

ATTENTION: © Copyright The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. The following materials can be used for educational and other noncommercial purposes without the written permission of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. These materials are not to be used for resale or commercial purposes without written authorization from the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. All materials cited must be attributed to the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University.

**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Bill Henri
Conducted by Kelly Crager
Date June 24th, 28th, July 6th, 13th 2011
Transcribed by Aaron Kellerhals**

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting an oral history interview with Mr.
2 Bill Henri. Today is 24 June 2011. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas Tech
3 University and Mr. Henri is joining me by telephone from his office in Houston, Texas.
4 Mr. Henri, to begin this interview I'd like to get some background information from you
5 if I could, can you tell me when you were born and where?

6 Bill Henri: I was born July of 1946 in Boston, Massachusetts.

7 KC: In Boston, okay, now what were your parents' names?

8 BH: My father's name was Willard, W-I-L-L-A-R-D, Henri and my mother's
9 name was Margaret, M-A-R-G-A-R-E-T, Henri.

10 KC: What did your parents do for a living up there?

11 BH: My mother was a homemaker, my father was a Boston police detective.

12 KC: Is that right?

13 BH: Yeah.

14 KC: That must've been pretty interesting.

15 BH: It really was during the— yeah, it was.

16 KC: Growing up in the 1950s with a father as a police detective in Boston, I mean
17 these are what crime novels and things like this come to mind.

18 BH: Well absolutely, and—

19 KC: What was that like? What kind of stories did he share with you?

20 BH: At the time Boston was a lot more, the neighborhoods were a lot more ethnic,
21 people for better or worse, were identified by Irish or whatever. So it was more—Boston

1 now is a bit different, and I think probably for the better than it was back in the '50s and
2 '60s. But it was an interesting perspective having a father in the middle of all that law
3 enforcement stuff.

4 KC: Yeah, I'm sure. Now did your parents have any other children?

5 BH: Yeah, I'm the oldest of six children.

6 KC: Of six.

7 BH: Yeah. I have a brother who was a year younger, then I have four sisters.

8 KC: Okay, now growing up in Boston as you did, obviously in the epitome of an
9 urban environment there, what was it like growing up in the 1950s and 1960s in an
10 environment like Boston?

11 BH: Well it—as I say, it was fairly insular, it was very ethnic and very religious
12 but most of the city was Catholic, at least in my experience. A lot what neighborhood life
13 was revolved around church and school. A lot of the social activities in the neighborhood,
14 it was not a wealthy neighborhood by any stretch of the imagination, so a lot of what
15 passed for a community social life tended to revolve around church and church-related
16 things. Of course, in the '50s and the '60s the United States had come out of World War
17 II and recognizing it after the fact now, we thought we were pretty exceptional. In fact,
18 we were obviously, we as a country had won World War II, folks were coming back and
19 going to work. When I was a kid I didn't realize it, but we really were very close to the
20 end of the war, within ten years or so by the time I have an actual memory of things. It
21 was an interesting place. The things were more black-and-white, at least people perceived
22 them to be, the right or wrong. Again, that may be, looking back at it for us commoner
23 classes, but for better or worse people had a fairly direct perspective of things, this is
24 right and this is wrong.

25 KC: What sort of things would you do for entertainment as a kid growing up?

26 BH: Sports, played an awful lot of sports, basketball, baseball, any sport, a ball
27 rolled down the street I'd go out and get in the game. Did a lot of reading. I always
28 enjoyed reading. I always enjoyed history. Pretty much that's it, though.

29 KC: Mm-hmm. Did you grow up a Red Sox fan, I assume?

30 BH: Absolutely. I was a Red Sox fan when you could walk out to them and get
31 day of the game tickets in the bleachers for seventy-five cents, that's how long ago it was.

1 KC: Wow, you've really dated yourself there.

2 BH: Yeah, and you could walk into the park—it was like an echo chamber.

3 KC: Yeah, I think they were the Boston Beaneaters back then when it was that
4 cheap, it seems like.

5 BH: I'm not that old.

6 KC: What about school? Did you go to a Catholic school I would assume?

7 BH: Yeah, I did. I had the good fortune as it turned out, I went to public school
8 for four or five years and then I transferred to parochial school, but then I went to a Jesuit
9 high school in Boston that was very rigorous, college preparatory school. But the longer
10 I'm away from it, the more I appreciate what just an extraordinarily good education I got.
11 I probably worked harder on a day-to-day basis in those four years than I did in college or
12 law school.

13 KC: What made that education so exceptional?

14 BH: Very rigorous. I had one or two, I think it was only one elective in four years.
15 It was classical education, four years of Latin, three years of Greek, several years of
16 modern language, math, English, theology, history, and just no—the course was laid out
17 for me. One of the electives was I could take German or French as my modern language,
18 but it was very rigorous and the discipline, the intellectual discipline I learned, I've never
19 really lost the benefit of that.

20 KC: Now you mention that you come essentially from a working class
21 neighborhood and working class background, and you're taking this—in high school
22 you've got this rigorous intellectual approach, really preparing you for something. Did
23 you know at the time or did your family push you toward higher education, toward
24 college?

25 BH: Yeah, they did, as a matter of fact. I grew up in a public housing project. So
26 it was a little bit, as it turns out, a little bit unusual, not a lot of the people who I grew up
27 with went to college as it turned out, but within my family it was just spoken about in a
28 very natural way like, "When you go to college," or "When you do this," so I didn't
29 know any better. I just figured I was supposed to work hard and study and that's what I
30 would do. So it turns out it was a wonderful course for me to approach, I didn't think

1 there was anything special about my situation one way or another, I just had to achieve
2 certain things and that's what I went out and did.

3 KC: Right. What about your brother and sisters? Did they attend college as well?

4 BH: Yes, they did, all of them did. Yeah, which never struck me as unusual until
5 again looking back at it, it was, and then following up on what the people who I grew up
6 with ended up doing, I think a lot of it was, really just came from family life. It was sort
7 of expected of us that you work hard and you achieve, and we were all smart or we were
8 told we were smart, not in any condescending way, but you're all smart and you're just
9 expected to work hard. So, yeah, we all ended up going to college.

10 KC: Well, it's also quite a testament to your parents' ability to—

11 BH: Yeah, it really is. They didn't have two dimes to rub together, really.

12 KC: Very interesting. Now before we send you off to college, Mr. Henri, I want
13 to know about just the kind of backdrop of American life in Boston growing up. Of
14 course you're growing up, your entire existence up until the fall of the Berlin Wall was
15 the Cold War, I mean it's the background of life. What do you remember about the Cold
16 War as a kid growing up?

17 BH: It was easy to pick sides, clearly the Soviet Union were the bad guys and I
18 guess to a, not so much a direct extent, China, but we paid more attention to the Soviet
19 Union as I remember and it was a very simple and clear choice I think for people in the
20 United States generally, that was not an unusual thing. I think there was a particular strain
21 of Catholic anti-communism that I think had a pretty good impact on the people around
22 me, whether we recognized it or not. So I think that may have fed the business in a sort of
23 godless communism.

24 KC: Now it's interesting that you mention this kind of a Catholic anti-
25 communism, and I think pretty clearly that this was something that definitely existed.
26 What sort of manifestations of this Catholic anti-communism do you recall? I mean was
27 it something that during a sermon or during Mass that they would discuss this? Or was it
28 just more of a general approach and understanding, and where the church stood on
29 international issues? What do you recall about that?

30 BH: Well, I can remember, and some of it is family directed, too. I can barely
31 remember although I do remember the Senator McCarthy stuff going on. I can remember

1 my father being very strong pro-McCarthy because we needed to get the communists out
2 of the government, and I never engaged him in any discussion on that, I wasn't old
3 enough, but I can remember that part clearly. I don't recall really any sermons or
4 anything of that sort in church about anti-communist stuff, we got it—I think it was, I
5 won't say part of the curriculum, but certainly in high school the folks that taught us were
6 free with their opinions about human dignity and history and all the rest of it. But that's
7 how I recall it anyway.

8 KC: Sure, sure.

9 BH: As I say, things were presented in more of a black-and-white way, and
10 whether they were or weren't, or should or shouldn't've been, but that was my
11 perspective.

12 KC: Mm-hmm. Well, let's bring these two strings together, Catholicism, global
13 events, as well as Boston and that leads to, of course, John Kennedy. Growing up there,
14 you would've been in your teens when Kennedy became a national figure, obviously
15 elected to presidency in 1960.

16 BH: Freshman in high school.

17 KC: Freshman in high school. So what was your and your family's impression of
18 Kennedy?

19 BH: Kind of interesting, actually, for reasons that I guess are completely
20 unexplainable, my family was a Republican family (laughs).

21 KC: Is that right?

22 BH: Yeah. Well, but I think what it was, was it was more in the nature of local
23 politics. As a matter of fact, John Kennedy was my congressman. I lived in his
24 congressional district.

25 KC: Is that right?

26 BH: Yeah, and then Tip O'Neill took over from him, but same congressional
27 district, Cambridge and Brighton. But I was never enamored. I don't think of Kennedy
28 very much, again I sort of heard the stories from the dark side of the Kennedys, you
29 know. The old man, Joe, and people had strong feelings about the Kennedys, pro and con
30 in Boston. I mean he was even then I can remember him as sort of a charismatic and

1 romantic figure, there was no question about that, but I can remember voting in the
2 student election in high school voting for Nixon, one of two or three people in my class.

3 KC: Yeah, this is definitely not where I thought this conversation was going to go.

4 BH: Oh, I know. It's interesting, isn't it?

5 KC: Yes, it really is.

6 BH: Yeah, but I think a lot of it went back to more just basic local, ward politics
7 and maybe it was folks in the local ward who might've had some connection with
8 Kennedy, but my family just got on the wrong side of it, didn't care for it, and that
9 might've colored their—but it's odd when I tell, yeah, no, but Republicans.

10 KC: Yeah. Well they say that all politics is local, and that's a perfectly good
11 example of it.

12 BH: Well, Tip O'Neill was right on that one I think, yeah.

13 KC: Yeah, that's exactly right, and he would know. All right, so in high school,
14 Kennedy, New Englander, Massachusetts, Boston, Kennedy is president whether you
15 voted for him in a high school election or not.

16 BH: That's right.

17 KC: What were your recollections of this brief and turbulent presidency?

18 BH: It was a very exciting—my recollections at the time or what I think now?

19 KC: Either is fine.

20 BH: At the time, again, it's sort of the mystery and the magic of it, the way press
21 covered it, and I think there was kind of an excitement, probably the folks who had been
22 in World War II were coming into their prime at least as far as social engagement goes,
23 that would've been late '30s, '40s, I guess. So there probably was some pent-up energy
24 there to get in and change things, and maybe a generational change in the politics from
25 Eisenhower, Truman, Roosevelt, but there was certainly a great deal of excitement and
26 attraction about that. Of course, Kennedy appeared to—I think he did engage in the last
27 great anti-communist crusade with his Vietnam stuff. But I agreed with that. I thought it
28 was the appropriate thing to do. The fact that I didn't really pay too much attention to his
29 European foreign policy, which is really I think where the story was actually being told,
30 at least in '61, '62. He was developing a Vietnam policy or lack of policy was

1 developing, but his whole business with Khrushchev and Europe was fascinating to me,
2 too. Of course, the Missile Crisis I can remember that quite vividly too.

3 KC: Tell me about that, what are your memories of the Missile Crisis?

4 BH: You know I was never really, people talk about being afraid of nuclear war, I
5 don't know, maybe I had a sense of adventure or something. I paid attention to it, but I
6 never really thought anything was going to happen. I just wasn't sure what was going to
7 happen. But I can remember very vividly a Latin teacher, I guess I was a junior in high
8 school, maybe a sophomore, giving an assignment and then he said, "It will be tested on
9 this next week, if any of us are here." That sort of stuck in my head, but it was just sort of
10 very exciting time. I can't say that I was afraid, though.

11 KC: Interesting, very interesting. Well, of course, to bookend this, is the Kennedy
12 assassination. Where were you? What do you remember?

13 BH: Oh, yeah, I remember, yeah I remember exactly. I was a senior in high
14 school and I had been, and I mean it was on a Friday, and I can remember it was like one
15 o'clock or twelve-thirty or two o'clock whatever something like that, and they announced
16 it that the president had been shot, at that time they weren't even sure he was killed. But
17 of course, in Boston, it was—a complete pall went over the city, the whole country. All I
18 know is what happened in Boston and I think there was a particular wound for folks in
19 Boston by that time. So yeah, it was pretty surreal actually, all of that stuff unfolding in
20 slow motion, and then two or three days later Oswald being shot on national TV, it was
21 kind of a—again looking backward on it, it was just an extraordinary time to be around
22 and be young and be paying attention to it. But you sort of—well, gosh, this must be what
23 life is like, but obviously that was a pretty good period from 1961 to up through '74, '75.
24 I mean there was a lot of social dislocation for want of a better word there. It was—a pall
25 was cast over the city and things sort of changed then, I think. Lyndon Johnson inherited
26 whatever he inherited, in Boston people seemed to be very resentful of him, everything
27 from the sort of haughtiness that I don't know if it's still there or not, but there was a kind
28 of a haughtiness and superiority, kind of a Puritan strain in folks up there. They couldn't
29 get over the accent, for one thing, Lyndon Johnson's accent. They just thought he was a
30 sort of pretender to the throne, if you will.

1 KC: Mm-hmm, sure. Now you touched on something that I didn't ask you about
2 earlier. You were talking about the "social dislocation" and this kind of feeling of the
3 times. Obviously one of the major events or one of the major developments during this
4 time while you're growing up is the civil rights movement. I know Boston, depending on
5 who you talk to, it was fits and starts and there are problems with civil rights there, and as
6 you mentioned there was a segregated city in terms of neighborhood and background and
7 those kinds of things, and that's all true. What do you remember about the civil rights
8 movement as it affected you growing up, or Boston itself?

9 BH: For the most, it's interesting, for the most part it was something that folks in
10 the north could feel superior to the southern United States about and all of the voter
11 registration, Freedom Riders, and all the rest of it. It was only, I say later, '63, '64 when
12 the first intimations of, "Wait a minute, there are also problems with the Boston schools,"
13 for example. Even then I thought—I don't think I articulated it this way to myself then,
14 but I think there was a benefit to keeping whites and blacks who lived in the city at each
15 other's throats. Fighting over a smaller and smaller piece of pie. The people who lived in
16 the city, I think it was an economic and class thing more than it was ethnic. As you know
17 the Boston area of Newton, Brookline, Cambridge, we can name all those suburbs where
18 the folks tended to be, again, have a pretty rarified opinion of themselves as being liberal
19 and open, and they were demanding all sorts of the things of the people who lived in
20 Boston, but not in their schools. So I think it was a class thing more than anything else. If
21 folks had been paying attention, if I had been a little bit older, I mean I didn't have any
22 voting interest in any of this stuff. I think I would've seen it, "Look, wait a minute.
23 There's more to this than meets the eye and if folks really want to solve this problem it's
24 not something within the geographic boundaries of Boston, we probably want to include
25 the Brookline schools and Newton schools, then we'll see how much cooperation we
26 get."

27 KC: Right, right, sure. All right, with all this as a background for you, you
28 graduate in, I guess, what, 1964?

29 BH: From high school, correct.

30 KC: Graduate from high school in 1964. Did you have a college picked out? Did
31 you know where you were going to go?

1 BH: Well, I applied to a couple places and I didn't, fortunately, it never crossed
2 my mind, that, "How was I gonna pay for this?" So I applied to Boston College, and I
3 applied to Georgetown. It's an interesting little sideline, I applied to the School of
4 Foreign Service at Georgetown and I was accepted. I had the good fortune of being
5 accepted. I had to let them know, I think it was by the end of February whether I was
6 going to come, so no one in my family had ever been to college. If I knew then what I
7 know now, what I would've done is said, "Yes, I'm coming," and they would've found a
8 way for me to come up with the money, a combination of scholarships or whatever. But I
9 didn't. Heck, I didn't know a thing about any of that stuff. So I finally had to—and it was
10 for the grand total, room, board and tuition, of \$2300 a year.

11 KC: Wow.

12 BH: It might as well have been a quarter-of-a-million dollars. I just had no
13 money. So I wrote them and thanked them for admitting me but told them I wouldn't be
14 able to attend because of financial considerations. 1992, this is sort of off the topic, but
15 1992 when Bill Clinton is running for president they're interviewing his mother. I was
16 watching it on TV, and she was talking about Bill going to college and she said, and we
17 were the same age exactly, said, "In his senior year I asked him, 'Bill, where are you
18 gonna go to school?' and he said, 'Mother, I don't know. I haven't been accepted
19 anywhere.' She said, 'What do you mean? What about the University of Arkansas?' 'No,
20 I didn't apply there.' 'Well, what do you mean?' 'Well, I talked to the guidance
21 counselor, told him I wanted to do international relations and the guidance counselor told
22 me the best place in the country to go was this Georgetown. So that's the only place I've
23 applied,' and she thought to herself, 'Oh my God.'" He didn't hear anything until the end
24 of February, the beginning of March, so I always tell people Bill Clinton got my spot.

25 KC: So you're responsible in the way for the presidency.

26 BH: Who knows if it's true or not? But I always tell this joke, I can claim him or
27 you can blame me.

28 KC: Well, if I were in your shoes I would tell that story as often as I could, as
29 well.

30 BH: Well, it is a great story, and that was the interview I heard with her, but
31 anyway that's where I wanted to go but just for financial reasons couldn't go so I went to

1 Boston College and again, as it turns out, had the good fortune to have the substantial
2 assistance from scholarships which was really the only way I could do it.

3 KC: Now did you live at home while you went to B.C.?

4 BH: Yeah, I did, yeah. It was funny. I lived, just by geography, the college that I
5 went to was substantially closer to where I lived than the high school I went to.

6 KC: Is that right?

7 BH: Yeah, I did. Kind of funny, it used to take me like an hour, an hour-and-a-
8 half each way on the subway to get to the high school. I lived a mile-and-a-half or two
9 miles from Boston College.

10 KC: Is that right?

11 BH: Yeah, it's kind of unusual.

12 KC: What was your college experience like?

13 BH: Wonderful. I just had the best time. Again, it was, as things go now, fairly
14 rigorous in that we had a strong theology and philosophy core that I had to take, as well
15 as liberal arts courses, history, English, foreign languages. Then of course I had a major
16 that I could take, but it was structured, at least as a comparatively from when my kids
17 have gone through school here in the last ten years, it was just a wonderful education. It
18 was, I think the undergraduate school is about eight-thousand so I never had a graduate
19 student teach me. I always had a full faculty person teach me. Classes were, for the most
20 part, very small, twenty at the most, maybe twenty-five, I mean there were the occasional
21 history classes where you would have the amphitheater twice a week but even then you
22 would meet with a grad student for a discussion group of ten people, so it was a
23 wonderful, wonderful education.

24 KC: What was your major while you were there?

25 BH: Political Science.

26 KC: Poli-sci. Okay, well, I guess that would suit you for later life. Now being on
27 the campus of an eastern college and B.C. is different than a lot of others, we certainly
28 know that, what was the social environment and political environment like? You're there
29 from '64 through '68 I assume?

30 BH: Mm-hmm.

31 KC: What was the environment like there on campus?

1 BH: It was—it didn't become overtly political with respect to the war, at least that
2 I noticed, until probably '66 or '67. I mean there was discussion about it before that and
3 there would be speeches or discussions, pro and con involvement in Vietnam. But there
4 wasn't any of that, what I'd call the "firebrand" kind of crazy, shutting the school down
5 stuff at all, but it came more to the forefront in people's minds in '66, '67 I would think.
6 There was a lot of what I would call "vigorous discussion" about it, but not sort of
7 mindless taking of positions on either side of the issue.

8 KC: Right, well you're a bright kid, you're a political science major, I mean this
9 would inevitably, I would think, come to you in a classroom and through newspapers and
10 things like that. What was your take on the growing American involvement in Southeast
11 Asia?

12 BH: I thought it was right. Again, I was informed by the anti-communism of the
13 period and of the time. So I always thought that the war was an appropriate use of
14 American power. That was—well, I mean, actually from the beginning up through, I was
15 for the whole length of the policy, but I was—I mean if you're asking, "Was I in favor of
16 the war?" Yeah, I was, yeah.

17 KC: Mm-hmm. Well, a corollary to that, it's one thing to be in favor of the war, it
18 would be another thing to be aware of and approve of the way the war was being
19 prosecuted. Now were you that involved and that informed to know how the war was
20 going militarily?

21 BH: No. I mean I don't think so in the sense that what I knew and what I learned
22 was from what I heard on television and read in the newspapers. I mean, I kept up with
23 political magazines, or probably read more than most folks on that stuff, but again I was
24 getting my information from the news sources, communication sources, so I mean I
25 didn't have any inside pipeline to anything.

26 KC: All right. Well, here's something that certainly would not have missed your
27 view, missed your ears, missed your reading of the papers, and that of course is the Tet
28 Offensive of 1968. You're a senior in college. We've still got the draft going on, so
29 Vietnam's out there and possibly lurking for you. We understand college deferments and
30 you're a senior, so college deferment is likely to disappear for you pretty quickly.

1 BH: Well, grad school. I had planned to go to law school after college and in '67
2 General Hershey got rid of the grad school deferments except medical school folks.

3 KC: Right, right. So here the Tet Offensive comes rolling down the pike and the
4 media coverage in the United States, there's the impression that this was this massive
5 surprise that the US wasn't ready for, that the war had taken an ugly turn here. Then of
6 course there's the mistrust of military and political leaders as a result of this, as well.
7 What did the Tet Offensive mean to you as a young man who's getting ready to graduate
8 college?

9 BH: Well it—again, I really wasn't, of course I didn't have a dog in the hunt then
10 directly, I wasn't—I mean it didn't particularly frighten me. Obviously, the fighting had
11 intensified. Did I think that there was some sort of breakdown in the story we were being
12 told as opposed to what was actually going on? No, I can't say that I did. Even then I
13 think I understood it, probably not nearly in the way that I came to understand later,
14 there's a certain mindlessness and once things start happening, nothing is predicable
15 anymore. No, I wasn't—it didn't bother me, and I had a family friend and several
16 neighborhood kids who I grew up with who were killed during that period of time in
17 Vietnam. So it wasn't like it didn't have an impact on me. I mean I knew folks, one of my
18 parents' godchildren was killed at Con Thien in I guess January of '68. I think that's
19 right, January, February. So I mean it was around then. I knew people, several people,
20 who were killed in it. But can I say that it frightened me? No. Can I say that I thought,
21 “God this policy is a failure. What the heck are we doing?” No, I can't say, I mean I
22 really didn't even think that, I just, well this is what happens in war. What I do remember
23 is Lyndon Johnson, and I'm thinking this was in March of '68 but you can correct on the
24 date, but when he announced that he wasn't going to run again, I don't know if you
25 remember that he was—

26 KC: Sure, that was March '68.

27 BH: Okay. I can remember thinking to myself, “What a marvelous country this is,
28 that a political leader would see that he's not the guy to lead the wagon anymore.” I was
29 twenty-one or twenty-two and I mean I didn't particularly like Lyndon Johnson at all, or
30 didn't dislike him, I sure didn't like him. I'm thinking, “It's fairly marvelous that the
31 system works in this way,” and I thought that that might be some hope there, that okay if

1 it was a personal thing, maybe this is the way to do it, get some new blood in there and
2 see if we can't get things resolved, however you obviously wanted to win the war, but get
3 things resolved. I still thought about it in terms of winning and losing.

4 KC: Well, it's really remarkable that at that age you could see that kind of benefit
5 out of the American system and to harbor that kind of hope that things would work out.

6 BH: And it's funny, I remember very specifically I was in the library of Boston
7 College, and I saw a newspaper about his speech, it was a political cartoon, something
8 about Johnson, and I just stopped and it was like a revelation to me about my impression
9 was, "God, this is just an incredible system, how that works," I was just, "awe" may be a
10 too strong of a word, but I was just fascinated that this stuff really does work, it's not just
11 lip service.

12 KC: Mm-hmm. All right, now you finish your degree there in the spring of 1968.
13 Where were you going to go from there?

14 BH: Well, I knew I was going into the service. As I said in October and
15 November of '67 General Hershey, who's the head of the Selective Service at the time
16 said, "No more grad school deferment." Up to that point I just figured I was going to
17 continue on, go to law school although I had also talked about maybe getting a Ph.D. in
18 political science or philosophy with a couple different people. Fortunately, I was
19 [disabused] of that. I mean I didn't follow it and it turned out to be the right thing for me.
20 So I was planning to do some further education but, as I say, like in the fall of '67 it
21 became clear to me and I said, "This isn't going to work for me, at least right now." I
22 graduated in June 4th, 1968 and literally by the 7th or 8th of June I had my draft card
23 reclassified me 1A from my local draft board, it was literally that fast.

24 KC: Yeah, you're going.

25 BH: Yeah, that's right. Which didn't really bother—it hadn't been anything that I
26 was planning, but it really it didn't trouble me at all. I just went, well okay that's sort
27 of—I'm trying to think of a way to put it, sort of the price you pay, you know. I think we
28 all have a covenant with our civilizations and depending on when things, when you are at
29 certain ages and certain things are going on, you may need to pay rent to live in the
30 civilization, you know.

1 KC: Right, sure, sure. Of course, you grew up as a child of World War II-era
2 parents and then the Cold War and service was a different thing.

3 BH: Absolutely it was.

4 KC: People's understanding of community service and public service were
5 different than they are now.

6 BH: I think they tried, I think they tried. It was more or less expected of you and it
7 didn't make any difference. It wasn't the sense of *noblesse oblige* at all regardless of your
8 socio-economic class, it was just something that everyone was pretty much expected to
9 do.

10 KC: Right, right. Now you graduate and receive your draft upgrade notice in June
11 of '68. Now of course, 1968 obviously is still one of the most turbulent years in the
12 country's history and we've got the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., we've got
13 the assassination of Bobby Kennedy later on in '68, the Democratic National Convention,
14 all of the turmoil really bubbling to the surface. What was that year like for you? It's a
15 very, very important year, I would think, in your life's history. What was '68 like?

