or whatever they wanted
10 to do with it.

11 SM: Well what were the facilities like there as far as the living quarters, food,
12 everything else?

13 BS: The living quarters were adequate. They weren't great. Like I said, the
14 barracks we lived in were built by the French some years back. No air conditioning. The
15 food was adequate. Now the clubs, the NCO Clubs and PXs and so forth, exchanges,
16 were air-conditioned. The chow hall was not air-conditioned. So basically you tried to
17 find a place that was air conditioned to stay, especially in the heat of the summer. Then
18 during monsoon of course it started raining one day and it never did quit for about three
19 months. That was kind of a trying time. It really was.

20 SM: The food was decent?

21 BS: Well, it was acceptable. I'll put it that way. (Laughs) It was decent. It
22 wasn't anything to really write home about. Steaks and lobster were very few and far
23 between. A lot of hamburgers, a lot I think, what do they call it, stovetop stuff but overall
24 it would sustain you.

25 SM: How frequently would you get some time off where you could just do what
26 you wanted?

27 BS: Well, the rotation I was on was pretty good. We never had the same exact
28 schedule all the time. We worked eight hours on and then twelve off so you never went
29 to work at the same time every day. We worked eight on and twelve off and then if your
30 twelve off fell within the daylight hours then you'd spend probably four or five out

1 helping string concertina wire or helping build new towers or filling sandbags or
2 whatever needed to be done.

3 SM: Speaking of the towers, what weapons did they have on those? Did they use
4 the 60s or the 50-cals?

5 BS: Oh, nothing.

6 SM: Nothing on the towers?

7 BS: No, just M-16s. We had an M-60 on our jeep that we used. Well, we had
8 two patrol jeeps and both of them had M-60s on them.

9 SM: When you had time off, what other recreational activities were available to
10 you?

11 BS: Oh there were a lot of things there. There was a compound of Korean
12 Marines from Korea, what they called ROK Marines. They did a lot of teaching of karate
13 and Taekwondo and all that stuff. We had a huge library there. Of course you had clubs
14 with slot machines. All the NCO clubs and the Officer's Club had slot machines. I think
15 that we had a pool for swimming. Of course you could go to the beach but that was
16 basically it.

17 SM: What about library facilities and that kind of stuff?

18 BS: Yeah, there were libraries there. They did. They had music and we could
19 listen to records, they had books, magazines, stuff like that.

20 SM: Did you correspond very much with your wife and family?

21 BS: Every day. Every single day.

22 SM: Did you receive a lot of correspondence in return?

23 BS: Yes. We exchanged tapes, audiotapes.

24 SM: And what was the news you were receiving as far as what was happening
25 back in the United States?

26 BS: Probably the one that sticks out most in my mind was the way they were
27 treating the guys coming home. What went on at the airports, just basically the bleeding
28 hearts I guess is what I'm looking for. We're over there doing this and doing that, killing
29 babies and killing women and so forth and they had no earthly idea of what was going on
30 over there.

31 SM: Did you get a lot of magazines, news magazines in Vietnam?

1 BS: No. A lot of *Playboys* (laughs) and that was about it.

2 SM: What was your principle source of news? Was it *Stars and Stripes*?

3 BS: *Stars and Stripes* and then there was TV station there also that broadcast four
4 hours a day.

5 SM: Did you listen to any of the anti...not anti-war...well, yeah, anti-American,
6 anti-war North Vietnamese sponsored radio programs? You know, Hanoi Hannah and
7 that kind of stuff?

8 BS: Oh yes. I heard it several times. I really did. And it really didn't make a lot
9 of impact on me. It really didn't. I probably heard it maybe half a dozen times at the
10 most.

11 SM: Did any USO (United Service Organization) shows come through while you
12 were there?

13 BS: Any what?

14 SM: USO shows?

15 BS: Yes they did. Let's see. I don't remember some of their names. I really
16 don't. Diane McBain who was a movie actress, she came through there one time and we
17 were responsible for her security while she was there. I met Bob Hope and Ann Margaret
18 in Guam. I was leaving Vietnam and they were coming. They stopped in Guam going
19 and I was stopping in Guam going back so I did get to meet them but that was the extent
20 of it. But as far as any other shows, they had a lot of Filipinos over there doing USO
21 shows. They would play at the local clubs. Well, not the local clubs but the military
22 clubs and so forth and they were quite good.

