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**The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Edward J. Marolda  
Conducted by Kelly Crager  
Date: 8, 20 November; 2 December 2024**

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

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting an oral history interview with Dr. Edward  
2 J. Marolda. Today is 8 November 2024. I'm in Granbury, Texas, and Dr. Marolda is joining me  
3 by telephone from Montclair, Virginia. Okay, let's start with a little bit of family history. Tell me  
4 about your parents and your history?

5 Edward J. Marolda: First of all, please call me Ed. I go by Ed more commonly than my  
6 full name. First my parents. My father was in the U.S. Army in World War II. He was, in fact, in  
7 the National Guard before [Pearl Harbor]. The 102<sup>nd</sup> [Infantry] Regiment, part of the  
8 [Connecticut] National Guard. And he took part in training in Louisiana [in 1941]. And then he  
9 was posted over to Camp Blanding in Florida. And so when Pearl Harbor happened, he heard it  
10 on the radio, like most Americans. "Pearl Harbor". He wondered, "Where's that? What is that?"  
11 Of course, they learned soon enough what it was. And so his regiment was called up and it was  
12 part of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, National Guard. They had four regiments at that point, and so  
13 they sent them to the Pacific. He was on a troopship. I've forgotten the name at this point, but  
14 they went through the Panama Canal, worried about submarines the whole way. German  
15 submarines and Japanese submarines. Of course, [the Japanese] weren't in the Caribbean, but  
16 they were in the Pacific. Anyway, by the time they got to Bora Bora in the Society Islands, they  
17 decided that that was the front line. So, they dropped off the 102<sup>nd</sup> Regiment on Bora Bora and  
18 then the rest of the division, which followed in other troopships, went further on and they ended  
19 up fighting in the Philippines and elsewhere. My father's regiment never left Bora Bora. What  
20 they had to do was to haul these huge coastal guns up to the top of the mountain on Bora Bora.

1 That was their main task. That they did for the next year or so. Of course, the war quickly  
2 bypassed Bora Bora which was no longer the front line. At the outset, he was concerned that the  
3 Japanese might land at any moment. They all were. And he told a funny story where one night he  
4 was out on patrol along the lagoon, and he saw these heads bobbing in the water, getting closer  
5 and closer and closer. Well, he didn't open fire. And then he discovered those were coconuts  
6 floating in! So, they never heard a shot fired in anger there. But they did their part. And he was  
7 proud of that. He was always proud of his Army service. And so he served there for a couple of  
8 years, and then his time was up, so he came back to the States. And I'm not quite sure of the  
9 chronology here, but he then did a short stint as a guard at one of the German prisoner-of-war  
10 camps, I believe, in Texas. And then they assigned him to the 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, which was  
11 regular Army. And so, he's getting ready to go to Europe. And of course, that would have been  
12 [for] the D-Day landing. And he happened to be on a bus and on the bus with him near the base  
13 was the wife of the division commander of the 35<sup>th</sup> Division. And he was telling her, "I served  
14 two years out in the Pacific." And she said, "Wait a minute, you've had more than enough  
15 service. Let me check it out." So anyway, the long and the short of it was that he did not go to  
16 Europe with the 35<sup>th</sup> Division, which saw some really heavy fighting in Normandy and  
17 elsewhere and later under General George Patton. So, he stayed in the States. I think that maybe  
18 that's when he went to the prisoner-of-war camp. You know, the chronology, like I said, is a  
19 little bit murky at this point. But anyway, he was one of the first [soldiers] in World War II to  
20 have put in enough time to get out of the service [before the end of the war.] This was in 1944,  
21 and I'm not sure what month it was, but his picture appeared on the cover of, I think, *Life*  
22 *Magazine* or one of the big national magazines showing him handing in his dog tags. So, he went  
23 into civilian life. He went to work for a family [business,] for my mother's brother, who ran a  
24 factory. My father worked for him for a short time. And then he and his brother, [Theodore, or  
25 Ted, who served on Guadalcanal with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, partnered in business.] I'll tell you  
26 more about Ted later. The two of them said, "Let's start our own business." And they did. They  
27 started with a floor covering store on the main street of my hometown, Winsted, Connecticut.  
28 And they sold linoleum, basically. And they started out with maybe twenty rolls of linoleum.  
29 Sold all that and bought about twenty more rolls. The long and short of it, they made a go of that  
30 business. And in 1955, we had a really bad storm all over New England. It hit Connecticut [and  
31 the Housatonic River Valley particularly hard.] My hometown, Winsted, has two features that

1 play into this. Number one, Highland Lake is literally higher than the town. It's up on a hill  
2 above the town. The river that runs through the town is called the Mad River. How appropriate!  
3 So, in 1955 early one morning, like four o'clock in the morning, my father came into my room  
4 and he said, "Ed, get up, we've got a flood. The lake has overflowed." The water was coming  
5 down the street where I lived and it tore up that street. There was a huge chasm in the middle of  
6 the street with kids' toys and all kinds of stuff floating down. It never went beyond that, but our  
7 front yard got covered with mud. That was the only damage we suffered. [My father] and his  
8 brother [owned] a furniture company right across the [street] from the Mad River. The store was  
9 down the hill from where we lived. So my father said, "I've got to go down there and check on  
10 the business." So he went down the hill and he even had to go across over the water by a chain  
11 link fence, grabbing hold of the chain link fence over the water which was pouring underneath it.  
12 And he finally got to his store. My Uncle Ted had arrived there earlier because he lived closer [to  
13 the store.] And the two of them, with the water starting to build up in the first floor of their  
14 furniture store, they actually threw hard objects through the front plate-glass windows to allow  
15 the water to come in and then flow out again so it wouldn't go further up in the building. And by  
16 the way, that building was an old Methodist church which had a steeple on it, a tower with a  
17 huge bell, and every hour that bell would ring. As kids, we used to love to go up there and listen  
18 to the bell going off. Anyway, as I said, that store was across the street from the river, which was  
19 fortunate because those businesses and homes that were on the riverside just got totally swept  
20 away. We had five people killed in my hometown in that flood. I don't know if it's ironic or  
21 whatever, but the fact was that their competition had been [washed] away. It really put them in  
22 the catbird seat when people after the flood needed to get furniture for some of their houses that  
23 had been pretty badly handled. So they did fairly well after that point. And they kept that  
24 business. They were local fixtures. And both he and his brother Ted were [well-respected] civic  
25 leaders. They headed the Kiwanis Club. We had an annual parade. It was called the Laurel  
26 Festival. Mountain laurel was abundant in northwest Connecticut. And so they made a thing of it.  
27 I remember we went out into the woods and we picked laurel, piled it high on their furniture  
28 store trucks. And the town had a Laurel Parade. And we all took part in that with our bikes, with  
29 little streamers on them, and the rest. And so, they were very well thought of and highly regarded  
30 by the town townspeople. And they did very well. Jumping ahead, maybe twenty years later,  
31 some young kids were [behind] the store, unseen by people from the street. And [they started a]

1 fire. And the fire spread to the back of the furniture store, the old historical church. The firemen  
2 showed up and, according to my father and my uncle, they said, “We kept asking the firemen to  
3 get in there and pour water from the inside on the fire. They said, “We don’t care about the  
4 furniture, but we want to save the building.” Well, they wouldn’t do it. They said “It’s too  
5 dangerous. We’re volunteer firemen and we’re not going inside.” So, the church, the steeple,  
6 everything, came crashing down and the store was destroyed. It’s now a parking lot. And, my  
7 father said, “Well, I was about ready to retire anyway,” but Uncle Ted took it [harder.] Anyway,  
8 they actually rented another building further down on Main Street that had avoided destruction,  
9 and they ran the furniture business from there for another, I don’t know, five or six years, I  
10 guess. And then of course, both of them retired and continued to live [in Winsted]. My mother’s  
11 [maiden name was Paolantonio.] Both [my father’s and mother’s] families were Italian-  
12 American. My [grandfather] on my father’s side came over to the States in the late 19th century.  
13 He and my grandmother were married, as I remember [it,] on New Year’s Day 1900. They had a  
14 huge family. One girl died during the Spanish flu of 1918. Her name was Rose. Another one was  
15 named Nettie. She survived that, but she was very sickly, and she finally passed away in 1944.  
16 And then you had had four other females, Tessie, Lucy, Marie, and Clara. And then three boys,  
17 Edward, Theodore, and Victor. So it was a large family. They moved back and forth between  
18 New York City and Winsted, Connecticut. They [and I] were very proud of our Italian heritage.  
19 My grandparents on my father’s side quickly tried to assimilate and they learned English fairly  
20 early. My grandfather said “We’re Americans now.” Going back to Italy, my grandfather  
21 apparently was orphaned. His parents had died and he was given to an uncle to be raised. And  
22 my grandfather, for some reason, didn’t take to the uncle. He said “I’m out of here.” By the way,  
23 the town that they came from is named Muro Lucano. Lucano relates to the [pre-Roman] tribe  
24 that was actually in that part of southern Italy called the Lucani. And I loved this, that the Lucani  
25 were barbarians from the mountains, and they would come down periodically and raid the Greek  
26 colony at Paestum, right down there by Salerno. Muro Lucano is up on the [Apennine  
27 Mountains.] It’s like a medieval town. It’s still there. We went back there a few years ago and  
28 the town is on the side of a mountain, obviously for defense, for defensive purposes. And so  
29 anyway, he left Muro Lucano and came to New York [City.] They first settled in Washington  
30 Heights, I think, just above the Bronx. And he had a cart [and horse] that he used to deliver ice to  
31 the people around Washington Heights. And my father used to go with him as a kid, and he

1 remembers they'd have to haul the stuff up to the top floors of these tenements. And it was rough  
2 work. But according to my father, his father was just one tough SOB. He took care of his family  
3 and was very proud of that. He was a working man and proud of it. At one point in the mid-  
4 1940s, he had a stroke and he was incapacitated. He died in 1944. So the boys had to step up.  
5 Oh, I forgot to [mention their oldest brother, Joseph.] Joe had to become the father of the family.  
6 Basically, he took over from there. And Uncle Joe was too old for the service at that point. Next  
7 in line [was my father Ed and after him was Vic.] My father served in the Army, Victor served in  
8 the Navy, and Ted was in the Marine Corps. They had great longevity and my Uncle Ted, the  
9 youngest, is still alive at 101. And I'll tell you more about him in due course. So, he was with the  
10 Marine Corps and Victor was with the Navy, and he died at the age of 99. My father died at the  
11 age of 95. And Uncle Ted is still going strong at this date. Great genes, I guess. I hope that's  
12 good for me. So, that's my father's family. All the females have passed on and all but one of the  
13 males have passed on. My mother's family, also Italian-American, came over more recently, in  
14 fact in 1915. My grandfather on my mother's side was sort of like a happy-go-lucky bachelor  
15 and had come over a couple of times and then went back to Italy to their hometown, Frosolone.  
16 It's on the coast of the Adriatic Sea, in southern Italy, and it was a town known for knife-making.  
17 And so my grandfather came over. [He married my grandmother, Angelina.] He had worked in  
18 knife factories in Italy. But when he came over to Rhode Island, he worked with his brother in a  
19 knife factory in Providence. He had a falling out with his brother, as far as I can tell. And he said,  
20 "Okay, [I'm finished with Rhode Island.]" He left Providence and moved his family to  
21 Thomaston, the little town of Thomaston, [in northwest] Connecticut. I'm not sure what he did  
22 there, but then they all moved to Winsted, right up the road, like [20 miles] away. And my  
23 mother's brothers, John and Nick, started a business of manufacturing products for dogs, dog  
24 chains, dog collars, all manner of things related to dogs. It was called TWINCO, which stood for  
25 The Winsted Company. They stamped all their products with that [logo.] So they had a going  
26 concern. Now, Nick had some sort of a physical problem that prevented him from serving in  
27 World War II. But his brother John was fit as a fiddle, and he went off to the engineer training  
28 school at Fort Belvoir, [Virginia,] right close to where I live now, [and he went overseas.] He  
29 was part of the D-Day invasion. He got there on D-Day plus 4 or 5, something like that. And one  
30 of his jobs was to help put together what they called emergency landing fields just in from the  
31 beach. And he said they got shelled all the time by German artillery. And so he did that. And he

1 spent the rest of the war and moved up with the engineers all the way into Germany. He came  
2 back to the States at the end [of the war.] I remember because he brought back a German helmet  
3 and a German rifle. I loved to go into the attic of his house and check them out. So the bottom  
4 line of all this basically was that I was steeped in what these guys had been involved in in World  
5 War II from an early age. I mean, I was just gaga sitting at their knees listening to their war  
6 stories. Not only my relatives, but even their friends when they would come over for dinner or  
7 whatever. They all talked about World War II. So from that point on, [I was hooked.] I now have  
8 a house that is just filled with books. I'm trying to get rid of most of them because there are just  
9 too damn many. And, I'm retired now. Anyway, one of my earliest collections was a five-  
10 volume pictorial history of World War II. I remember that my father bought those for his own  
11 use, but I started going through them page by page, and it's like I was blown away. And from  
12 that point on, I was hooked into military history, and it's never left me. Also, on my mother  
13 Anne's side, she had an older sister, Lucy, whose husband [Mike] had been in World War I. He  
14 was in the artillery in World War I. [Lucy and Mike] lived in Providence, Rhode Island. She  
15 became very important in local and state politics. She knew Senator John Pastore very well. She  
16 was head of the VFW Women's Auxiliary (Veterans of Foreign Wars). She was the president of  
17 that. It had to be in the 1980s, I guess. And so she was very much into that. The other family  
18 members were three sisters, Philomena who ran a hairdressing salon in Winsted. We called her  
19 Aunt Minnie. Her sister Josephine worked at my uncle's factory. [Another sister, Carmela, also  
20 worked in my uncles' factory.] My mother Anne was the youngest [and before marriage to my  
21 father she worked for Pratt and Whitney in Hartford, Connecticut.] She and my father were  
22 married in 1944. And they settled in Winsted. She lived to the age of 95. They got [divorced] in  
23 1969 but maintained contact and attended many family functions. [I had a brother, Gerald, who  
24 passed away at age nine in 1956. I have another brother, Dennis, an accomplished musician, who  
25 served on active duty in the Army and then in 102<sup>nd</sup> Army Band in the Army Reserves. I also  
26 have a sister, Diane, who completed many academic degrees and had a full career as a social  
27 studies teacher in Connecticut high schools. Eventually some of the family migrated to the  
28 Canton area west of Hartford.] So anyway, those are the two sides of my family.