16 BH: Yeah, it was, and Martin Luther King I think was killed in I'm gonna say
17 March or April of 1968.

18 KC: April.

19 BH: Yeah, and I could remember that, and that was one of those things where I
20 thought, "Things are going off the track here. This is crazy for people to react in this,"
21 and of course Kennedy had been killed, too, but I just thought that was an isolated deal. I
22 didn't—well, it was the first one, and I'm not minimizing it, but I just, well our president
23 was assassinated, but Martin Luther King, all of a sudden you're thinking, "This is really
24 taking an ugly turn. I mean this is close to urban warfare in the sense this is kind of
25 crazy." At the same time we have that and then I'm thinking, "God, this is what happens
26 when you push systems to the edge, maybe we need to be a little more conservative
27 about," not in the political sense, "but it takes time to do all this." I can't say that that was
28 the right answer, but I can remember thinking at the time, "Gosh, social change
29 happening too fast results in this stuff." But I can remember thinking that when Martin
30 Luther King was killed, because Bobby Kennedy was first week in June I think of '68
31 somewhere, it was right around the time I graduated from college and I just thought to

1 myself, “Wow, this is really strange.” Of course, Eugene McCarthy was also running in
2 the primaries at that time. That might’ve been what forced Johnson to make his speech.
3 Again Bobby Kennedy, who I thought was sort of an interloper, you may see my anti-
4 Kennedy side.

5 KC: Sure. Yes, I do.

6 BH: Where he sort of sat around and waited for Eugene McCarthy to see what
7 happened, then I think Bobby Kennedy jumped in and said, “Okay, this is for me. I see
8 that there are some legs to this anti-war stuff.” That’s my opinion. So I didn’t like that, it
9 was not clear yet, I just didn’t like the Kennedys for whatever reason. But again, just a
10 horrible deal—obviously we got really off the track now. Then you had the convention in
11 ’68 in Chicago which was kind of nuts, but again I’m thinking, “As bad as Daly and the
12 police were, this is what happens when you get so aggressive seeking social change that
13 you have anarchy,” and that troubled me a bit, too.

14 KC: Mm-hmm, sure, and I’m sure you weren’t alone in those feelings.

15 BH: I wouldn’t think so. Again, by that time I’m sort of separating myself, my
16 father’s political opinions meant nothing to me. If anything I was maybe a bit disdainful
17 of them. I mean it’s just a natural separation for us. So I know among my father’s friends
18 they were still, “My country, right or wrong,” and I’m not making light of it or making
19 fun of it, but I was sort of thinking about things in a different way, but coming ultimately
20 to the same conclusion that they were in terms of thumbs up, thumbs down on the war for
21 example.

22 KC: What was it becoming for you? Still thumbs up?

23 BH: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

24 KC: Okay, all right.

25 BH: Maybe it will unfold in a strange way after a lot of thought in between now
26 and then, I think still thumbs up in a certain sense.

27 KC: Sure, absolutely. Now you’re graduating again in June and you know that the
28 little man at the draft board is gonna send you a letter eventually. Do you wait around for
29 that letter? Or do you—

30 BH: No, no, no I enlisted.

31 KC: You enlisted, okay, so you volunteered. When did you do that?

1 BH: I went into—well I think I enlisted in February, no I'm sorry September of
2 1968. I applied for Navy OCS (Officer Candidate School) and that was just impossible to
3 get into at the time. They were taking like ten or twelve people from New England, most
4 of them were science, I think they had one non-science, as I checked into it, I applied but
5 I got through a couple levels and they said, "No." So then I went down to Tremont Street
6 and completely unscientifically went to the recruiting station and talked to the recruiting
7 sergeant and enlisted for infantry OCS.

8 KC: Is that right?

9 BH: Well, it's an interesting story, I mean it's a funny story. I knew I was going
10 in anyway so it's not like it made any difference. But I go in and this staff sergeant, his
11 name doesn't make any difference, but I joke I'll remember him, I'm gonna find him
12 someday. But he, I explained, so he kind of pulls his chair up pretty conspiratorially says
13 to me, "What is it you wanna do?" And I said, "Well, I think Army intelligence or
14 something like that," I'm thinking political science, and he said, "Look, you're a smart
15 guy, you graduated from college, you'll understand this. We can get you in military
16 intelligence, but infantry OCS is the liberal arts of the Army." And I bought it hook line
17 and sinker. I did. I wish I could—I bet I sound pretty stupid but it's the truth. But the
18 reality is I would've gone in anyway, I was enlisting anyway, and as it turns out I was
19 happy to go to infantry OCS. I didn't care.

20 KC: Sure, sure, you consider just the way the war was grinding up first
21 lieutenants. Yeah, I'm sure that your opinion changed after a while. So you—

22 BH: So I enlisted then, and then they said, "Okay, you report on November 4th
23 1968," so I absentee voted. I think it was the first time I'd ever voted. I absentee voted
24 and the day I went in was the day of the election, the Nixon-Humphrey election.

25 KC: What did your parents think about your enlistment?

26 BH: I mean it sounds funny, we never talked about it. My father generally one
27 time said, "Did you ever think about going in the Reserves?" I had, and I said, "No, I
28 don't think it's right for me to be in favor of a war and—"

29
30
31

1 **Interview with Bill Henri**

2 **Session [2] of [4]**

3 **28 June 2011**

4 KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Mr. Bill Henri.
5 Today is 28 June 2011. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas Tech University,
6 and Mr. Henri is joining me by telephone from his office in Houston, Texas. Mr. Henri
7 when we left off last time, we were cut short by a technological goof or a problem, you
8 were just about ready to join the United States Army. This is November of 1968, you've
9 talked to the recruiter, you've made the decision to join, so pick up the story there please.

10 BH: Well I—actually that was in September of 1968, and then my time was
11 scheduled for the first week in November and so November 4th 1968 I reported to the
12 Boston army base and took my oath of whatever you take, swearing you in, and off I
13 went I was officially a member of the Army. I went from there to basic training at Fort
14 Dix, New Jersey, which, basic training is always interesting. It's a very democratic
15 experience and I truly mean that, 'cause it's very, very interesting. I was at Fort Dix for I
16 guess until January of 1969, and then went from Fort Dix to advanced individual training
17 at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where I was trained to be a combat engineer. Road
18 building, bridge building, some demolition stuff. What you would think of typically as a
19 combat engineer or engineering, road clearing, mine sweeping, that sort of stuff. But I
20 knew the whole time my deal was that I was going to go to OCS at Fort Benning. So I
21 finished up both the basic training and the AIT (advanced individual training) training, I
22 think both eight weeks. So I reported to Fort Benning first part of March I believe of—
23 yeah, first part of March of 1969.

24 KC: Let me interrupt you there if I may, Mr. Henri. Now you mentioned a
25 moment ago that basic training, you seemed to have some sort of a strong feelings or
26 thoughts on that, you said it was a "great democratic experience," if you would and I
27 think I know where you're going with this, but if you would describe basic training to me
28 and describe what you mean by this democratic experience of basic training.

29 BH: Well, I mean it's an incredible task that they have, and I think they do it quite
30 well for the most part. They take a bunch of civilians from disparate backgrounds, socio-
31 economic, educational, geographic. In eight weeks they whip you into, you're no longer

1 from any of those places, you are now a private in the United States Army. As a matter of
2 organizational behavior and indoctrination, for want of a better word, it's something
3 marvelous to behold when you're in the middle of it. Of course, you don't think and
4 you're up running around and you're looking foolish, working hard for twelve, thirteen
5 hours a day. But it's pretty marvelous to behold how they do that. We had a number,
6 well, I can't remember the breakdown, we had a lot of enlistees and a lot of draftees.
7 Draftees sometimes were, "Well, they'll get my body but they won't get my mind," and
8 so surprise they end up doing it to a greater or lesser degree. It's fairly interesting for just
9 as organizational psychology. But it was an interesting time because there were a lot of
10 people, as I recall the average education level in my basic training company was about
11 fourteen-plus years that they said the company commander told us. We had a lot of
12 college folks apparently who were in the same boat I was, that either hadn't planned to go
13 to graduate school or had planned but the deferment disappeared, so we had a good
14 mixture of what I would call college grads and along with guys straight out of high
15 school or whatever. I was a little bit older. I was I guess, I don't know, twenty-two, I
16 guess, twenty-two, twenty-three, somewhere in there, twenty-two. It was just very
17 interesting to see how—some folks thought it was terrific 'cause they got to sleep in to
18 five-thirty in the morning. It was a terrific experience really.

19 KC: What was the routine like there? What do you recall?

20 BH: Up at very early, five or five-thirty I think, and then everything was very
21 regimented. Everything we had to do it in a certain way. Again, it's part of their
22 indoctrination, bunks were made a certain way, you'd report to the chow hall in a certain
23 fashion. There was a tremendous amount of physical training. Then the rest of it we
24 marching and things like that, there was not much really in the form of real hard
25 soldiering and a little bit of I think rifle range for a few weeks or something. It was more
26 to really turn you from a civilian into someone who was in the Army. It was highly
27 regimented. We got very little time off. I think we might've gotten one weekend off,
28 maybe two I don't remember. I can't say I enjoyed it, but I didn't really dislike it, it was
29 just something to be done and get up early and as I say run around and do as they told
30 you. But I really didn't mind it that much.

1 KC: How did you feel you did? Do you feel that you did a good job there? Was
2 there anything that gave you particular difficulty, or anything you particularly enjoyed?

3 BH: No, there wasn't really anything that gave me any difficulty at all. It was
4 interesting to see how just by virtue of the fact that you were always running and doing
5 physical activity, that over the course of time you—there was an introductory physical PT
6 (physical training) test they called it, physical training test, and for the most part it was
7 agility. But at the very end of it there was a mile run, and it was interesting to see how my
8 time dropped in the mile run over an eight-week period simply because I was running
9 everywhere and I guess you become habituated or acclimated or a training effect or
10 something I don't know what it is, but physically you feel stronger and better. They
11 convince you a little bit that you are getting stronger and better, and "Boy, you're going
12 to be a good soldier," and that sounds simple minded now, but I think it really does work
13 with people. People really start to say, "Yeah, this is good, I am getting better at this stuff
14 and there's something to it."

15 KC: So that's your earliest connection, I guess, part of your military career. What
16 did you—do you still harbor this vision of going into Army intelligence at this stage? Or
17 are you just trying to get through basic training?

18 BH: You mean in basic training? No, I was just moving forward, you can't stop
19 the clock sort of—I just knew you do the eight weeks here, and you go to the next base
20 and you do the eight weeks there, and then you go to the OCS program and you do that. I
21 didn't know that—I didn't know that I wouldn't go into military intelligence. I think that
22 sort of evolved but once I got to Fort Benning everything became pretty clear to me what
23 Uncle Sam's plans were for me. But no, I didn't have any long-term goals, military goals,
24 I just knew the eight weeks, eight weeks, and then six months of OCS and then we'll see
25 what happens.

26 KC: All right, well, what about your time there at Fort Leonard Wood? You say
27 this was combat engineering. What was that like?

28 BH: It was more of the same, it was a little bit—it was not quite as regimented.
29 We could have one set of civilian clothes that we could wear on the weekends. I think we
30 got just about every weekend off unless you had KP (kitchen patrol) or something. But
31 we had every weekend off and we would go to Columbia, Missouri, which I think was—

1 I think it's Columbia, where the University of Missouri is. We'd go up there and kind of
2 enjoy ourselves. Went to St. Louis. It was a little bit, not quite as rigorous twenty-four-
3 seven. But again it was—I mean you really were a construction worker. They taught you
4 how to put culverts in roads, and build expedient bridges, and a little bit of detonation and
5 stuff you know explosive stuff, mine sweeping and things like that. To me it wasn't
6 particularly challenging, but it wasn't—I mean I was just never really wasn't very much
7 interested in it.

8 KC: Probably not enough explosives training, it sounds like, to really trip your
9 trigger, as well.

10 BH: No. No, no, no not really, no it was just very fundamental stuff.

11 KC: Mm-hmm, right. Okay, you finish your time there and you say that was what,
12 eight weeks?

13 BH: Mm-hmm.

14 KC: Okay, and then you go to infantry OCS here at Fort Benning. All right, so
15 this is where you're starting to really get serious about what you're going to be doing, the
16 training, the understanding. Tell me about your time there at Fort Benning.

17 BH: Well, I'll tell you, that OCS that six-month period was an incredible crucible
18 to measure yourself. I think how the training was structured, and for the most part it was
19 well structured, there's some of it that I think might've been in my opinion misguided a
20 little bit. But you are under tremendous physical and psychological, and to a lesser degree
21 intellectual stress. I mean it was just from morning to night, no breathing room, lots of
22 pressure. I think part of their approach was to put you under pressure, see how you
23 reacted. They assigned the company—there was sort of a shadow command structure
24 within the company, that there was a student company commander and there would be
25 student platoon leaders and XOs (executive officers) and you would be graded both by
26 your tactical officers, who are these combination mother, father, grandmother, and
27 confessor I guess, as well as your peers. Your peers would also grade you, too. So it
28 was—physically it was tremendously grueling. A lot of—it was a much more intense
29 than, say, the physical aspects of basic training.

1 KC: Now you've mentioned that there were some things that you thought perhaps
2 could've been done differently, could've been done better. What are you referring to
3 there?

4 BH: I think there was at the time—there may still be I don't know—a concept
5 that, gosh, if we put these guys under artificial pressure, we see how they will react in
6 combat. I don't know that there's really a correlation. I'm not convinced that there is. I
7 used to think, "Maybe they're right. Maybe they get to see how people react here and if
8 they can't bear up under being screamed at and having to make decisions at the same
9 time, maybe that's an indication they might not be good at combat arms leadership."
10 Maybe that's true, maybe it's not. I'm just not as convinced now as I was then that one
11 equals the other. I think it's important that they find out to the extent they can who would
12 be good or not so good at combat squad unit leadership and for the sake of the individual
13 person and the units do something to separate you from that course. But I'm not sure
14 there's a direct correlation, or at least as much as I thought that there probably, at the time
15 I thought there was.

16 KC: If you can give me some examples of the types of stressful situations under
17 which they would put you, and what kind of results would they expect?

18 BH: You would be given more, both individually and, as a platoon is typically the
19 smallest unit you operated in, you would be given more things to do than could possibly
20 be accomplished within a period of time and I think, well, they never told you this, but I
21 think if you were observant enough you figured out part of the thing was they wanted to
22 see how you could prioritize, triage the issues knowing you weren't going to get
23 everything done, figuring out what was the more important thing to do, and getting that
24 done. They also tried to, part of it was, to see if you could adapt, see if you could do—
25 this is a crazy example. You are always running, apart from everything else, you could
26 really eat off the floors of those barracks, the floors looked like mirrors. We used to rent
27 buffers, professional buffers, everyone did it, and you would constantly have people
28 assigned to buffing the floor and waxing the floor, every day the floor was waxed. I mean
29 it sounds crazy, and the telling of it, it sounds crazy now, but there would be an
30 inspection announced for six o'clock in the morning. Well, they would come through
31 sometime in the middle of the night and cut all the plugs off the buffers. So you either

1 had someone who had been an electrician in a prior life and knew how to fix them, or you
2 figured out, okay, they don't work, so what do we do then? Do we make—do the floors
3 look as shiny as they would with a buffer? No, but you get towels and you go and do it,
4 you get your butt chewed up by the tac officer and you understand he probably figures,
5 “Okay, this guy figured out how to adapt to the situation.” Some guys never figured that
6 out I don't think, the people who did well and got through for the most part figured that
7 out.

8 KC: Yeah, that's an interesting little vignette there. I mean because it really does
9 give a kind of a foothold or handhold we can get a hold of that and look at it and say,
10 “Well that seems strange,” but I guess you understand the method to their madness. Were
11 there any other episodes like this? Or any other issues? Any other things, tools, that they
12 would use like this?

13 BH: They would always have the boot polishing stuff, everything was to a high
14 gloss, the rooms would be—you had inspection every day, and it sounds crazy, you were
15 supposed to have a picture of I forget now, a four-by-eight in the frame, of a loved one. It
16 had to be, these aren't the exact measurements, but they would like it should be placed
17 exactly four and three-quarter-inches from the front right corner of the dresser, and three
18 and an eighth inch from the right-hand-side of the dresser. It was just crazy stuff that you
19 were constantly having to adjust to. Everything had to be folded in a certain way, beds
20 had to be made in a certain way. I had a roommate, the poor guy was, I wouldn't say he
21 didn't have a sense of humor, he was just so darn serious that he would get up, and it was
22 an exhausting thing we did, and he would get up at three-thirty or four in the morning to
23 put an extra coat of wax on his boots. I said to him one time, it doesn't matter what his
24 name was, I said, “Look, no one as far as I know ever really got thrown out of here for
25 not having boot shined to a certain specificity,” they did get thrown out if they didn't pass
26 their tactics exam. It turned out the guy washed out, he just sort of cracked not in the
27 sense that he had a nervous breakdown, but he just couldn't take it anymore. He just kind
28 of broke down weeping and off he went.

29 KC: I'll be darned. Did you see much of that?

30 BH: Well, that's the only one I saw, I think it was just he was highly stressed. I
31 don't think it was a breakdown in any stretch of the imagination, but it just got to be too

1 much for him. There was a great washout rate and my guess is we probably, whatever the
2 size of the company was when we started, we probably got rid of forty percent of the
3 company that quit or washed out as they called it, over the six-month period. So that's a
4 fairly high washout rate, all sorts of reasons I guess why people either quit or get washed
5 out. Some folks just frankly didn't—they weren't cut out for that sort of job. They were
6 terrific folks and great guys and would be interesting probably to see them now, but it
7 just wasn't their thing.

8 KC: Sure, that's absolutely right. The Army's looking for some sort of standard
9 that they can have everyone meet and then you're just dealing with individuals, and
10 individuals deal with things differently.

11 BH: Sure, well, and certainly in that branch, by that time it became clear to me,
12 that was 1969 when they were grinding through, they needed a lot of junior infantry
13 officers, small unit leaders. So it became pretty clear to me that I was going nowhere but
14 the infantry. Some people are cut out for it, and some people aren't. I'm sure some of the
15 folks who for whatever reason chose not to stay or were asked to leave would've done
16 wonderfully in Signal Corps or administrative or any other thing. I think it's probably a
17 peculiar set of skills that they were looking for.

18 KC: Sure, and of course that makes sense. As you realize your career is probably
19 gonna be here in the infantry, how do you feel about that? Are you feeling okay about it?

20 BH: Oh, yeah, sure. Yeah, I'm twenty-three, twenty-four years old, you're bullet
21 proof. Sure. No, yeah, no, and I mean you believe it. One, you are in tremendous physical
22 condition; two all you do all day is learn about the tactics, and the weapons, and you run
23 and you do PT so you start to believe you're sort of like Superman a little bit, not really
24 it's a little bit flip, but you start believing that you can be pretty good at this stuff.

25 KC: Well, you bring up a good point there, what about your typical day at Fort
26 Benning? From the time you get up, take me through your day. You're talking about
27 tactics, you're talking about, obviously, the PT and these different things. Give me the
28 average day for you if there was such a thing there at Benning.

29 BH: Get up at five o'clock in the morning. You're in formation in about five
30 minutes to ten minutes, then supposedly an inspection for your rooms or inspection—you
31 can imagine people running crazy. You go out and then typically, probably six days a

1 week PT, but the barracks that we were in at Fort Benning was literally right across the
2 street from the Airborne training area, so there was the Airborne track was, I'm gonna
3 say it was two-and-a-half or three miles. We would do some basic stretching and PT, and
4 then we would run that track once or twice, or however long they wanted to harass you,
5 once, once-and-a-half, but we travel a lot—and all of this is before breakfast, you see. So
6 you generally have breakfast at six o'clock in the morning, I think is my recollection.
7 Then you go back to your room, and you had to get the whole area ready for inspection.
8 Then from seven o'clock in the morning to whenever you'd be in training, you'd be
9 maybe back to eat lunch in the chow hall, more often than not you were fed out in the
10 field. Then you're out all afternoon and you had to study, believe it or not at night, the
11 Army training manuals for whatever course of instruction you were in. They examined
12 you fairly, I mean written exams, they examined you fairly frequently. So you were
13 required, there was a mandatory study hall for two hours at night where there could be no
14 noise at all, and people had to be at their desk reading their manuals. Then, again, the
15 ever-present buzz of the buffers and the waxing was going on at all times, and I think you
16 went to bed theoretically at ten-thirty. There was some sort of Army requirement of X
17 number hours of sleep, but you really couldn't get everything done in that time so people
18 sort of worked on the sly after lights out to do some things.

19 KC: How about you?

20 BH: No. I think I figured out—I mean I really did well, but I figured out early on
21 what was important and what wasn't. You could get demerits for foolish things, in my
22 opinion, foolish things, or things that they just wanted to gig you on, if you got so many
23 than you had to march tours, which you go get your rifle and you have to clean it, get
24 inspected, it's on the weekends, then you march back and forth a hundred feet each way
25 or something. It's sort of a harassment deal. I bet you I did more than anyone else in my
26 platoon on that, and I figured out that I'm not gonna be having fun on the weekends
27 anyway so if I can feel a little bit rebellious within the system and not be crazy about
28 things, then that's fine because again they couldn't stop the clock. I knew that on August
29 29th that class was going to graduate and be commissioned and I was gonna be part of it,
30 in my mind. I think that was a fairly healthy way to get through it all.

1 KC: Now you've mentioned this little bit of rebellion that you were able to create,
2 or to feel that you are a part of. Was that important to you, in the midst of all this
3 regimentation?

4 BH: Oh, I think so. Yeah, I think it was. It was rebellious only in a relative sense.
5 You're in an absolutely disciplined environment, but it was kind of fun to see if you
6 could get away with things.

7 KC: Such as what? Give me an example.

8 BH: Sneak out at night and go to a 7/11 on post and get popsicles for everyone in
9 the platoon. That sounds crazy, doesn't it? But it took planning, it took a lot of things,
10 'cause if you get caught you would be thrown out of the whole program, or at least that
11 was the scuttlebutt and it probably—if you were otherwise good, I think they'd make
12 your life miserable for a while. I don't think they'd kick you out, but maybe it was a
13 relatively daring thing to do. I guess it allowed a little bit of rebelliousness, it's kind of
14 challenge and fun.

15 KC: In the midst of all this, are you receiving training from veterans who have
16 been to Vietnam?

17 BH: Yes.

18 KC: And what kind of, I don't wanna put words in your mouth, what sort of
19 things would they tell you, or would they tell you things about what you were going to
20 face in Vietnam?

21 BH: Well it was—you may or may not know that's where the infantry school for
22 the Army is, is at Fort Benning, so we had instructors who were assigned to certain
23 committee so the folks who might also be teaching, it was a career course which was
24 seniors, captains, and majors would go it was part of your ticket to be punched as you
25 moved along, they would be in the career course too so we had the benefit, frankly for the
26 most part, I think really some pretty good instruction. Ultimately it was very little of what
27 I would call "war story telling." I can remember one time, and it was apparently hot off
28 the presses, but do you remember the Hamburger Hill business?

29 KC: Sure.

30 BH: We were at some stage of our technical training, and it must've been like
31 within two or three weeks of Hamburger Hill because the instructors talking about

1 lessons learned from this deal that had just gone on. They would send all these after
2 action reports to the infantry school I think for analysis, doctors call it I guess “morbidity
3 and mortality analysis.” But okay, what went wrong here, what went right, what should
4 we have done differently, and so as I place it I’m thinking this is probably like May or
5 June of 1969 is my recollection. I think Hamburger Hill was sometime not too long
6 before that, so you were sort of cutting the edge in that sense. It was not a lot of war story
7 telling like they might do in basic training to try to spook people to, “You guys better pay
8 attention because in eight weeks you’re gonna be in the jungle.” But there was some—
9 the instruction was good, but for the most part I didn’t think there was a lot of the BS
10 storytelling and war story stuff.

11 KC: Right. Did you feel comfortable that when you left your time there at
12 Benning, did you feel comfortable that you were properly trained? Did you feel good
13 about what you knew and what you believed you were capable of?

14 BH: Yeah, I think I did, I think I—that’s a very good question. I think I did.
15 Again, when you finish, you have a feeling that you really—and not a feeling, you really
16 have accomplished something because of the rigorousness of that program and the
17 number of people who do dropout. So you have a feeling, “I must know something or I
18 couldn’t’ve made it through.” After the fact, I guess maybe later this—I don’t know that
19 anything really prepares you for the actual thing. I think you learn concepts of leadership.
20 I think you learn some fundamental concepts of tactics and strategy, map reading, things
21 like that. But the actual experience, I don’t know that anything can really prepare you for,
22 probably Ranger training could to some degree and even there as close as that gets,
23 there’s just no substitute for when the actual stuff goes on. What I did learn, and I may be
24 jumping ahead of you here, out of OCS we were assigned different places and I happened
25 to be assigned back to the candidate brigade. I was assigned to be a tac officer.

26 KC: Is that right?

27 BH: My tac officer called me into his office and he said, “Don’t blame me,” he
28 said, “I didn’t volunteer you for this.” So it’s like going through OCS all over again
29 except you had to be up earlier. But I was assigned to the candidate brigade, but I ended
30 up in, there was a program called, instant NCOs (non-commissioned officers), Shake-n-
31 Bake. Are you familiar with that term?