23 SM: Any other interesting or significant events occur while you were there for
24 that twelve-month period?

25 BS: Once again, getting back to the racial thing, there were some instances there
26 that took place and there was a lot of gang related activity but the bulk of it was blacks
27 assaulting a white guy maybe waiting on a bus or something on that order. We had one
28 particular incident where there was a group of blacks, I want to say a hundred and fifty to
29 two hundred, that had congregated in the fuel depot right next to our compound and of
30 course they sent us over there to investigate and it was quite scary. I don't know if some
31 activity had been planned for anybody that intruded but the Commanding Officer of the

1 base, the Navy Commander of our compound, he came over there and they actually
2 belittled him and slapped him in the face and it was just a bad situation all the way
3 around. It really was. And I don't recall the circumstances that caused it to break up but
4 whatever it was, we were thankful that it happened. And it was shortly after that in our
5 chow hall—once again, I said our towers were positioned about fifty to seventy-five feet
6 apart all the way around the compound and we had a particular tower outside the chow
7 hall because there was a main road going towards Da Nang right there and there was a
8 black in the chow hall. He had been drinking and he had an argument with someone and
9 pulled a .45 out and started shooting it through the ceiling. Consequently, one of the
10 bullets went into the ceiling and went into the tower and shot the sentry in the neck that
11 was in the tower. So we didn't realize at the time—I had been dispatched. We were in a
12 village real close by there and they dispatched us to investigate the gunshots and we got
13 there and we placed the guy under arrest and the dispatcher kept calling this particular
14 [tower]. The sentries had to report in every twenty or thirty minutes I think via a sound-
15 powered phone and he kept telling us that he hadn't received any response from the
16 sentry in tower seven or whichever one it was. And they said, "Will you check him out?"
17 And so I went over there and I crawled up in the tower and I found [that] where he had
18 been shot in the neck. The bullet went in his neck and came out the top of his head. And
19 of course he was dead. And that stands out in my mind to this day.

20 SM: Well, when that group of—was this mostly black sailors or just American
21 personnel in general that had congregated there?

22 BS: No, they were black military.

23 SM: Just U.S. Military Personnel?

24 BS: Yes.

25 SM: Did you know why they had all collected there? Was it for a particular
26 reason?

27 BS: I've still got the newspaper article from the *Stars and Stripes* that covered it.
28 I don't really recall what it said they were doing. I know there was a lot of dope
29 smoking. Of course you could smell that anywhere over there. I don't know really what
30 they were there for. I don't think it was to do any type of damage to the fuel depot or

1 anything but there was a large depot where a lot of fuel was stored in drums there and
2 that's where they had decided to congregate.

3 SM: Now how many people where on the base total?

4 BS: Nine hundred, maybe. Somewhere in that area, maybe.

5 SM: And what was the overall ethnic makeup, would you estimate?

6 BS: Probably seventy percent Caucasian and thirty percent black. Something like
7 that. That's roughly.

8 SM: Were there any specific acts of violence that you recall besides what you've
9 already discussed?

10 BS: Just some isolated instances where like I said there were gangs of people.
11 And I won't say they were black gangs. There were probably some white gangs, too, that
12 would catch a lone sailor, whether it be a black or white one waiting on a bus or going
13 from one place to the other and he would be jumped and you know, they'd just beat him
14 up. And this went on for some time. In fact, it probably went on the whole time I was
15 there. After I saw this stuff starting to happen and I was reflecting back, you know, "This
16 is what I saw going on at Great Lakes, too." They were doing the same thing. So it kind
17 of spilled over and just kind of stuck with me all the way through.

18 SM: Were there problems with any other drugs? You've already mentioned
19 marijuana. Any other drugs that were becoming a problem while you were there?