29 KC: No, no, no it's a great little family history there and looks like longevity may work  
30 to your advantage. So, you've talked about some aspects of being a kid and growing up. But tell  
31 me what it was like to grow up there at that time?

1           EM: Okay. It was fine and northwestern Connecticut was a great place to grow up in. In  
2 fact, the street we lived on, Woodland Avenue, was right down from Highland Lake. So we spent  
3 a lot of time going up to the lake and riding our bikes. We'd ride around and we'd go swimming  
4 of course. And, actually, that's something I want to mention. It also was accompanied by a  
5 tragedy. [My brother, Gerald] (Jerry), was one year younger than me. And in [July] 1956 we  
6 were up there swimming with my Uncle Ted's kids, Theodore and Larry. We were in an area  
7 that had a lifeguard, but right next to it was an area that didn't have a lifeguard. And there was a  
8 big floating [raft.] We all jumped on it, and we were thinking this was great. Well, we [floated it]  
9 into the area that didn't have a lifeguard. And at one point the thing, that was waterlogged, begin  
10 to sink. So we said, "Let's get away from this thing." So, three of us swam to the shore, but my  
11 brother was not strong enough to make it. I barely made it myself, but my brother was not strong  
12 enough and he died. He drowned. So that was a tragedy, a family tragedy. I often think about  
13 him. What would he have done in his life? He only lived nine years.

14           KC: That's so sad.

15           EM: Very Sad. But anyway, as a young boy, I was always going into the woods. We dug  
16 foxholes, and we built little lean-to cabins and played army and, you know, the usual stuff. I  
17 remember a kid across the street. Michael Sullivan was his name. He had a whole bunch of little  
18 Army trucks and little Army men. Man, I wanted to get a collection like that! I was in Boy  
19 Scouts. I didn't advance as far as my sons [Jeff, Brian, and Michael] later did. And one of my  
20 sons, [Brian,] became an Eagle Scout. [My grandson Nicholas also was in scouts.] I made it to  
21 second class, but I wasn't really into merit badges and all that stuff. I loved camping out and we  
22 did a lot of hiking, so I did that. I played some baseball and attended the local schools and went  
23 to Gilbert High School. Now that school had an interesting history. Mr. [William L.] Gilbert  
24 founded an orphanage and it later became the high school. I'm not sure when, but they started  
25 the Gilbert High School and I went to [it]. My mother also went to that high school. Well, my  
26 first year in high school, they had actually gone to a brand-new building in another part of town.  
27 And so I was part of the first class that did all four years at the [new Gilbert High School,]  
28 graduating in 1963. We had about 100 students in the class. It was a small class, of course, and  
29 we knew each other. I played football there for three years. I got my letter, a big letter G. The  
30 team was called the Yellow Jackets. Got my Yellow Jackets jacket! I got my letter my second  
31 year and played my third year. The last year in high school I said, "I've done my time here. I

1 want to make some money.” So I went to work at a local grocery store. Even before, when I was  
2 old enough to get a job, they were hiring people to pick tobacco. Connecticut broadleaf tobacco  
3 is [widely] known and grew in the Connecticut Valley up by Granby, Connecticut. They have  
4 these huge covered areas where they grow this leaf tobacco. So anyway, [when I was 15 or 16,] I  
5 would get on the bus around 4:00 in the morning. We’d go over to Granby on a bus from  
6 Winsted. There, we would sit in the rows where they grow the tobacco. And your job was to  
7 move your butt along the row picking off what they called “suckers” from the growing plants of  
8 tobacco. And you just go to the end of the row, turn around, and come back the other way. Well,  
9 invariably the rows were filled with water, so you’re dragging your butt through water and  
10 you’re soaked. And these rows were covered with some kind of [see-through mesh.] The sun  
11 would partially get through, and it was like being in a pressure cooker. I mean, it got hot as hell  
12 when it got like 9:00 or 10:00 in the morning. And so I did that for about a week or two. And  
13 finally, I said to my father, “This is too much and I have to get up so early.” There were Puerto  
14 Ricans who worked there, also. And they were really used to it. And they worked hard. They  
15 laughed all the time but it was hard work. Well, my father said, “All right, come work in the  
16 furniture store.” So, I did that, and that was less rigorous. But still, when I started out, I had to  
17 dust all the knickknacks and stuff in his furniture store, which wasn’t really taxing, but boring.  
18 But then he sent me out on the delivery trucks. We delivered furniture, and by that time they  
19 were also selling refrigerators and stoves and other appliances. So, I was getting pretty hefty. I  
20 got some muscles doing all this delivery up three and four stories and things like that. And I  
21 liked it because you’d go out and you’d have to travel maybe a half hour to some place. But in  
22 the meantime, you’re sitting in the truck relaxing. We’d stop and have coffee at a diner. And then  
23 we’d do our deliveries. And then you’re back to the store. So I didn’t mind that work at all. And  
24 it helped me in my football stint because I was pretty strong and beefy, even though only five  
25 foot, seven inches tall. And, that’s why I made the team. I got my letter my second year, which  
26 was a little bit unusual. So I did that. And then when I was in college, my uncles who ran the  
27 TWINCO factory said, “do you want to work here?” I said, “Yeah, sure.” My Aunt Josephine,  
28 who I was always very close to, was a secretary in their main office. She said, “Uncle Nick  
29 wants you to work here.” It was a basic wage. I don’t even remember what it was, but it was  
30 enough to keep a young college kid happy. So, Uncle Nick was the guy running the show. He  
31 said “You’re not going to get an easy run here. You’ve got to work hard. In fact, you’ve got to

1 work more than the others because you're my nephew. You're not going to get special  
2 treatment." So, the first year I was in what's called the plating room. It's like a picture of hell,  
3 with steam coming up and fumes all over the place from vats of chemicals. And we had to dip  
4 the dog chains into these things and take them out. Take them off the racks. And so, it was hot,  
5 nasty, and smelly. Probably not very healthy either.

6 KC: I would guess not.

7 EM: And so I did that. That was the first year. No. I'm sorry. Let me backtrack. The first  
8 year he said, "All right, I'm going to give you an easy job." Yeah, right. And it was to wash all  
9 the windows in the inside of this factory, which hadn't been washed in maybe fifty years, if ever.  
10 So I spent all summer washing windows. And the next year, I did the plating room job. The third  
11 year I was assigned to a machine where you would take the brass backings to combs, dog combs,  
12 and they would put little teeth into these combs. Well, before that happened, it came to me. I had  
13 to put these things through a machine that would mill the grooves so they could put the little pins  
14 in. And that, again, was hot work. You'd get the metal and it was hot to your fingers. You could  
15 get burned if you weren't careful. But the worst part of that job is right smack in front of me was  
16 this huge clock. And it's like, every second of the day [went buy slowly, with] tick, tick, tick. It  
17 made it the longest day possible. But I did these jobs. And at one point, my Aunt Josephine came  
18 to me. My uncle Nick was fairly reserved. She came to me and said "Edward, Uncle Nick is  
19 really impressed with your work ethic, that you just work, work, work." Well, I didn't say to her,  
20 but to myself I said, "I have to keep in my mind that I've only got to do this for three months and  
21 I'm out of here." And I thought, "I never want to do this for my life's work." This is really hard  
22 work! So that put me in the right direction for academics. And then the fourth year, I got a break.  
23 I worked in the shipping department with my Aunt Carmella, and we packaged stuff and  
24 [shipped it.] That was an easy job. The room was nice and warm. The temperature was just right  
25 and she was a joker, so we were always kidding around. So, I did that and it worked out fine.

26 KC: You mentioned college. Was it a foregone conclusion that you were going to go to  
27 college?

28 EM: Yes. After doing this hard work, laboring, I said, "I'm definitely going to college." I  
29 had a liking even then for history, and I did very well in the history classes. I remember I had  
30 Mrs. Thompson who was my eighth-grade history teacher. I just loved the way she taught. Mr.  
31 Head was another history teacher I admired. Mr. Nelligan had me in his geography class. But as

1 it turned out he only did that for a short time. He was really a history teacher. He brought a lot of  
2 history into his geography class, and I really grooved on that. And jumping ahead, [he came up  
3 to me at a ceremony after I retired from federal service in 2008. Gilbert] High School gave me a  
4 [lifetime achievement] award and Mr. Nelligen attended the ceremony. He said, “I always knew  
5 you would do well.” And as it turned out, he was in the Naval Reserve, and one time he came to  
6 Washington and came into my office. [I was then the Navy’s senior historian, and I was blown  
7 away to see Mr. Nelligan in uniform!] So, he came in to see me and I have always remembered  
8 that. So anyway, I really gravitated toward the humanities and social sciences in high school, and  
9 that went very well. I wanted to go to West Point but my grades in high school only were fair to  
10 middling. I did well in the humanities but not so much in math or the [sciences.] And I remember  
11 my last year [at Gilbert.] I was applying to colleges, and I had taken a chemistry class, which I  
12 didn’t really cotton to. The teacher was named Flaherty. “Doc” Flaherty, we called him. And I  
13 had to go to Doc Flaherty. I said “Please give me a break. I know my grades aren’t too great, but  
14 I’ve been accepted to college.” So, he passed me. It was a kind gesture. Jumping ahead. Once  
15 when I was at a conference, his daughter, as it turned out a Navy rear admiral, mentioned her  
16 name, Flaherty. [I said, “could it be the same as my high school chemistry teacher?”] So I went  
17 up and introduced myself. She said, “Yeah, that was my dad.” And I told her the whole story of  
18 how Doc Flaherty let me go on to college. So, anyway, my grades were not great, and I didn’t  
19 even apply to West Point because I didn’t think I’d have a shot. But I started to send in  
20 applications to Northeastern University in Boston, the University of Hartford, and some other  
21 schools. Then I came across this place called Pennsylvania Military College. So, I said, “That  
22 sounds good.” So, I looked into it. It turned out that the school was established in [1821]. It was  
23 one of the oldest military schools in the country. They wore uniforms that were comparable to  
24 West Point’s. They had the gray uniform, their formal dress. They also had shako hats, swords,  
25 the whole bit. And I said, “Wow, it’s not West Point, but it’s sure close enough.” So, I applied  
26 there and I was accepted. So, I went to my father and said, “I’ve been accepted.” He said “great,  
27 but it’s like twice the price of the other places you’ve applied to. Are you sure you want to go  
28 there?” I said, “Well, I’d really like to go there.” He said, “Okay.” So off I went to Pennsylvania  
29 Military College in Chester, Pennsylvania. It is no longer the college. The physical structure is  
30 there, but by 1973 they couldn’t get enough people—men to join the cadet corps. The Vietnam  
31 War, I’m sure, had a lot to do with that. And it went co-ed. My last year we had twelve [female]

1 nursing students there. And even by that time, we had [non-ROTC students] who would  
2 commute to the college. But I was part of the cadet corps, about 700 cadets, as I recall. And, we  
3 did all the military training. Of course, it was ROTC. I was in the Army Reserve Officer Training  
4 Corps. Every Saturday we'd have our marches. The whole cadet corps would get out there and  
5 march around to bands and the families would come in to see it. I also remember that on  
6 Sundays, you had to pick a religion, basically. And we marched to church. We had to march  
7 about a mile to church and back. And I remember the training we had when I first got there, and  
8 part of it was manners [and formal dancing! It was like charm school.] You had to learn how to  
9 be a well-mannered young man. And we had to learn how to dance with females. And they  
10 brought them in from a local school, and we learned how to dance formally. And it was really  
11 like old times there. So, I was part of the cadet corps and one of my memories from that time is  
12 of 22 November 1963, when John F. Kennedy was assassinated. As I recall, it was a Friday and I  
13 was trying to finish a term paper. I was in the back of the library, and I noticed a lot of  
14 commotion up at the front desk. I said, "What the heck is that?" Well, finally somebody came  
15 back and said, "The president has been shot." Holy smoke! I couldn't believe it. And nobody  
16 could believe it at that point. And then I went back to my work. Well, I kept looking up there and  
17 sure enough, somebody came back and said, "The president's been killed." So I closed my books  
18 and went back to the dorm. And I remember that for the next week, we all sat around the TV  
19 watching the whole thing, the funeral and the whole bit. So that really sticks out in my mind. I  
20 don't remember so much about the Cuban Missile Crisis in October of 1962. I was into school  
21 and it didn't impact me as much as my wife, my later wife, [Beverly,] who was a registered  
22 nurse. She and her fellow nurses followed the whole thing. They thought they were going to be  
23 called up at any minute to be nurses and go off and help in a nuclear [war.] So, it had a greater  
24 impact on her than I think it did on me. I don't know why, but Kennedy's assassination certainly  
25 did. So, while I was at PMC, I joined the Glee club, which is kind of [ironic.] I had never been a  
26 singer in high school or anything like that. In fact, I remember that at my graduation from eighth  
27 grade at the Pearson School they had tried us all out to sing for the graduation ceremony. I didn't  
28 make [the grade.] So, they took all of the non-singers and put us in the first row. We're up on the  
29 stage with the singers behind us. I thought, what a cruel way to do that because we sat there like  
30 bumps on a log, not singing, and the people behind us were singing, so it was embarrassing. But  
31 in college I said, "Well, I'm going to go out for the glee club." And I did. I joined it and I did

1 well enough. I had fun with that. I also joined the ranger platoon because I thought, “Wow, that  
2 sounds [cool.]” We went to various locations, camped out, played army, ran against each other  
3 with rifles [shooting blanks and] whatnot. One time we went up to a mountainous area of  
4 Pennsylvania. It was January and it was cold as hell. I had a very thin sleeping bag, so I froze all  
5 night. We played army and charged each other and all that. But I said, “I don’t think I’m cut out  
6 for the infantry. It’s just too, too much. And I’m not gung ho.” I stayed with it and I’ve got some  
7 pictures of that time. I’ve gone back [to PMC] and they have a PMC Museum. They want to get  
8 money from the former PMC graduates. [By the way, PMC] is now called Widener University.  
9 It’s a large university, co-ed of course, and a first-rate university. So, I did that in my last year  
10 there. They actually made me the officer in charge of a platoon, a cadet platoon. I had a sword,  
11 and I had to be in front of the group, and we marched around and did all that. It was ROTC. At  
12 the time of my graduation in June 1967 [from PMC I was commissioned a second lieutenant in  
13 the US Army Reserve.]