1 KC: Sure.

2 BH: There was a program, they needed certain branches of the Army, they needed
3 junior NCOs in the worst way and I think probably by, now we're talking '69 now, '69,
4 '70, they have lost a lot of guys who had been in the Army since '64, '65 either through
5 attrition, normal people in and out, or people wanting to do the two years—anyway, they
6 had this program where they would identify folks in advanced training who were pretty
7 smart, had some leadership capability. I forget and I don't know how they did it but then
8 they could volunteer for, and I think it was volunteer. I don't think you could be assigned
9 to it, NCO training and I think it was a twelve-week course as I remember it. If those
10 guys finished they would come out as sergeants, E-5s, and the top three or four guys
11 came out as E-6s, which was a pretty good grade. I mean it took enlisted folks a long time
12 to work their way up through the ranks to do that. But they called it Shake-n-Bakes
13 NCOs, or instant NCOs, and they were also part of the candidate brigade at Fort Benning
14 which was both OCS and this NCO program. I was assigned out to the NCO program
15 kind of at the last minute because of some—I got married so I needed an extra week, so
16 they said, "Well, we'll send you out." So anyway that's what I did, but I learned an awful
17 lot, I became friendly with—I was the XO or the training officer, we had a company
18 commander, but most of the training was done, they had E-7s who were assigned to these
19 platoons, like in OCS we had second lieutenants assigned to be the tac officers so kind of
20 the tac NCOs had that—there were a lot of NCOs. But I became friendly with one or two
21 of the NCOs and I learned an awful lot from them, we just kind of hit it off, I think I did a
22 good enough job for them. There's always some suspicion, rightful or wrongful, between
23 NCOs and junior officers, a lot of the time they think junior officers are dangerous if you
24 give them a compass or a map, and they may be right. But for whatever combination of
25 reasons, I seemed to hit it off with these guys and I know one in particular. I know I
26 learned an awful lot from him. He had, I guess, had had at that time three tours in
27 Vietnam with the 1st Cav and I forget who else, but had done a lot of stuff, he was a pure
28 combat guy and so he sort of took me under his wing in the sense that we became as
29 friendly as you can in military. I mean we weren't drinking buddies particularly or
30 anything but I learned an awful lot from him. Practically speaking more so than I
31 probably did in the six months of OCS, but the practical side of things.

1 KC: Well, tell me about that. What sort of things did you learn from this E-7?

2 BH: Sort of to be alert and not to be, I don't wanna say mindlessly following
3 orders because that sounds like—I mean you need to pay attention to what's going on,
4 you need to be aware of the quality of the people you're working with. You need to be
5 constantly paying attention to what's going on around you, and you get that of course in
6 OCS as an academic discipline. But this guy, he would tell stories and, again, they
7 weren't bragging stories, they were fairly hair-raising stories he would talk about, but he
8 was telling them for the reason of explaining things to me, "This is why you should do
9 this," or "This is why you need to pay attention to this." I mean he was—absolutely the
10 best NCO I ran across in three years in the Army. He was older than me. As it turns out
11 he wasn't an old guy at all he was early thirties, but I was in my mid-twenties so I
12 thought of him as an old guy at the time. Just a wonderful source of practical information.

13 KC: One of the things that I hear over and over again, especially from some of the
14 officers that I've interviewed, is that during the Vietnam War that the US Army had a
15 lack of good NCOs, and that there was the Shake-n-Bake program that you witnessed,
16 was just a way to try to make up for that lack, but of course with the lack of experience
17 and the lack of time and all of these things that went into that particular NCO program,
18 that it didn't turn out as well as people would've hoped, it was just a matter of filling
19 numbers. What was your opinion of the NCO corps as you saw it in your time in the
20 Army?

21 BH: My time in the Army?

22 KC: Yes.

23 BH: Well.

24 KC: Or even here at Fort Benning.

25 BH: Yeah, again, the senior NCO, the one who I identified this guy in his early
26 thirties as being older, but guys who were E-6s, E-7s, people who were making the Army
27 a career. For the most part, I mean, they were very highly motivated. As they got closer
28 to their retirement, maybe not so highly motivated and I understand that, I mean if you
29 get one year left you wanna do some easy time in the States, they weren't interested in
30 one more tour in Vietnam probably. But what I call the "professional NCOs," my
31 experience was they were terrific. There are some guys who are not particularly good but

1 in any field of endeavor that I've been involved before or since you realize, that's gonna
2 happen, not everyone's gonna be Sergeant Rock of Easy Company, but they were all—
3 the guys that I worked with at Benning were very, very capable guys. Now the young
4 guys going through our training, God they were just kids. Some of them might've been
5 college grads, some of them—for the most part they weren't, they were probably pretty
6 smart guys who had been to junior college or out of high school but were high in IQ, you
7 know good IQ, and had some leadership skills. In that job and being an NCO, at least in
8 the infantry, requires you to be a little bit grizzled in my opinion. If you're going to be in
9 charge of a squad or you're going to be a platoon sergeant, people who are reporting to
10 you have got to believe you earned your stripes. If you come straight through basic and
11 then AIT, and then you become a sergeant through this instant NCO program, I'm not
12 sure that you really get the—you don't have that to deliver the package, and eighteen,
13 nineteen, twenty year old kids, privates and specialists, they figure that stuff out. It
14 doesn't mean that the guy won't ultimately be capable, but just no experience for putting
15 those five, six, seven years of time in in the Army and having a tour or whatever in
16 Vietnam.

17 KC: Right, sure. Well, what about this instant NCO program? How did it operate,
18 and what was your role in all this?

19 BH: It was, as I say, it was a twelve-week program. At the time I was there, I
20 think there were three battalions, two or three battalions that were training NCOs there.
21 At the command structure of the company, well, it was the battalion's so the typical
22 battalion structure, your colonel, and then a major XO, and sergeant major, and supply
23 and all the rest. At the company level, there would be company commanders, typically a
24 captain, there would be an XO and a training officer who by that point we were all
25 second lieutenants, there might've been an occasional first lieutenant in there. Company
26 commanders tended to be guys who—there were some career guys. I wouldn't think it
27 would be a primo assignment, in terms of career development. If you're a captain with
28 any longevity and looking to move along, there would be more prestigious assignments.
29 But the other group who were company commanders were guys who had done a tour in
30 Vietnam and either had extended for a year or had six or eight months left in the service,
31 so they were assigned as company commander at one of these instant NCO deals. For the

1 most part the company commanders were very good. I didn't have anything bad to say
2 about them, but looking back on it if you were looking to build a career path, if you
3 wanted to be Colin Powell, being the company commander of an instant NCO company
4 wasn't a primo assignment.

5 KC: I'm sure of that. Yeah. So here you are a second lieutenant, you've been
6 assigned to this instant NCO program, are you feeling good about that? Do you realize
7 that maybe it's not career enhancing? But you're not concerned career? Where are you
8 headed at this point? What do you wanna do?

9 BH: No, I mean I had never planned on making it a career, it was purely—it was
10 an obligation that I thought I had because of where I was in time and space in 1968. It
11 never crossed my mind that I would do anything but spend my three years in the Army
12 and get out. So I wasn't really looking for—I mean I didn't care, infantry assignment was
13 an infantry assignment. I don't know if that answers your question, but I mean it's just it
14 was fun, I was at Fort Benning, it's kind of the home of the infantry so you there was
15 some panache, I hate to use that word. I'm thinking back on it now, I hadn't really
16 thought about that in a long time, you were kind of proud to be associated with the
17 Infantry Center. I was anyway, yeah.

18 KC: Sure. Okay, you finish your time up in Fort Benning, it's roughly ninety-days
19 later, make it three months later. What's the next step?

20 BH: Well, out of OCS that was from March to end of August, and then I was
21 assigned from say September 1st to this instant NCO program but we went through
22 several cycles.

23 KC: You did? Okay, so you're up for a good little while then.

24 BH: Yeah, so I was assigned there, I was at Fort Benning in December, it was
25 kind of a maudlin deal. The XO in my company called me, I was on leave for Christmas,
26 and he called me and he said, "Well they're here." I said, "What do you mean?" And he
27 said, "You know what I'm talking about. Your orders to Vietnam." (Laughs) But you
28 expect, I mean we all knew what was going—we knew we were going. So anyway I
29 stayed at Benning doing that stuff until May, yeah, May of 1970 now I guess, or April. I
30 had been on orders for Vietnam since December of '69.

31 KC: You also mentioned that you got married.

1 BH: Mm-hmm.

2 KC: You know that Vietnam's in your future.

3 BH: Yeah.

4 KC: What kind of effect does this have on your new bride?

5 BH: Well, I don't know, it's hard to—she sort of bought into it. She was not a
6 warmonger, is not a warmonger. I'm still married to her. It was part of the deal. She was
7 a year behind me in school and we had planned to get married. Of course, I'm off in the
8 Army for a year, she finished school, and then we get married and three days later I have
9 to report back to Fort Benning. We lived in Columbus, Georgia, for a while. She sort of
10 went along with the program, all of my friends were infantry officers and you just sort of,
11 I don't know if it's a gallows humor or of a—it's just part of the life that you have right
12 then, so you go along. She went along. I mean did she have any problems with it? No, not
13 at all, I mean I don't know if you scratched your soul a little bit and ask her what she
14 thought about the war, I'm not sure what answer I would've got. But was it ever a
15 problem for me? No, not at all. Was it a problem for her that she manifested? Nope, mnh-
16 mnh. No, we lived in Columbus off-post and when I ended up going to Vietnam she
17 moved back. She's from Texas. She moved back and lived with her folks and taught
18 school for a year.

19 KC: Okay, you've got your orders. It's spring, summer of 1970. You're headed to
20 Vietnam. Take me on that trip.

21 BH: Well, I first went to the jungle school in Panama, which was it three weeks I
22 think, something like that, don't hold me to that, I think it was three weeks, two to three
23 weeks. Was again a very interesting adventure, when you're twenty-five or twenty-four
24 everything's an adventure. But it was fascinating to go down there and really be floating
25 around in the jungle and learning jungle operations, I think there was some counter-
26 guerilla, I forget the actual—Jungle Operations Training Center was the name of it. So
27 there was some counter-guerilla stuff, a lot of just jungle survival stuff and how to
28 operate in that environment. Fascinating place. Have you ever been to Panama ?

29 KC: No, I've not.

1 BH: Fascinating place. I'm sort of tempted sometime to go back and just take a
2 peek at it again. I can tell you from a pure physical standpoint, it was far more grueling
3 physically than anything I did in Vietnam.

4 KC: Really?

5 BH: Yeah, it was sort of double- and triple-canopy jungle, and again a lot of night
6 and day stuff that you were out parading, well, not literally parading, but on different
7 exercises. It was physically very grueling.

8 KC: Mm-hmm. Well, you know it sounds like this was a pretty important thing
9 for you, you've got some pretty strong memories of this. Tell me about the jungle school
10 training you received there in as much detail as you remember.

11 BH: Well, it was—as I recall the first week, it was either three weeks or two
12 weeks. The first week was more straight and structured. You would be out in the field but
13 it would be instruction about survival training. It would be instruction about small unit
14 operations. It would be about ambushing. Then the second half of the training, as I recall,
15 it was a week-long or a ten-day long field exercise where we were out in the field, never
16 going back to the Fort—I can't remember the fort. It wasn't a very big fort, but I think it
17 was right at the Pacific-side with entrance to the canal, and sort of a world-class view
18 really when I think back on it, but I think we spent all of that week or ten-days out in the
19 field going from one training exercise to another. It was as if—well it wasn't as if, you
20 were out operating in the field, so there was a reality to it that you don't have when you
21 go back to the barracks every night.

22 KC: This was what, you say two, three weeks long?

23 BH: Yeah, it was either two or three, I can't remember. It's funny but it was say
24 three weeks, two to three weeks. You finish up and you're theoretically—at least they
25 gave you a patch that says, "You are jungle operation expert."

26 KC: Well, you know, with the leadership training that you've had, with the jungle
27 training, with the combat engineer training, all of the things you have that you're carrying
28 around in your sack there, it would seem that you would be an ideal candidate perhaps for
29 what you would do in the future which is of course serve as an advisor in the Delta. Did
30 you have any idea that this could possibly be where you were going with this kind of
31 background?

1 BH: No, not really. The only thing that was on my orders, now remember the
2 orders were cut back in December, and I'm assigned to MACV, Military Assistance
3 Command, Vietnam. Not assigned to either a US personnel or a replacement depot, or a
4 particular division, 101st or whatever, 9th Division. But only in the most cryptic way I
5 said, "Okay, MACV," I really had no idea what that was, so I guess as I got closer to
6 maybe finishing up at Benning or maybe when I was at Panama, sort of found out exactly
7 what I would be doing and it would be part of the advisory effort rather than with a line
8 company in the American division.

9 KC: Mm-hmm. Well, there's a massive difference there, and maybe it's best to
10 hold this question for later but maybe not. Working with Vietnamese as an advisor and
11 working with Americans as a straight-leg infantry outfit—

12 BH: Straight-leg. Well, you know what you're talking about when you use that
13 term. Good for you. I haven't heard that in a while, but that's the real term, yeah.

14 KC: They're again drastically different and you don't understand that you have
15 orders for this or that you're predestined for this or anything like that, but even as you
16 look back on it now, you look at the differences between the two, would there have been
17 one that you would've preferred over another?

18 BH: You mean now?

19 KC: Yes.

20 BH: No, I wouldn't have traded my experience for the world. I wouldn't trade it
21 for the world. Of course, before the fact, you want to be with an American unit because
22 that's what you've been trained to do, and be a platoon leader and all the rest. You really
23 do get—all of those divisions tend to have strong *esprit de corps*, the 1st Air Cav, the
24 nine, I mean those guys really—it's kind of funny how they're really proud of what
25 they're with. But anyway so generally I always thought I would go to an American unit,
26 but as it became clear because of the Vietnamization program and however they selected,
27 I was on initially a Mobile Advisory Team. My experience now, I can tell you I wouldn't
28 trade it for the world. It was the most extraordinary experience. I learned about Vietnam
29 and what was going on in a way that I never would have in an American unit. Just didn't
30 because I wasn't around Americans, a hell of a lot of Americans, for any period of time
31 and for a while but I got to know the Vietnamese in a way that I otherwise would never

1 have gotten to know them. And maybe understood and understand what that whole thing
2 was truly about in a way I'm sure I wouldn't as if it was purely a combat deal for me.

3 KC: Mm-hmm. Well, those bring up a variety of questions and issues and we'll
4 get to them later on down the line as we work our way through the interview. Okay, here
5 it is, spring 1970. You're out of Panama. Your next step is Vietnam, I assume?

6 BH: Right.

7 KC: All right, take me to that trip to Vietnam. How do you get there?

8 BH: Well, actually one thing, it was right at the Cambodian Incursion time, and
9 I'm trying to figure out am I gonna end up in Cambodia or not, but I think literally while
10 I'm at the airport they announced there's gonna be a stand down in Cambodia. I don't
11 know but I can remember going to—I mentioned to you I'm from Boston, I was home,
12 my wife and I went to Boston for leave and we fiddled around with different, went to
13 Cape Cod and up to Maine to do whatever we wanted to do. So anyway I left from
14 Boston. God, that was probably the most difficult part of the whole deal is leaving home.
15 It's very, very difficult to do. After the—several years later I can remember my brother
16 saying, and I think maybe my father even said it, that in the back of their mind they
17 thought that they would never see me alive again, you know. It's just a very difficult
18 thing, all of that bravado that you have, all of a sudden you realize, "Oops! Here I go."
19 You know, you travel alone, that's not any secret, you don't go as a unit. They drove me
20 to Logan Airport in Boston. I got on, waited for my plane, I got on a plane to Oakland
21 and there I was, but all the while I'm by myself with my duffel bag and whatever else. No
22 unit, no bravado with the guy in the next seat to talk about, you're sort of locked in your
23 thoughts, "Okay, here it is, this is what I've been preparing for, for a couple of years,
24 what's gonna happen?" Frankly it's a pretty good amount of trepidation, I would be less
25 than honest if I didn't tell you that, you don't know. You know what the statistics are for
26 combat arms junior officers and it's not like being a supply sergeant at Fort Lee, New
27 Jersey, you know, it's something a little different. But when I got to Oakland I had some,
28 I forget what my flight was, I was dead tired, and I sat in a chair there with the I think
29 Oakland Army Base, I don't remember. I fell asleep. I woke up and the plane that I was
30 supposed to be on I missed, so I jumped up and I went up to the guy and it was a
31 sergeant, he said, "You missed your plane." He said, "You know what—you know what,"

1 he said, “You missed your plane,” and he started to give me, I said, “Look, what are you
2 gonna do? You gonna send me to Vietnam? I mean what’s the problem, put me on the
3 next plane.”

4 KC: It’s not like there’s gonna be a shortage of planes going over.

5 BH: Exactly, or there’s not anything bad you can do to me that’s not already
6 happening. I got on the next plane and we flew to I can remember Anchorage, Alaska,
7 flying into Anchorage being just completely blown away by coming down through the
8 mountains there you know in the plane, coming through and landing at Anchorage. Those
9 planes were just jam packed, I think they chartered them, I forget. I don’t remember who
10 the companies were. They had different names, but, one, it was jam packed, two, there
11 was no alcohol served on it unlike a regular plane, so your just sitting there and you get
12 your food and whatever. Food at Anchorage, spent maybe an hour on the ground there.
13 Then flew from there to Yokota, Japan, spent a little more time on the ground there, and
14 then from there flew into Saigon, I think it was a twenty-seven hour flight, or so. Flew
15 into Saigon at night. The thing that impressed me most, when they announced the pilot of
16 the plane said, “Okay, we’re now entering the air space over Vietnam,” you would look
17 down and you would see these little fires. Now I don’t know if they were village fires, or
18 if they were the results of artillery or whatever, but you talk about a reality sign saying,
19 “Okay, we’re not in Kansas anymore. This is the real deal,” you know. But that’s what I
20 remember about that trip.

21 KC: Right, after all of that time like you say you’re not with your unit, with any
22 unit because you don’t belong to one. You’re alone in your own head for basically twenty
23 hours to think about it. Like you say, you run the statistics through your head, the
24 statistics can only tell you so much of the story, and you don’t know what you’re getting
25 yourself into, literally do not know what you’re getting yourself into at this point. Then
26 you’re flying over Vietnam, you see the fires, and pilots often use the phrase, “pucker
27 factor.” I think that would probably apply here when you see this. Okay you hit the
28 ground, you’re at Tan Son Nhut I assume.

29 BH: Yep.

1 KC: You get off the plane, it's at night. Take me through the process by which
2 you find where you are going to go. What are your first impressions of Vietnam, where
3 are you going?

4 BH: Get off the plane, it smells like diesel, it's hot, and it stinks. Just miserable, I
5 mean it'd be like Houston on a bad day in terms of humidity. They sort of hustle you into
6 the—the building at Tan Son Nhut, it's not exactly a regular airport, it looked like the old
7 French airport. But then they—it was amazing. They had a guy there in a Jeep who
8 picked me up. There were maybe one, maybe one other guy in the Jeep, there were only a
9 few of us I think on the plane probably who were going to MACV. So they picked us up
10 and they took us over to a transfer barracks, I guess you'd call it. We had all those
11 basically the old sort of World War II barracks, wooden and a bunch of bunks. They laid
12 you out there and next morning you got up and started your in-processing.

13 KC: So you're going through your in-processing. Where is the process going to
14 spit you out? When do you find this out?

15 BH: Probably the first day or the second day, they—I'm sure there was something
16 on the orders, some sort of spin number or something I didn't know at the time, but we
17 fairly quickly were—I can't remember if it was the first or last thing when they issued us
18 our weapons. But anyway they moved you right along and then they said, "Okay, you
19 fellows, you're gonna come with us," and they took us for a briefing within MACV. They
20 explained that, "Okay, you're going to go to this Mobile, and you're going to MACV and
21 you're gonna be part of the Mobile Advisory Team. You're gonna be assigned to a
22 Mobile Advisory Team." I think it was part of CORDS (Civil Operations and Rural
23 Development Support), C-O-R-D-S, I forget what that means. Then even there they
24 divided it off and they said, "Okay, you're going here, here, here, and here." I found out I
25 was going to IV Corps then, but gosh it was within a day or so I think, "IV Corps and
26 you're gonna go to that." I can't remember if I even had the province or if they said,
27 "You report to Can Tho," which is the IV Corps headquarters. So it became—the sieve is
28 getting finer and finer pretty quickly here.

29 KC: Now did you know what a MAT (Military Advisory Team) team was?

30 BH: Yeah, I think there had been a little bit of training about that in OCS. It was
31 an evolving concept. I don't know when they actually came up with, probably in '69, it

1 was part of the Vietnamization push. So I knew probably the table of organization and
2 equipment probably was part of some of the stuff we learned at Fort Benning. I knew
3 generally what they did but that would be the extent of it.

4 KC: Mm-hmm. All right here you are, you're at Can Tho. You've found the
5 personnel officer or whoever is in charge of this. Where are they sending you from Can
6 Tho?

7 BH: Well, there's two things: one, I had to go to a place called Dian, D-I-A-N,
8 which was a three week in-country school for people who were going to MAT teams.
9 Again, a lot of it was more of the same, although we had to learn about weapons that
10 were like World War I, World War II weapons which as it turns out were the weapons
11 that at that time were still being assigned to these local units like M-1 Garands.
12 Something we had never really worked with, would be working with M-14s, M-16s, and
13 all the rest of it. So there was a lot of that stuff, there was the tactics again there was a lot
14 more specificity with respect to mines, concertina wire, you know the practical stuff of
15 how to setup outposts and how to do all that stuff. But there was I think a pretty good
16 intensive training on the Vietnamese customs since we were going to be living with the
17 Vietnamese for all intents and purposes, and there was a very good, intense, and for a
18 three-week period very effective training on Vietnamese language.

19 KC: Okay, now I want you to slow down and tell me about the training you
20 received in Vietnamese culture and language. This is gonna be an absolutely vital part of
21 your ability to perform your duty there. How did they try to teach you? And what sort of
22 things did they teach you about Vietnamese customs and language?

23 BH: Well, I'll work backward. The language training was like language training
24 you would take in college in an intermediate course, i.e. it was just vocabulary, they had
25 very good instructors. There were a couple of majors as I recall who were very good
26 instructors, they'd probably been to that Monterey Institute, and I think they probably had
27 the great linguistic ability anyway, but so they were very good in teaching it. I, because
28 of the education that I mentioned to you that I'd had both in high school and college, I
29 had a lot of language training, not in Vietnamese, and I think I had some facility and the
30 natural gift, nothing I did, but it was just sort of a gift that I had. So I enjoyed it, I thought
31 they did a very good job of training you. There's a lot of language lab work, believe it or

1 not, you're in these little trailers in the middle of Dian which is out north of Bien Hoa.
2 But it was like you might as well have been in a college language lab. It sounds kind of
3 funny. They did a good job of teaching you the basics, and the culture, they also did a
4 very good job in the culture. I think part of the problem—well, anyone has this problem. I
5 think we're probably seeing it to some degree now with some of what we're doing is, you
6 need to be very respectful of a different culture. The last thing you wanna be is the Ugly
7 American. I mean if you're gonna be good at your job that's the last thing you wanna do,
8 is be the Ugly American. You need to understand folks, you need to respect what they do,
9 you need to respect what's been their way of living and their belief for a long time. I
10 think they were pretty good at teaching you to be sensitive to things that you otherwise
11 might blunder through, and insult people and not even know it.

12 KC: How did they impart this to you? What sort of things do you have to look out
13 for? What sort of customs are you trying to observe? How do you take in all of this? I
14 mean you're from Boston, yes, you've got a facility with languages and Boston is a
15 culturally diverse city and all this sort of stuff. But you're in Vietnam now, Jack, and this
16 language is different from Latin, it's different from French, and it's a totally different
17 environment. How did they impart all this into you, and how do you deal with it all?

18 BH: Pay attention. I mean my ears were on stems as they say, I realized, "Okay,
19 this stuff seems to be very practical, and I'm closer and closer to my ultimate job, so I can
20 either not pay attention or pay attention. I've gotta believe and trust that these guys are
21 telling me, for the most part, what's correct and true so I better pay attention because this
22 may mean life and death for me at some point." So I really did pay pretty good attention
23 to it.

24 KC: All right, now how would they—it's one thing to tell someone, "Okay, this is
25 a Vietnamese custom for this, so you have to do this," or "Here's how you respond to
26 this," is that the way they approached it? Or was it more of an immersion into a culture
27 type of approach?

28 BH: It was more, because of the time constraints, it was more of the former. From
29 what I understand at Monterey or wherever the Language Institute is now, there's just a
30 total immersion after a short period of time where everything, your food, all of the
31 discussions in mess halls, are in the language that you're working with. We couldn't do

1 that. Although there was some attempt, we would have Vietnamese meals, here's how
2 you eat rice, here's what you do with the meat, their etiquette structure is as developed as
3 ours is. That sounds like a snobby thing to say but a lot of people don't realize that they
4 just think there's a bunch of people sitting around eating rice. Well, no, there's a lot more
5 to it than that. So as I recall we might've had one or two meals or but for the most part it
6 was more, "Here's what you do. Here's my experience." They had people who had spent
7 maybe six or seven months on a MAT team and then came down to instruct, so you paid
8 attention to them because those guys, their intel is pretty current, you know?

9 KC: Mm-hmm, right. They've obviously been living it, and those people tell you
10 how to deal with it from there.

11 BH: Yeah, and then they would tell you, "Okay here's what you learned in the
12 field manual, and boy that's correct." Or, "Here's what you learned in the field manual,
13 and you may wanna think about doing it a little differently because."

14 KC: Okay let's move away from the culture and language and talk about more
15 military aspects of it. Now you've talked about the weapons training and trying to
16 familiarize yourself with older weapons and things like that, but you're in the Delta and a
17 lot of the things that you learned earlier in your training in your career, about "Echelon
18 this," and "Flank that," and all these kinds of things simply won't pan out in the Delta.
19 What kind of changes, what kind of issues, I should say, are they telling you about and
20 how does it differ from what you learned before?

21 BH: Now you're talking about Dian or the Delta?

22 KC: At Dian.

23 BH: They're basically telling you—well, it was difficult for them because they
24 were training people all the way from I Corps which was mountainous, to Delta which—
25 throw out map reading for crying out loud or jungle survival. I spent all that time and I'm
26 in a place where there's about a six-inch change in elevation, and there's absolutely no
27 landmarks that you can read from map reading. So it's a different deal, and so they're
28 trying to give you—it's hard for them to be specific about it. They would say, "Now if
29 you're in the Delta it's a little different because of whatever." Like a lot of stuff
30 ultimately it ends up as OJT (on-the-job training). If you're fortunate enough to learn the
31 lessons fast and early that's where you learn, but all of this stuff is preparatory to it. I

1 don't know that you'd be ready for the OJT without having all this other stuff leading up
2 to it, frankly.