20 BS: Not that I recall.

21 SM: What was alcohol consumption like?

22 BS: A lot. (Laughs) A lot. I guess everyone, even the religious ones did a lot of
23 drinking over there because there wasn't a lot else to do and it was very inexpensive.
24 And once again, they had slot machines in the clubs and a lot of people did some
25 gambling. So basically that was the bulk of the intoxication—from liquor and not from
26 drugs. There was a lot of drugs but the majority of it was liquor.

27 SM: What were some of the harder leadership challenges you faced?

28 BS: How to deal with people when they got out of line. For example, the guy that
29 was shooting up the chow hall. He had been drinking and of course once we arrested him
30 we turned him over to the military police and he was their responsibility but we had our
31 own folks that would do the same thing sometimes. They would just get overly

1 intoxicated and they would come out and they would get in fights, just shooting their
2 weapons off and stuff like that and it was difficult to deal with because you knew they
3 were away from home, away from their families, there was a threat of losing your life
4 possibly there and a lot of them just got real lackadaisical about it. They just didn't care;
5 and it was difficult to deal with them because you knew this situation here was temporary
6 and wherever they were going to go from here was probably going to be a more
7 permanent type of arrangement for them. And I was a Section Leader and a lot of
8 discipline fell back on me. How I dealt with it and what I did with the folks and a lot of
9 stuff I just let fly. Probably maybe I shouldn't have but I did.

10 SM: When you arrived in Vietnam, did it meet your expectations? What
11 surprised you most?

12 BS: I guess what really surprised me most was the friendliness of the people
13 there. I really wasn't expecting to be involved with people that were so friendly. And
14 come to find out later, they were just using us for their benefit but the Vietnamese were
15 very hospitable in the area I was anyway.

16 SM: Is there anything else that you'd like to discuss about your time in Vietnam?

17 BS: Well, no. Up to that point, that's basically covered all the major events that
18 took place there. I wasn't real pleased. Flying back, they told us— we had our Navy
19 uniforms with us but when we were in Vietnam we wore fatigues. Of course, when we
20 left, the morning I was to leave, they hit the runway with some rockets and damaged it
21 considerably and this huge Flying Tiger cargo plane was circling the air base up there and
22 they were out there repairing the runway and then when they got it repaired the plane sat
23 down and landed and we took right off again. We stopped in Okinawa and they told us,
24 “We want you to go to the cargo area and get your sea bags and you need to put on your
25 dress uniforms because what type of treatment are you going to receive if you come back
26 into the United States with a Vietnamese fatigues on. You're going to be ridiculed.” So
27 we had to change clothes in Okinawa. That's where we changed planes to a commercial
28 jet. And really, they were there. We flew into San Francisco and they were there
29 harassing and yelling and screaming and carrying on and we just kind of ignored them
30 and went on by them. But had we been in our fatigues, no doubt there would have been
31 some type of assault on us. I would have expected that, anyway.

1 SM: When you left, when you got your orders and it came that it was time for you
2 to leave, how did you feel? What did you think?

3 BS: Well, that was kind of a mess-up, too. Once again, when it comes time for
4 rotation, you fill out what they call a dream sheet and it's supposed to be an unwritten rule,
5 if you're in a war zone, when it comes time to rotate out you can either get the coast of
6 the United States you want—east or west coast—or the type of ship you want. So I put in
7 my dream sheet for a destroyer type vessel out of somewhere in San Diego or Long
8 Beach or somewhere on the West Coast. And when my orders came in, I got a sub-
9 tender out of Norfolk, Virginia. I said, "Ugh, this isn't going to work." So I called my
10 wife through the satellite link and her uncle at the time was Commanding Officer at the
11 Naval Air Station in Corpus Christi. I said, "Call Uncle Lewis and see if there's
12 something he can do." Anyway, I called back in a couple days and he had called
13 BUPERS (Bureau of Navy Personnel) in Washington and found out there was a billet
14 open in New Orleans and one in Galveston for a reserve training ship, a destroyer. So I
15 said, "Well, have them send me orders to this ship in Galveston." So that's how I ended
16 up here in Texas.