14 KC: Okay. Well, let me ask you this. What did you know about what was going on in  
15 Southeast Asia at that point?

16 EM: I was aware of the war in a general [sense.] I don’t even think I had time to read the  
17 newspapers. I’d watch TV. I knew we had a war over there, but I was too busy doing academic  
18 work and that sort of thing. But I knew the chances of us going were pretty real. I didn’t say,  
19 “Oh, I’m not going to do that.” I knew it was going to happen. And as a matter of fact, with my  
20 background with my uncles in the war, World War II and all that, there was no question that I  
21 was going to do my duty. As it turned out, [the PMC cadet corps had already suffered casualties  
22 in the war.] In 1965, we had a fellow who figured very prominently in the Battle of Ia Drang. His  
23 name was [John] Lance Geoghegan and he was killed in that battle. His name appears in the  
24 movie *We Were Soldiers Once and Young* about [Colonel] Hal Moore and his unit of the 1<sup>st</sup>  
25 Cavalry Division. Many of my fellow cadets [suffered death or wounding in the war. There were  
26 ten former cadets who died in Vietnam. One of the cadets killed in action was David Wilson,  
27 from the class of 1966.] He was in my fraternity, Tau Kappa Epsilon, which I joined in my last  
28 year. He was in an ordnance unit up in the Central Highlands [of South Vietnam.] No one was  
29 killed from my class, thank God. But a hell of a lot of guys were wounded or injured. One of my  
30 good friends, John Finn, [was badly wounded.] He was in a helicopter that was shot down. [Two  
31 of my room mates, Alan Lipnick and Ken Byerly, also served in combat in Vietnam.] Another

1 good friend, Art Pollak, was wounded twice. Fortunately, both John Finn and Art Pollak are still  
2 with us. In fact, Art Pollak and I reconnected fifty years after the war. Now we talk every month  
3 or so. He's in Florida at The Villages. He was an officer in the infantry with the 101<sup>st</sup> [Airborne  
4 Division.] The first time he was injured he came back to his unit. The second time one of his  
5 soldiers was out there and [he saw a] piece of enemy equipment laying in the dirt. He had been  
6 told to never pick up anything. Well, he went over and picked it up. Boom. It blew up killing the  
7 guy, who was in front of my friend Art, who was badly injured. So he was sent statewide and had  
8 to recover from his serious wounds. I went to the fiftieth anniversary [of my PMC class] a few  
9 years back. I started talking to some of the other guys in the class. Bob Durkin, [Mike Sullivan,  
10 and many other classmates were wounded in the war.] So my class paid a high price. And the  
11 other classes, too. They all went into the Army. It was Army ROTC at PMC.

12 KC: Did you have any thoughts about the war itself? The reason for U.S. involvement in  
13 the way it was being prosecuted by that time?

14 EM: Yes. Because here we are in 1967 when I graduated. I was not in any great hurry to  
15 get into [action.] I wanted to get a graduate degree in history. So I applied to Georgetown  
16 [University's master's program] and they accepted me. I got two deferments, actually, to go to  
17 Georgetown. But when I applied for the third one, they said, "No more deferments." I actually  
18 started my active service in January of 1969 and it was clear at that point [there would be no  
19 victory for the United States in the Vietnam War.] It was after the Tet offensive and President  
20 Nixon's election to the presidency. In the latter months of 1968 he said, "We're going to start a  
21 withdrawal process." So I knew at that point that we're just finding a way to get out. So I said,  
22 "Well, all right. I understand that I have a duty to perform." I had never even thought of not  
23 doing my duty. And my thought was, "Okay, I'm going to go to Vietnam. I'm going to hopefully  
24 keep my soldiers alive, keep me alive, and not get badly injured and do my duty and get out of  
25 there after a year." [Some of the guys at PMC had been "gung ho" and wanted to earn combat  
26 medals.] I was not gung ho [and I had no interest in medals.] I thought this is a no-win situation.  
27 We're not winning this war. So what's the point? But I was going to do my duty. The other thing  
28 was my Aunt Josephine, I mentioned earlier. I was very close to her. She said "Edward, why  
29 don't you go to Canada? I'll help you with that!" I told her "I'm not going to Canada." [So I  
30 went on active duty] in January of 1969 [as a second lieutenant in the Army's Transportation  
31 Corps. I went to] school at Fort Eustis, Virginia. Everyone at that point was given three choices

1 for a branch of the Army. What branch do you want to be in? [After my experience in the cold  
2 mountains of Pennsylvania] I had no interest in being in the infantry, but one choice had to be a  
3 combat branch. So, I said, "All right, I'll do armor," thinking they didn't have tanks in Vietnam  
4 [they did.] They just have them in Germany and I'd love to go to Germany." My [other choice]  
5 was the Adjutant General branch because they had the historian branch of the Army. [My third  
6 choice was the] Transportation Corps, [to which they assigned me and so I went] to Fort Eustis.

7 KC: Tell me about that. Tell me about that training at Fort Eustis.

8 EM: Well, I had gone to summer camp. I backtrack a little bit. In my junior year at PMC  
9 I went to officer basic training at Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania. Now, that was for basic  
10 soldier skills. We did physical training in the morning with three-mile jogs. We did 25-mile  
11 hikes. We learned how to fire and clean weapons. [We saw artillery and other weapons being  
12 demonstrated. I remember a so-called] "mad minute" one time where they had artillery and  
13 mortars and small arms fire, all impacting on a hill across the way at one time. It was a very  
14 impressive demonstration. I had instructors there, a lot of them Vietnam veterans, who had come  
15 back and of course, they were like gods to us. "Oh, these guys actually made it back." And we  
16 tried to learn all we could from them. But this was basic infantry, basic training. So anyway, off I  
17 went to Fort Eustis in January 1969. This kind of surprised me that the Army Transportation  
18 [Corps] had more boats than the Navy! It had a lot of small boats, but they also had transport  
19 ships and various other things. And there were, as I recall, four segments to the Transportation  
20 Corps. You had truck units, you had boat units, [and you had railroad units.] And I forget what  
21 the fourth one was, but we got a sampling of each and how they did their thing. And also at one  
22 point I was in this other category. I was trained to be a [truck] convoy routing officer. And I  
23 thought, "This isn't too bad. If I get to Vietnam, I'm going to be sitting behind a desk in Saigon,  
24 and I'll be sending out messages like 'I want your truck unit to go here, go there, go here.'"  
25 Well, that wasn't the reality, because when I got to Vietnam I said, "I'm a convoy routing  
26 officer." They said, "Yeah, well, that's fantastic but we don't need any of those. We need guys to  
27 lead [combat] convoys." So, I'm thinking, "[Drats!]" And so at the replacement depot I said  
28 "Well, all right, but where am I going?" They said "You're going to a special truck unit which  
29 delivers fuel, highly flammable fuel, and ammunition to the forward combat bases. I'm thinking,  
30 "This is going downhill quickly." And so, they assigned me to the 538<sup>th</sup> Transportation  
31 Company.

1 KC: Let me interrupt you there, if I may, Ed. Before we get you to Vietnam, I want you  
2 to finish your time there at Fort Eustis and getting prepared to go over. Pick up the story there  
3 before you go.

4 EM: All right. The instructors knew what they were doing. I don't recall anything really  
5 specific about the training that later applied. Let me backtrack. They told us how convoys  
6 worked. You've got march units and trail parties and the ins and outs of a convoy, a truck  
7 convoy. I knew at that point I'm going to trucks, not trains or boats or anything like that. You're  
8 going to trucks. We had five-ton tractors pulling 5,000-gallon tankers or flatbed trailers. They  
9 told us the ins and outs of those things. Pretty straightforward. So, nothing really stands out.  
10 They had some veterans telling us about how they ran truck convoys. So, that's basically what I  
11 remember from that.

12 KC: Well, let me—

13 EM: Well at that point—Go ahead.

14 KC: Go ahead, please.

15 EM: Well, at that point, once I graduated from the transportation school I was sent out to  
16 Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I guess because of my historical background, they assigned me to a  
17 magazine which is still there. I believe it's called *Military Review*. Right there at Fort  
18 Leavenworth. And I was on the staff of the magazine. Now, they put out articles periodically. I  
19 didn't get to write any. I mean, as a young second lieutenant I was the guy who ordered pencils  
20 and paper and stuff like that.

21 KC: That right?

22 EM: Yes, but here I was at Fort Leavenworth, and I got to go around, look at the base,  
23 which was very historic. I remember seeing some of the convicts [from the federal penitentiary]  
24 who would wash cars outside of the prison. They were on good behavior. And it was an historic  
25 town, a pretty town. Kansas was flat as a washboard. So I was there for a bit. Also there was the  
26 Army Command and General Staff College, although they might have called it something  
27 differently then. But I was told that they were going to reassign me because they didn't want a  
28 young officer like me jaded by these officers like majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels who  
29 were coming back from an active unit and they're letting their hair down. They didn't want me to  
30 be influenced by that. At least that's what they told me. So, then I was reassigned to an Army

1 Reserve detachment at Fort Snelling in Minneapolis. Fort Snelling, of course, goes back to  
2 frontier days. It was a very important post during the Indian Wars.

3 KC: A beautiful place, too.

4 EM: Yes, but there was nobody there! I was in an office with an Army captain, a reserve  
5 captain, just the two of us. And we didn't have a lot to do. At least I didn't. He said, "I'll tell you  
6 what, you're into military history, so go ahead and read books and make maps. I was into maps,  
7 drawing military maps and all that. Periodically the two of us would go visit Army reserve units  
8 around the Minnesota-Wisconsin area and just pop in on their weekend drills and see what  
9 they're doing. Nothing much to it. That's what we did. And I remember this Army captain. I've  
10 forgotten his name, but he spent most of his time in the office. He was on the phone talking with  
11 his father, and the two of them were trying to sell an airplane filtering system or something of  
12 that sort to get a patent on it and sell it. So he spent a lot of time doing business, leaving me to  
13 my own devices, which was fine [by me.] There was one [major] thing that impacted me hard  
14 during that time in Minneapolis in the summer of 1969. I was told "You're going to be a casualty  
15 assistance officer, a CACO." We got word that a young sergeant, Jeffrey Charles Peterson, had  
16 been declared missing in action in Vietnam. He was with the [196<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Brigade] in  
17 Vietnam. The captain I worked for said "Ed, they always come back with a missing in action  
18 message first to sort of help ease the family's [initial shock.] That there was a little bit of hope  
19 [their son might still be alive.] The captain said "Ed, he's probably dead." [I visited the family to  
20 offer the Army's and my assistance. Sergeant Peterson's mother, who had lost her husband to  
21 cancer the year before, was there to receive me.] You've seen all the scenes and movies where  
22 the government vehicle pulls up to the house and guys in uniform come out and the family  
23 knows exactly what it means [and they collapse.] Well, that didn't happen with my visit. His  
24 mother was deeply saddened but in control of her emotions, despite the circumstances. [And as  
25 my captain had predicted,] a few weeks later, [when I was off in another part of the state,] word  
26 came in that he had been declared KIA, killed in action. And I guess either my captain or  
27 somebody else had had to inform her of that. But then when I came back, I was assigned the  
28 responsibility of meeting the plane bringing his body home in a metal casket when the plane  
29 landed and escort it to the funeral home. And I had to make the arrangements for the military  
30 funeral and take part in the ceremony [at the grave site]. And you know the drill when the officer  
31 presents the flag to the grieving [family member.] And they always say something [honoring his

1 service.] Well, I was just so really messed up that I just knelt and handed her the flag and I didn't  
2 say a word. And when I got into the limousine afterward, the pastor said "You should have said  
3 something, Ed." And, you know, I've never forgotten that. But I was just so overwhelmed with  
4 the meaning of that [tragedy.] You know, I had read the news, heard news about the war, but that  
5 really brought it home to me [where I was headed.] And I said to myself, this is serious stuff. So  
6 that was that. And I'd say about [September] I got word that I was to report to Fort Riley,  
7 Kansas, for pre-Vietnam orientation and training prior to going over. [I had] my wife Beverly  
8 with me at that point. We were married on 17 May 1969. [We were ultimately blessed with sons  
9 Jeffery, Brian, and Michael and grandson Nicholas.]

10 KC: What did that [orientation and training] consist of?

11 EM: I remember a few things that stand out. Number one, I got a lot of instruction about  
12 the diseases in Vietnam. The anopheles mosquito. It's a killer. So you've got to take your  
13 malaria pills all the time. Number two, the food. You were told "Don't eat the food if you don't  
14 have to, because you can get food poisoning and die from that stuff." So that stuck in my mind.  
15 Also, I remember it was a colonel who got up in front of several hundred soldiers, they were all  
16 officers, and said "Okay, you guys think some of you think you're going to Germany? You think  
17 you're going to who knows where but every one of you, with few exceptions, you're going to  
18 Vietnam. So get used to it!" It's like, okay, well, that's that. So we went back to my hometown in  
19 Connecticut, my wife and me, and got ready for deployment. When we left Minneapolis, I think  
20 it was October 2<sup>nd</sup> and it snowed that day. I thought, "Well, we're getting out of here in the right  
21 time!" So this was getting toward the end of the year, and I had some leave time. I took leave  
22 time and we stayed with the family. It was the 12<sup>th</sup> of December of 1969 when I deployed to  
23 Vietnam. And everybody in my family was upbeat. There were some tears shed by some  
24 members. But, you know, I'm doing my duty. Off I go.