3 KC: Mm-hmm. Okay now you say it's what a six, or excuse me three-week class?

4 BH: My recollection around that, yeah.

5 KC: Yeah, okay. Well, at the end of your three weeks I'll ask you this question
6 again: do you feel that you're adequately prepared, or at least as prepared as you can be,
7 to go out on your own?

8 BH: Yeah, I thought so.

9 KC: Yeah.

10 BH: I thought so. Now after the fact was I don't know anyone's adequately
11 prepared for it. Because all of the practice in the world is not the same as the real thing.
12 But, yeah, do I have any problem with my training? No, I think they did everything they
13 could do to train me that way, though they might be—if I went through and say, “Oh,
14 yeah, I would do this differently or I might do that differently,” but nothing jumps out at
15 me particularly. I think they did a good job of training me for what I was supposed to do.

16 KC: All right your time at Dian is through. Where do you go next?

17 BH: Then I go back to—either go back to or go to Can Tho. I can't remember if I
18 went to—no, I think I went to Dian directly from Saigon and then when I finished up at
19 Dian they loaded a few of us on a plane, I forgot I remember eight or ten of us maybe out
20 of that class, and we were headed to the Delta. Then we report to Can Tho which is
21 capital city more or less, to the extent there is a capital city of a corps. It's a major city in
22 the Mekong Delta. It's about halfway between Saigon and the Cambodian border, as I
23 recall. But it's an old French-type city, a lot of those old French-type buildings, if you
24 know the ceiling fans that revolve maybe once every hour (laughs). It looks like
25 something out of *Apocalypse Now*. It's really what they looked like, I mean it was a very
26 exotic place to be, and I was again just fascinated by the whole thing, and I sort of it took
27 all in and paid attention to it. But they briefed us, we were there two or three days. That
28 was an interesting deal because we had several different briefings and I worked,
29 ultimately, the head of IV Corps at the time was John Paul Vann. I don't know, have you
30 heard of him?

31 KC: Oh, yes. Yeah.

1 BH: Okay, well, actually I worked for him and got to meet him several times.

2 KC: Is that right?

3 BH: Yeah, yeah, and had fairly extended conversations with him. He was quite
4 the—the first time I met him there while we were there for the training, he was quite a
5 character. I remember him saying one thing. There was a group of three or four of us, and
6 of course I didn't realize it at the time but it always stuck with me. He said, "You know,"
7 he said, "our problem here is not that we've got eleven years' experience now," he said,
8 "the problem is we have one year experience eleven times." I read—*A Bright and Shining*
9 *Lie* was a book about him. I think Neil Sheehan wrote, and I think Sheehan alludes to him
10 saying that in there but I actually heard him say it earlier in the game. So that was
11 fascinating, although at the time I didn't know who John Paul Vann was other than one,
12 he was a civilian, and two he was, in the chain of command, he was the head of IV Corps
13 and ultimately he was my boss. The other guy who I met there very passingly, he came to
14 speak to us for an hour and there were probably twenty or twenty-five of us, was William
15 Colby.

16 KC: Really?

17 BH: Yeah.

18 KC: Wow.

19 BH: Colby was, I don't know what his job was at the time. I think he was
20 probably up in Saigon still. But he appeared and he wore black pajamas. He spoke and he
21 looked, it sounds crazy, he looked like a priest. He was very articulate guy, but he had
22 hair combed straight back and he had very simple eye-glasses on like you might see a
23 clergyman wear. Again, I sort of knew who he was but that was the only time I ever ran
24 across him, but even at the time I thought, "This is kind of special. I need to remember
25 this," but this guy's talking to me and nineteen other guys.

26 KC: Yeah, those are two pretty serious heavy hitters in the scheme of things.

27 BH: Oh, yeah, they really were, they really were. As I say, Vann I didn't realize at
28 the time, he sort of took on mythical—'cause I worked for him, he was my boss the
29 whole time, so I got to know him but what's his name—drawing a blank on the fellow
30 were talking about, the guy who—

31 KC: Colby.

1 BH: Colby, yeah, it was one time but I knew who Colby was in a general sense
2 and I was, “Okay, I need to remember this. This is something that I’m gonna wanna
3 remember in the future.”

4 KC: Hmm.

5 BH: Yeah.

6 KC: That’s really interesting.

7 BH: Yeah.

8 KC: I’ll ask you about both of these individuals in more detail later on, I think I’ll
9 make a note here. All right now you’ve got yourself in Can Tho, and what I’d like for you
10 to do now is explain to me, and to the listener of the interview, and the reader of the
11 transcript, what was the hierarchy there? How did the advisory effort out of Can Tho
12 operate?

13 BH: This’ll sound crazy. I don’t have the slightest idea.

14 KC: Is that right?

15 BH: Yeah, I mean I knew there were a bunch of colonels there and a bunch of
16 majors, and it seems like they’re in one compound or not a particularly big compound but
17 a series of buildings, and I reported to room and there was a major who said, “Here, you
18 go into this province,” and he said, again the gallows humor, he said, “you’ll be happy to
19 know that,” he had something called the HES (Hamlet Evaluation System) ratings and the
20 TEFES ratings. I don’t know if it was a McNamara deal or something where by God
21 we’re gonna reduce this to monthly reporting and you bubble in the A, B, C, D with a
22 Number 2 pencil, then it gets fed into a computer somewhere, and then they decide what
23 the classification level is for all these provinces, towns. Really I think it was TEFES, T-
24 E-F-E-S, and HES. HES was Hamlet and Evaluation System and I don’t remember what
25 TEFES was. But anyway he said, “You’ll be happy to know that the province you’re
26 going to,” and I think, was it forty-two or forty-four provinces in Vietnam? I don’t
27 remember but he said, “Consistently for the last X-months, you have been forty-two,
28 three or four in that province,” in terms of lack of pacification. So he said, “Good luck,
29 and you can catch a plane out at the airfield, and someone will pick you up at the
30 airstrip.” It was Kien Hoa province was the province. K-I-E-N H-O-A. But other than
31 that I have no idea how it worked. I have no idea how it—I mean it was almost like it was

1 a way station for me, I don't know. After the fact, I'm sure that all the province teams in
2 the Delta ultimately had a reporting chain up through Can Tho that then was ultimately
3 synthesized by Vann and then went to Saigon. I didn't really have very much—my whole
4 time I didn't have—I think I was in Can Tho then and one other time in the whole year.

5 KC: All right now you're headed to Kien Hoa province, you've received all this
6 training, and again you're an individual, you're on your own. You're gonna go out there
7 and live with the Vietnamese and you're gonna help them defend themselves from the
8 Viet Cong as it is in this rough and ready province down there. So do you fly down there?

9 BH: Yeah.

10 KC: Catch a Huey or whatever it may have been?

11 BH: Yeah, no we—no I was gonna say I did but what happened is, they sent me—
12 well I mean the traffic control—they sent me from Can Tho back to Saigon. Saigon, the
13 first sergeant for Advisory Team 88 and each province had an advisory team, and I don't
14 know how many people were, fifty sixty people maybe, province is roughly like a state.
15 It's not exactly, and it's geographic size would vary, but it was a fairly large area. But I
16 go back and the first sergeant for Advisory Team 88 happens to be in Saigon and they
17 said, "Well, you can catch a ride with him." So I go over and introduce myself to the first
18 sergeant, we drive down from Saigon down to Kien Hoa.

19 KC: Okay, now during this drive does he relate any sort of information to you?
20 What to expect? Anything like that?

21 BH: Sort of, maybe as I asked questions. I'm sure I must of looked like I was
22 scared to death. He kind of got a hoot out of it because Jeeps of course they're all open,
23 they have canvas tops, but otherwise they were open and I can remember it was, I forget
24 what part of the rainy season, but it was still rainy anyway and you drive from Saigon
25 south until you get to a city called My Tho. Then you're there at the first tributary of the
26 Mekong and at that time the only way to get any farther south is you have to take a ferry
27 across the Bassac River, I think is what it was. So we're on the ferry and then we get off
28 and as you get off, unload the ferry, you're then in Kien Hoa Province. We're driving
29 along and that's when it dawned on me, man, all of a sudden it was nothing but rice fields
30 and mangroves, things like that. I'm thinking, "Holy Christ, people can be anywhere
31 looking to kill me." (Laughter) I mean it was sort of a reality check. As I think, I think it

1 was probably pretty safe. I mean there were ambushes on the road all the time, but it was
2 probably pretty safe. But I can remember all of a sudden the skies open up and the rains
3 coming, I'm getting soaked, I'm sitting in the passenger seat, so I'm looking for a way to
4 hide my duffel bag and get my right leg out of the rain which by now is just sopping wet,
5 and I can remember the first sergeant looked at me and laughed, he said, "Sir, you might
6 as well get used to it. You can be wet for the next twelve months." I thought, "Okay,
7 welcome. Here I am."

8 KC: Yeah, "On top of everything else I'm gonna be soaking wet."

9 BH: Yeah, so that was—but I mean he was a friendly enough guy, but some of
10 those old timers they wouldn't urinate on you if your coat was on fire unless you asked
11 them.

12 KC: Sure, sure. Well, why don't we stop there for today, Mr. Henri?

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

1 **Interview with Bill Henri**

2 **6 July 2011**

3 **Session [3] of [4]**

4 KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Mr. Bill Henri.
5 Today is 6 July 2011. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas Tech University
6 and Mr. Henri is joining me by telephone from his office in Houston, Texas. Okay, Mr.
7 Henri, when we left off last time we had you arriving in Kien Hoa province. You had
8 related the story about your trip down there with the soaking wet and the rain with the
9 first sergeant. Tell me what it was like, tell me about your arrival there in Kien Hoa
10 province. What was the village you were stationed at? Take me through your arrival
11 there.

12 BH: We arrived, the province capital is a city named Ben Tre. The new
13 government there has changed the whole province name from Kien Hoa to Ben Tre, but
14 the capital city was Ben Tre. It was bigger than I—it was a small city, I don't know forty,
15 fifty-thousand people maybe not that big but there was a market place, and a fair number
16 of buildings, no high-rise buildings of course, but two-story buildings, a lot of people
17 there. It is on one of the—it's on a canal off of one of the major tributaries of the Mekong
18 as it heads to the South China Sea. Kien Hoa province actually borders the South China
19 Sea. So everything revolves, one way or another, around water. The Advisory Team 88,
20 which was the province team that I was assigned to, had a compound that was essentially
21 right on one of the canals, there was a small road in front of it. There were, probably I'm
22 guessing, a hundred people or so, there'd maybe 125 people assigned to the MACV
23 Advisory Team 88, and maybe forty or fifty of those were at the province level and the
24 rest were at district level or MAT team level. So anyway it was about that size, the
25 compound wasn't fancy but it wasn't bad at all, there was a mess hall, they had latrines
26 with running water. It was a walled compound and of course it was guarded at all times.
27 We reported there. They processed us in fairly quickly and I met the province senior
28 advisor who was a civilian. The way those province teams worked, my recollection is
29 they had either a civilian as the province senior advisor and a military person as a deputy
30 province senior advisor, or *vice versa*. My province we had a civilian and then we had a
31 lieutenant-colonel who was the deputy senior advisor, and met with both of them

1 anyway. They explained what was going on in the province at that time, and then
2 assigned me to a mobile advisory team, a MAT team. It's a duplication sort of a military,
3 MAT is actually Mobile Advisory Team but they called them MAT teams, anyway the
4 organization of them was five people, two officers, three NCOs. The team I was assigned
5 to there were—first lieutenant who was the team leader, I was the assistant team leader. I
6 became a first lieutenant not long after I got there, but I was a second lieutenant when I
7 arrived. There was a medic who was an E-7, and then there were two small-arms infantry
8 NCOs who were one E-6 and one E-7. We'd lived with a *lien doi* I think was the name of
9 it, which was supposed to be a battalion, it was more like two companies or a reinforced
10 company or something. It provided security within a certain area of operations, and it
11 went on active operations in the area. It was also a reaction force if it was required that a
12 reaction force was needed if something happened. In addition to that we, the MAT team,
13 were responsible for the security of three villages. By security I mean there was again the
14 counterinsurgency program required that we develop medical care there and so we would
15 hold clinics once a week in each of the villages. We would assist them in civil action
16 things as best we could, but we were essentially there to provide security and to advise on
17 security, I think more properly so in MACV, the whole advisory effort, and the whole
18 Vietnamization effort was to make a transition and help those folks function on their
19 own.

20 KC: All right, now that brings up a good question about your overall mission
21 there. You say to advise them and to help them make themselves secure. Now they'd
22 been doing this for a very long time prior to your arrival, and would continue to do it
23 after you leave. What kind of approach do you take to help them help themselves? I mean
24 this would be very, very tricky, I mean in addition to the cultural issues with which you'd
25 have to deal, how do you approach that?

26 BH: That's a very, very good and incisive question. I've thought about that a lot
27 after the fact. The cultural info that you have going in is you need to deal with people—I
28 had a counterpart who I advised who was the commander of the *lien doi* who was I think
29 he might've been a captain, I think he was a Vietnamese Ranger captain. I don't think he
30 was a major. So he was a smart guy, he had been in the Army for a long time. I think he
31 had been an architect by training so he seemed to be a pretty bright guy, too. But what

1 you don't want to do is to put folks in a position where they lose face, which was always
2 tricky for me and frankly I think was tricky for all Americans, and I don't know if we did
3 it particularly well, or I can only speak for myself, I guess. As I think back on it, there
4 was always a little bit of a scorpion dance. We were required to write a letter to our
5 counterpart once a month, setting out successes that we had or we perceived, and sort of
6 objective data. "Here's what we did, we had this many missions, we had this many
7 village visits, this many night outpost visits, this many," and all of that stuff. Then you
8 were to focus on something in there and make a suggestion as to how he might improve
9 in a certain area. I don't know that I ever really got that because you were always—
10 you're trying to make a point without—an American to an American at least in the
11 military context would say, "Hey, here's where you screwed up. You need to get his
12 squared away," or you could say it in a nicer way but you basically let people know
13 where they need to improve and then you hold them accountable to it. I don't know that
14 we ever really understood, I didn't. It was difficult to really motivate them because
15 frankly I was probably the fifth or sixth MAT team advisor this guy had worked with, so
16 he figures these guys rotate every six months or a year, however often we rotated through
17 those teams, and here's another American that I gotta nursemaid for a while. That's after
18 the fact. No one ever told me that, but as I've thought about it after the fact for a long
19 time, that was a problem that I don't know—some people were more successful at it than
20 others. I think I had more success than others, but it's sort of an endemic problem with
21 that sort of effort. It's very, very difficult.

22 KC: Mm-hmm. Now did you have any idea that this would be the case going in?

23 BH: Not in any real way. Again, I think when we talked a bit earlier we talked
24 about going to the schools, and was I well prepared, and could I have been better
25 prepared or better trained to do it. For the most part the training, as I think I mentioned, I
26 thought was very good, was good, and they did it as well as they could, but there's just no
27 substitute for being on the ground. It was kind of a joke, and I don't remember where the
28 joke, if it developed there or if I heard it before or after but let's see, "I may be only
29 twenty-three years old and a first lieutenant, but I'm the highest ranking American in this
30 part of the world and I need to make a decision." You're sort of on your own, and that's
31 good and bad, if someone is creative, and smart, and has a good ability to read people,

1 then freelancing that way can be kind of exhilarating and fun but it's an awful lot to
2 require or expect from someone twenty-three or twenty-four years old, as a group. It's a
3 hard spot for folks to be in.

4 KC: Now when you come into this province, you mentioned before that it was
5 like in the lowest part, the lowest of the lowest part in terms of pacification, I guess is one
6 way to say it.

7 BH: That's what they told us in Can Tho, and according to the HES and I think
8 it's TEFES, I couldn't remember the name the other day, T-E-F-E-S I think is it, I'm just
9 going purely on memory. But they were, as I said, bubbled in once a month how many
10 night outpost visits did you go on? How many people were captured? How many *chieu*
11 *hois* did you have? They would feed them into a computer somewhere in Saigon, and
12 then they would rank all of the hamlets, villages, and provinces throughout the country.
13 My understanding was that Kien Hoa province always came in forty-one, two, three, or
14 four out of forty-four provinces. Now what was interesting is to give you a feel for it, the
15 district or actually the next town from where this MAT team was, and probably three or
16 four miles, five miles, was a town called Mo Cai which was the actual village where the
17 National Liberation Front was established in 1961.

18 KC: Okay, so it's right in the middle of Indian country, as it's said.

19 BH: Well, yeah. I mean at least there was a strong history there of the National
20 Liberation Front movement and the Viet Cong, yeah.

21 KC: Now coming into this as you did, twenty-three years old, no real experience
22 in this. Understanding that it was a pretty tough place to be, let alone position to be in,
23 what did you identify, or what did someone else identify for you as it may have been the
24 case, as being the top priorities? Did anyone tell you, or did you figure out quickly, "This
25 is what I need to focus on, there is a threat from Viet Cong infiltration here, or tax
26 revenues coming from the villages to the Viet Cong here." What did you see as your
27 number one, or rank your priorities—

28 BH: It was more of, the sort of things you're describing are more of a reactive, not
29 in a bad sense, but that would be a reaction to particular intelligence. The overall mission
30 that we had was to, I guess in no particular order, was to establish a clear presence of the
31 government, not the Americans so much, but the government in those villages to let the

1 people know there was security, that the government could provide or would provide
2 security for the villages so that some of the development programs could take place. But
3 it was basically to provide security in the area, or again derivatively, it's always hard to
4 talk about it as an advisor, but is to put your counterparts and put the Vietnamese in a
5 position where they became maybe a bit more aggressive or whatever. I feel funny even
6 saying, "Make them feel like they should be more aggressive." Just sort of encourage
7 them and provide them with the assistance they need to be more assertive and to create
8 government presence in those areas.

9 KC: And, of course, security would be the first thing that you would have to
10 establish for these sort of things to happen. All right, now you wanna make the
11 government more visible and by extension more stable there, to introduce and protect it.
12 How do you go about doing that? What sort of things are you trying to help them do? Are
13 we talking about holding elections? You talk about the MEDCAP (Medical Civic Action
14 Program) kind of things, or—

15 BH: Yeah, not really the elections although we did—I dealt a lot with the I guess
16 we called them "mayors" of each of the villages, although there might've been a different
17 name but I think we called them mayors, and I dealt with each of them and would make a
18 point of meeting with them and talking with them, and finding out what was going on,
19 what assistance we could provide them to maybe get more security. But the politics, that
20 was one of those things that even at the time but certainly after, gosh, we were really like
21 Ned in the First Reader, you have no idea what's going on in the internal politics in any
22 of those villages or within any of the parties. I'm not even talking about who might be
23 Viet Cong and who might not be, but I mean to take a small town out in west Texas and
24 go to a town meeting as someone dropping in from St. Louis for example, you wouldn't
25 have a clue what was going on, who said what because of why.

26 KC: Right. How do you go about—I guess combatting that? How do you find
27 out? Is it just a function of spending time with them and getting to know them? Or is it
28 something you say, "Look, I can't figure this out in the time that I've got here. I'm gonna
29 try to take this objective view and do these things in spite of what might be going on
30 there"?

1 BH: A little bit of both. I always thought that I tried to spend as much time with
2 the village chiefs, village chiefs is what they called them. They were village chiefs, as I
3 could. I tried to listen more than to talk. These folks obviously one, they've lived there
4 forever, two, it's their house, it's not my house. I'm going back home in a year or
5 whatever. They were probably fed up with people telling them what was best for them, so
6 I would try to listen as best someone, I guess I was twenty-four or whatever I was, but as
7 best I could but I think I did a pretty good job of that. There's nothing worse than a
8 know-it-all in any walk of life, and certainly in that circumstance. I mean it's
9 counterproductive to be that way. So I would listen to them a lot, I would listen to my
10 counterpart, he was a pure military guy, but I would listen to him and take lessons from
11 him, he was very good with small unit tactics. I learned a lot from him, again things that
12 unless you're on the ground and paying particular attention, I might've heard it at the
13 infantry school I just never really picked up on it.

14 KC: You say in these conversations with, for example the village chief, just kind
15 of looking at the political aspects of things if it can be separated from the security
16 aspects. But when you talk to the village chief, what sort of things would take place in
17 these conversations? What would he bring up? What would you bring up? What were the
18 topics that would be discussed that would help you go further in your mission?

19 BH: Well, you would ask about placements of—there were something called the
20 RF/PF (Regional Forces and Popular Forces) forces, Ruff-Puff is what you probably
21 heard the expression. They were people generally from that same province, and maybe
22 even depending on where the same district, and they provided local security, they stayed
23 in the same area unlike the ARVNs (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) who would be
24 travelling all over the country depending on where their units were. These were more
25 local units, so a lot of times you would start by talking with them about what was going
26 on, had they had any engagements or had they had any contacts, enemy contacts, Viet
27 Cong contacts. One of the limitations on all of these things when you talked with the
28 village chief, some of it was cultural, some of it is just plain old human nature that you
29 and I would probably do the same thing. We want to make ourselves look like we're
30 doing our job. So you would either get gobble-gobble-gobble or sometimes you'd just get
31 flat made up info, too. It was hard to filter through that. You would try and after a while,

1 cynical isn't the right word, you became a little bit leery of what they told you, and you
2 tried to verify the information without embarrassing them direct—I mean you wouldn't
3 ask directly so that they could be shown to be not telling the truth, but you would try to
4 develop other sources of information to get the real lay of the land. The other thing we
5 used to do, we were required to go, on the MAT team anyway, for three nights a week we
6 had to go to night outpost visits or go out on ambushes with the RF/PFs. Going to the
7 night outpost, again, I found more by observing. I mean we would inspect the perimeter
8 and see where they had their mines laid out, and if they moved the mines around and did
9 all that sort of stuff, defensive things, but just sort of observing these guys in the night
10 outpost position you could pick up an awful lot about morale. You could pick up an
11 awful lot about who seemed to be probably a good soldier and who wasn't. Sometimes
12 those poor guys are just dog tired, you know they work all day as military people, and
13 then they were supposed to be up fifty-percent all night in these outposts, and gosh it
14 went on, and on, and on, they were just dog tired. So that's another way you would get
15 the information. I would try to be an active observer and pay attention to what was going
16 on around me.

17 KC: Right. Now when you mention that you would try to find other outside
18 sources of intelligence, not just relying on the village chief or just on your counterpart,
19 things like that, and you talked about your interaction here with the RF/PF. Having
20 interviewed a naval intelligence liaison officer who was in that area at that time, I mean
21 his job was to gather as much intel as he possibly could from as many sources as he could
22 develop. What other kinds of sources did you see available that you could develop these
23 contacts and bring in that intelligence with?

24 BH: Well actually we had an interpreter who was assigned to the MAT team and I
25 would use him. We would just sort of have a BS session, so to speak, we would talk
26 about villages. After a while I could draw him out and he would say certain things, and I
27 got to be able to listen in a way where when he said something a certain way I figured,
28 "There's more to this, and I need to find out more." He would talk about people in the
29 village, or what the real strength of a platoon was as opposed to what they report the
30 strength of the platoon was. The interpreter actually, it's kind of funny, one time he—I
31 mean he was a good sol—he was from Saigon, pretty savvy guy, young fellow. He told,

1 this is 1970, and we got talking one night and he was explaining to me how the
2 Americans had killed Diem and they had gone off and put him in a vehicle and dragged
3 him off, and he said, “Your CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) did it.” Of course, at the
4 time, this was 1970, I said, “Hung there’s no way.” He said, “Someday you’re gonna find
5 out that’s the truth.” And it turns out, of course, it was the truth, you know. But he was a
6 pretty good source of scuttlebutt and gossip, and if you listen to him, I can’t say
7 everything he told me was true but it was a pretty good source, alternative source, and
8 you sort of piece things together and say, “Okay, I’ve heard something like that
9 elsewhere, so maybe there’s some truth to that.” The other thing on the MAT team, there
10 was a cadre group of seven or eight NCOs who were assigned, they were almost like
11 bodyguards to us, that’s technically not what they were. They essentially assigned for us,
12 my counterpart, and you sign a contract with them, and you’ll do this and you’ll do that,
13 but I think they got in a lot of trouble if something happened to their MAT team or if
14 everything hit the fan. It was good for them to have a MAT team because one, you were a
15 source of medevacs (medical evacuation), you get medevacs pretty quickly where on the
16 Vietnamese chain they were much lower in terms of priority. The other thing you could
17 do is, of course, get them well supplied, too, so they had a pretty good, practical, I’m
18 being cynical, but a pretty good practical reason for them to want to take care of you.
19 Anyway, I would talk to some of these guys who were in this group of six or eight NCOs
20 and I became fairly friendly with them because we did everything together. They would
21 go with us on some of these night outpost deals and we went on operations with them.
22 One guy had been a VC (Viet Cong) and he had come over, come back, four or five years
23 before and as best I could tell he was legitimate anti-communist at that point although I
24 don’t know. But he had been VC and he said he got tired of it, was kind of crazy. There
25 was another guy there who I got a lot of info from, who believe it or not went to Laval
26 University in Montreal and had a Master’s in philosophy.

27 KC: Wow.

28 BH: He was a character, and he would talk about Thomistic ethics with me and all
29 this other stuff, it was kind of surreal, but in the course of this I would ask him questions
30 about certain things, he was one of the intel sergeant, actually. He would sort of make
31 allusions to what might be going on, I mean no one gave you the family jewels entirely

1 but if you listened and you got enough stories from folks, if you heard the same type of
2 story or similar stories from two or three people it started to give it some credence, as
3 “This is possibly reflective of what’s going on.”