17 SM: Okay, so you had access to a satellite phone. How frequently would you call
18 home?

19 BS: It was a two-time deal, basically. It was for an emergency. I really had to
20 pull some strings to even be able to do that. They wouldn't let us.

21 SM: So your new orders, when you received them, when you were leaving
22 Vietnam you were going to be stationed in Galveston, Texas.

23 BS: Right.

24 SM: It was a reserve unit but you were going to stay on active duty, correct?

25 BS: Right.

26 SM: And you did stay on active duty until 1970?

27 BS: Right.

28 SM: Okay. When you got back into the United States and you saw those war
29 protestors, the people there at the airport, what time was that when you arrived?

30 BS: Probably three in the afternoon. Two in the afternoon. Somewhere in the
31 early afternoon.

1 SM: What did you think when you came home to that kind of reception?

2 BS: Well, it disgusted me. It really did. These people, they didn't know what
3 was going on over there. They just seemed like they needed a cause and if it hadn't been
4 for that it might have been cruelty to animals protesting. That was the impression I got,
5 that they were trying to protest an issue that they knew nothing about. They had not been
6 exposed to it. And probably I just felt, "I sure wish one or two of them would get a trip
7 over there and let them get a firsthand taste and see if they want to come back and protest
8 then." But I was cool. I kept my mouth shut and I just sat over and waited. I missed my
9 flight home because of the flight leaving Da Nang due to the fact that the runway had
10 been damaged so I missed my flight from San Francisco to New Orleans so I had to wait
11 five more hours for another flight. I finally didn't back to New Orleans probably until
12 around four or five in the morning. So it was a long trip home.

13 SM: Did you get thirty days' leave after you got home?

14 BS: Right.

15 SM: How was the transition for you from Vietnam to the United States?

16 BS: It didn't take an awful lot of time. The driving situation is probably what
17 stands out most in my mind because over there, everyone drove slow and I'm driving
18 home from the airport on an interstate like at thirty-five miles and hour (laughs) and my
19 wife's saying, "You can drive sixty-five, you know." And sleeping. You know, sleeping
20 in the comfortable beds, sleeping in the air-conditioning was pretty nice. It really didn't
21 take me a long time to adjust.

22 SM: If you would, why don't you go ahead and describe you new duty
23 assignment there in Galveston? And what was the name of that ship?

24 BS: *USS Haynsworth* DD700. It was more like a Great Lakes duty station.
25 (Laughs) It was good. We pulled out one weekend a month to take a reserve crew out,
26 out of Houston. We pulled out on Friday and back in on Sunday. Went to Cuba a couple
27 of times, went to the Caribbean. Tropical working hours most of the year down here—
28 seven-thirty until one in the afternoon was your workday. Four-section duty—you stood
29 duty once every four days. It was good duty. It really was.

30 SM: Sounds like it.

31 BS: Yeah.

1 SM: What would you principally do for that month besides prepare the ship for
2 taking the reserve unit out for their maneuvers?

3 BS: Chip paint, paint, shine bright work, run around town buying stuff for the
4 Navy. We had a charge account at Sears. I managed to go over there once a week to buy
5 tools for something. We did a lot of high-maintenance stuff. Once again, this is a World
6 War II destroyer and it took some money to keep it in good shape. And it was in good
7 shape.

8 SM: Anything in particular or interesting happen while you were there?

9 BS: Yeah, there was a tanker sank off of Freeport, the *V.A. Fogg*, and we went out
10 on a rescue mission. I don't remember what night of the week it was but I know that we
11 pulled out of Galveston and we ran under full power almost to Freeport. The seas were
12 terribly rough and out of all my ten years of Navy the only time I ever got seasick was in
13 the Gulf of Mexico. (Laughs) But I know we did pick up a few survivors off of the ship
14 that had sunk. That incident stands out the most and of course I decommissioned that
15 ship here and they sold it to Thailand, which they steamed it for another ten or twelve
16 years. But I went aboard another destroyer that replaced this one, the *USS Ault*, and I was
17 on there for several months before I decided to get out.