25 KC: So what did you think about going?

26 EM: From Connecticut to Washington for the next flight, but then on to Travis Air Force  
27 Base in California outside of San Francisco. I had been a smoker, but at my wife's behest, I had  
28 quit. But when I got to Travis Air Force Base, I remember sitting in the terminal waiting for the  
29 next flight out to Vietnam. And I said, "Geez, I'm going to start smoking again. I've got to have  
30 some release!" So I started smoking. I didn't tell my wife until when I was in Vietnam for a  
31 month or two. And inadvertently, she saw a picture of me with a cigarette in my hand. So the jig

1 was up. I was outed! I smoked for the rest of the year [and until I] came back to the States. In a  
2 month or two, I quit again. That was the last time I ever smoked cigarettes.

3 KC: So I'm curious, when you're preparing to leave, what are your thoughts about going  
4 to the war?

5 EM: Well, as I said earlier, my thoughts were, I want to try and protect the lives of my  
6 men. I want to be a good officer and do the right thing. I don't want to get myself or my men  
7 killed or injured if I can help it. But I want to do the mission and whatever they ask of us. I want  
8 to carry it out to the best of my ability, and I hopefully had enough background to learn. Oh, let  
9 me go back actually to some training. I'm trying to think of where that was. It could have been at  
10 Indiantown Gap in 1966. They were telling us young trainees some things to do and not do. And  
11 I remember one of the instructions was when you're on the radio, you've got to make it brief.  
12 You can't be blabbing away for hours because enemy ears could be listening and you're going to  
13 give away important information. Make it brief and get right to the point. And so they had all of  
14 us practicing radio communication. Well, I didn't pass muster because in the period afterward,  
15 when they show here's what you do and you don't do, they played an audio of somebody on the  
16 radio who's doing the wrong things. Staying on too long, saying too much stuff that you don't  
17 need to say. And I'm thinking, "Holy crap, that's my voice! I was the example." Now, I knew  
18 none of these listeners so they didn't recognize my voice. And I'm thinking, I hope they don't. I  
19 messed up here. In another segment we were marching down the road, and they had each of us  
20 take a leadership position. And one of the words of advice was, if you see something lying  
21 around, don't pick it up. Well, I saw what looked like a map case. I thought, "Oh, man, an  
22 intelligence [bonanza!]" So I went and picked it up. Boom. You're dead. So, you know, those  
23 things stuck with me. [I did not repeat screwups like that when I got to Vietnam.]

24 KC: Better to learn that at Indiantown Gap than somewhere else.

25 EM: Oh, absolutely. You're right.

26 KC: Well, I think that probably takes us to a pretty good point to stop for today before we  
27 get you over to Vietnam. So let me turn off the recorder.

**Interview with Edward J. Marolda**

**Session [2] of [3]**

**Date: 20 November 2024**

1           KC: This is Kelly Cramer continuing an oral history interview with Dr. Edward J.  
2 Marolda. Today is 20 November 2024. I'm in Granbury, Texas, and Dr. Marolda is joining me  
3 by telephone from Montclair, Virginia. Okay, Ed, let's pick up the story where we left off last  
4 time. You're headed to Vietnam. Give me your thoughts on going. Your anticipation. What goes  
5 through a young officer's mind on his way to the combat zone?

6           EM: Right. Well, my thoughts were that this is the 12<sup>th</sup> of December of 1969. I had a  
7 little trepidation. I wasn't panicked or anything of that sort, but you don't know what situation  
8 you're getting into. So, I said goodbye to [my wife and] my relatives at Bradley Airport north of  
9 Hartford and off I flew to Travis Air Force Base [near San Francisco]. And I remember there  
10 were a few hours there before we took the flight across the Pacific. And I remember sitting there  
11 thinking, "Boy, this is going to be a [challenging] year." I had been a smoker, but I had quit  
12 several months before at the behest of my wife, my new wife. So, I said, "Damn, I'm going to be  
13 gone for a year. If I have nothing else to divert my mind, I'm going to take up smoking again."  
14 So I started smoking again. We laugh about this now. My wife Beverly and me. I really didn't  
15 tell her that I was back to smoking for a couple of months, until I inadvertently sent her a picture  
16 of me. And here I was, holding a cigarette at my side. When I got back from Vietnam I quit  
17 pretty quickly because I had a young son who had been born when I was gone. So I said, "I don't  
18 need to be smoking anymore." And so I quit, and I've never smoked cigarettes [a cigar now and  
19 again, however] since then. So it was a good ending to that story. So going to war I was a little  
20 concerned. So we got on the plane and it was nothing unusual for tens of thousands of other GIs.  
21 And as I recall, our first stop was Wake Island. I remember it being just an isolated place out in  
22 the middle of the ocean. They gave us an hour to walk around and just get a breath of fresh air,  
23 which I did. And I think the next stop, although it's a little bit murky, I think was Manila.  
24 Anyway, on to Vietnam. And I remember my reaction as we were over Saigon, over Tan Son  
25 Nhut Airfield. The pilot didn't make a rapid descent. We just did circle eights or circled around  
26 the airport. And I thought, "What's going on?" Then it dawned on me that they were trying to  
27 descend and come down almost vertically without flying over territory where they might get us  
28 shot at by the enemy. So anyway, the plane landed safely and we came off the plane. The first

1 thing that struck me like everyone else was the heat that hit you in the face. It was like, wow, It's  
2 hot and it's humid! And as we came off the plane in a long line, there was a long line of guys  
3 going onto the plane. They were going on the plane that we had just vacated and they looked  
4 scruffy. They looked sunburned, suntanned. Their uniforms were not ragged but clearly faded.  
5 They had a good time heckling us, saying "Oh, you're in for it now. You're in the shit now!"  
6 And of course, we're all looking at them and wishing we were in their line going out. They were  
7 happy to get out of town. So anyway, we all proceeded into the terminal area. It was like an  
8 outdoor waiting area, and I didn't know what to expect. I mean, you heard all these stories about  
9 ambushes and people sticking a knife in you when you least expected it. And so I'm sitting there  
10 on a bench, and there was this little old Vietnamese woman who was sweeping behind me, and I  
11 just felt the hairs on the back of my neck going up like, "Uh oh. Is this going to be a threat?" Of  
12 course, she was no threat at all. Then we got on a bus to the replacement depot. I noticed that all  
13 the windows had wire mesh over them, obviously to prevent grenades from coming through the  
14 window. And I thought, "Well, okay, this is a war zone." And then we went on to the  
15 replacement depot. I mentioned this in [our last session] that I had been supposedly trained to be  
16 a convoy routing officer, and I had thoughts of going to an office somewhere in Saigon behind a  
17 desk and routing convoys for people elsewhere in the country. Well, I got to the replacement  
18 depot and I said, "I'm a convoy routing officer," and they said "Well, we don't need any of  
19 those. We've got plenty of those. You're going to be [leading] convoys." So, I thought, "This is  
20 not good." And they said, "You're going to the 538<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company," which is part of  
21 the 64<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Battalion. Well, it turned out that my company's job was to deliver highly  
22 flammable fuel and highly explosive ammunition to the forward bases all over the Saigon region  
23 and down into the Mekong Delta. And I thought, "This is getting worse all the time as I'm  
24 proceeding through the process here." And before I went to Vietnam, I had been reading that one  
25 of the places that got ambushed a lot was Tay Ninh [on the border with Cambodia.] So I said,  
26 "Please don't tell me [the 538<sup>th</sup>] goes to Tay Ninh." And they said, "Oh, yeah, our truck convoys  
27 go there all the time!"

28 KC: This is getting worse.

29 EM: Yes, but it actually got better after that. When I got to the company area they said,  
30 "We do go to Tay Ninh often but it's not one of the most dangerous places we go to." In any  
31 case, I just sucked it up. During my tour I made multiple runs to Tay Ninh and all the other

1 destinations and I didn't get killed. Also during the initial briefing I learned that the day before I  
2 got there, they had either a mortar or a rocket attack, and one of the incoming rounds hit right  
3 around the supply shack or the supply building. I was tasked to be the supply officer in addition  
4 to my other duties. And periodically the huge base itself, Long Binh, got hit with all kinds of  
5 enemy fire.

6 KC: Tell me about it. Describe the base for me.

7 EM: Well, I don't know the dimensions of it, but one of our [neighboring commands]  
8 was the 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade. And so, day and night, at all hours, we had helicopters coming and  
9 going. We got used to [the noise.] But they were next door to us. The headquarters of U.S. Army  
10 Vietnam (USARV) was right up the street. [Long Binh] was a big place. There were ammunition  
11 depots all over the base. There was a fuel farm not that far away from my company area. And I'll  
12 get to a related story later on. So, we had a tank farm nearby. Long Binh was basically a huge  
13 logistics base. I think it was the largest one in Vietnam. Maybe Da Nang was larger, but Long  
14 Binh was certainly in that league. [The base was also the site of the Long Binh Jail,  
15 affectionately called by us as the "LBJ" in honor of the president who got us into that war!] My  
16 company area was on the perimeter on the eastern side of the base. We had the usual barbed  
17 wire, Claymore mines, and all kinds of defensive devices set up there. In my company area, we  
18 had billets, called "hooches," for the officers and the troops. We had a huge place for the trucks  
19 to be worked on, maintenance for the trucks. And we also had sandbagged berms to protect the  
20 trucks and the fuel tankers. We had some other amenities. One thing that sticks in my mind was  
21 the "Loon Foon Chinese Restaurant." I thought, "Here we are in Vietnam and we have a Chinese  
22 restaurant on the military base? "We went there all the time. [It also blew my mind that we had  
23 TV in a war zone! I watched the Bob Hope Christmas show, which was staged just down the  
24 road, on TV.] Not far from my officer's hooch was an enlisted club. We had an officers' club a  
25 little bit further away. During my first months in Vietnam, I was promoted to first lieutenant. I  
26 was a second lieutenant when I got there. So, they had a little bit of a shindig to congratulate me  
27 on becoming a first lieutenant. So, this one officer, I didn't even know what rank he was, poured  
28 me a beer. I said, "This is great." So I drank the beer. A little bit later, I came back and I said to  
29 the guy, "I'll have another." And he said, "What the hell? Do you think I'm a waiter? I'm a  
30 major [and way above your pay grade!]" I was embarrassed but it was not a big deal.] We had a  
31 large number of Vietnamese who worked with in the company area. That included housekeepers

1 to clean the sleeping quarters. Our housekeeper, [Ms. Nguyen Thi Riem, was a hard worker and  
2 a gentle soul but she had a] really tragic story. Her husband had been killed by the Viet Cong. He  
3 was in the South Vietnamese army. They had a baby. And the baby died from a disease. Her  
4 hands were gnarled from hard work. Every so often she'd bring in some French bread, baguettes,  
5 or even some seafood that was cooked on the spot. [Remembering my orientation at Fort Riley  
6 about food poisoning], I tried to stay away from Vietnamese food [but bread and cooked seafood  
7 passed muster.] The food in the mess hall was good enough [and plentiful.] I didn't want to risk  
8 it by being adventurous. So, anyway, we also had many Vietnamese men [and women who  
9 worked in the mess hall or] in the motor pool to keep up the trucks. And of course, there were  
10 Vietnamese who worked for the nearby officers' club and the enlisted club. I remember that a  
11 mainstay of the Vietnamese diet was a fish sauce called *nuoc mam*. I'm sure you've heard of  
12 *nuoc mam*? Fish sauce that was so smelly we actually asked them "Would you mind, when you  
13 eat your lunch, could you do it out in the field [around the buildings?]" So they did. They gathered  
14 in a little group out in a flat space and they would have their lunch. They were nice about it. I  
15 never had any problem with the Vietnamese. Oh, another thing. One of my duties was to be in  
16 charge of the mess hall. I had to make sure everything went right there. I'd go in periodically,  
17 and if the food trays had cracks in them, I'd break them apart. It was just to make sure everything  
18 was healthy and hygienic. And I remember the head Vietnamese woman there. She was a young  
19 woman and her name was Nguyen Thi Hung. Her husband was fighting with the South  
20 Vietnamese armed forces. I don't remember in what capacity, but I remember one time  
21 commiserating with her and saying, "We Americans are here helping to fight the war but we've  
22 brought some crap to the country, too. Too much money around and there's too much  
23 corruption." And she said, "Well, don't sell yourself short. You guys are helping us to fight the  
24 communists." I was kind of being down at the mouth and she said, "No, no, no. It's not all bad.  
25 Good things are happening. And thank you for that." It was a little bit surprising. And, I was  
26 conscious of who could do you in. There were Vietnamese barbers doing their thing in the  
27 company area or nearby. We'd go get a haircut and the barbers would use a straight razor to trim  
28 your facial hair. I thought, "What would it take to just slit your throat and run away?" But  
29 fortunately, that never happened to me [or anyone else in my unit.] Those were my recollections  
30 of the Vietnamese personnel. I was assigned to command the company's Third Platoon.

1           KC: When you arrived you were a second lieutenant, brand new. How did you approach  
2 the challenges of leadership there? You can't possibly know what these other guys know,  
3 although you're obviously an officer. How did you approach leadership?