4 KC: All right, now that is a great introduction to this. What I’d like for you to do
5 now if you can, if anything comes to mind specifically or just in general terms on it, what
6 kinds of stories would you be hearing? What sort of information would you be looking
7 for from these various sources that you could piece together?

8 BH: They would say that, “Well, such-and-such, that there’s a Viet Cong squad,”
9 it never really got as big as a platoon, but “They’re operating in this area. Or this village
10 chief, I’m not sure about him, or he may be stealing money from such-and-such.” I mean
11 there was no high-quality intel like there’s gonna be a battalion moving through here. It
12 was more a general lay of the land of what’s going on here. Any higher intelligence that
13 we got generally came down through our chain of command, the American chain of
14 command. They ran parallel chains of command, including radios, the radio nets, we had
15 ours and they had theirs. So any higher intel that I might get would’ve come down
16 through the American chain of command. There wasn’t a lot of sharing, the Vietnamese
17 did with us in retrospect, as I think about it.

18 KC: Now you say there wasn’t that much sharing, are you talking in terms of
19 official contacts? Official, you know, the chain of command coming down through the
20 ARVN, or are you talking about the informal contacts, or both?

21 BH: More the chain of command stuff coming down. You hear different stories
22 about what was passed on and what wasn’t passed on. I really can’t speak to that in a
23 first-hand sense. I just remember it being frustrating if you can imagine communications
24 where I’m communicating with my Americans at district, the advisory team, and my
25 counterpart’s communicating with the Vietnamese district headquarters. At best, you
26 know, the old parlor game of passing the secret down among ten people from one to the
27 next, what it started out with and what the story ended up with is maybe accidentally the
28 same. I’m not sure if that really answers your question, it was hard to get information and
29 to know what was going on. There are a lot of reasons for that I think, but it was just very
30 hard to—and some of it maybe, maybe if I were in the same position now, I might listen a
31 lot more acutely, I don’t know that that’s the case. I’ve tried to figure that out if I were to

1 go back a second time, or having gone back a second time, I would hope I would've been
2 better at it. But you don't know. It's a primarily cultural, I think, primarily cultural.

3 KC: Sure, and that would stand to reason given at the level where you're trying to
4 work. You can't think in broad strokes because at that level it's not broad strokes, it's a
5 million tiny, little strokes that affect all the other strokes that are being laid out there.

6 BH: Sure, sure, and I guess ultimately that information passes up from guys like
7 me at the end of the advisory food chain, so-to-speak. It gets collated at the district level
8 and goes to province level, ultimately I guess to corps level and then to Saigon. But I
9 think you had the same problem there of passing the secret along, the parlor game of
10 passing information along from one level to the next. I'm not sure that the information
11 that got to Saigon and went to Washington. I would be curious to see how much it got
12 embellished at each level of reporting, because people, it's not a peculiar Vietnamese
13 situation, everyone wants to make themselves look good. Certainly if it's a career for
14 you, you wanna make yourself look good and that's not casting aspersions on anyone. I
15 mean that's human nature. So I'm not sure how foolproof the intelligence, or how
16 accurate the intelligence reporting was even in the American advisory effort.

17 KC: Right, and as you say as it moves up the chain of command it's not only that
18 each level may want to embellish for whatever reason, or to hide things for whatever
19 reason, but you're also dealing with you are one guy who is there, and there are
20 thousands of people who are involved and as it gets larger and larger, so it would be
21 difficult for the picture to not get distorted, would be my guess.

22 BH: Sure, absolutely, yeah, I think even in the fairest or the most optimistic
23 reading of it to collate all that information would be an incredible task and I'm not sure
24 that, we're talking 1970, '71, I don't know that—well I'm quite sure computers didn't
25 have the ability to deal with algorithms and things like that. It was pure bubbled in so I'm
26 not sure how nuanced and accurate the information was, even without the human thing of
27 wanting to put the best face forward.

28 KC: Right, right. What about the American intelligence that you received? Were
29 there any difficulties with, you know 'cause obviously the Navy is in that part of the
30 world as well, did you have any sort of inter service problems when it came to

1 information, intel, the CIA's involved, the Army's involved, all of this? Were there any
2 difficulties in that arena?

3 BH: I never had any. Now, I will tell you again on the MAT team I subsequently
4 moved to the province and did a different job there, but on the MAT team that was never
5 an issue for me. But I was, again, I was at the very end of the advisory food chain there.
6 The intel that I got seemed to be pretty good, it was never inaccurate. To me it was
7 always helpful to know, maybe it's because I had an innate trust of the guys who were
8 providing me information that I'm maybe a little skeptical of from my counterpart's side.
9 Of course, at the MAT team level, we simply got it as intel so I didn't know—it came
10 down through my chain of command, but I didn't know if it was Army intel, I didn't
11 know if it might've been NILO (Navy intelligence liaison officer), I didn't know if it
12 might've been OSA (Officer of the Special Ambassador), O-S-A, intel or whoever else
13 might've been operating in the area, it sort of came down to me as a conclusion, "Such-
14 and-such of Viet Cong platoon is operating in your area and is expected to be engaging in
15 tax collecting activities." I mean take that as an example, and it was generally I mean it
16 was fairly accurate. But at least on the MAT team, I didn't know very much about where
17 it was coming from.

18 KC: And when it comes right down to it at the level that you are operating, it
19 probably wouldn't've mattered where it came from, it's just what you're gonna have to
20 do, and if it's reliable then you're satisfied with it.

21 BH: Absolutely, absolutely, yeah. The quality of that stuff, at a certain point it
22 becomes—it's not an exactly predictive thing, intelligence, sometimes it is, most of the
23 time it's not, it's just, "Well, we have information that such-and-such a group is operating
24 in your area." Well, they may or may not be there. But that's certainly a piece of
25 information you pay particular importance to, and then if you can pick up corroborating
26 stuff from your counterpart or folks on the ground, well they can say that's pretty good.
27 But the thing changes so quickly too that it was kind of hard to do, how valuable was that
28 piece of information? Because it would be very particular, "Such-and-such a group's
29 going to be operating in this area on such-and-such a night." Well, they either did or
30 didn't, so you don't know. No, I was happy with the information, the intel, that I got. But

1 it was from the chain of command, the subtleties of where it was coming from within the
2 province.

3 KC: Sure. I wanna pick up on something that you mentioned a little while ago,
4 and it's something that I think would be incredibly difficult and this goes from the
5 beginning of human interaction to the war in Afghanistan today. How do you—let me put
6 this in a different way 'cause I think that's maybe too leading. When you are faced with
7 Vietnamese sources of information, they're coming from people who live in the province,
8 and like you said this was a hotbed for VC activity, how trustworthy or reliable do you
9 think the people were, that were providing this information to you? Like you mentioned,
10 there was a Chieu Hoi with whom you were working, and you know the political
11 reliability of Chieu Hoi would, I would think, would always have to be in question. Even
12 if they're acting as a double-agent, openly as a double-agent, you just don't know. How
13 do you deal with that? With these questionable sources that may be out there.

14 BH: You become very cynical, very skeptical, and I'm not sure that I've ever
15 shaken that for the rest of my life. You work with certain people, and you get to the point
16 where you actually like them. You actually trust them. After the fact, am I certain that
17 they were a hundred-percent behind their own effort? I think so, but I'm not sure, I don't
18 know. They all had their own fish to fry and as I said at least, speaking for myself at age
19 twenty-four and things I learned later from NIOs and other people, I was like Ned in the
20 First Reader about what was actually going on. Some of them I didn't trust at all even at
21 the time, some I was neutral on, some I actually affirmatively trusted and relied on them.
22 After the fact, was that a well-placed trust? I think so, but I'm not sure.

23 KC: Mm-hmm. Well, it's a very difficult situation to be put in at twenty-four
24 years old, even with all your training, you're asking someone to take a brand-new crash
25 course in human psychology and human behavior, and that's not even including what was
26 going on before you got there. Let's face it, not all VC were necessarily convinced
27 communists, there were those who just held a grudge against others in the village and the
28 power structure as it was, and all that sort of thing. So it may have been tied in directly, it
29 may not have been, it would be just an incredibly complex, almost a kaleidoscopic kind
30 of thing to look at.

1 BH: Well, that's very well put, that's exactly right, it was so complex. It really
2 wasn't—people like me, military people, you're supposed to keep the mission simple for
3 folks you know, and it was, "kaleidoscopic" is a good description of it. There was just so
4 much in the way of nuance going on, political, military, social, cultural, religious, a
5 whole bunch of things that we sort of, and I thought I was fairly aware of things, and over
6 the years thinking back on it I'm thinking, "Oh my gosh." There was just so much going
7 on that I really didn't have, I didn't really truly appreciate the interplay of things.

8 KC: Sure, and throw on top of that the fact that it's changing all of the time, and
9 that the ARVN approach to things is going to be changing, and the American approach to
10 things is going to be changing, what they want from you, so it's a really difficult spot to
11 be in, which I think is what makes it so interesting for someone to be involved in
12 something like that. All right, now with all of this going on, with all of this change and all
13 of this impossible-to-figure-out nuance, and all of these things, you still gotta get through
14 each day. Take me through a typical day.

15 BH: We lived on, there were five of us and then we got down to four of us
16 because of a rotation deal, we lived in a hooch that was I'm gonna say maybe thirty-by-
17 twenty if it was that big, in which we all slept, we kept our radio, kept all our ammunition
18 and everything, it was not a particularly commodious place to live. We got up early,
19 whatever time we got up, generally the night before we would plan out what we were—
20 well, it's usually at the beginning of the week, and then during the week the night before
21 we would decide if we were going on operations, who was going on the operation,
22 generally try to rotate that. We would always have two Americans on any operation when
23 we'd accompany the *lien doi* or when we went to a night outpost, there were always two
24 Americans, it made no sense to send one American clearly. So we would rotate that,
25 those assignments, and then we would rotate so that it wasn't the same two people going
26 on deals all the time, everyone needed to be able to work with everyone else was, in my
27 mind, that's what I thought we needed to do. We handled the—and any food, we would
28 generally eat soup for breakfast, Vietnamese soup, just drew a blank on what we—not
29 miso, that's Japanese, but anyway we would generally have soup. We had no real stove to
30 speak of, we had kind of a kerosene deal with a mop soaked into the kerosene and then
31 that would heat the pots up, it was very rudimentary as you can imagine. During the day

1 we never really had a meal. We might eat rations or something during the day or sort of
2 maybe eat in some of the hamlets if we're with the people, and at night we would
3 generally eat at the team house at night. We rotated the cooking among ourselves, there's
4 no mess hall obviously. But we would typically during the day operationally, we might
5 have the medic go to a village and have a medical clinic. It was kind of tricky because we
6 needed to schedule them, obviously, but you couldn't schedule them too tightly because
7 then you become targets for people when you're going down the road to these villages.
8 So on the medical clinics, for example, what I did was, and this seemed to work pretty
9 well, is I made a deal. We would also make these contracts and deals with the village
10 chiefs in addition to my counterpart. I said, "Look, we will—" I can't remember now if it
11 was once a week or every other week, doesn't matter, but I said, "We will come and I
12 will have the medic—" God I don't mean to wander—the Vietnamese word for doctor is
13 *bac si*. They would refer to our medic who was just a—not just, he was an E-7 enlisted
14 guy, as *bac si*, well he was really a medic but to them he was the state of medical
15 treatment. So we would go, and sometimes I would go with the medic and hold clinics in
16 these villages, and the deal was we would do that as long as they provided an (??) like a
17 nurse or a medic, so it was someone in the village. I said, "You have to have someone
18 there to work with our medic." Obviously, you want them to learn from the medic so that
19 when we leave they have some residual knowledge. As long as they did that we would go
20 to the village, if they didn't do it, if for some reason they didn't have the medic show up
21 that was it. I actually cut them off one time in one village. They didn't have the guy show
22 up, and I felt horrible about it but I figured if I don't do it they'll run all over me. So I
23 said, "No," and I then reinstated it two or three weeks later and said, "Okay, last
24 chance." But so our medic and there in the village medic, nurse, or whatever you wanna
25 call it, they would hold clinics there. In the course of the—the stuff we saw was stuff that
26 you just even then you never saw in the States anyway, just sort of infections and things
27 like that, but they didn't have the means and methods and medicines to take care of it so
28 our medic might—I mean in their mind it was like Denton Cooley, for crying out loud,
29 you know he was sort of the cutting edge of medical—and they were pretty good, our
30 medics were very good. He would see a lot of wounds that were infected, and we would
31 use that as an opportunity to teach you about fundamental antiseptic stuff, taking care of

1 wounds, things like that. We had a tremendous source of supply, there were only five of
2 us, and we got they called them SP (supplementary pack) packs and they were only made
3 for a platoon, so they would be overloaded, we'd get them every thirty days, they'd be
4 overloaded with soap and sewing kits and things like that. We would take them and if
5 these people came and were good patients, so to speak, we would give them others cases
6 of lye soap that would last, I'm sure they're probably still running out. I mean it was just
7 real fundamental stuff, and then we used to—they had this crud on their head, some of
8 these little kids, and we'd explain to the mother how you could do that, and I think that
9 did some good. I really do think that did some good. We would also go and visit, that's
10 when I would use time to go visit some of these village chiefs and hamlet chiefs,
11 although again you need to be careful. You didn't wanna step on anyone's toes, you
12 always checked in through the village chief just to see what was going on, go and drink
13 tea with them. Chitchat with them, most of it was I don't wanna say wasted time, but it
14 was more of just developing a rapport, I don't know that it was any tit-for-tat stuff. To the
15 extent we went on operations, combat operations with the *lien doi* of course we would do
16 that during the day, we didn't do that every day or close to every day, that was more hit
17 or miss deal. Then two or three times a week, three times a week we would go on these
18 night outpost visits and go to these RF/PF deals and check things out, see how they were
19 doing, sort of gauge morale and gauge what was going on and see if there was any enemy
20 activity.

21 KC: Talking to the people in the villages, especially the village chiefs, like you
22 said, you have to go through them first obviously, 'cause you wanna be very careful
23 about how you approach these kinds of things. What do they complain about? Are they
24 angry about the presence of the Americans? Or are they angry about the presence of the
25 VC? What sort of things do they tell you they want fixed?

26 BH: They were very circumspect, and again that may be cultural or it may be just
27 looking out for their own rear ends as far as words come down that they're not getting
28 such-and-such supply, so they were very careful. You would learn more by asking them
29 about platoons 'cause they always liked to brag about their platoons, but it was things that
30 weren't said that you sort of said, "Okay, there's maybe a shortcoming here or there may
31 be some morale issue here," or we would ask for desertion rates of platoons. You would

1 look around and there'd be very few people in the platoon and you'd figure, "Okay,
2 there's a lot of guys who aren't here for some reason." So again it was hard because—
3 they were very careful, they didn't wanna paint too bad a picture for you.

4 KC: Sure, and for a variety of reasons, too, I would assume. Well, what about
5 these night outpost missions? Take me on one of these.

6 BH: Again, I would go with one or two people from the *lien doi*, usually my
7 counterpart or he would sometimes send his XO in part of that group of eight or so. We
8 would go to these night outposts which were, as I recall, they were pretty much modelled
9 on the old French deal, they were triangular. Weren't particularly big, there was a platoon
10 in there which might be anywhere from fifteen to twenty-five people as I remember.
11 They had maybe berms, just packed mud, that were probably chest high on an American,
12 maybe a little bit higher. Sandbags. There was a place where they lived in there and it
13 was positioned so it covered what was perceived to be a route for Viet Cong to either
14 harass or come into villages, or whatever. Generally, they were fairly well placed, I think.
15 But we would go, probably get there a little bit before dusk, again you had to be careful.
16 You didn't telegraph what you were doing or where you were going till the very last
17 minute. It really wasn't paranoid, I mean you didn't do it, you didn't want people to be
18 able to know or to predict or tell someone where the Americans were, what they were
19 doing. So anyway we would go out to these places and they were generally way the heck
20 out in the middle of rice paddies or off of rice paddies. We would show up and as we take
21 a look at their defensive positions and again inspect, but only in the most informal
22 fashion because you wanted to—if they thought that you were quote "spying on them"
23 then you got nowhere, so you would do that. Then we would eat there with the
24 Vietnamese in their compound, and then these poor guys, people on each of the three
25 corners or the three apexes, I guess, of the outpost, they had guards and they would rotate
26 during the night, and these guys as I said they worked all day, too. So I was always
27 concerned the whole place could fall asleep you know? So what we would do, we would,
28 the other American and I and we all did it, we would, it got to be ten or eleven o'clock,
29 there was no electricity clearly or anything in these fields. We got these guys to play
30 bingo, the Vietnamese name for bingo is lotto it's exactly like bingo. They just loved to,
31 it was a recreational deal and I think they liked to gamble these guys, liked it a lot like

1 military guys, a lot. Anyway but I would get in and I, at the time, I could understand
2 Vietnamese pretty well, speak it passingly, but not that I'd wanna rely on it. But I could
3 certainly play bingo, they would call the numbers out, so I would get in the game and
4 with three or four dollars and play bingo with them for a couple hours, and then I would
5 make sure by about midnight I'd lost all the money. So I had now provided this huge pot
6 of four bucks for these guys, and they'd be up all night long playing bingo and the other
7 American and I would alternate, one would sleep for an hour or two hours and then wake
8 the other guy up and he would sleep, we just took a hammock with us and hung it up
9 there and there would be one American awake at all times. But kept them all awake by
10 three to five bucks a night losing at Bingo.

11 KC: Well worth it for alert sentries.

12 BH: Yeah, it's not a particularly good war story, but it's the truth.

13 KC: All right, now you're out here on one of these things, you mentioned the
14 hammock, what else do you bring with you when you know you're gonna be out for one
15 day, two days, three days?

16 BH: Our operations were generally—sometimes we might go to a spot where they
17 might be fixing the road and you might be out there three or four days. Other than that,
18 our operations were all day-based operations, and we would go back to our team house,
19 team headquarters. When we went on these night outpost visits you would leave and go
20 back in the morning, and either you would go back and do your regular work or you
21 might take it easy for a couple hours 'cause you were pretty tired at the end of a night
22 outpost. But didn't take very much at all, didn't take food. Basically, I took as much
23 ammunition as you can carry. I don't mean that to sound like it was a terrible burden, but
24 you didn't need food, you didn't need sleeping bags, you didn't need anything. You just
25 had a hammock, you know you've seen those, they weight about six ounces, and other
26 than that took your weapon and ammunition. They would feed you there. We, one time
27 early on, we were headed out to one and saw some guys that clearly they were from the
28 outpost, and they were out killing rats. I mean that place is just filthy with rats just
29 because of the water. We go to the outpost and go through our usual deal, then we have
30 dinner and Hung was my interpreter and I said, "Hung, this is good, what is it?" Because
31 again you compliment them on their food, it was rice and meat. He said, "I'll tell you

1 later.” So we finish eating and I thanked them, so later I said, “Hung, what was that?” He
2 said, “You know those guys coming in with the rats? That’s what you just ate.” I said,
3 “Hung, here’s my deal, if I ask you what we’re going to eat or what we’ve had to eat,
4 don’t tell me.”

5 KC: That’s obviously a cultural thing, as well. Rats in the United States, of
6 course, carry disease and the wrong kinds of places all the time. It’s a much more natural
7 state for them in Viet Nam.

8 BH: Yeah, yeah. I mean nothing bothered me about the food, at the old line it
9 tasted like beef I hate to say that but it tasted like beef, *nuoc mam* and the rice, and it was
10 a very satisfying meal to me.

11 KC: Right, right, especially if you go without one for a while. You mentioned
12 weapons and ammunition. What weapons did you take with you typically?

13 BH: M-16 was the standard thing we all had. I think there were pistols. I never
14 saw much sense in having a pistol, actually, so I think that they were allocated to our
15 team. We might take an M-79 grenade launcher, you know that’s sort of like a sawed-off
16 shotgun really. I’m trying to remember how many rounds of ammunition we take for the
17 M-16, a fair amount, maybe a couple hundred rounds. Then I would load up my pockets
18 with grenades. Simply close-in sort of stuff, but you needed stuff that you could use. I
19 mean, it wasn’t any real big deal.

20 KC: Right, well here comes the inevitable question then. Did you ever encounter
21 any enemy forces while you were on one of these night missions?

22 BH: Well, actually, yeah, a couple times. In this sense, one night we were at an
23 outpost that was not far from a canal, and at about midnight or so one of the guards heard
24 someone calling in from the path into the outpost from the canal, so they woke me up, my
25 counterpart woke me up. The story was, they said, “Look, we’re from such-and-such a
26 platoon, and we’ve just been involved in an ambush or a deal and we have several
27 wounded people here and we need help.” So my counterpart and I talked about it, and I
28 said, “Well, our medic,” fortunately as it turns out our medic wasn’t with us that night, I
29 said, “Our medic’s at the team house and that might be two clicks away from here or
30 whatever. Go down the road to do that,” and they just begged and pleaded, “No, we’re
31 not gonna make it.” I said, “No,” ‘cause we didn’t know who they are,” I said, “Tell them

1 to go see the medic up there,” and I radioed ahead to our medic and said, “There may be
2 a guy coming in or two or three people.” Well, they sort of disappeared, and about two
3 hours later they did the same thing at another outpost not far from where we were, they
4 let them in and they overran the place.

5 KC: No kidding?

6 BH: Yeah, yeah.

7 KC: Wow.

8 BH: Well, it’s just again it’s pure, blind luck on my part.

9 KC: Was it a case of you had a bad feeling, like some people say? Or was there
10 just the evidence wasn’t falling into place right?

11 BH: Yeah, it didn’t make sense, it didn’t make sense and especially when they
12 were so adamant when we said, “Well, there’s a medic, a much better medic down the
13 road not that far, it’s a decent road so it’s not gonna take you a long time,” and they were
14 just insistent. Both my counterpart and I independently sort of just got a feeling, there’s
15 something crazy about this, you know or something doesn’t sound right about this.
16 Another time we were on the night outpost visit, it was just quiet as a mouse, it couldn’t
17 have been more peaceful, so to speak. First light the next morning, we wake up and
18 festooned on the coconut trees not a hundred meters from where we are, are three Viet
19 Cong flags hanging (laughs).

20 KC: Oh, goodness.

21 BH: So their infiltration ability was pretty good.

22 KC: Now why do you think they decided to put those up there? Just to show you
23 that they could?

24 BH: I think so, yeah. I think so. Or there might’ve been just—no I think that could
25 be it, or it might’ve been part of the intra-village, intra-hamlet stuff that we just happened
26 to be around and be the audience for, who knows. But I was—whimsical, you’re not
27 particularly whimsical there, but I remember even at the time thinking, “That’s kind of an
28 irony to that isn’t it?”

29 KC: Yeah, at least, yeah and that would be I think disturbing though waking up to
30 see that. Holy smokes.

1 BH: Well, yeah, you'd figure, "Well, if they were that close, they probably
2 could've been closer." So you wonder who was awake on the three-quarters of the fort?
3 Not fort—I mean those guys, gosh they had a hard job, work all day and then sleep who
4 knows how many hours a night, it was an almost impossible task for them really. The
5 Vietnamese I'm talking about.

6 KC: Yes, yes, yeah. How are they armed? The RF/PF that you worked with?

7 BH: By the time we were—I've read histories of it since, by the time we were
8 there they all had M-16s. Some of the village forces might still be using M-1s, the
9 people's self defense force and things like that. By the time we were there—and of course
10 being assigned primarily to the *lien doi* which was more of a pure military operation deal,
11 they had pretty good equipment. I mean they had M-16s, they had grenade launchers,
12 they had stuff like that. They were outfitted like an American unit would've been more or
13 less.

14 KC: And of course, at this time, Vietnamization, turning over weapons, and these
15 kinds of things, and there's so many weapons of course available by that time as well just
16 throughout the country. What was their morale like, the RF/PF? I know this would
17 depend on the individual, and the time and things like that, but what was your general
18 impression of the indigenous personnel's morale toward what was going on?

19 BH: It was—for the most part it was like any military unit, there was a lot of good
20 natured bitching and moaning about things. Some bitching and moaning is an indication
21 of a pretty good attitude in a unit. I know that sounds crazy, you know, people complain
22 about food, or they complain about how many operations or whatever, but that sort of
23 good natured stuff. It's sort of part of the lore I guess of being in a military unit. There
24 were others, other units that you would see, they were just accidents looking to happen,
25 and who knows the reason. Stories I have heard, this was not first-hand with me, stories
26 that I have heard from other folks who had work with MAT teams and other—this was
27 not my experience but one guy for example said early on he decided he wanted to muster
28 to see what the strength of platoon was in an RF/PF deal. So on payday he went with the
29 pay officer, and he asked the platoon commander to have them muster to get their pay,
30 and there was a lot of hemming and hawing and then he said after a short period of time
31 all of a sudden you see a number of guys running from huts in the village putting

1 uniforms on. They show up and the pay is made. His interpreter told him later, he said,
2 “Look, if you do that again, that platoon commander will probably see that you’re
3 killed.” He said, “What happens is, there’s a big game going on.” The men don’t wanna
4 go into the RF/PFs or a good number of people like anyplace else, it’s nothing peculiar to
5 the Vietnamese. If you don’t wanna put your life at risk, you don’t wanna do it. So they
6 made a deal with the either the village chief or the platoon leader, that he would enroll
7 them as being in his platoon so that they had the card that showed they were actively
8 engaged. The deal was, he got their pay. There were units like that. Now how many did I
9 come across? I’m not sure. When you think about it after the fact, I mean these guys
10 didn’t have a DEROS (date estimated return overseas), they’d been in the Army since
11 they were seventeen or eighteen, and they were gonna be in ‘til whenever. So you could
12 generally tell by the desertion rate. Some of these platoons had, that may be too strong a
13 word “desertion rate,” but some folks deserted but some people would just kind of
14 disappear for a week or two or whatever.

15 KC: And was any effort made to stop that when it would happen, or is it just part
16 of the natural attrition of a platoon or whatever?