18 SM: When you got back to the United States, how closely did you follow what
19 was happening in Vietnam?

20 BS: Well, it wasn't too long after that they were bringing people home. I watched
21 that very intensely, very much so. I watched the returning Prisoners of War and I
22 watched the other troops coming back. Yeah, I stayed glued to that quite a bit.

23 SM: What did you think? Your return and your assignment to Galveston—about
24 when did you arrive in Galveston?

25 BS: Probably the end of January of '69, I guess, somewhere in there. I'm trying
26 to think. Because I came back in December of '68, it must have been January of '69.
27 Yeah.

28 SM: What did you think of President Nixon's ideas on fighting the war in
29 Vietnam, the Vietnamization and all of that?

30 BS: I was fairly supportive of him. I think he had a good grasp of things, of what
31 was going on, and he made some good decisions, yeah.

1 SM: What did you think about how the war ended as far as the Paris Peace
2 Accords of '73 and the "peace with honor," as it was called?

3 BS: After being over there—of course my outlook was a lot different than the
4 people that had never been there—but I came to realize that we were there helping a
5 country that really didn't want our help and they benefited a lot from our being there. I
6 think that the way the war ended was the only way it could have ended. There was a lot
7 of pressure put on the administration to end it. Probably, had not all that pressure been
8 on there, it may not have ended when it did. I don't know. I think it ended the only way
9 it could have.

10 SM: What did you do when you got out of the Navy?

11 BS: Let's see. I had ordered a new car as soon as I got back. I ordered what they
12 call a Hemi Roadrunner, which was a devastating muscle car. And I got to be good
13 friends with the owner of the dealership where I ordered the car and I would go down
14 there sometimes and have lunch with him and I told him I was going to be getting out of
15 the Navy in a couple of months and I wasn't sure what I was going to be doing. He said,
16 "Well, would you like to come to work for me here at the dealership as a shop foreman?"
17 And he explained what the job entailed and I said, "Well, sure, I'll give it a shot." And I
18 did and I wasn't there too long and the service manager resigned and then he promoted
19 me to service manager, so I was over the whole service end of the dealership. I enjoyed it
20 quite well and I was there a couple years before I left and moved on to greener grass.

21 SM: I guess more recently, how have you felt, what have you thought about the
22 U.S. approach to Vietnam now, especially after of course '75 when Saigon fell and the
23 entire country became a Communist country? What did you think about the more recent
24 attempts and more recent actions by President Clinton to normalize relations with
25 Vietnam and that activity?

26 BS: Well, my personal opinion, I think we just need to wash our hands of them.
27 We have no business being involved with them. We've done so much for their people by
28 letting them even come to this country and taking care of them and giving them money
29 and new lives and so forth. Personally, I think we just need to wash our hands of them. I
30 don't think we need to be involved with them.

1 SM: What were the most important things you took away from your Vietnam
2 experience, for you personally?

3 BS: Appreciation of life, I guess. It did create some problems for me when I
4 returned. I ended up getting divorced and so forth. But it was a good learning experience
5 for me. It was. I guess the preparation going to Vietnam, the intensive discipline type
6 training and weapons training and survival training probably did me more good than
7 anything because it showed me what I could do.

8 SM: What do you think we as a nation should take away from that war
9 experience?

10 BS: I don't know that we took anything away. I don't know.

11 SM: Lessons learned that we should have learned?

12 BS: Well, we thought we were doing the right thing, I think. At least, I felt we
13 were. And then after it was all over, you know I'm having second thoughts. Maybe we
14 really shouldn't have even been in there. So I guess basically what I'm saying is, you
15 know, we really need to look at a situation a little bit closer to see if we really need to be
16 involved. Not necessarily want to be, do we need to be involved? And with the issues
17 going on right now, yeah, I see we need to be involved in this one. But no, I don't know.
18 It's hard to say sometimes. It really is.

19 SM: Is there anything else that you'd like to discuss today?

20 BS: No. I think we've just about covered everything.

21 SM: Okay. Well, let me go ahead and put an official end to this.

22 BS: Okay.

23 SM: This will end the interview with Mr. Brad Senter. Thank you very much, sir.