4           EM: Well, I kept my ears open and I tried to learn. Now, one of the things goes back to  
5 every war. As soon as I came in, I met with my platoon sergeant, named Smith. [He was a]  
6 Korean War [veteran and] had been a long time in the Army. I think he was getting close to  
7 retirement. So, Sergeant Smith knew the ropes. And I remember the first day he said,  
8 "Lieutenant, the first thing you need to do is gather all the platoon [together] and talk to them  
9 and say what you expected of them and just to get to know them." And I did. It went very well. I  
10 remember some of [my men that stood out.] My Jeep driver was named [Tragle] [and we got  
11 along well. He was brave and dependable.] My supply shack guy[s were Sergeant Simpson, Spec  
12 4 Murphy from Chicago [he knew the members of the band "Chicago", and PFC] White. [Other  
13 Third Platoon soldiers who were first-rate soldiers included Sergeant Reese and Sergeant  
14 Ramgren. Most of the NCOs were professional and dedicated to the mission but] some I thought  
15 were just not really doing the job and only waiting for retirement. But for the most part, the  
16 NCOs were top-notch. I got along well [with the other officers and with my first company  
17 commander, Ed Rishabarger. He appreciated my interest in military history and I valued his  
18 leadership qualities. Another platoon leader I knew was first lieutenant Mike Windsor] One guy I  
19 became friends with was First Lieutenant] David Kuta [from Indiana. He was a real stand-up guy  
20 and unafraid. He volunteered to lead a convoy up to the Cambodian border only days before he  
21 was slated to head back to "the World." He made it.] The guy I relieved as commander of the  
22 Third Platoon [was first lieutenant Webb. I also got along well with a new officer, second  
23 lieutenant Larry Pilcher. My second company commander was Captain George Thurza with  
24 whom I never really clicked.] who had been in Vietnam almost a year and had experienced a  
25 couple of firefights. He told me what to expect, how to do convoys, and who controls what, how  
26 your convoy is defended, and what your mission is. That was very helpful. I remember the first  
27 convoy I went out on. We were heading north toward Lai Khe up toward the Cambodian border.  
28 I kept hearing [popping sounds and I wondered] "Is that gunfire? Is that that small-arms firing?"  
29 Eventually I realized that it was just the sound of the [gravel] on the dirt road crunching.  
30 Anyway, that's something I learned to recognize. It was just ambient noise. That wasn't gunfire.  
31 So he was very helpful. The commanding officer of the company Ed Rishabarger, I liked him a

1 lot. And, it's interesting because move [forward] maybe thirty years after Vietnam. I got a  
2 [phone] call and the caller said, "Hey, Ed. This is Ed Rishbarger. I'm in Texas and sitting in a  
3 barber chair getting my hair cut, and I'm looking at the History Channel, and there's Ed  
4 Marolda!" [He was really surprised that I was still doing military history.] You know, I did a few  
5 things for the History Channel on various military history topics. He called to just say hi, and  
6 make the acquaintance again. So I liked him a lot. His successor I wasn't enamored with and I  
7 don't want to give his name but—Some of the [newly arriving] officers before I left [the country]  
8 I thought were kind of "rah rah" [just] out of college. They just weren't very practical or down-  
9 to-earth, so I didn't really get to know them well. Now, we had all kinds of episodes in my  
10 company that year with personnel problems. The first six months we were very busy doing  
11 convoys every day or every other day. So, there wasn't much opportunity for troops to have time  
12 on their hands and get into trouble. But it changed once the U.S. and South Vietnamese armies  
13 went into Cambodia in May of 1970. The war was, in a way, pushed farther into Cambodia and  
14 farther away from what we did in South Vietnam. And so the troops had more down time, and  
15 that's when we started to have problems with bags of marijuana being thrown over the fence to  
16 guys on the other side. We even had some on heroin in the unit. My battalion commander's  
17 hooch was "fragged." He wasn't in his hooch at the time but the grenade blew up his sleeping  
18 area.

19 KC: How did you deal with these issues?

20 EM: Well, as a first lieutenant, I just wanted to make sure my own guys were taken care  
21 of. And, with my battalion commander's hooch getting fragged, I thought, "That's terrible and  
22 that's what the situation in the Army [was at that time, not only in Vietnam but worldwide.]"  
23 Thinking in larger terms, what it meant if we had to fight the Soviets right now with the Army  
24 with the shape it's in? I said, "We're going to have a hell of a time." But anyway, the marijuana  
25 thing. Okay, I'll have to fess this up and I've said it elsewhere, so it's not unknown. But at one  
26 point, somebody found a big bag of marijuana right next to one of the abutments that protected  
27 the trucks. We brought it back to the officers' hooch. We were kind of all sitting around and  
28 someone said "Look at this," looking at this bag of marijuana. And somebody said, "Well, have  
29 you ever smoked a joint?" And I said, "No, I never have." So the long and short of it was we  
30 started lighting up. Now, we shouldn't have done that. But anyway, I took one or two drags and I  
31 really didn't feel anything. But in the back of my mind, I said, "What if we get attacked and

1 we're all buzzed?" So that's it. That was the first and only time I've ever taken a drag of a  
2 marijuana cigarette. We got rid of the bag, and nobody got stoned. We were just young  
3 [adventurous guys.]

4 KC: I interrupted you with the question a little bit ago. Would you speak about race  
5 relations, as well?

6 EM: Yeah, race relations. Well, here's one example. The race relations were complicated.  
7 One of my best truck drivers, Sam Smith, [who was black], was really a first-rate [soldier]. He  
8 did his job and never complained. No problem at all. And I had a fella named White, African  
9 American who was in my supply room. He was a good guy. And that was the case with most of  
10 the African Americans in the company. At that time, however, it was common for black soldiers  
11 to hang together, and they did a special greeting and handshake that was called a "dap." To me it  
12 looked ridiculous and waste of time. But it meant something to them. And, you know, that was  
13 part of the culture at the time. And our black soldiers had grievances. There was one incident I  
14 remember that had unpleasant consequences. Apparently, a hooker or several hookers had been  
15 snuck into the enlisted barracks, my platoon's barracks. And I guess they were making their  
16 money. And at one point, an African American soldier wanted their services. The Vietnamese  
17 hooker said, "No, I don't do black guys." And he got really pissed off, went nuts, started running  
18 around screaming and all that. It was reported to me later on, and I informed the captain. I'm not  
19 even sure what action he took. He might have just told the guy to forget about it. My platoon  
20 sergeant did reprimand the men for bringing hookers into the hooch. There shouldn't have been  
21 hookers in the barracks in the first place. Maybe the captain read the soldier, or his barrack mates  
22 the riot act, but I don't recall anything seriously happening. But that just shows that there were  
23 racial problems and that was one example. Now I don't know who did this. It could have been  
24 just disaffected white or black guys or I don't know who. But one night somebody threw a  
25 smoke grenade between the wooden walls of our officers' hooch and the sandbag revetment  
26 around it. The sandbags. The smoke grenade was tossed in there. It was just smoke. Nothing  
27 more than that. And I don't know if it was a prank or just somebody wanted to send us a  
28 message. That occurred. Okay. One more thing comes to mind. I remember I had a soldier, [a  
29 white soldier], who had another couple of weeks to go in Vietnam. All of a sudden, he got really  
30 freaked out and in a panic. He said that "I'm going to get killed before I leave Vietnam." And of  
31 course, you heard those stories all the time. People in their last day, they get mortared and get

1 killed or run over a mine or something. He refused to go on convoy. And so, Sergeant Smith  
2 talked to him. He then came to me and said "I talked to him and told him you've got to go. You  
3 have to go. Because if you don't, you're going to be brought up on charges." I told the soldier the  
4 same thing when Smith brought the man to me. He still refused to go. And guess what? They  
5 made him stay in Vietnam longer. [You can't just say you're not going to go. But he refused to  
6 go and he had to spend more time in Vietnam on road convoys.] Okay, here's another example  
7 of the occurrences on the base. My entire battalion had a responsibility for guarding the fuel tank  
8 farm which was nearby. So, I had the duty one night to [work my way down the line of bunkers  
9 around the fuel farm to make sure the men were on guard]. That's kind of hairy duty, especially  
10 on a dark night. I was in my Jeep, and I had to drive by each of these bunkers. These are heavily  
11 armed guys, armed and ready to shoot. So, you have to do it very gingerly trading passwords and  
12 all that. So, I came up to the first bunker and nothing. Nobody challenged me or anything. I  
13 finally got somebody's attention, but all the guys were fast asleep on top of the bunker when they  
14 should have been in the bunker and awake. And so, I got him into the bunker to wake the others  
15 up and said, "You guys can't do this crap." I went to the next bunker. Same thing. I don't  
16 remember how many, but basically the bunker line was undefended because these guys were all  
17 fast asleep. So, I reported it to battalion. I passed it up the line. I don't know if anything was ever  
18 done to correct that. I don't recall anything coming down to my company to get these guys on  
19 the hot seat. Fortunately, during my time there was no attack on the fuel farm. But it was maybe  
20 typical of the war at that point that a lot of guys were there to do their time and then get the hell  
21 out. There was no thought at this point that we were going to win the war. We're already  
22 withdrawing from the war. All during my year, we heard rumors that we're going to be leaving  
23 Vietnam next week or some silly thing like that. Until the very end, it was clear that we were all  
24 going to do our full 365 days. And, in fact, I did 366. I got to the replacement depot and they  
25 said, "Sorry, you can't go because we've given your plane seat to an enlisted guy." I said, "Well,  
26 all right, fine." I spent the last day in a bar just waiting for my time. This is something else, too,  
27 that speaks to the tenor of the times when I was in the replacement depot waiting to take my  
28 flight. There were a whole bunch of bunks in this barracks. And this guy came in with a couple  
29 of his buddies, and they were getting ready to bunk down. They're obviously leaving Vietnam,  
30 too. And one guy came up to my face and said "Where did you serve?" I said, "Long Binh." He  
31 didn't give me a chance to tell him that I did not stay hunkered down in the large and relatively

1 safe logistics base. My job was to go all over the Saigon area, down to the Mekong Delta, and up  
2 to the Cambodian border in convoys that got shot at and blown up and the rest of it. We carried  
3 fuel and ammo. He just thought I was sitting in Long Binh twiddling my thumbs. He got really  
4 freaked out. He was a helicopter pilot who had been up north, and I think he had lost some of his  
5 friends. And he was just ready to start beating the shit out of me. And I'm thinking, "What the  
6 hell's wrong with this guy? Does he already have PTSD?" His buddies pulled him off telling him  
7 to "Leave this guy alone. He didn't do anything to you." But I remember that he was really  
8 beside himself and there was nothing unusual about that in Vietnam. The logistic support folks  
9 were referred to as REMFs, rear echelon motherfuckers, despite the fact that anywhere in  
10 Vietnam you could be killed. We all got mortared and rocketed and we went over mined roads.  
11 We had snipers shooting at us. And even operational accidents could be deadly. I recall two  
12 operational accidents. I led one convoy north up to a place called Song Be right next to the  
13 Cambodian border. I was ordered to deploy my tractors and trailers on an airfield that was not to  
14 be in operation that night. But, in the middle of the night word came down that they would be  
15 landing planes. They said, "You've got to get your tankers and trucks out of here." Most of the  
16 guys know that you don't sleep near or under the wheels of your vehicle. Well, one soldier  
17 hadn't paid attention, and he went to sleep close to a tractor wheel. His buddy, a driver, failed to  
18 wake him and moved his vehicle, a wheel of which ran over one of the sleeping guy's legs. We  
19 had to get him out of there and he got medevac'ed. Another time, we were delivering fuel to a  
20 forward combat base. The soldiers offloading the fuel had to make sure their hose connection  
21 was a good one or you'd have fuel spilling out. Well, on one occasion, the fuel spilled out,  
22 somehow got ignited, and a soldier got badly burned. So these things could and did happen. At  
23 other times, trucks and tankers ran off the road or in at least one instance killed pedestrians. It  
24 was dangerous work. Accidents happened.

25 KC: I'm curious, for someone who has never been on a convoy. Take me through the  
26 process. How is it formed up? How are the decisions being made at the higher levels passed  
27 down to you? Take me through an entire operation, planning to coming back home to the base.

28 EM: Okay, first of all, I was not involved in any planning. I was a lowly lieutenant! I  
29 thought before I went over there that I'm going to be in charge of a lot of things. And I said to  
30 myself, "Am I really prepared to run a convoy with all kinds of armed support?" And, will I be  
31 calling in artillery strikes or air support? Am I trained to do that?" The answer was, not enough.

1 We really didn't have a lot of training in that regard. So anyway, the convoys would go out from  
2 Long Binh at the crack of dawn. You got up and went to the mess hall and had chow. I believe  
3 we would take malaria pills at least several times a week, if not every day. I don't recall exactly.  
4 Typically, in my Jeep was me, my driver, and my machine gunner who had a mounted M-60  
5 machine gun. So we would drive to the marshaling area where the trucks and either the fuel  
6 tankers or the flatbed trailers were all drawn up in lines ready to go. And we'd wait for the sun to  
7 come up. Our escorts would then join us or we would pick up more escorts later. But my  
8 responsibility really was to make sure that all my thirty or more trucks and personnel were  
9 accounted for. They're all lined up where they're supposed to be. At that point in the war, they  
10 had really formalized how convoys were run. They had the escort force and that was pretty much  
11 their sole job. They were really in charge. They could call in air support and ground support and  
12 the rescue medical evacuation helicopters, medevacs. I had radio frequencies where I could do  
13 that if I had to. But they really knew what they were doing and they were in charge of the  
14 convoy. Our escort force consisted of V-100 reconnaissance vehicles. They were armored but  
15 not as much as tanks. And then we would, depending on where we went, have what were called  
16 "Quad 50s." 50-caliber machine guns, four of them in a truck bed. They also operated what were  
17 called "dusters," 40-millimeter guns. I don't recall any tanks, but we might have had them on  
18 occasion. Also, the escort force had APCs, M-113 armored personnel carriers with 50-caliber  
19 machine guns mounted on them. We also had overhead air support by light observation  
20 helicopters. They would be flying over the convoy looking all over and on both sides of the road  
21 to see if any bad guys were out there. And I remember I really marveled at the flying skill of  
22 these guys. They're right over the top of our trucks. And I remember one guy was heading for a  
23 tree. He just did a quick flip, like a sideways flip, and just went right by that tree like it was  
24 nothing. I thought, "That's pretty hairy," but it was good to know they're there because they can  
25 call in support when needed. Most of the roads by 1969 and 1970, especially around Saigon,  
26 were tarred, paved roads. So the enemy couldn't readily implant mines in those roads, and we  
27 felt pretty confident that we're not going to have any problem there. But then you got to some  
28 places like north of Saigon or up toward the Michelin rubber plantation at Dau Tieng and those  
29 were dirt roads. We knew that the enemy would often come out there and plant mines at night.  
30 And so when we got to those roads Army engineers would go ahead of us and clear the road and  
31 let us know that it had been cleared. Once we were cleared, we got the go-ahead and off we