17 BH: Depends on how good the Vietnamese leader was, and it depended on how
18 good the village chief or the district chief was. Again, you couldn’t do it as an American.
19 You could report it up through the chain of command and hope that the word got back
20 down in a way that was effective. “You need to do something about this.” I one time was
21 in a meeting where there was talk about a particular unit or a platoon having a problem
22 like this. Someone in the group who outranked me, someone in the group his answer was,
23 “Get them a motto, get them a shoulder patch.” And I’m thinking to myself, “Jesus, what
24 are you talking about?” It was sort of a World War II solution to things.

25 KC: Yeah, yeah, huh. You talked about this kind of a ghost soldier, shadow
26 soldier kind of thing, and that brings to mind something that oftentimes comes up in the
27 discussion of Vietnamese forces whether they are the local forces or the ARVN in
28 particular. Corruption at this level. Now corruption means different things to you and I
29 and across cultural boundaries, what is seen as corrupt in one culture is not corruption in
30 another. But from the American sense, what did you see in terms of corruption among the
31 Vietnamese you encountered, that you worked with?

1 BH: You know, again, at the tail end of the food chain I didn't see very much of
2 it, because I didn't know how much—I didn't know what could be done in terms of, I
3 mean, did I see people steal chickens and things on operations? No, didn't see any of that
4 stuff, they were pretty well trained not to be abusive to the local population. Finally the
5 word had gotten out that you want to turn someone into a VC just be nasty his family or
6 whatever. So there was not a lot of, among the military at the MAT team level, I'd really
7 didn't see any crime. I'm not saying there wasn't any, but there wasn't any that was
8 obvious to me. In the villages you sort of wondered how people could—and they would
9 insist on giving you a big lunch for example, and you can't insult them and say, "No," but
10 I'm thinking, "Jesus, he doesn't need to be spending this money on me." Well, the thing
11 is you think about it, where is he getting the money that he can go do this stuff? Do I
12 have any direct evidence of that? No. I think that he was, I had some sort of vague, free-
13 floating suspicions about some of them. The corruption probably took place more at the,
14 I'm guessing the province and the corps level because there was much more opportunity
15 to get your hands on money there, and goods, too.

16 KC: Yeah, a lot more access to a lot more resources, and things can disappear
17 pretty easily at that kind of level and no one will question it. Okay, well, what about the
18 Americans? You've talked about the Vietnamese in some great detail, what about the
19 attitude, what about the approach, what about the morale of the Americans on these MAT
20 teams?

21 BH: My experience was it was pretty good. Of course, these guys were all, you
22 were either junior officers or what I call senior NCOs, E-5s, -6, -7s. So the folks I worked
23 with were career guys. I mean they were in for more than the two years or whatever the
24 basic three- or four-year enlistment. So they were always pretty good. When I was on the
25 MAT team I made it a point to always have a reason to have to send a guy to Saigon, we
26 were about thirty-five to fifty miles, I don't remember exactly now, almost due south of
27 Saigon, maybe southwest of Saigon. So I would always rotate every couple weeks I
28 would have some reason someone had to go to Saigon for three or four days, or five days,
29 and the deal was they had to be back by a certain day and if they weren't then they'd
30 screw it up for everyone else, 'cause nowhere in the manual did it say I was supposed to
31 do that. I think for the most part they appreciated it, they could get out, blow off steam,

1 do whatever they wanted to do, and I never had any problems with that, no one really
2 abused that. The other added benefit is you have to behave very carefully when you're in
3 those rural villages. You can't be like a marauding American soldier in Saigon. You can't
4 do the usual things that a certain number of soldiers might do when they're on leave in
5 Saigon.

6 KC: That brings up another good point. Did you see any of that while you were
7 there? Any, you used the word "abuse," but abuse could be part of it, taking advantage of
8 the Vietnamese on part of the Americans?

9 BH: You mean the advisory teams?

10 KC: Yes.

11 BH: No. No, not at all. They did a very good—no, I never saw that. I'm not sure, I
12 don't know why that is, that's a good question. I mean it was constantly drummed into us
13 from the time way back at Dian or the jungle school or whatever, and then at every level
14 and it was absolutely reinforced in the command structure on the team. My experiences, I
15 never saw it. I never saw it. I don't know if it's because folks were a little bit older, we
16 didn't have a lot of eighteen-, nineteen-year-old kids and I'm not saying anything bad
17 about them, but we had sort of a different—we had like I say senior NCOs and officers,
18 not that they're immune from bad behavior, but I just never saw it. I think we all finally
19 got the message that if there's anything good to come out of this, we gotta behave in a
20 certain way.

21 KC: Mm-hmm, sure. That brings up another good point here, and it's this: do you
22 think that the Americans that you worked with on these MAT teams, whether they were a
23 superior officer or whether they were the NCOs or whoever, do you get a feeling that
24 they believed in what they were doing? Did they grab a hold of this opportunity to work
25 on MAT teams and work with the Vietnamese? Did they believe in this part of the war?

26 BH: I wish I could say yes. The best answer I can give you is I don't know. The
27 reason I say that is your job first and foremost every morning was to be alive that night,
28 so you didn't really have a broad view of what was going on. You could measure whether
29 things were going well or not, but did they buy into the fact that is Vietnamization going
30 to work? I don't know, you tend to be cynical in that situation and all you do is your
31 twelve bricks a day, you do your job for that day, and what you planned out, and what

1 your folks from above tell you they want you to do, and you do the best you can. But I
2 don't know that there were any broad strokes of people saying, "God, this is really
3 making a difference. This is doing something." Now after the fact I think it did in fact
4 make a difference? I think that Vietnamization effort got a bad rap. I think it was very
5 successful by all objective standards measuring from '68 to '72 or '73. They did a heck
6 of a job. But if people day-to-day did they do it with a sense of, "God, we're really
7 making a difference," I can't say that they did. It was an assignment that you had, and
8 you did it.

9 KC: Mm-hmm, sure, sure. It's hard to be philosophical about things when you're
10 square in the middle of it.

11 BH: Exactly, exactly and I don't mean to sound cynical or dismissive of the
12 question, but that's an honest answer to it.

13 KC: Sure. No, no, no that makes perfect sense. Well, this goes along with that, of
14 course, and I can probably predict your answer in this case but maybe not. We tend to
15 think, in our popular culture in this country, we think of Vietnam, especially the latter
16 years of the Vietnam War, we have soldiers who are disgruntled, we have people who
17 don't wanna be there, we've got people who don't believe in the war anymore, we have
18 the rise of the drug culture in the US finding its way to Vietnam and from Vietnam back
19 to the US depending on who's point of view you're looking at I guess, and then racial
20 problems and these kinds of things. Did you encounter any of this part of the negative
21 kind of aspects of the American experience there? I don't mean to say these were myths,
22 because they were not myths. I mean this is a very real part of it. Did you see any of this?

23 BH: I saw it in Vietnam. I never saw it on the advisory team. Never saw it on the
24 advisory team, no. I was aware generally speaking of one or two people using a little bit
25 of marijuana at the province level, not a good idea, but still it wasn't a widespread deal at
26 all, it was sort of an anomaly, actually. Now I guess if I'm being honest, you're talking
27 senior NCOs and officers, boozing is probably the drug of choice there. There was a fair
28 amount of that, but not to a degree that it could—I mean only in the sense that at a
29 province level you might be able to have four or five or six beers sometimes and it's not
30 like you're putting anyone else's life at risk. On the MAT teams we didn't have any
31 alcohol on MAT team, no beer no nothing, you just can't afford to do that with four or

1 five people. But as far as morale or racial or drug problems, didn't see it at all on the
2 MAT teams, on the district level, or at the province level. The province level is probably
3 a hundred, a 125 people. They were fairly spread out, they would probably be maybe the
4 size of Rhode Island, I don't know, but it's not like there was a heavy concentration of
5 folks. Province was the most, now when I would go to Saigon, had occasion to go to
6 Saigon, or when I would go on R&R (rest and recuperation), I was probably as stunned as
7 Americans in the States were about what was going on. Someone I knew was an
8 administrative, an adjutant at the main American hospital in Saigon, and went to visit him
9 one time when I was up there, I forget why I was up there for a couple days. We were in
10 his dayroom area, you know in general it looks like every military unit, they all look the
11 same, the grey desks and the linoleum on the floor. Talking to this fellow who was a
12 captain, he said, "Come with me," he said, "I need some help." So we walked maybe
13 twenty feet to the latrine door and he said, "I'm gonna need your help." He throws open
14 the door and there's a kid, a Spec 4, in there with piece of rubber tied across his arm, and
15 he's got a needle in his arm with heroin, sticking heroin in his arm. This guy apparently
16 had been in trouble for this, my friend the adjutant, in any number of ways by not doing
17 his job well. But so I was stunned at that. I mean I was absolutely stunned. I know that
18 sounds like very naïve, but I'd never seen it. I had never seen it. There was a lot of, and I
19 guess this isn't unusual for Vietnam, there was a fair amount of black market activity
20 where you could take military payment certificates and turn them into—or dollars into
21 military certificates, and then to piastres, and it was a multiplier effect as my economist
22 friends would call them, you'd make a tremendous amount of money. Lots of stuff,
23 electronic gear being sold on the black market, that's more your common garden variety
24 corruption that I suspect you find in every war. Stuff would be stolen off the—I mean
25 there was a program, New Life Development, where if you came over and moved into
26 these secure areas, the government would give you so much rice, so many pieces of tin, it
27 was kind of a laundry list of things that you got. At every level of distribution, for when it
28 arrived at the docks in Saigon to when it got to the person at the end of the chain where I
29 was, about half of it disappeared. So if you were supposed to get twenty bags of rice, by
30 the time it left Saigon you were down ten, and then you got to the province and it was
31 five, and then it got down to you and you maybe got two bags of rice and so many pieces

1 of tin. A lot of that was lore, but as I recall I had some experience with that, where what
2 they were supposed to get and what they actually got, they didn't get it. That's again
3 common garden-variety corruption that you would find. The other thing I noticed, I went
4 on R&R one time—I swear you sort of ask the questions to get me talking don't you?
5 (Laughing)

6 KC: Of course I did,. That's the whole point. Tell me about, I was gonna ask you
7 about R&R anyway, tell me about it. When did it take place, and where did you go?

8 BH: Well, actually, I took two of them. I took one about seven or eight months
9 into it, I met my wife in Hawaii. It was like a week, or I think it was a week or six days or
10 something. That was terrific, it was great, you could eat whatever food you wanted.
11 When you go from a place like that to a place like Hawaii I mean it's like *Alice in*
12 *Wonderland*, people drive around, you don't worry about things and all the rest. Then I
13 went also, maybe ten months into my tour, a guy on the province advisory team who I
14 was friendly with, his father had a friend who was a businessman in Hong Kong, and he
15 said, "Why don't you come? This guy is grateful to my father for some opportunities he
16 gave him and he's gonna show us around." So we went to Hong Kong, had a terrific time
17 there, too. It was the same five or six days or whatever. But it was on that trip to Hong
18 Kong that I get on the plane, and I think we were all wearing, I'm trying to remember—I
19 can't remember, it's going and coming, but anyway we're all in fatigues on the plane and
20 there's a group of folks chanting Black Power stuff in the plane. One, it made you
21 uncomfortable, and two, it was something that I hadn't experienced. One of these guys
22 getting off, I'm looking at his nametag and I thought, "That's an unusual name." The
23 name was B-R-O-J-E-F-F. I'm trying to figure ethnically what kind, and then it dawns on
24 me. He's got a nametag that says Bro Jeff. I'm thinking, "Jesus, what kind of units are
25 these guys in that they get away with this stuff?" I mean the experience I had was at
26 much a higher level, and it seemed like farther back from anything really going on, the
27 more chance was that you run into that stuff, the drugs, and the racial stuff. There was a
28 guy on our province team who extended, he had done a year, he was with an American
29 division as a platoon leader, and he had just enough time left that he couldn't get an early
30 out so he extended for six or seven months in Vietnam and the only thing, he said the
31 requirement was they had to send him to MACV. He said, "Because it was too

1 dangerous.” He said, “Not on operations with his platoon, but in the basecamps it was far
2 too dangerous.” Fraggings, and racial stuff, and drugs, he said, “I just needed out of
3 there,” he said, “it was horrible.” This would’ve been late ’70, early ’71 when this fellow
4 came. He was a very normal guy, I mean it wasn’t like he was a nut or a prick or anything
5 else, the more I talked to him he was pretty level headed. He just said, “Operations were
6 great,” he said, “you go to the basecamp,” and he said, “you’re just nervous all the time
7 what some crazy person was gonna do.”

8 KC: It must’ve made the Delta and Kien Hoa province, or Ben Tre, seem a little
9 normal I guess after you—

10 BH: Well, it did. Yeah, it really did. I never saw any of that stuff down there. It
11 was like a military unit should run. I know that’s normative, but you know what I’m
12 saying.

13 KC: Mm-hmm, right. Well, tell me about this R&R you took to Hong Kong. What
14 do you do? Where do you go? What sort of things do you see? Tell me about Hong Kong
15 in 1970, 1971.

16 BH: It was fantastic. This fellow was, my friend his father was the president of
17 one of the big stockbrokerage firms in New York and he had sent this fellow to Hong
18 Kong to open an office for them sometime in the ‘60s. He was a young guy, he seemed
19 old to me at the time he was probably thirty-five to forty, but he saw wonderful
20 opportunities there and left the brokerage firm and went into the import/export business
21 himself, but he was very grateful to my friend’s dad for sending him there, giving him the
22 opportunity to see. So anyway, he was sort of our guide, we didn’t spend a lot of time
23 with him. I knew I was getting out, I wanted to get the usual deals, suits and all the rest,
24 and he said, “Look,” he said, “let’s go to my tailor,” and I figured, “This is pretty good
25 instead of some guy you don’t know.” Anyway, we go to his tailor, and until I finally
26 outgrew them those suits lasted me for years, they were just classics. You had handmade
27 shoes made, went to restaurants, toured around Sai—not Saigon, Hong Kong and went up
28 Victoria Peak and did all that. Just kind of goofed around and shopped and had a good
29 time.

30 KC: What was the general reception for American service personnel over there in
31 ’70?

1 BH: In Hong Kong?

2 KC Yeah.

3 BH: You know, I don't even know that they knew that we were—I was gonna say
4 we were in civilian clothes and they probably figured out, but even then the city was
5 teeming with commercialism so they didn't pay attention to us one way or another. They
6 were very courteous, liked doing business with us and they were friendly as I remember.

7 KC: It's kind of a wide-open city.

8 BH: Yeah, yeah.

9 KC: And these sort of things, it wouldn't've been—it's not like you'd be going to
10 San Francisco in 1971, or anything like that.

11 BH: Exactly. Yeah, no. Yeah, there was no ill feeling toward us at all.

12 KC: Well, getting back to some of these other aspects of it when you're not out on
13 missions or these night operations or whatever it might be. What is life like for a guy who
14 is in this team in Vietnam? I mean you've got things you gotta do, clothes possibly to
15 wash, hygiene to take care of, letters home. What sort of things do you do in the little
16 downtime you have, just to make life normal or to stay in touch with the normal aspects
17 of life?

18 BH: Listen to the radio. There was AFVN (Armed Forces Vietnam Network) I
19 think was the thing we listened to that, and that sounds crazy in simple terms, that was
20 sort of a link to what was going on. We would sit around and talk, I mean you'd read
21 sometimes, but it was hard because you ran out of light and we didn't have any real light
22 in the team house. But we sort of talk about things, there was one guy on my team who
23 had escaped from Hungary back in '54, '56, '57 and came to the United States and had
24 enlisted in the Army, and I was fascinated to listen to him talk about his life of getting out
25 of Hungary and then getting to the States and wanting to join the Army. He was delighted
26 to be in the Army. He just loved being in the Army. But we were from all different
27 backgrounds, it sounds crazy, but we would sit around talking about things.

28 KC: Mm-hmm, like what?

29 BH: You talk about sports. You talk about one fellow, the medic was a bit older,
30 he had a couple kids who were probably junior high, high school, and he would talk
31 about them and sports, and what he wanted them to do. Just sort of the same stuff you and

1 I might talk about, or you might talk about at the faculty dining room. I mean it sounds
2 crazy but just sort of very mundane things. Music, whatever, yep.

3 KC: Right. Well, we're at about an hour-and-a-half for today, Mr. Henri, so why
4 don't we stop for today?

5 BH: Sure.

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

1 **Interview with Bill Henri**

2 **Session [4] of [4]**

3 **13 July 2011**

4
5 KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Mr. Bill Henri.
6 Today is 13 July, 2011. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, and Mr. Henri is joining me by telephone
7 from his office in Houston, Texas. Okay, Mr. Henri, let's pick up the interview with your
8 changing jobs. This was November of 1970, I believe you said.

9 BH: Right, somewhere in there, yep.

10 KC: Describe how this change of job and location to some degree, explain how
11 this came about. How you were informed, why it came about, and then take me through
12 the move.

13 BH: Well, I developed a gut problem. I lost a bunch of weight and I couldn't—I
14 had some sort of intestinal deal so I went and had it checked out and I was in the hospital
15 in Saigon for three or four days. I had some sort of enteritis—I can't remember the name
16 of it, but it essentially was an infection in the gut from, I don't know if it was the food, I
17 don't know what or if it just would've been an opportunistic sort of deal. But anyway
18 they recommended that I have some semblance of regular American food. So that was the
19 genesis of it, so they moved me to the province team where we had a mess hall, and as I
20 said I was made the advisor to the People's Self Defense Force, PSDF is what it would be
21 referred to when you read about it, and also the RD cadre which both of those were under
22 CORDS, C-O-R-D-S, and I still can't remember what, "the Revolutionary", I can't
23 remember the C-O, but "Revolutionary Development" or something. It was a joint
24 civilian/military deal and it might've been ultimately headed by civilians, it was part of
25 the Vietnamization effort. I think at one point that Mr. Colby that I mentioned earlier
26 maybe was involved in it and the running of it, so it was a pacification effort anyway.

27 KC: Sure. All right now, what was the PSDF? Who were these people? What was
28 their mission?

29 BH: The PSDF, it ultimately we figured out that villages and hamlets needed to
30 be secure, and that the people in the villages and hamlets didn't use the term at the time,
31 it's a 1990s business school term I guess, they had to buy into the solution. So what we

1 did is they had the people in hamlets and villages mustered, people being they were
2 young men, as I recall fifteen to seventeen, and old men at the time might've been I don't
3 know if it was forty-five or they were beyond military age or draft age, and to a lesser
4 extent the women of the village. They were to protect their hamlet and their village, they
5 stayed within their own hamlet and their own village and they theoretically provided
6 defense in case of infiltration or Viet Cong. They wouldn't have been any good at all in
7 my opinion against any sort of main force Viet Cong unit, organized unit, but for guerilla
8 stuff they were. They had mixed success, in my opinion. Even at the time I would think
9 about it, it was one of those sobering things that I'm thinking, "Oh, my God. You get
10 fifteen-, sixteen-year-old boys and old men defending villages," it felt kind of—I'm not
11 sure how this would work. I sort of felt sorry for the people, it's one of those things you
12 realize, "Man, these people are totally mobilized and from the time they're fifteen or
13 sixteen to the time they're whatever, they're somehow actively involved in it." The other
14 thing that was interesting at the time, I didn't pick up on it so much—a little while it took
15 me to figure it out. They provided some weapons to them, but they were the M-1s, they
16 were old, old World War I sort of things.

17 KC: So they're still handing those down to these people?

18 BH: Yeah, they were. Now the regular Army units and even the RFs and PFs by
19 that time all had M-16s, and basically the same type of armament that an American
20 platoon would have, not entirely, but more closer to it than what they used to have. But
21 there was a concern that these PSDF people, you didn't know who you were arming.
22 They theoretically had five- or six-hundred-thousand in the PSDF, at least on the official
23 rosters they did, because every province was required to implement this program and I
24 think there was some fear, probably more so from our counterparts the Vietnamese folks,
25 that we have this internecine stuff going on that at least I was more or less oblivious to in
26 a more general sense, and they're wondering if they're arming the next insurrection
27 against them. So apparently there was some push and pull on that at much higher levels
28 about, "Do we want to arm these people? Or do we want to arm them with M-16s or
29 anything else?" The program, I don't know if it worked, it worked in some cases, it didn't
30 work in other cases. When we had someone killed in the PSDF, I can remember one time
31 going out with my counterpart to a village in one part of the province. It was an older

1 man, we went to the Buddhist ceremony for the funeral, there was a solatium payment
2 they called it, it was sort of “We were sorry,” from the government. I don’t remember the
3 exact amount, fifteen dollars, twenty-five dollars. It was a miniscule amount of money
4 and it was meant I guess to show the government’s appreciation but again that was one of
5 the things even as a young guy I’m thinking, “Good God. Someone’s life is worth
6 twenty-five bucks, this is crazy.” But anyway, I spent more of my time working with the
7 PSDF folks than I did with the RD cadre and I’m not sure why, I think I liked them more.
8 I think I liked the guy I advised more. I understood more what the goal of PSDF was. RD
9 cadre was teams of twenty, twenty-five people, I think that’s right, and they would go out
10 into these villages and help and provide security, and then they would do pacification
11 stuff, they’d do some education stuff, I guess public health things. I never quite
12 understood what they—they had been around forever. I just never had a good feeling
13 about them, and I can’t tell you why, there was an E-7 who worked with me on that side
14 of the house and I’m more or less let him do the day-to-day stuff with them and I would
15 know what was going on. But he seemed to enjoy working with them, he had been there
16 five years in a row, he just sort of continued to reenlist so it wasn’t like he didn’t know
17 what he was doing. But there was something about them, one, I’m not sure I really
18 understood what they did, and I just didn’t like them. It sounds like a weak reason not to,
19 but that’s an honest answer about it anyway.

20 KC: Now was this based on, do you think, suspicion of their motives or their
21 loyalties? Or anything like that?

22 BH: No, I don’t think so. It may have been more a reflection on my counterpart at
23 the province level who was in charge of the RD cadre, I just didn’t think much of him
24 either, and frankly that may have been as much of it as anything else, but it wasn’t really
25 clear to me what their mission was. I mean I know what the table of organization said,
26 but you know I just didn’t know how you measured success with those folks. I just didn’t
27 know. But anyway that was my job too and I was ultimately responsible, at least within
28 our chain of command, but in terms of how much time I spent with each, I spent a heck
29 of a lot more time with the PSDF folks.

30 KC: Mm-hmm. How would you characterize the capabilities of both the RD cadre
31 and the PSDF folks that you were working with, in terms of whether it was education or

1 just understanding of mission, or military capabilities? I know you said we're very
2 limited for obvious reasons. What kind of challenges did you see from their capabilities?

3 BH: Well, one, they were limited by the sort of armament they had. Two, they're
4 living in these villages and even then you start to think, "Wait a minute, I really don't
5 know who the Viet Cong infrastructure is here, and these people are sort of laying it on
6 the line one way or another that if the guy in the next house over is Viet Cong
7 infrastructure, it's gonna cause problems for the PSDF guy in the—" either probably
8 potential problems at that point because all of these hamlets were being contested or were
9 controlled some way or another. What I ultimately came to the conclusion on was that it
10 was more important that they have, again a 1990s terms "skin in the game," that they had
11 committed to one side or the other. Ultimately, I saw that it was more of a,
12 "indoctrination" is too strong a word, but the fact that they had cast their lot in some
13 fashion with the government I thought was good. Now how much they in fact actually
14 cast a lot with the government? Ultimately, I don't know as I think back on it. But we had
15 training in the villages and hamlets, very rudimentary training, firing of weapons, care of
16 weapons, some sort of not even patrolling but sort of village defense, area and stuff. I one
17 time went with my interpreter in the program, there's a place called Vung Tau. I don't
18 know if you've ever heard of it.

19 KC: Sure, R&R center.

20 BH: Yeah, Cap Saint-Jacques was the French name for it. Anyway that's where
21 the PSDF national training center was. So there was some sort of training deal, so he and
22 I went up there, my interpreter and I, went up there and we spent two or three days. Well,
23 it was a beautiful spot. Gosh, it was just spectacular. I'm picturing the Conrad Hilton
24 expensive hotels there now. I don't know. I've never been back. But at the end of it, at
25 this two- or three-day session, there weren't a lot of Americans at this deal and I'm sort
26 of up in the front sort of not on the stage but in the stage area. Who comes in and is
27 speaking to these folks and gives a little talk but Nguyen Cau Ky.

28 KC: Really?

29 BH: Remember him?

30 KC: Oh, sure.

1 BH: Both he and his wife came, and I was as near to, I was gonna say, “As you
2 are to me,” but it was like they were five or ten feet away. They were every bit as dashing
3 as the press had made them out to be. He had some sort of jumpsuit on and a lavender
4 ascot, and he had two pearl-handled revolvers on his hips. His wife was dressed the same
5 way. I don’t remember if she had the pearl-handled revolvers, but she had the same-
6 colored jump suit and the same lavender ascot (laughs).

7 KC: Well, that’s what you expect, yeah.

8 BH: Yeah, but I thought to myself, that was one of those things even then I said,
9 “I need to keep a mental picture of this, because I knew who this guy was before I got
10 involved in all this.” I think he was vice president at the time. I might be wrong, but
11 anyway he was down there and he gave a rah-rah pep talk to the PSDF. I think it was the
12 trainers from each province if my recollection is correct. That would’ve been like early
13 ’71, I think.

14 KC: Well, I asked you the question, what were the drawbacks, or what limitations
15 were there and how did that affect things that you did. What about the positive aspects?
16 Did you see things that these people, these young and old men, could bring to the game,
17 and like you said some cases of village women, could bring to the game to make a
18 positive impact?