1 went. As I mentioned earlier, after allied forces had invaded Cambodia things were a little bit  
2 quieter in our operating area. Just from my military history knowledge, I know that it was partly  
3 a result of the Tet offensive of 1968. Washington became convinced that we were losing the war.  
4 But enemy forces were hurt badly during that offensive. Some 100,000 communist soldiers were  
5 killed in Tet, so it kind of took the heat off my area, at least while I was there. I got sniped at  
6 twice. And we had guys who were killed from mines and ambushes on roads in my battalion. We  
7 had two guys who threw caution to the winds. We were told never, never travel up this dirt road  
8 at dusk, just before the sun goes down. Well, they didn't listen and they got killed. So it could  
9 happen. And the year before, a truck convoy was ambushed on the way to Tay Ninh and they had  
10 five men killed in action. That didn't happen during my watch, thank God. But there was always  
11 a risk. And we did lose some people to various causes. So, anyway, the convoys were out on the  
12 road, the mines are cleared away, and we are proceeding. We got to the forward bases. One that  
13 comes to mind was Quan Loi. It was close to the Cambodian border on highway 13, QL-13.  
14 There were units of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division deployed there and they had fuel bladders that we  
15 needed to fill. They didn't have a tank farm, but they had fuel bladders. And we would offload  
16 the fuel into the bladders and then head back. We almost always would complete a convoy the  
17 same day. Only a few times did we stay overnight. I remember Song Be was one time. Phuoc  
18 Vinh was another. One of the problems we had, and it was my responsibility, was to make sure  
19 you had all your trucks and all your people accounted for. My predecessor told me that  
20 sometimes you'll have drivers who'll stop off at a camp on the way back, say midway back, and  
21 want to stay overnight for whatever reason and to be wary of that. And what happens is, a guy  
22 has a problem with his trailer, either a tanker or a flatbed, and they would leave them at an  
23 intermediate stop and jump into someone else's tractor for a ride back to Long Binh. You're not  
24 supposed to do that. Well, one time that happened. They left the tanker behind in Phuoc Vinh  
25 and it disappeared, of course. This was not an unusual occurrence. The local Army unit would  
26 clean out the fuel and they would use it as a water tanker. So I lost a tanker. We had to work that  
27 out. And it was basically written off as a casualty of war! I don't know how it was justified by  
28 my captain, but it never caused me any heartache. There was another thing before I was to leave  
29 Vietnam. I was responsible for all the supplies in the supply building. Well, we came up short of  
30 100 bayonets. Who the hell's going to use bayonets in a truck unit? But they were missing. So I  
31 went to my supply sergeant. I said, "What are we going to do because they won't let me out of

1 here if I don't come up with the equipment." I didn't know what had happened to those bayonets.  
2 He said "Don't worry about it, Lieutenant." I guess he traded a whole bunch of steaks to another  
3 unit or something like that. I don't know, but the problem went away.

4 KC: It's been known to happen. Well, I'm curious that once you reach where you're  
5 going, what happens next? What do you do with the supplies? How does that work?

6 EM: Well, we offload them. Like I said, the fuel went into fuel bladders, and when we  
7 were bringing ammunition, that would be offloaded and put into bunkers that they had at the  
8 forward bases. That reminds me of another one. I went up to the Michelin rubber plantation at  
9 Dau Tieng and went into the main headquarters building. All of a sudden, wham, a rocket came  
10 in and I dove for the floor. The officers there pretty much chuckled and said, "Don't worry about  
11 it. Get up. These things come in here all the time. If it didn't kill you, you're all right." So that  
12 was a little bit embarrassing, but, hey, I wanted to be on the floor if another one hit. So we  
13 offloaded everything. And we would then stage so I could count all the trucks and make sure  
14 everyone was there and they had their trailers with them. And then we'd head out once the escort  
15 gave us the go-ahead and that they were ready to go too. I don't remember if I had mentioned  
16 this in the previous talk or not, but it stuck in my mind. We had offloaded our cargo and we were  
17 parked on a road right next to what was called a Chieu Hoi center. Now, Chieu Hoi was a  
18 program to bring former Viet Cong, and I guess some North Vietnamese soldiers over to the  
19 government side. Either they had been captured or they decided they wanted no part of killing  
20 and fighting or whatever. So they came over to the government side, but they had to go through  
21 sort of a reeducation process. So there was a building with a whole bunch of these guys right  
22 next to us across the wire. We're waiting in the trucks to take off to go back to Long Binh. And  
23 there were some hookers at the back of the convoy. I didn't even know about it, but they were  
24 plying their trade back there, and these former Viet Cong were seeing that, and they were just  
25 furious. And they were railing against these Vietnamese women for servicing the Americans.  
26 And I thought, "Wow, here's a problem. Here we are the occupier. And no wonder they want to  
27 shoot us. They don't like the fact that their women are getting prostituted and corrupted." And,  
28 you know, of course, that speaks to the larger issue, too. Money flowing from American coffers  
29 into Vietnam was corrupting a lot of people. And, I thought, "Boy, that speaks to the larger issue  
30 of the war. We're an occupying force." And that brings to mind another thing. I went to a little  
31 store where they sold stuff. I don't even remember what it was, but when I went there and the

1 woman working the counter started speaking to me in French, I said, “No, that was the previous  
2 occupying army.” I thought, “We’re just one more occupying force.” And even now, the  
3 Vietnamese refer to the “French War,” the “American War,” and later the “Chinese War.” We  
4 were just one of many wars that beset the country. Another thing I remember was we had to be  
5 careful on the roads crowded with civilian traffic. Now I’m in a Jeep without seatbelts, and it  
6 could be very hairy out there on the roads. You know, we’ve got these huge 5,000-gallon tankers  
7 and five-ton tractors and all that. And we’re barreling down the road. And with the Jeep, I  
8 couldn’t be in every place at once to monitor the convoy. So my driver had to zigzag in and out  
9 of traffic with the Vietnamese coming the other direction on the very narrow roads. And, I could  
10 easily have been killed in an automobile accident because we were making tracks, and we’re  
11 dipping in and out of the convoy and back and forth and all that. And, things did happen. In fact,  
12 here’s another thing that I remember in our sister company in the battalion, I forget their number,  
13 but one of their drivers had killed an old Vietnamese man who was on a bike. They knocked him  
14 off the road and killed him. Now, I don’t know whether it was an accident or it was done  
15 deliberately. But I was part of a preliminary investigation. I went over to this other company. I  
16 just remember the reaction of the officers of that company, sort of making light of the whole  
17 thing. I thought, “What the hell? What kind of attitude is that? This guy was killed for no good  
18 reason, and you guys are making light of it.” So there was some carelessness on our part and that  
19 really bothered me. The Vietnamese I dealt with I thought highly of. They were very decent,  
20 hardworking people who might have had some Viet Cong in there. Who knows? There was  
21 probably somebody who was reporting back to communist headquarters, but I didn’t know it.  
22 And of course, nothing untoward ever happened in my company area from the Vietnamese. And  
23 part of that might have been that most of the help had come from a village nearby named Honai.  
24 And the people in Honai basically had come from North Vietnam in 1954 and were fervent anti-  
25 communists. They decided they didn’t want to live under Ho Chi Minh. A lot of them were  
26 Catholic and they came south in 1954-1955 to Honai. So maybe they weren’t representative of  
27 the majority of the Vietnamese people who were not Catholic and were not northerners. There  
28 were many southerners who sympathized with the communist cause. I remember some other  
29 things, in terms of speaking about the Vietnamese, that always blew me away. You’d see these  
30 huge earth movers, earth moving equipment, derricks and cranes and all that. You’d have a thin,  
31 little Vietnamese woman with a conical hat, like 5’2” working these machines. Holy smoke. But

1 they did very well. And they wanted, of course, to work. They wanted to have money to live on.  
2 And they did a lot of the drudge work. Some of the Vietnamese men in our company area had the  
3 daily task of burning off excrement contained in 55-gallon drums that were sawed in half. They  
4 used diesel fuel to burn the excrement. So every day we'd have excrement being burned. That  
5 was a common sight and smell. But they worked very hard at that dirty work. Here's another  
6 thing. One day we were getting ready to go out, and we had to go down this short street right  
7 outside Long Binh to hang a left onto the main highway. And right ahead of us was a steam-  
8 shovel on top of a flatbed truck. It was not part of our convoy. And whatever the guys were  
9 responsible for, they hadn't ensured that the boom on this steam-shovel would not swivel. So,  
10 sure enough, when they made the left turn, here comes the boom swinging out. It collapsed the  
11 whole back of the truck, right smack in the middle of the road. So the whole convoy had to stop.  
12 Fortunately, we were right there next to the base, so it was no real danger, but they had to come  
13 out there and remove this thing which took an hour or so. Another thing that comes to mind is  
14 seeing the enemy up close and personal. Well, it wasn't that up close and personal, but I  
15 remember one morning we were getting ready to go out on a convoy, and there was a communist  
16 soldier who obviously had tried to sneak into the base through the wire. He got caught on the  
17 wire and he was killed. He's hanging there on the wire for all to see. And I remember passing  
18 through, I think it was Trang Bang on the way to Dau Tieng. A Viet Cong soldier had been killed  
19 and the local people in Trang Bang had put his body out on the side of the road. I don't know  
20 why, but maybe to show the Americans that "Hey, we're doing our part. We killed this enemy  
21 soldier." I don't know, but here's this guy laying there dead. I didn't have anybody that shot at  
22 me that I could see. They did, but they were hidden. And there was one other time I remember  
23 seeing the enemy. Well, I guess I talked about the former enemy guys in that Chieu Hoi camp.  
24 But another time was right on the first day of the allied invasion into Cambodia. Of course, I'm a  
25 first lieutenant and nobody was going to tell me about an impending invasion. My whole convoy  
26 was coming back from the Michelin rubber plantation, and we were stopped before we entered  
27 QL-1, the main road to Cambodia. And I said, "What's going on?" And I looked ahead and on  
28 the main drag heading toward Tay Ninh was one convoy after the other of South Vietnamese  
29 troops. I said, "Holy smoke! There's something big going on." And it was the invasion of  
30 Cambodia. And once we did get going after a long wait, I remember passing by maybe twenty or  
31 so guys in black pajamas and in military gear and blindfolded. They were prisoners. Their hands

1 were tied behind them, and they were sitting in little trailers behind a Jeep. So that was my  
2 limited contact with the enemy.

3 KC: What's it like to come under fire? Sniper fire? Especially the first time?

4 EM: Well, I'll tell you the second time. And after it happened, we just kept on going. It  
5 was like zing, right by my Jeep. It was close enough. I knew it was a shot, and we just kept on  
6 going. Nothing happened. But the first time, I was in Long Binh and we got word that one of our  
7 trucks had been returning from someplace close by. And I guess they got fired on or they were  
8 stopped for some reason. So I wanted to get out there and check it out. So, my sergeant and I  
9 jumped in the jeep and we headed out there. And then it dawned on me, "Holy shit! I didn't take  
10 my M-16 with me." So, we went out and nothing happened, but that was a dumb thing on my  
11 part. I probably had had my .45-caliber pistol with me, but sometimes you can get very jaded and  
12 think, "Oh, we're safe here." Two other cases I'll bring up. First of all, we were heavily armed  
13 and we had escorts and all that for most of the places we went to, especially close to the  
14 Cambodian border. But I remember when we were returning or heading out and we passed  
15 through Cu Chi, the headquarters of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. And the roads were all tarred at  
16 that point. And we kind of thought, "This is a milk run going past Cu Chi." No problem. We had  
17 our flak jackets on but we'd opened them up because the day was really hot. Well, you may  
18 remember the tunnels of Cu Chi? In tunnels under Cu Chi were enemy troops! They were all  
19 around us and we had no clue. In another instance, my platoon was going from one place to the  
20 other just off the base. And we were going to do target practice with our M-16s. The trucks  
21 carrying the troops were going to proceed separately from my jeep. I said we will meet them at  
22 the firing range. So me and my Jeep driver, I didn't even have my machine gunner there, went  
23 ahead to the firing range. And I thought, "What a stupid thing that was." Here I am outside the  
24 base with only my driver. It took another ten minutes for the trucks to arrive, but I thought,  
25 "You've got to be more careful what you do and how you do it. Here's how you could get  
26 killed."

27 KC: All right, this convoy that we've been on for a while has finally rolled back into  
28 base. What goes on next?

29 EM: Okay, we roll back into the base. The truck drivers take their trucks to the motor  
30 pool to get refueled and to get maintenance work done. And, at that point I would report to the  
31 company commander and tell him how the convoy went. Any incidents, any problems, anything

1 of that sort. Then I would head back to my officers' hooch, take a shower, and go over to the  
2 mess hall around dinner time. And have dinner. Oh, by the way, we would always be on the road  
3 for lunch during our convoy operations. We'd either be at the place we're going to or somewhere  
4 in between. So we would stop for lunch. It was always C-rations.