19 BH: Sure, they knew who the players were at the village and the hamlet level. I
20 suspect they were probably a good source of intel to the Vietnamese chain of command.
21 They would, again, be fairly circumspect. I can’t tell you that anyone ever came to me
22 and said, “So-and-so is this.” But if you live in the village or on the same street as
23 someone who doesn’t put his trash out, you can report him to the homeowners
24 association so I suspect having eyes and ears on the ground even if not everyone was
25 totally committed to it, if you just had anyone who was committed to it was probably a
26 source of information and intelligence to the government and the military that they
27 otherwise wouldn’t have had. Sometimes you would run across these folks, the old men
28 in particular, they were old to me then but they were in PSDF, and you could tell when
29 they were saying things just to say things just so that they would ingratiate themselves to
30 you. Sometimes you would occasionally run into one of these old timers and you would
31 get an inkling that this guy really believes this stuff, that he sees that ultimately his

1 salvation may be more on the side of the South than the North. I can't say that it was
2 anything highfalutin like he understood democracy and nationhood and all the rest. One, I
3 don't know if I would've recognized that anyway, two, I don't know if I thought that
4 way, but he had some sense of identity with a cause.

5 KC: Mm-hmm, yeah. All right, now you've come into this, and you've got
6 yourself into this new position and it's somewhat similar to what you were doing before
7 but yet it's a little bit different in that the mission and the people that you're working for
8 or working with are different, and these kinds of things. How do you approach this new
9 job? There has to be a change in the way you approach things, just because of the nature
10 of the change of your job, how do you build off of what you knew before, this well of
11 knowledge that you have created over your time there? And how does that morph into
12 what you're trying to do with these new responsibilities?

13 BH: That's a good question. I think what happens, unless you've slept walked
14 through whatever your time is up through wherever you are, you should've learned
15 things, you should've learned how to deal culturally with folks, how to make suggestions
16 to get things done instead of blustering in like a, well I won't say an "ugly American,"
17 but you know in a military situation you just sort of give orders and expect it to be done.
18 Well, that didn't work in the advisory effort, and it took some understanding of that, it
19 took and understanding of being willing to listen more than you talk, to hear what they
20 were saying and then hear what they were really saying. I learned to rely on my
21 interpreter. One, both interpreters I had I established I think a good personal relationship
22 with them, because it was important for me to get them to give me the nuance of what
23 was being told to me, and they both did that to a greater or lesser degree. They would
24 basically tell me what they thought was BS and what wasn't. Sometimes they were right,
25 sometimes they were wrong, but it was a source of information for me to kind of put in
26 my mental computer and figure out, "Okay, how much credence do I give this stuff?" So
27 I think learning to deal in a, 'indirect' is not the right word, but there's a difference in
28 cultures and how I dealt with my counterparts, and I learned that on the MAT team that
29 there's certain ways you ask things and get things done without embarrassing people, but
30 still moving the ball forward.

1 KC: Mm-hmm, and I guess that would depend on the circumstances. It would
2 depend on the individual, as well, because you're obviously dealing with people and
3 everyone deals with things differently. So it's a matter of feeling your way through and
4 probably making a mistake here and there I would think, and how you approach things
5 and you get your answers and trying to not repeat that same mistake again, obviously.

6 BH: Yeah, well, that's the trick. Once is not stupid, but you do the same thing
7 three or four times and you start to wonder, "Am I stupid?" So you try to keep those to a
8 minimum and so, "Okay, what did I learn here? Or what did I learn in this district that
9 might apply to another district," you know.

10 KC: Well, how does all this go into training these guys? You're dealing with boys
11 and you're dealing with older men and to some degree women. How do you approach
12 training these people?

13 BH: Again, I was more directly involved with the Vietnamese officer who was in
14 charge of it at province level, but what we tried to do or what I tried to do and frankly it's
15 not like it hadn't dawned on them, to a greater or lesser degree they would work through
16 the province, and then you districts, and then you have villages and they would work with
17 the district and village folks, and they would have rudimentary training. It wasn't
18 anything approaching real military training. They have some—how to sight in an M-1,
19 and let them fire one or two rounds or something to get the feel of it. There was, for want
20 of a better word, indoctrination, in the course of all this stuff they were sort of giving
21 them the government line about things. That sounds cynical. I don't mean to be. You
22 know, "Here's what we're trying to do, we're trying to provide security and help you
23 provide security for your hamlet or village, and by doing that anything else flows from
24 that. Whether you had schools, villages had whatever, but you need to be secure where
25 you live."

26 KC: Now you are the first person that I've interviewed in, lo, these many years
27 that has worked with the women in the village at this level. I'm not saying others didn't,
28 but people I've spoken with you're the first one who I've talked to who has done this.
29 This is something different, there are cultural differences in what we know and expect in
30 this country, even back in the 1970s, which was the dark ages for a lot of people I'm sure
31 over here, and dealing with women there, although the Viet Cong and the North

1 Vietnamese obviously women were a very, very important part of what they were doing.
2 How did you find the women, in terms of their capabilities, and understanding, and
3 talents and drawbacks, *et cetera*? As you found yourself in this new job, essentially what
4 were the women like?

5 BH: To the extent that, again, it was more through my counterpart, but they—my
6 impression of the women working for the government, on the government side of things.
7 They seemed to be, frankly I thought they were more focused than the men I dealt with.
8 Now some of them were civilians clearly. I'm not talking about PSDF people. that's part
9 of it. They were just sort of in the villages. They were sort of medics or whatever as part
10 of the PSDF. I don't remember them as being armed or any of the actual defense of the
11 village. The women that worked at the province level seemed to me to have—you know I
12 really hadn't thought about that until you asked me the question. They seemed to be
13 more, if you were to give me a group of five or ten that I knew worked in both, and you
14 said, "Which is the more talented group?" I think I would've said the women.

15 KC: Is that right?

16 BH: Yeah.

17 KC: What was it about the women, what characteristics did they possess?

18 BH: Don't know, don't know. They tended to—they stuck on task. When you
19 gave them something to do they did it, there was a fair amount of dealing with the
20 counterparts who typically were male of kind of excuse making. "Well, no I didn't get to
21 do that," or "Yeah, we'll get to that tomorrow or whatever." My experience was that I got
22 more direct results from the women. I mean I don't have a big universe of a sample to say
23 and we should draw a big picture from that, but they tended to be smart and they tended
24 to be focused. Now that may be a self-selecting sample, that the folks who had thrown
25 their lot in with the government to the extent that they were working formally for the
26 government, they may have been upward mobility people anyway in that environment,
27 that may have been. So maybe it was a self-selecting sample, I don't know.

28 KC: Yeah, sure. Well, that makes sense as well. Yeah, okay let's—as you've got
29 these guys trained here, you're talking about self-defense and you're showing them how
30 to pop off a round of an M-1 and these kinds of things. You're preparing them to prepare
31 themselves for something nasty to happen, should it happen. Did anything nasty happen?

1 BH: Oh, yeah. I mean occasionally it would, sure. That funeral that I mentioned to
2 you that I went to. I was never out with them on actual village defense. I would be there
3 more during the day observing training. I travel around the province doing different
4 things. But you know occasionally PSDF people, I don't know how many, but they
5 would be wounded or killed or whatever and sometimes they would scare off a VC
6 squad, or tax collector or something was coming through the village. So yeah, there was
7 some activity. Yeah. But were they like a SouthVietnamese Ranger battalion? No, no
8 way. No, unh-unh.

9 KC: Sure, sure.

10 BH: Yeah, but what they were doing, and I think, really I hadn't really thought
11 about it until you asked me the question a while ago, it was more to get them to buy into
12 the government side of things and the program. Again, I didn't realize this until much
13 later when I was through and back in the States, that maybe that's what the real purpose
14 of that thing was and it probably was more successful than I realized at the time when I
15 was working with them,

16 KC: You think so? Now, why do you say that?

17 BH: Well, that's a pretty good question when you see who ultimately ended up
18 flying the flag over Saigon. But the folks—if the purpose of the program was to convince
19 people that they had a stake in things, and that security for the village was all-important, I
20 really do think that happened. I think there was some fudge factor in some of that stuff
21 when we would have these weekly reports that we would do, province senior advisor, and
22 you would have how many PSDF under arms, how many trained, how many this and
23 these numbers would be coming from my counterparts. Frankly they had to be BS, but—
24 well, I did make that known to, at least as best I could, to the province senior advisor,
25 these numbers are not verified and frankly I'm suspicious of some of them, but yes some
26 activity is going on in these areas. How many weapons have been distributed, how many
27 people did I oversee training on weapons, and then be some KIA (killed in action), WIA
28 (wounded in action) stuff and then enemy action. But I think ultimately it probably did
29 have some impact, but those villages did get more secure from '68 to '71, '72, '73, that
30 was long after I was there. But it became easier to move about the country, and I think

1 there was real progress being made, and I think that was a small element of what
2 contributed to some of that stuff.

3 KC: Right, and really I guess what it comes down to is getting the people to buy
4 into what you want them to buy into, and then acting upon that at the lowest levels in a
5 type of warfare like this. Then, of course, what the United States has itself involved in,
6 especially in Afghanistan as we speak today, it's that kind of thing, the problem is of
7 course that it takes a long time to do that and it eventually will become costly, although at
8 this stage in the Vietnam War we're doing this on the cheap as we're backing away from
9 the commitment over there.

10 BH: But it really was, I mean not to be corny, but it really was a hearts and minds
11 thing, that's ultimately how actions like that are won or lost, do you win the hearts and
12 minds or not? It's ultimately not—I mean the military part of it is very important, but
13 ultimately it's winning hearts and minds. Sounds corny to even say but I think it's true.

14 KC: Right, because the phrase has been used so often.

15 BH: Well, it's been abused, frankly.

16 KC: Well, there you go, yeah. All right, well, speaking of hearts and minds, how
17 did the villagers respond to you personally? And your presence there, as well as here
18 comes this American, he's going to be doing this with us, or for us, or around us, or at us
19 or whatever it's going to be, how did they treat you? How did they respond to you?

20 BH: I never felt that I was getting a cold reception from anyone. It was
21 interesting, I would deal with the village chiefs, I'm talking both on MAT team then after
22 MAT team when I was doing the PSDF and the RD cadre, I would deal with village
23 chiefs and so you expect sort of the company line just like you would find in an
24 American unit you know. If the captain or a colonel comes down and says, "How things
25 going?" "Wonderful, sir, give us more," you know, it's just sort of the way it works. But I
26 never received a hostile treatment or greeting or reception from any of them. Then I
27 would always, in the course of spending time in these villages and these hamlets, I made
28 it a point to visit with the people in the marketplace or the people in the outpost or
29 whatever, not in such a way that—you had to be careful because the whole social
30 structure was a little different there. You couldn't be, "buddy-buddy" isn't the right word,
31 but there was, not a caste system, but you had to be very careful. But I think I got where I

1 developed a rapport with most folks, you know. One, they were fascinated by the fact that
2 you were tall, and two, they were, this sounds crazy, fascinated by the fact they had hair
3 on your arms. So generally the kids would come up first and kids are kids, you know you
4 could joke around with them at least in the villages, joke around with them and goof
5 around, play games, make faces and all the rest. Then you would also get friendly with
6 the women in the marketplace. Shit, they've been gathering intel for like the whole
7 (laughing)—I mean people are people. So I never had any problem with them. I never
8 had any real run-ins with folks in the village, but I also tried to not act like an American
9 know-it-all, too.

10 KC: Well, that brings up another good point there. Did you see other people
11 behave in a way that kind of turns you off or at least you could see why it would turn the
12 Vietnamese off? Someone who was not necessarily working with you, but in the same
13 type of environment, same type of job as you?

14 BH: Yeah, sure. I never saw any physical abuse or anything of that sort among the
15 advisory team, but sort of obtuse to just interpersonal actions. I don't know if it was some
16 perverted sense of American exceptionalism, or if it was some just a personality quirk
17 that had nothing to do with anything other than someone—some people just don't have
18 very good personalities to deal with other people. But I saw some of that, but not nearly
19 the amount that sometimes you're led to believe after the fact reading about the war. I
20 mean you're not gonna have—nothing is perfect. Yes, and I did see something of that,
21 but not in any physically abusive way or psychologically, maybe psychologically abusive
22 I don't know, in the sense that, "Goddamn, you're stupid," or they would act that way,
23 they wouldn't say it, and then thinking, "If you're on the receiving end of that sort of
24 treatment, what do you think about that?" I mean you'd have to be a psychologist to
25 figure that stuff out in my opinion. But I did see some of—but I mean not nearly the
26 amount that's—some of the stuff you read after the war where Americans tended to be
27 abusive and overbearing, I'm not saying that didn't go on, I'm saying that I didn't see
28 very much of that at all.

29 KC: Mm-hmm. Well, it kind of stands to reason that if you're gonna be good at
30 what you do—

1 BH: You would hope so, otherwise do something else, but if you're gonna spend
2 a year there, you might as well be as good as you can at it.

3 KC: Yeah, especially when you consider the stakes not just for the villagers, but
4 for yourself while you're there. I mean you're security is their security to a large degree,
5 which makes perfect sense. All right, now looking back at it Mr. Henri, which of the two
6 jobs did you prefer while you were there? Did you like your earlier time there with the
7 MAT team, or did you prefer being with the PSDF and the RD?

8 BH: That's a good question, too. If I had to pick one or the other and say which
9 did I prefer more, there were interesting elements to both. I think the PSDF at the
10 province level and the RD cadre I enjoyed more. But the reason was, one, comparatively
11 it was not physically as grinding as the MAT team just in terms of running water and
12 things like that, and I would be less-than-honest if I didn't tell you that. But I also got—
13 there was a wider group of people who I worked with every day, I mean there weren't a
14 lot of us in the province team. I don't know I'm guessing, and I think I may have told
15 you, maybe a 120 on the whole team and maybe forty, fifty at the province level and the
16 rest were out at district and on MAT teams. So you got to interface, that's one of those
17 fancy words, you saw people on the compound all the time, you got to know them, and
18 people really didn't talk—I mean people talked about what they did only in a very
19 general sense. But it was like the guy next to me was the Phoenix Program advisor, so he
20 had stories to tell figuratively, not literally. Or the intel folks, the NILO for example, or
21 the Army intelligence, the S-2 in the province. You would see those guys, they would
22 bunk in the same hooch with you or whatever. In terms of learning about what was going
23 on and getting a little bit broader feel for what was going on, that was far more interesting
24 and instructive to me at the province level.

25 KC: Mm-hmm. Well, that makes perfect sense as well, and of course you're
26 dealing with Americans and you literally speak the same language and principles
27 figuratively.

28 BH: That's right, and there were forty of them as opposed to three or four other
29 guys.

30 KC: Right, which again is just part of the function I guess of being up at the
31 higher level of a province. Describe for me the nature of your interaction with these other

1 Americans. You talked about the NILO and of course we have one shared friend, that
2 friend who was a NILO there. Tell me about the nature of the interaction with you and
3 the other Americans.

4 BH: Well, one, there was a social aspect to it, at night you might drink a beer or
5 two with them or whatever, or talk sports or the sort of BS-ing that you would do
6 anywhere. You would do it in Lubbock, you would do it in Houston, you'd do it in Ben
7 Tre, I guess. But that lead to—there was information sharing, not of a confidential nature
8 by any stretch, but I would say, “You know, on the MAT team, in Houng My, this section
9 of the district I was in, it was particularly bad down in such-and-such a place,” and I
10 would say that to the NILO or I would say that to the S-2 as an example, and I don't
11 know if that was ever of any benefit to them or if it was part of a general fabric that they
12 could sort of piecing together about that part of the province. So there was some of that
13 that went on just as the natural course of things. It was nothing of what would be a
14 confidential or classified nature by any stretch, but I'm thinking just hearing another
15 guy's experience with another aspect of the advisory effort was helpful. It was to me.

16 KC: Sure, sure. All right, well that brings me to another question. This is a
17 broader question. You've been at the local level on these MAT teams, you've worked
18 with the people, you've heard all about the war up to this point and now you're there and
19 you're in the middle of it and you're actually I mean boots on the ground. You're helping
20 with MEDCAPs and all these different kinds of things that you're doing, as well as self-
21 defense, and you're doing it here at the province level with this new group of people.
22 You're seeing a cross-section of Vietnamese, you're seeing a cross-section of Americans
23 who were there. What is your opinion, or how are you viewing the war effort in general
24 while you were there? Is this something that you think about and say, “Man, I've heard
25 all this stuff and then here's what we're doing, and we're doing some good and the
26 newspapers are wrong,” or are you looking at it and saying, “Man, we're spinning our
27 wheels,” or what was your impression of things while you were there?

28 BH: And you're talking about at the time? I mean what I was thinking then?

29 KC: Yes, at the time.

30 BH: Okay. I thought we were doing some good, I really did. I thought, and even
31 after the fact, I ultimately wouldn't change that opinion, I think what we were doing there

1 was getting a bad rap in the United States, and I've no conspiracy theory about it. I don't
2 know if there's a herd mentality among the press or if there's a philosophical
3 predisposition that they wanted an outcome one way or the other, or there was just an
4 honest difference of opinion. But I think they missed the boat, I think if you look—I
5 thought, and I think the data after the fact I looked at long after, the pacification effort
6 worked. I think what—I'm just talking about the MACV pacification stuff, man it
7 worked, things improved. There were places you couldn't go in my province when I got
8 there, and you could go there when I left, so something tells me that it improved things,
9 you know?

10 KC: Right. All right, now what other sort of things come to your mind when you
11 think about your time here up at the province level? When you look back on it, when
12 you're lying there in bed at night or reading a book or whatever, and things come to your
13 mind about your time there. What sort of things pop up? Were there any interesting
14 stories, vignettes, people, what sort of things come to mind?

15 BH: Yeah, there were, interesting again because I got to spend a lot of time in
16 different parts of my province rather than limited to the area where the three villages on a
17 MAT team. I really got to go anywhere in the province I wanted to go, I mean consistent
18 with my missions, so I did an awful lot of travelling around in that province and the
19 districts, so I got to spend a lot of time seeing how things worked. I thought we were
20 doing a very good job—but having said, I thought that we were doing well and
21 improving, and things were getting better, and I did believe that and I still do believe it.
22 There were sorts of reality signs that came along to me, even at the time I sort of
23 wondered. I'll give you an example, there was a SEAL (sea, air, land) team that was, I
24 don't know if they were attached to our province, but they lived on our compound
25 anyway. They ran into a problem, it was a hard-luck platoon, we'll leave it at that I think,
26 but it was right around Christmas of 1970 like the 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st. These folks were
27 out and they were a couple of them killed and a couple wounded, they were out on an
28 ambush or out on a mission or something. So I went—their bodies were on the dock,
29 there was no sense bringing a helicopter in before first-light, they were dead. But I was
30 there and I helped load the bodies onto the helicopter. Maybe again that sort of—I had
31 seen people killed before, but there was a certain sense of reality to this and I'm thinking,

1 “My God, what is this all about? I hope this is worth something, that these guys have
2 given their lives for.” That was a fleeting deal, but I can remember thinking about that,
3 that was sort of one of those things that just sort of stuck in my mind that, “Oh boy,
4 there’s something about this that—this better be right,” you know, what I’m thinking.
5 Life is precious and I knew a little bit about one of these guys, and he had a family and a
6 couple kids, I mean they just happened to be in the compound with me, it’s not like I did
7 any operations with them or anything. That was sort of, it was very troubling to me, “My
8 God, what’s going on here?” It would cross your mind from time to time as other
9 Americans on the team were killed or wounded over the course of the year. Another
10 thing, this is—again wondering, “What are we doing—what’s going on here?” I was one
11 time in Saigon during this, probably very early part of 1971, and I was visiting with a
12 friend and he said, “I know a great restaurant,” sounds crazy, “let’s go to this restaurant.”
13 The restaurant was somewhere in Saigon, I don’t remember but the name of it was La
14 Cave, it was a French place. The story was it stayed open through Tet of ’68 and
15 everything else, so you tell me how that happened. But we go to this restaurant, and in
16 my mind, at the time and even in my mind now, it’s one of the best meals I’ve ever had.
17 All the waiters were dressed in tuxedos. I was in jungle fatigues as was this friend of
18 mine who was stationed in Saigon. Tuxedos, everything was served with silver services,
19 they had the best cream-of-chicken soup I’ve ever had in my life, and a steak. But what
20 got me, we’re sitting there and I look around and there are a huge number of draft-age
21 Vietnamese men. All dressed in civilian clothes, and a good number of them are
22 conversing in French. Not Vietnamese, French. It was sort of like I was a disembodied
23 ego, I was sort of there watching this stuff and I’m thinking, “You know, I don’t know
24 that this war’s gonna be won when you have all these draft-age people here who live in
25 the country, who apparently aren’t in the military. And two, talking in the imperialist
26 language of the French.” That was sort of a fleeting deal, but it had stayed with me my
27 whole life. It was one of those things I thought, “Uh-oh, we’ve got trouble here.” Again,
28 it was just a fleeting, it’s not like I had some sort of grand, analytical ability but I can
29 remember very distinctly that happened and saying, “This little cognitive dissonance
30 here, you know this is crazy.” And here I am, I’m sitting here in a fatigue uniform

1 literally half-way around the world and these sons of bitches aren't in the military and
2 they're talking a foreign language, this doesn't make sense to me.

3 KC: That's a pretty bizarre little scene there.

4 BH: Oh, it really was. It really was.

5 KC: Yeah, just like you used the word earlier in the interview, "surreal." It seems
6 like it would be somewhat surreal there, all of these different elements into that little
7 picture that you've just painted there.

8 BH: That's literally true. My memory of that is quite clear and it's not
9 embellished, I mean to the extent I can remember what the soup was and the fact that I
10 had a steak. Just seeing those guys there and what I just told you, it just struck me, "This
11 doesn't seem like a winning team." Ultimately doesn't seem like a winning team.

12 KC: Yeah. What else? What other things come to your mind when you think
13 about your time there?

14 BH: Well I was—come to mind just about my experience generally?

15 KC: Sure.

16 BH: I was terribly impressed overall with the quality of our folks there. It
17 became—it was kind of fun for folks to make fun of the military people, and the officers
18 and all. I met some incredibly talented people, you know, like people who, certainly my
19 own rank, but I'm thinking more guys who were majors or lieutenant-colonels or
20 whatever. Just incredible and I've always wondered what happened to some of them. A
21 couple of them I saw had made it up to general rank, this is back in the late '80s or
22 something, it'd be something on TV. I had remembered seeing them or dealing with them
23 and these guys were just incredibly talented, and the country was very, very lucky to have
24 them working for peanuts, and they were committed to what they were doing. There was
25 a, this is a little bit off track but I would like you to hear this story, I was in Can Tho
26 which was the headquarters for the IV Corps and met a guy who was one of the PSDF
27 deal and I met guy down there who was a colonel, and his name was James Torrence, T-
28 O-R-R-E-N-C-E. He was older than I, I thought colonel was older, as it turns out he was
29 probably ten or twelve years older than me, so he had made rank pretty quickly. He was
30 very friendly. As a matter of fact we had supper, he said, there were two or three of us,
31 "Let's go get a pizza," he said, "on me, pizza and some beer." So we went and we just

1 kind of chitchatted about what was going on. The word's overused now, but he was
2 absolutely charismatic. He looked like Robert Redford. I mean he was an infantry guy,
3 looked like Robert Redford, just absolutely charismatic. Several months go by and he's
4 killed like in May of 1971, he's killed in a helicopter crash and I don't know if he was
5 shot down or what. So the last—I was shortly after, that was in Can Tho again, or I don't
6 remember maybe Vann was in our province headquarters, John Paul Vann, but we were
7 talking about Colonel Torrence and he said, "You know," he said, "Jim Torrence was one
8 of the finest officers I've ever dealt with." He said, "As a matter of fact, David
9 Halberstam wrote a book called *One Very Hot Day* about the early years in Vietnam,"
10 and he said, "The all-American captain in that book was fashioned on Jim Torrence
11 because he went on a couple operations with Jim Torrence." Fast forward and when I
12 came home I told my wife about this, you talk about it, you don't talk a lot about it but I
13 was so taken by this guy and what a waste that seemed to me. About ten or twelve years
14 ago, and you can probably find this, David Halberstam wrote an article for *Parade*
15 *Magazine* or one of those publications where he's talking about what he learned, it was a
16 letter to his daughter about basically his time in Vietnam in the early years and he
17 mentions Vann and he actually mentions Torrence. He's talking about Torrence, and he
18 said, "He was incredibly gifted, and talented, and brave," and all the rest, and he said,
19 "And to this day I can't see a movie with Robert Redford in it without thinking of him."
20 Isn't that amazing?

21 KC: Yeah, it really is.

22 BH: But he was symbolic of the talented folks, and I think he went to West Point,
23 and he would've been a general, no question in my mind, he could've been one of those
24 chief-of-staff guys or three- or four-star general guys, he was that talented. Even as a
25 twenty-five year old I recognized, "This guy is something special." For that talent to be
26 lost, just a horrible tragedy for his family and for the country, I think. There was so much
27 of that, but so many, so many talented people that I saw there, for the rest of my life I
28 have a predisposition toward the military. I can't help myself. I listen to these guys and I
29 say, "You know, these guys tend to be pretty talented. Let me pay more attention to him
30 and see what he's saying." The Petraeus' of the world, even this guy who got the bum
31 rap. McChrystal, is that his name?

1 KC: Mm-hmm.

2 BH: He was a very—whatever happened there, a twenty-five year career of
3 complete and utter dedication to the nasty business that he was about, kind of get tossed
4 in the wind and he became the punchline of a lot of jokes and that just sort of makes me
5 angry even now.

6 KC: Well, I guess that's the nature of the business, unfortunately, in this country,
7 like you say all these years of service and it can be cast aside for one inopportune
8 comment at one inopportune moment and the way it's caught, and the way it's oftentimes
9 manufactured in the media, and it's incredibly unfortunate, and I'm not speaking in favor
10 or against General McChrystal or anything like that, but just the nature of the business for
11 sure. Now I'm glad you mentioned John Vann because you've mentioned him earlier on
12 in the interview. I wanted to get back to your experiences with him, describe the nature of
13 your interaction or your relationship such as it was with John Vann. What kind of person
14 was he, what kind of interactions did you have with him, how did all that go?