5 KC: Tell me about your thoughts on C-rations.

6 EM: I didn't mind C-rations. I knew it was just a temporary thing and as long as it filled  
7 me up, it was okay. Everybody, of course, detested ham and lima beans. But there was spaghetti  
8 in a can, too. I think there was a beef concoction. You had crackers. You had cheese. You had a  
9 couple of cigarettes and some other little ditties. It was enough. A lot of the guys didn't even  
10 finish their C-rations. We would pass by these little ponds, and the kids would be all around.  
11 We'd be throwing cans into the water. They'd dive in to get the cans. It was like a fun thing to  
12 do. And whenever we'd stop for breaks, we'd always have a lot of young kids come by all  
13 smiling. And, of course, they wanted handouts and all that, and they knew some GI lingo, and  
14 we'd have fun with that. I don't recall any harsh looks at us or anything like that. Kids are kids  
15 everywhere. I remember that in the highly populated areas right outside the base or going  
16 through Saigon often to get down to the Mekong Delta I always had the feeling that we were like  
17 ghosts. The Vietnamese wouldn't look at us. They knew we were there, but they didn't want to  
18 make eye contact. I thought maybe it was because they'd seen so much of us, so many years of  
19 us, that they just wanted to blank us out. And I remember that reaction. But when I was there, all  
20 the roads were tarred in the populated areas and you had commerce everywhere. People selling  
21 stuff everywhere. We went through fish markets loaded with fish. There was prosperity and there  
22 was relative safety during daylight. Now, you came to some areas where the roads were not  
23 tarred. They were just dirt roads. And then you often wouldn't see a lot of commercial traffic. Or  
24 you wouldn't see any traffic. You knew that this is Indian country. It was very clear. Later on,  
25 there was a lot of controversy about the spraying of Agent Orange defoliant. And, that was done  
26 up until I think 1971 or so. But, from my standpoint the fact that the defoliant was used to clear  
27 away the woods on either side of the road to me was "Thank you very much. We appreciate  
28 that." I was probably sprayed with it. I know people who were. And some suffered grievous  
29 injury and disease later on. But at the time I thought, "Anything to clear away cover for the  
30 enemy on either side of the road is a [blessing]." I remember going on the dirt road to Song Be  
31 and for whatever reason the foliage came right up to the road. We were in a sunken roadway and

1 the berm on either side had South Vietnamese soldiers looking outward. They were just sitting  
2 there, looking outward searching for the enemy. So I thought, “Wow, this is too close for  
3 comfort. If not for the South Vietnamese troops, the enemy could really get up right next to us  
4 and we’re toast.” Nothing happened. At least not on that trip. I remember another trip on that  
5 road that somebody had come out and put a skull right in the middle of the road. I’m sure the bad  
6 guys did that just to give us a little heads-up. So, that was my reaction to what was happening  
7 primarily in 1970. And I remember that in the populated parts of the country the people were out  
8 in their rice fields and they were tilling their fields. It seemed to be prosperity all around. The  
9 enemy was not in great evidence. Now, at night that was a different story in a lot of places. But  
10 that was my reaction. Another thing I should talk about is when we would go through Saigon.  
11 Saigon was just filled to the brim with all kinds of vehicles. And of course, there was no center  
12 line in the middle of the road. It was just everybody making their own way. So we were having  
13 trouble with Vietnamese on bikes and in cars who would just dart in front of our trucks and the  
14 guys would have to slam on the brakes. So our solution to that was we installed a big air horn on  
15 the front truck. And as we were entering the populated areas, we would just let loose with that  
16 thing. And it was just enough to get their attention. And they’d clear out of the way because  
17 we’re coming through. Now, I don’t know if that created enemies from that, but we had to get  
18 through, and that was the problem.

19 KC: Hopefully saving some civilian casualties?

20 EM: Yes. I don’t recall anybody being hit by our trucks. I’m sure it happened but  
21 fortunately not on my watch. So now let me talk about the geography of Vietnam, because we  
22 went all over Military Region (MR) III and Military Region IV all the way to Dong Tam in the  
23 delta. The country’s geography was so varied. Now it must be beautiful. I’ve never been back.  
24 But without the military stuff all around, I bet it’s really a gorgeous place to visit. I’ve talked  
25 about up to the Cambodian border and that was mostly forested and over to Tay Ninh. Tay Ninh  
26 was the site of the Cao Dai religious sect. And they had their own pagodas, their own houses of  
27 worship, which were beautiful and they were untouched by the war. The enemy didn’t bomb  
28 them and neither did we. So it was a pretty sight up there by Tay Ninh. Overlooking all of MR  
29 III was Nui Ba Den, the Black Virgin Mountain. You could see it from miles away. It really  
30 stuck out. The rice paddies were all around the area. Then we would get down to the South China  
31 Sea at Vung Tau, which under the French they called it Cap Saint Jacques. It was a resort for the

1 French. And it became a resort for us as well, I guess. The Royal Australian Army was  
2 positioned near Vung Tau in Phuoc Thuy Province. We used to love to go down there because  
3 when the guys would be off unloading their fuel or their ammo, we had nothing to do. So, we  
4 went down to the beach and just sat there in our jeep, looking out at the South China Sea and  
5 enjoying the breeze. And periodically, we'd have time to go into the Australian Army's officers'  
6 club and get some Foster's beer. And the Aussies are very outgoing and we had a good time with  
7 them. So that's the southern part. Then we would travel through Saigon, as I mentioned. And  
8 once you get past the fish markets with the smell of *nuoc mam* and all the rotting fish, we'd pass  
9 through the Chinese section of Saigon, named Cholon, and then down into the Mekong Delta.  
10 Now the delta is flat as a pancake. Rice paddies as far as the eye could see with villages in  
11 between. It was idyllic. We'd go through Tan An, the site of the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's graves  
12 registration building. The guys who were killed were being processed there for the homeward  
13 flight. That stuck in my mind. And then we would cross over the bridge at Ben Luc. Being an  
14 Army guy, I was surprised to see Navy vessels below the bridge and that far upriver! I thought  
15 "Why is the US Navy up this river?" There were river boats there. It really struck me as unusual.  
16 Little did I know that in less than a year I would be immersed in the history of the Navy's  
17 Vietnam experience. Later on, I also saw when we were on the road to Tay Ninh more Navy  
18 boats at Go Dau Ha. There was another Navy base there. I'll bring in some interaction with the  
19 Vietnamese. I remember crossing over the Ben Luc bridge. Now, this was a common practice. At  
20 all the bridges and at the other sites periodically the South Vietnamese or the American soldiers  
21 would throw grenades in the water to prevent swimmers from coming up and attaching satchel  
22 charges to the structures. Well, the Vietnamese would just delight in waiting 'til we got in the  
23 middle of the bridge and they'd start throwing grenades in the water just for fun. It got our  
24 attention! I remember another "fun time." I remember my Jeep was at the back-end of the  
25 convoy, and right behind us comes a truck loaded with South Vietnamese troops. And just for the  
26 hell of it, this guy opened up with his M-60 machinegun right over our head. I almost jumped out  
27 of my uniform and out of my seat. I turned around and gave him a dirty look, and he just had a  
28 big smile on his face. They were having fun with us. I don't recall any more interaction than that  
29 with our South Vietnamese allies. Okay, here's another story, going back to the REMF business  
30 where we were considered "rear echelon motherfuckers" [when there were grunts] out there in  
31 the jungle. And in truth, every night we'd come back to the base and we had [beds to sleep in.

1 We had] hot meals for breakfast and supper. But we took risks like everybody else. And it was  
2 hot and humid and dirty and the road dust was up in our face and all that. Still, it had no  
3 comparison to the infantry being out there in the jungle for weeks and months at a time. And I  
4 remember we were on a convoy, but we were stopped on this dirt road. Here comes a line of  
5 grunts walking down the road. It's hot, it's humid. And these guys look beat to shit. And I don't  
6 know why but I was just trying to make conversation. So one guy was dragging his body by and  
7 I said, "How's it going?" He looked at me and I could tell by his expression that he was thinking  
8 "You stupid ass. You're sitting there in your Jeep and I'm humping down this road. How the hell  
9 do you think I am?" He didn't even say a word, but I remember the look on his face and I  
10 thought, "Yeah, he's right." In so many ways, it was a different war for the guys out there in the  
11 boondocks.

12 KC: Well, I tell you what. Why don't we stop there for today, Ed?

13 EM: All right.

## Interview with Edward J. Marolda

Session [3] of [3]

Date: 2 December 2024

1           KC: This is Kelly Cramer continuing an oral history interview with Dr. Edward J.  
2 Marolda on 2 December 2024. I'm in Granbury, Texas, and Dr. Marolda is joining me by  
3 telephone from Montclair, Virginia. Okay, Ed, you were talking about everyday kinds of things.  
4 What's going on in your routine? Pick it up from there, please.

5           EM: All right. Well, as I mentioned, the daily routine was basically to rise before the sun  
6 came up and get some chow. If we had time, get down to the convoy staging area and we would  
7 have to wait there a half hour or so while the escorts got there and everything was arranged. And  
8 off we would go. And, depending on where we're going, how long it would take, for example,  
9 going up toward the Cambodian border. Normally, it didn't take that much time. It's a full day  
10 drive, and normally fairly uneventful. When we had to go down to the Mekong Delta, we'd have  
11 to pass through Saigon. And, the traffic there could be pretty heavy. So we had to be careful, of  
12 course, with our trucks not running people over. So that took a while longer. But normally on a  
13 given day, we would get down to our destination, offload the fuel and ammunition and other  
14 cargo, and be back in time for the dinner hour, about 6:00 or 7:00 PM and before the sun went  
15 down. Only on a few occasions that I recall did we stay overnight. One time was up to the  
16 Cambodian border at the Song Be airfield. It was kind of an exciting night because we were all  
17 fast asleep. The drivers were then told that you have to move your vehicles off the airport  
18 because we've got planes coming in. So my convoy had to find another area to bed down at. And  
19 as it turned out, one of the soldiers happened to be asleep close to a wheel of one of the five-ton  
20 tractors. His cab mate did not alert him to the fact that they were moving. The driver just sort of  
21 moved and ran over part of the guy's arm. And, as I think I mentioned earlier, we had another  
22 operational accident that I recall. One of the soldiers was pumping fuel from the truck into the  
23 fuel bladder at one of the bases. Somehow, the fuel leaked out and it ignited and he got burned.  
24 So those were some of the risks with the folks in the unit who were hauling ammo and fuel. And,  
25 you know, we've seen pictures of when fuel tankers got hit, they would really go sky high, blow  
26 up to the sky. It didn't happen on my watch, thank God. But that could be the end result if you  
27 got attacked. So, we would be out on the road and we'd periodically stop. And while the troops  
28 were unloading the fuel and the ammo, we would make sure everything was where it should be

1 and how it should be. Then we'd take a break for lunch. C-rations, of course, was the meal of the  
2 day. I always found them palatable. Spaghetti and meatballs were fine. I don't recall the others. I  
3 guess everyone detested ham and lima beans. That's part of the story. You also had little packets  
4 of Chicklets and a couple of cigarettes and a packet of crackers and cheese. I remember that  
5 those were common items. So we'd have lunch and after lunch or later in the day, head back to  
6 the base and get in. We had hot chow in the mess hall. And again, I found the mess hall food  
7 certainly edible, sometimes done well, but sometimes not so well. But it was hot. It was hot food.  
8 The guys out there in the jungles, however, didn't often have hot food, rarely had hot food. So,  
9 our lifestyle was not as tough as theirs by any means. But we had risks. In my battalion, we had  
10 people killed and wounded. So, we didn't get by unscathed in our time there. At nighttime after  
11 dinner, we had the option of going to a local restaurant on the base called the Loon Foon. It was  
12 a Chinese restaurant. And sometimes we'd have cookouts with steaks and hamburgers and the  
13 rest. Of course, the beer was plentiful. That was pretty much my daily existence, on a routine  
14 basis. I did a lot of reading. I cleaned out the unit's library, read everything under the sun, and  
15 then I had people from home sending me books.

16 KC: What were the books?

17 EM: Well, I'm a military historian and even back then I was a military historian. Army  
18 history. And so, I got books of that sort. Novels now and again but I was more into non-fiction at  
19 that point.

20 KC: Did you correspond with folks back home all that often?

21 EM: Oh, yeah. My wife pretty much every day would send letters. They sometimes  
22 would arrive in a bunch. It wasn't a systematic thing where every day you'd get a letter. So, I got  
23 letters from my wife all the time, and I wrote back, too. And also my Aunt Josephine would send  
24 me something almost every day. Not a lot of content there. She usually said, "The weather is fine  
25 here. We've got 90-degree weather." It was always the weather, I remember. She took the time  
26 and she was very caring and I really appreciated that. And I'd get packages of goodies every so  
27 often. I remember I liked to get sardines and smoked oysters and things of that sort. Cheese and  
28 crackers.

29 KC: Did you know what was going on at home from the relatives?

30 EM: Yes, as a matter of fact, from my wife. I left in December 1969 to Vietnam, and my  
31 oldest son, Jeff, was born on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 1970. So he was seven months old by the time I

1 got home. And my wife, of course, was caring for him. And she had the support of my family  
2 and her family. But she still was on her own with a baby, a brand-new baby. And, of course, we  
3 had telephone communication with the States back then, but it was infrequent, especially for me.  
4 I remember at one point we were traveling through Saigon, and we had stopped there for some  
5 reason, and I figured, "Let me call home." So I called home and she was actually staying with  
6 some friends of ours, Mr. and Mrs. Donahue. So I said, "I'd like to speak to Beverly." And they  
7 said, "Well, she's in the hospital." I said, "Oh, my God!" And I'm thinking, "What happened to  
8 her?" Dennis Donahue said "Well, what do you mean, 'What happened to her?' She's having a  
9 baby!" Dennis said, "Let me patch you through to the hospital." I said, "You can do that?" And  
10 he did patch me through to the hospital and to her room. And so I actually talked to my wife, and  
11 she had my oldest son in her arms. She was pinching him to get him to cry or make some noise,  
12 but he wouldn't. I think he was fast asleep, so I didn't really hear my son, but she assured me  
13 that he was right there and doing fine. He's now 54 years old and I just saw him the other day for  
14 Thanksgiving.

15 KC: Oh, that's terrific that you had that opportunity.

16 EM: Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

17 KC: Did you take an R&R during your tour?

18 EM: I did, in July 1970. We went to Hawaii. My wife Bev met me there. We also met  
19 one of my other aunts, Philomena. We called her Minnie. She and her husband Tony were there  
20 on vacation. So we had dinner with them one night. But, for the most part, it was me and my  
21 wife. We did all the tourist things. We had a luau at the Army's Fort DeRussy. I think that was  
22 fairly common. We stayed at the Illikai Hotel. I remember that there was some mix-up, so they  
23 upgraded our room that overlooked the ocean and the marina down below. It was a beautiful spot  
24 and that was enjoyable. We went to Pearl Harbor and did the tour there. I was wearing shorts. So  
25 I'm up on the top deck and by the end of the day, my legs were just beet red and sunburned. And  
26 I was wearing flip flops for a lot of our walking around, so I got blisters on my feet. I've often  
27 said to friends and family that I got badly injured, not in Vietnam but on R&R in Hawaii! I went  
28 back to Vietnam as a walking wounded. But we had a good time there and we rekindled our love  
29 and did lots of touring, went to lots of good restaurants, and we just had a good time. Now, when  
30 I went back, I knew I had like another five months to go. And that seemed to drag. As I recall,  
31 after R&R every day seemed like it was an agony. And you hear all these stories that on the last

1 week or the last day, they're in some place and they get mortared or rocketed and get killed. So  
2 that was in the back of my mind. "Am I going to make it through a whole year, or am I going to  
3 get killed in the last few days?" I just went on and did my job, ran my convoys. It wasn't every  
4 day. I would say it was like every third day, because we had other lieutenants who would take  
5 the wheel, as it were.