15 BH: The interactions I had with him, I had several meetings in Can Tho when I
16 would be down there. It was more PSDF and RD cadre and he would always speak to us,
17 or come in and give a talk, or a status report or something. Sometimes it was
18 opportunistic. I think he flew a Loach (light observation helicopter, L-O-H) himself
19 'cause he would pop in on folks in the different provinces, he would ask you a question
20 and you better know the answer, you know, "What's the strength of this RF platoon in
21 such-and-such village?" All you have to do is not know one time and you tended to know
22 after that 'cause he would let you know that he was a bit disappointed in you.

23 KC: How would he do that?

24 BH: He'd ask you, and you would either know—I mean you had to be truthful, "I
25 don't know sir, I think it's this or whatever," and he was a civilian but he had been a
26 career military guy so he could let you know that there was something lacking in your
27 performance as an advisor if you didn't know all of that information. Now ultimately this
28 information that no one knows, but he was very good at doing that. I don't know if he
29 wrote it down or if he just kept it in his head, but the next time you would see him he
30 would ask you about that specific, I mean that happened to me, that specific platoon or
31 with me it was an empty oxygen cylinder on a helicopter pad that we couldn't get a

1 helicopter to take out, and he said, “Get that out of there.” And he came back five days
2 later or he was in the area and he said, “Did you ever get rid of that empty cylinder?” And
3 I thought, “God, this guy doesn’t forget anything.”

4 KC: With everything else that he has going on, he’s concerned about that
5 cylinder.

6 BH: Yeah, exactly, and he may have had all sorts of tricks to do it, he may have
7 had people reminding him of it. But so it was both opportunistic and I would sometimes
8 see him at the—for some reason he was he had a particular interest in my province I
9 think, Ben Tre province or Kien Hoa province. I think maybe that’s where he had done
10 some of his operating early on when he was there in ’61 or ’62, and it was kind of a
11 bellwether for the Delta. But anyway, so did I have a lot of interaction with him? No, but
12 I had some interaction with him. He was, physically, he would—I would describe him as
13 one of those banty-rooster guys. He wasn’t, as I recall, wasn’t particularly tall, maybe
14 5’7”, 5’8” would be my guess. Just as cocky as all get out. He spoke in sort of a staccato
15 style, very sure of himself at all times, knew all sorts of facts and figures that stuff would
16 roll off his tongue but I think he was a pretty impressive guy and I think he had, this is
17 after the fact, I think he had the advisory effort figured out. I think you know you needed
18 to be at the lowest level possible, that having gunships come in or artillery blasting away
19 at things ultimately is not the way you’re going to win a pacification counter-guerilla,
20 counterinsurgency deal.

21 KC: Someone else you mentioned earlier in the interview was Bill Colby, and you
22 talked about CORDS as well and, of course, we know Colby’s involvement there. What
23 was your impression of Colby and again the nature of any interaction you may have had
24 with him?

25 BH: I only saw Colby one time, I think when I finished at Dian which was sort of
26 a crash course in Vietnamese culture and a little bit of language. He spoke to us and I
27 don’t know maybe there were twenty of us, twenty-five, it was a relatively small group,
28 and he just kind of spoke to us generally. He impressed—so that’s my universe of dealing
29 with him, you know I would read stuff directives that might come down from him but
30 that was the only face-to-face I had with him, but he seemed to me to be very cerebral as
31 my recollection. Very measured in the way he talked. Not at all, if I described Vann as

1 sort of banty-rooster and cocky, he was anything but, he was sort of almost aesthetic.
2 Almost aesthetic, very soft spoken. Hair combed straight back you know sort of like, I
3 think I mentioned to you, sort of looked like a clergyman or something. But again even
4 early on I knew that name so I thought, “I want to specifically remember this ‘cause I
5 think this’ll be something in ten, twenty, thirty years I’ll be happy to remember the story
6 of having been in the room with a small group of people listening to him talk about
7 what’s going on.”

8 KC: Yeah, pretty heady stuff.

9 BH: Yeah, well, it was interesting for a twenty-five year old guy, I’ll tell you that.

10 KC: Yeah, sure. I’m sure. All right ,before we move you out of this job and start
11 moving you back home, is there anything else that comes to your mind about your time
12 either in this new position with the PSDF and RD, or prior to that, or any Vietnam
13 experiences that you would care to relate before we start the process of bringing you back
14 home?

15 BH: You know I think I sort of covered—my particular experience for the one
16 year was I think extraordinary, I learned a lot, I’m talking about while I’m there I learned
17 a lot. Met a lot of talented people, both American and Vietnamese. I think at some point
18 in there toward the end of my time, I started to get a little bit dubious about what the
19 ultimate result would be. I mean that restaurant story was one, one sort of emblematic
20 thing and there might’ve been a few others along the way. I don’t know, I think maybe I
21 got a little cynical although I don’t know that I recognized that at the time. On the hand
22 I’m thinking we’re making progress, that by objective measures things are getting better,
23 but you almost start believing what you read in the press, too. Like this is crazy and the
24 people in the States really didn’t seem to care very much, they didn’t care. I didn’t really
25 feel any classic alienation, it seemed like you hear about some folks while they were
26 there, I just didn’t, I was very happy to be doing what I was doing, I didn’t resent the time
27 at all. But there was a little bit of cynicism I think probably creeping into me as the time
28 got toward the end.

29 KC: All right, well time is coming toward the end. June I believe it is of 1971 is
30 when you come home. As a young man, an officer in the United States Army, are you

1 looking forward to this day? Are you looking forward to coming home? Or are you even
2 considering extending a tour there?

3 BH: No, as a matter of fact my supervisor, the one who wrote my OER, officer
4 efficiency report, said that he wanted to recommend me for a regular Army commission. I
5 said, “Well, I appreciate the confidence and I appreciate the kind thought, but that’s not
6 something—that’s not in my plans, this is a three-year deal for me, it wasn’t a career
7 deal, and you may wanna find someone else who would want it, but I appreciate it.” So
8 yeah, no, I never gave it any thought, although that sort of focused me a little bit, but I
9 said, “No, this is really not—I haven’t had this as a lifelong dream to spend twenty or
10 thirty years.” Yeah, I was looking forward to getting back because I had already—
11 actually the law school, I’d applied in ’67, ’68, and several of the law schools actually
12 held the places open for me. I explained what was going on and I have always been
13 appreciative and grateful for that. I suspect a few years later that wouldn’t’ve been the
14 case. I think we’re probably were perceived in a different way as the ‘60s turned into the
15 ’70s, so I knew I was coming back to go to law school, and I was anxious to get on with
16 my life.

17 KC: Sure, sure. All right, tell me about the process by which you leave Vietnam.
18 You’ve got a calendar, you know roughly what day and perhaps exactly what date you’re
19 leaving.

20 BH: The DEROS date, it was sometime like around the 12th or the 13th of June.
21 Isn’t that funny I don’t remember the exact date? But they put you—you go through all
22 this stuff where they debrief you and you do all the things, but the last thing you do is
23 turn in your weapon. I was schlepping along, I had a duffel bag and my weapon and I’m
24 dressed in jungle fatigues still, and I’m headed to the armory at MACV at Tan Son Nhut
25 Air Force Base, and I haven’t thought of this during a million years, and I look, it’s late
26 in the afternoon and it’s sort of—it’s not in a crowded area of the base at all. It looks like
27 maybe a year or two before it was a tarmac where they had parked a bunch of trucks or
28 something but it’s empty now. I look up as I’m headed to MACV and I see two guys, one
29 looking older and with a dog, and I get closer and it’s a major and it’s like a Labrador
30 retriever, and it’s General Creighton Abrams.

31 KC: No kidding.

1 BH: Yeah, yeah, that's why I say it's sort of like *Forrest Gump*. We're walking
2 toward one another and I'm sure he was just out taking a walk clearing his head or
3 something, and our paths cross so I salute him and he said, "You turning your weapon in
4 Lieutenant?" And I said, "Yes, I am, sir." He said, "So you're going home?" And I said,
5 "Yes, sir. I am," and he said, "Thank you for your service." And off I went, and I thought
6 to myself, that was one of those things where it wasn't a BS sort of comment, and he
7 didn't make a big deal of it, but I thought, "That's okay." That's okay, so anyway I
8 turned my weapon in and then we got on a plane. I came to Yakota, Japan and then I
9 don't remember. Anyway we landed in Oakland, and it's just before dawn and I can't tell
10 you what a feeling of elation that was. A bunch of like yellow green grass out round
11 Oakland, and flying over it, it was like an anvil had been lifted off my shoulders, it's hard
12 to explain. So then they pile us off the plane and we just march over, not march we
13 literally go over and jump on a bus, and they take us to wherever it is to out-process. It's
14 still before dawn, although the sun's starting to come up, and I was taken with how
15 beautiful the country was, at least Oakland, of course, that doesn't take any brains,
16 California, and San Francisco and Oakland, how spectacularly beautiful it looked to me.
17 The other thing that got me was there were no wire cages on the buses so people couldn't
18 throw grenades in.

19 KC: Yeah, the difference a year makes, huh?

20 BH: Yeah, and we just got on the road and we drove at forty-five miles an hour or
21 whatever and I hadn't travelled that fast in a year. That sounds like a silly thing to say but
22 that's my recollection of it. So we went in and got to Oakland and I out-processed, and I
23 had lost some hearing somewhere along the line. The story was if you let them know they
24 would hold you up, so I just pretended I could hear everything and the Spec 4 who was
25 doing the testing, I don't think he cared either, so they processed me out. I wish I hadn't
26 because I could never prove to them that I lost some hearing in my ears. But anyway so
27 we processed us out. I can remember going and maybe we were still at the base there, and
28 I had to get a haircut. I hadn't shaved. So I got a haircut and I decided I'm gonna get a
29 shave, I'd never had a shave before in my life. So they straight razor shave and I felt like
30 I was king of the world, incredible. Then we jumped on a plane and I was going back to,
31 my wife was living in San Antonio with her family. I didn't go to back to Boston. I flew

1 to Dallas and then to San Antonio. In Dallas I had an interesting thing, this is just a story,
2 it doesn't say anything larger about anything. I was waiting for my plane in Dallas and I
3 was in the bar at the airport there. God I was tired, I had been up essentially for a day-
4 and-a-half by that point or whatever, I was just sitting there having a beer and there was a
5 guy who would've been, he was older he wasn't a contemporary, he was two or three
6 seats over and after sitting there for a couple minutes he said, "Are you in the Army?" I
7 said, "No," well I said, "I was." Very, you know, sort of monosyllabic answer. He said,
8 "Really? Where were you?" I said, "Southeast Asia." He looked, I had the khakis on, he
9 looked at me and he said, "Well, no offense, Lieutenant, but we won our war." At which
10 point I just nodded at him, put my money down, and walked out of the bar. Isn't that
11 something? (Laughing). Yeah, but it's one of those things you sure remember.

12 KC: I can imagine that you would, I assume obviously he was a World War II
13 veteran.

14 BH: Well, I don't know what he was, World War II, Korea, or something I don't
15 know.

16 KC: Yeah. So you handle this in the most diplomatic manner possible which is
17 just to ignore it. How did it make you feel when he first says that?

18 BH: I don't know if I was mad so much as I was disappointed. I really don't—I
19 don't wanna make anything bigger out of it than it was, but I mean it was kind of hurtful
20 actually. You know, I was thinking, "Shit, I did my job." If something's going on it's
21 above my pay grade, I just gave you three years for it. Then that evening continued the
22 story from the dislocation. I get back to San Antonio and I still haven't had any sleep, and
23 my brother-in-law who had been in Vietnam six, our tours overlapped by about six
24 months. He said, "Look, we're having a little cocktail party," he said, "why don't you
25 come by if you feel like having a drink before you go," so of course I was, "Yeah, why
26 not?" So anyway I go to this cocktail party, or you know it's just a group of people
27 getting together, and what I remember about it is, the last time I'd been asleep I had been
28 in Vietnam so I hadn't had a lick of sleep really other than what's on the plane. All these
29 people, the cocktail glasses were these glasses that had like a history of the Dow Jones on
30 it, you know and the traces, and I'm sitting there having a drink, looking at this thing, and
31 I'm thinking, "Man, there's two different worlds out here. There's the one I came from,

1 and there's this world and I'm not sure which I'm more comfortable in." That was
2 another thing that always stuck in my head, talk about dislocation of the ability to travel
3 great distances in a short period of time, it's kind of screwy. Plus, it's been overdone but
4 you didn't decompress, and you didn't go or come back as a unit, you sort of went by
5 yourself and you came back by yourself, and that's not the way it should be done.

6 KC: Right, right. It's interesting that you should make that comment and
7 remember vividly, that the glasses from which your drinking—

8 BH: Oh, I remember, they were like—scotch and water, you know that kind, a
9 similar sort of deal but they had that graph on there. Yeah, I remember it very vividly.

10 KC: Yeah, that is very interesting, and kind of a disjunct of time and space there.

11 BH: Yeah, and not knowing where I felt more comfortable.

12 KC: Yeah. How long does that last for you, you think? I mean it's more than just
13 a function of getting a good night's sleep and getting over it. I'm sure that probably had
14 some sort of an effect, as well, but at least at the time.

15 BH: You mean how long before I felt—

16 KC: Yeah, how long before you feel comfortable?

17 BH: Well, I think I felt comfort—I think I felt, at the time, I thought I integrated, I
18 did integrate for some, I mean, four weeks later, five weeks later I'm in Boston going to
19 law school. Thinking back on it, it probably took me a little bit longer to—and some of it
20 you never, when I say, "You never shake," I mean having that experience for three years
21 at that point in your life, you're irretrievably changed. It doesn't necessarily have to be
22 traumatic but I, for the longest time, was angry about the whole deal and I'm not sure
23 who I was angry at. I was angry at people who, my age in law school, who, editorial
24 comment here, had convinced themselves they were operating with some sort of high
25 moral purpose and they're really looking to save their own ass, so they figured a way out
26 of things. I feel guilty and silly even saying that now, and I think I've just about lost that
27 figuring, well, people get up in the morning and they look in the mirror, and however
28 they got through life they got through life and they deal with it however they did. But for
29 the longest time it really bothered me. I had an awful lot of resentment toward people
30 who, in my opinion, avoided things. I had more respect for folks who probably went to
31 Canada or jail than who snuck in the Reserves or came up with some manufactured

1 doctor's excuse or whatever. Was it healthy? Was it the correct thing or a correct
2 conclusion? I don't know one way or the other, but that's what I thought and that's what I
3 felt.

4 KC: Sure, and that's not surprising. I mean it's a very common thing, one would
5 think.

6 BH: And it's funny, a few friends that I had who had the same, I say the same
7 experience, you know, went in the service, spent three years or whatever. After a while
8 you would talk to them and all of a sudden you realize, "Okay, I wasn't quite so nuts,
9 they sort of felt the same thing to varying degrees," but there was a fair amount of
10 resentment. You did feel a little bit different than the folks who hadn't done it, not with
11 any sense that you were entitled to any respect or anything of that sort, you just felt a
12 little different.

13 KC: Tell me about the reunion with your family there in San Antone.

14 BH: Well, that was my wife's family, actually.

15 KC: Wife's family.

16 BH: It sounds crazy, the only thing I wanted was a pizza and I ate a whole pizza
17 by myself. Does that sound nuts? I just couldn't get enough pizza. We stayed there—so I
18 had a terrific time, I mean it was great to get home, but then after a day or two we set off
19 to head up to Boston, one, 'cause we needed to get a place to live and sort of get settled in
20 for me to go to law school. It was interesting, it was maybe more interesting when I got to
21 Boston only because probably it was my family, but there was—I have a brother who's a
22 year younger than me who had instructed my parents that the last thing that I ever wanted
23 to do was talk anything about Vietnam, where I was, or what I had done. Didn't find that
24 out 'til later, so it was like they avoided talking about it and I'm thinking, "Wait a minute,
25 I wasn't on a road trip with the Red Sox here, you know. I was somewhere else." What I
26 find interesting is people really weren't interested in what I had done. Not that I wanted
27 to talk about it, but there didn't seem to be the slightest bit of curiosity—eventually my
28 father and I talked about it. Then I found out that my brother had told him, "These guys
29 coming back, they don't wanna talk about any of this stuff." So I think they were doing it
30 more out of what they thought was the way I would want to deal with it or not. In law
31 school, man, people just didn't want to—I don't know if they felt uncomfortable or I

1 mean it's not like you wanted to talk about it all the time, but you wanted some
2 acknowledgment that you'd been somewhere serving.

3 KC: Sure, sure. Well, there you are in law school in Boston on the East Coast, and
4 where were you going to law school, by the way?

5 BH: Boston College.

6 KC: You went to BC, okay. What was the environment like there for veterans?
7 Especially Vietnam veterans?

8 BH: Well, actually there were a, I don't know what percentage, there were a fair
9 number of veterans in my class, again, because that would've been the folks in '68 who
10 lost their no more grad deferment. So there were some folks who I knew from
11 undergraduate or they had gone to different schools but had spent three years in the
12 service. So what percentage of the class that was? I don't know, ten percent maybe, I
13 don't know. So there were some people you had something in common, and there's a big,
14 not so much now, but back then people tended to go right from college to law school,
15 right from college to grad school. Now they take two or three years off to go do whatever
16 it is they go do for those two or three years, so we were a little bit older and maybe saw
17 the world a little bit differently, for better and worse I think we saw the world a little bit
18 differently. So I think it was nice to have guys who you knew and occasionally would
19 talk about what you had done the last two or three years, again not in any war story sense,
20 but just what had gone on and what we'd done or did, whatever. But the environment in
21 Boston was kind of, there was no hostility in the law school. Now there may have been a
22 bunch of students there who thought the war was horrible and all and I'm sure there were,
23 but it was never visited on me directly as something that I had done. You hear all the
24 stuff about, "You baby-killer", well, I didn't run into any of that stuff. But Boston in the
25 early '70s, you talk about in the belly of the beast for the anti-war movement, good
26 gracious. There was just a lot going on there, it was a hotbed of anti-war activity.

27 KC: So do you run into any of this on a regular basis? You see them on the
28 campus, you see them in town, what kind of an effect does this have on you?

29 BH: I had no direct confrontations with folks or anything of that sort, but
30 generally speaking I thought I was angry, and I'm not sure if I was angry because they
31 thought I had wasted my time. I was around them enough that I started to wonder, "Had I

1 wasted my time?" Or I still had a lot of resentment of the type I just told you about, that I
2 had made my mind up about what really was at these guys' core rather than what they
3 said was at their core. Frankly, I thought a lot of them were cowards. Dressed up with
4 some moral sensibility of, "Well, I don't know if it's the right war, if it's an impolitic
5 deal," guess what, you don't get to make those decisions in a democracy, before and after
6 you better have a loud opinion and tell the government, but if your time comes up it's sort
7 of the rent you pay to live in the democracy. I'm not saying that's right, and I'm not
8 saying it wasn't a little bit crazy or whatever, I'm just trying to put myself back then and
9 tell you what I thought.

10 KC: Sure, sure and that's exactly the point here. As you work your way through
11 law school, of course, for the next couple of years, the United States is still militarily
12 involved, or a year-and-a-half or so still militarily involved in Vietnam. Are you
13 continuing to follow the war?

14 BH: Oh, absolutely, yeah. As a matter of fact, I stayed in touch sporadically with
15 my interpreter through the mail, and I had some contact with the OSA guy in our
16 province who I became pretty good friends with. Again, nothing special, but so I stayed
17 in touch with what was going on in my province a little bit that way, and I mean I sort of
18 have a stake in that war you know? I had a stake in it. I can remember I was visiting an
19 old college friend, the guy actually had been wounded in Vietnam. He's living in
20 Connecticut and we went down and visited him. So I'm sort of toward the end of my first
21 year of in law school. We come into his house and it's a Saturday, and he flips the TV on
22 and there's news about in the Central Highlands, an advisor by the name of John Paul
23 Vann has been killed in a helicopter crash. He wasn't a friend of mine by any stretch of
24 the imagination, but I can just remember sort of, not devastated, but just like sort of
25 punched in the stomach, like, "Oh, my God." Stuff like that doesn't happen to that man. I
26 can remember that. The other thing I remember, it's funny, so I knew that he had moved
27 up to I think II Corps and probably was in essence the commanding general up there
28 without portfolio. When Kissinger announced that at least the United States involvement
29 was over, now that would've been '73 I think, forgive me if I'm getting these dates
30 wrong, but I was still in law school and we were in my apartment that my wife and I lived
31 in, we had my sister-and-law and her husband were over having dinner with us, and they

1 announced it, it was on TV, and I was stunned. I went to the window, lifted the window
2 to see if there were church bells or anything. There was nothing. Nothing. The world just
3 went on like it had been going. I was just stunned by that. I thought, “My God, if
4 everyone’s bitching and moaning about getting out of here, we’re getting out, where’s the
5 joy? Where’s the celebration?” There just wasn’t any.

6 KC: Right. Yeah, it does seem quite odd of course—

7 BH: Well, it sure did to me then, and even now it strikes me as kind of odd and
8 just how crazy that whole time was.

9 KC: Yeah. Well, just two more question for you, Mr. Henri, and these are the
10 same two questions that I ask everyone as we wrap up an interview. The first one is pretty
11 general. As you look back on your time in Vietnam, what would you say or how would
12 you say your experiences there in Vietnam have most affected your life?

13 BH: Wow, that’s a good question. It’s hard to tell what would’ve happened as I
14 aged anyway, so I don’t know but all I can tell you, my wife says that I am a
15 fundamentally different person after that experience than before. I mean I’ve done well in
16 life. It’s not like I’m crazy. I’m not saying, I mean, she’ll say that if you get her to say—
17 a fundamentally different human being. And the other thing that happened to me is, I
18 withdrew from life, from active involvement in life. If you knew me when I was in
19 college, I probably would’ve said it or you might’ve concluded it that I was gonna be
20 actively involved in public affairs, or I might get involved in politics, I might do this, I
21 mean that was probably on my mind that I’d go to law school and do all that. I was so
22 turned off by all that stuff that I’ve never been involved in that stuff, just have studiously
23 avoided it, and I think the reason I have avoided it, this is my motivation on saying it’s
24 correct, is I think for the most part people are full of bologna about things. It’s a lot of
25 sunshine soldiers, and summer patriots you know? It’s funny, I guess I thought about that
26 before but the way you asked the question, it’s pretty interesting. I think I am a
27 fundamentally different person, it took me a long time to fully integrate myself. I think it
28 was one of the best things I ever did in my life. I wouldn’t trade a minute of it. I would
29 not trade a minute of it. I learned things about myself and other people that I never
30 would’ve learned otherwise, I don’t believe. But was it all fun and games, the experience
31 or the consequence of the experience? No, I’m just you know—what I thought I was

1 gonna be doing when I was twenty-three and what I've done in between is not at all—
2 I've been very successful, but not at all what I thought I would be doing and I really think
3 it was whatever that experience was for me.

4 KC: Interesting. Well, my last question for you—

5 BH: Does that make sense?

6 KC: No, it does.

7 BH: As I sort of listen to myself say it, it sounds sort of, not crazy, it sounds like a
8 strange answer, but that was the question and that was my answer. I guess it sounds funny
9 though as I hear myself say it.

10 KC: Well, that's, believe it or not, that's not as unusual as you might think.

11 BH: Really?

12 KC: Yeah, I do hear that from time to time. The same types of response to that
13 question, which is one of the reasons why I think it's an important question. My last one
14 for you is, again, a pretty broad and general one, but it is borne from the fact that the
15 Vietnam War, and the legacy of the Vietnam War has continued to be some sort of gob of
16 amorphous goop that anybody who wants to frame an argument they can throw this in
17 and say, "Well, the legacy of Vietnam teaches us this, and the legacy of Vietnam is this
18 and this is what we must learn from it." It's been used in a million different ways by a
19 million different people. So as a way to try to get an answer to this question from the
20 people who were there, and the people who fought the war, and the people who were
21 deeply involved, *et cetera*, I wanna ask you, what do you think was the war's lasting
22 historical impact? What was the legacy of the Vietnam War? Or what is the legacy?

23 BH: First of all, I'm skeptical or doubtful about saying what the legacy was as it
24 applies to Afghanistan, Iraq. I think sometimes people are a bit too glib throwing around
25 what the legacy was and sometimes things are *sui generis*, they just themselves. I think
26 maybe—some of my thoughts on the legacy, one, it was the first time we learned that
27 pure firepower can't win wars. I think another legacy is, I don't know that a democracy
28 has the ability to sustain a long-term military commitment where it's not directly
29 threatened. I think that's another legacy of it. And I think—Colin Powell, you know that
30 Powell Doctrine of—and Powell was interesting because he was a captain and a major
31 maybe when he was there, but one, if you wanna use your military as a military you

1 better have a clear idea of a mission, you better have overwhelming force, you better
2 have a plan to how you're gonna get in, how you're gonna get out. If we learned that then
3 I won't say it's worth the treasure and the lives, but I think that's one of the enduring
4 legacies of it, too, that we can't be policeman of the world. There are certain things that
5 we cannot, and I guess I sound like I'm sort of slipping in Afghanistan and I don't mean
6 to do that, I have an opinion on that but I don't mean to do that. We need to shake once
7 and for all that Wilsonian concept that we're somehow ordained by God to bring
8 democracy to the entire world, can't do it. Parts of the world aren't interested in it, and
9 we don't have the time, treasure, or political will to—you know the British in Indonesia,
10 it took them twenty years I think for the communist insurrection there. We don't have the
11 ability, the money, the ability of our military to commit to it, and the citizenry to support
12 and whatever it takes to support that time, money and blood. We don't have the ability to
13 do that, and I'm not saying that's a bad thing or good, I'm just saying we don't and if we
14 recognize that I think we will have learned something.

15 KC: Well, is there anything else you'd like to add before we close up the
16 interview?

17 BH: I don't think so. You asked some interesting questions on sort of things that I
18 hadn't thought about or at least hadn't thought about at a conscious level. You sort of
19 got—it's kind of interesting to hear the questions and hear myself answer.

20 KC: Well, okay then. I appreciate the kind words there. We'll put an end to the
21 interview.