6 KC: How does the weather affect your convoy?

7 EM: I don't recall it being much of a factor at all, now that you mention it. It was hot as  
8 hell on many days. And of course, a huge convoy like that puts up a lot of dust. So you're  
9 covered in dust and sweat. But we also had rainy days. Some of the roads were dirt roads. So that  
10 would have been a factor, but I don't recall it ever really stopping our movements. I don't recall  
11 that as a problem at all.

12 KC: Okay. I know sometimes the rainy season could impact troop movements, etc.

13 EM: Now that I think about it, it was typical of a tropical climate. You'd get a heavy rain  
14 like that during the summer monsoon season, usually around 4:00 PM. I remember being in the  
15 base camp in my company area and it would be raining cats and dogs from 4:00 on. Most of the  
16 convoys were back into the company area by that time. Maybe that's why I don't recall that  
17 being much of a factor. We're back home before the rains opened up. But the heat was a factor. I  
18 can remember in the company area sitting in my unairconditioned supply office and just sitting  
19 there and the sweat just dripping off me. I wasn't even moving, trying not to exert any energy,  
20 but it was still hot as hell and humid. That was Vietnam.

21 KC: Well, you talked about hearing people being injured on their last day or during the  
22 last week. Maybe it's a good time to talk about being a short timer. What did that mean to you?

23 EM: Well, the short-timer's goal was just to survive and get through to go home. And, I  
24 think I said this earlier, I knew that in the war at that point, we're not going to win a victory in  
25 the conventional sense. President Nixon had already ordered a withdrawal of the troops. Of  
26 course, this was 1969 and 1970. We'd already pulled the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division out of the Mekong  
27 Delta in late 1969. And I do recall these rumors. "We're going to be leaving in ten days or half a  
28 month from now," or something similar. Well, that was great but it never happened. I stayed in-  
29 country 365 days, in fact 366 days. I got bumped off the plane because the seat was given to an  
30 enlisted guy. And I sat it out in a bar. No problem. I had some beers and went out on the plane  
31 the next day.

1           KC: So, did you change routine at all or were you just more wary when counting down  
2 the days?

3           EM: Well, I didn't, I didn't take any undue risks. I remember that one of my fellow  
4 officers was Dave Kuta, a lieutenant from Indiana. He was a good guy. I liked him a lot. And, he  
5 had like a week to go, and they were looking for someone to lead a convoy up to the Cambodian  
6 border in an area that was kind of dicey. He volunteered to take that convoy. And I said, "Dave,  
7 are you, crazy?" He said, "Nah, no big thing." It didn't bother him one whit. He went on the  
8 convoy and came back safely. But I wouldn't have volunteered for anything like that that close  
9 to departure time. It's interesting, the countryside and where the threats were. After the invasion  
10 of Cambodia, the war kind of moved a little bit further away from us. During the day, we felt  
11 fairly safe on the tarred roads in the Saigon area and even down to the Mekong Delta. Some of  
12 the roads would end at a certain point, and you'd be on dirt from that point on. And then it was a  
13 little bit more nerve-wracking. We were much more alert at that point. And you could tell the  
14 commerce was bustling on the tarred roads and not so much on the dirt roads. You knew you  
15 were in a territory that was contested, so you had to be on your guard. But as I said, other than a  
16 few sniper rounds coming my way, we didn't get ambushed. At least my unit didn't get  
17 ambushed during my time.

18           KC: As a short-timer, what sort of things do you do to prepare to come home? What sort  
19 of things, administratively, did you have to take care of? Did you have to get shots? Do you have  
20 to turn anything in? What's it like and what do you do as a short-timer?

21           EM: Okay. I remember the prohibitions. They repeatedly said, "Do not think you're  
22 going to get out of Vietnam with a weapon that you bought or got somehow." There were to be  
23 no weapons coming out in your bag and obviously no grenades or anything like that. That stuck  
24 in my mind. Don't even think about bringing out souvenirs. It was just a normal preparation for  
25 departure, as I recall. One of my responsibilities was to run the supply shop. And I think I  
26 mentioned this the last time, but we were short a few hundred bayonets. But they had been traded  
27 away, I guess, for something else by one of our NCOs. They liked to trade stuff to get steaks or  
28 who knows what. Anyway, I'm missing those bayonets and I'm really concerned. You cannot  
29 sign out until you've accounted for everything that you're responsible for. Well, my supply  
30 sergeant somehow accounted for the bayonets. I don't know how. He got me off the hook. I had  
31 to account for everything. Of course, I had a couple of souvenirs. I bought some items in the

1 local shops and brought those home with me. But I remember when we flew out. Of course,  
2 everyone had the same reaction. You had this in the back of your mind. "I could be killed at any  
3 minute here." Once you got on the plane, everybody's sitting there waiting for takeoff. And of  
4 course, getting to the plane for departure. Here comes the new guys coming in. And just like it  
5 happened to us on arrival, we razzed them, saying "Oh, you're in it now!" And, I'm sure we  
6 looked scruffy and sunburned and all the rest. So we got on the plane. You're sitting there, and  
7 as soon as the plane lifts off, just a spontaneous roar goes up like we made it. I remember that  
8 vividly. That feeling of relief. And then I just pretty much relaxed. I think we had an interim  
9 stop in Okinawa. Maybe it was Tokyo. I don't remember specifically, but on the way back we  
10 landed at Travis Air Force Base. They put us up for the night at the BOQ in the Presidio in San  
11 Francisco. I guess I took a bus to get there. It's a little bit murky, but I remember that first night,  
12 and I was hungry as all get out. But there was no place to eat. So, I had to wait for breakfast. But  
13 I remember feeling so rested when I went to bed. It's like, "There's no threat here." I could just  
14 relax and sleep. I was soon fast asleep. The next day I transitioned out of the regular Army. I  
15 turned in my uniform and took a civilian hop to Washington, D.C. My wife had moved down [to  
16 Virginia] from Connecticut. She'd gotten us an apartment in Falls Church, Virginia, with our  
17 son. And so I flew into Washington. Now, I remember the flight well. First of all, when I had  
18 landed by military aircraft at Travis and went through customs, I remember the only greeting I  
19 got was from one of the customs officers who said, "Welcome back, soldier. Glad to have you  
20 back home." It was something simple like that but it was really appreciated. There was not much  
21 else. There were no bands to greet us. Then I got on the plane, the civilian plane to go to  
22 Washington, and I remember that they bumped me up to first class. They had an open space.  
23 They obviously knew I was a serviceman coming back, and they fed me well, too. More than the  
24 usual. So that was a nice gesture as well. I got off the plane in D.C., and my wife greeted me  
25 with my son Jeff. That was the first time I had held my son. He promptly threw up in my arms.  
26 He was drinking his milk, and it came up. Anyway, off we went to our apartment, and that was  
27 pretty much it. Back into civilian life. I had started my master's degree at Georgetown University  
28 before I went to Vietnam, and after two deferments. And the third time they said, "No more  
29 deferments for you. You're going to sunny Saigon." So I hadn't finished my master's degree.  
30 And so I had to do that when I came back in December of 1970. I finished it in May of 1971. I  
31 had the GI Bill, so I got some help with my educational expenses. My wife is a nurse, and she

1 got a job wherever we went. When we first got married, she'd get a job the same day. Nurses  
2 were in big demand. They still are. So anyway, she was working full-time and I, of course, took  
3 care of the baby in the times when she was working. And so, we're doing all right. I got my  
4 degree, a master's degree, which was fine. And then I started looking for work. I remember at  
5 the time, there must have been a problem with young folks getting jobs, at least in academia. So  
6 here I was with my degree, but I didn't have a job. I actually made the front page of the  
7 *Washington Post* with my son in my arms. The headline read "Here's a poor graduate student  
8 who can't find work!" I was applying to all kinds of history offices and universities and really  
9 not having any luck. By December I had been to the history offices of the Army, the Air Force,  
10 and the Marine Corps. They said, "Sorry. Not hiring." I said, "Well, maybe I'll try to work for  
11 McDonald's and be a manager at McDonald's." But a friend of mine who had gone to  
12 Georgetown with me said, "Ed, what about the Navy?" I said "Number one, I've really not  
13 studied the Navy. And number two, I live thirty-five miles south of Washington, and I'm not  
14 going to commute all the way to Annapolis to work for the Navy." He said, "No, the Navy's  
15 history office is at the Washington Navy Yard, which is on Capitol Hill." So, I went there and  
16 saw that there were other applicants who already had Ph.Ds. I did not. I thought, "My chances  
17 are probably not that great." But as it turned out, they were starting a program to record the US  
18 Navy's Vietnam experience. And here I was just coming back from Vietnam. So they said,  
19 "You're hired." So I started as a GS-[7], which is not a very exalted grade in the government. I  
20 think I was making like \$9,000 a year or something on that order. But after six months they said,  
21 "Oh, we have had a glitch and we have to bump you back to GS-5 if you want to stay on board."  
22 I did. I said, "Okay, I'm on board. Security is an important thing." And so I took the GS-5. And  
23 in the next forty years, I had worked my way up the chain of command to become the acting  
24 director of the Naval Historical Center, the Navy's central historical office. So almost from the  
25 mailroom to the director's office. And I certainly learned my Navy history during those forty  
26 years as a naval historian. I had to pick up pick up the pace because I was all Army before that.

27 KC: Right. Well, did you pay attention to the war when you got back? What was going  
28 on in Southeast Asia?

29 EM: Well, I had paid attention to the war before, during, and after because of my interest  
30 in military history, but also my degree at Georgetown. My master's degree was in European  
31 diplomatic history. So not only was I interested in military developments, but also foreign policy.

1 It was always a very great interest to me. And so, I followed the war before and I had this feeling  
2 of “We’re not there to win the war, but I’m going to do my duty and serve,” and I did.

3 KC: I’m sorry. What did you think about the way the war ended?

4 EM: In December of 1971 I got the job with Navy history. And right away, I’m working  
5 on the Vietnam War. And at that point, everything that we were working from was classified.  
6 We would get box after box of message traffic and all kinds of stuff coming in from Southeast  
7 Asia. And, I was fairly optimistic at that point. We had what was called the Vietnamization  
8 program, which was to turn the war over to the Vietnamese armed forces, and they would  
9 continue the fight against the communists. And not only from my own experience, but looking at  
10 all the materials coming out of Vietnam, I thought we had a good shot at it. Because when I was  
11 there, the area around Saigon, the area down to Mekong Delta, at least during the day, seemed to  
12 be prosperous, safe, and with very little heavy combat going on. Because during the Tet  
13 Offensive, the enemy had surfaced. Some of the Viet Cong had hidden themselves very well  
14 prior to that. Well, they came out during Tet and 100,000 were killed. So they were on the back  
15 foot. And then we invaded Cambodia in May of 1970. And that further pushed the enemy deeper  
16 into Cambodia. So in my area, there were South Vietnamese troops all over the place. And of  
17 course we had sandbag bunkers. There were military defensive structures all over the area. So I  
18 thought we had a chance to win the war. And it also influenced me that there was a lot of  
19 commerce all over the tarred roads and American-made tillers in the rice fields. You had farmers  
20 out there doing their thing. And I was optimistic. I thought, “We’ve actually gone into  
21 Cambodia, driven the enemy further into Cambodia.” And I thought, “We have a good shot at  
22 it.” And we did. I have to give credit to the South Vietnamese armed forces in 1972. And I’m  
23 following this, of course, back here in the States. In 1972, you had the Easter Offensive, the  
24 North Vietnamese charging into South Vietnam. Now, these were not Viet Cong guerrillas with  
25 black pajamas and conical hats coming out of the woods. These were fully armed and trained  
26 North Vietnamese regulars with tanks, armored personnel carriers, long-range artillery, and  
27 surface-to air-missiles. A modern army invaded in 1972, and the South Vietnamese armed forces  
28 fought them to a standstill. There were three major pushes. The enemy came across the DMZ up  
29 north, into the Central Highlands, and then south towards Saigon. Against each of those three  
30 prongs, the South Vietnamese army held their own. They kept the enemy from advancing  
31 further. Now, a key component here was US air and naval power. Without it, the South

1 Vietnamese would have been toast. But they put up a good fight and we thought, “Wow, with  
2 our support, they can hold their own and the enemy will not succeed in destroying South  
3 Vietnam.” By 1972, we still had some troops in South Vietnam. We also had advisors who  
4 helped bring in air and naval gunfire support to help the South Vietnamese. But by 29 March  
5 1973, all US personnel were gone from South Vietnam and the South Vietnamese armed forces  
6 were on their own. At the same time, congress said, “We’re tired of pouring money into Vietnam  
7 every year.” From 1973 to 1975, they cut back financial support, arms, ammunition, and the rest  
8 of it to the South Vietnamese. We were no longer there. And you also had President Nixon  
9 heavily involved in the Watergate affair. So, his pledge to the South Vietnamese that “If the  
10 enemy attacks you again, we’ll come back in like we did in 1972.” Well, he could no longer do  
11 that since he was gone in 1974, and nobody was going to adhere to that earlier pledge. So they’re  
12 on their own. And without our air and naval support, they couldn’t do it. I followed all that. I  
13 thought it was tragic. And I remember the *Mayaguez* incident where the Khmer Rouge, the  
14 Cambodian Communists, seized the SS *Mayaguez*, a merchant ship. And we had to go back in  
15 there. The Marines went in, the Navy went in, and we recovered the ship. We recovered the  
16 crew. And I remember feeling elated at that point because “Damn it, finally something works in  
17 our favor.” The evacuation from South Vietnam and from Cambodia had taken place in April  
18 1975. I was down about that. I thought the whole thing in Southeast Asia had turned to crap, but  
19 at least we had this one bright, shining moment where we got our guys back and the ship back  
20 and all that. Now, later on, having studied it, it wasn’t all that glorious because we lost too many  
21 Marines, sailors, and airmen on an island in the Gulf of Thailand. Anyway, that was my feeling.  
22 But, like all Vietnam veterans, I was kind of down about the whole situation. The fact that the  
23 country had really turned against not only the war, but a lot of the soldiers who had fought in the  
24 war. We were accused of being baby-killers and all that. Or that we were crazy and going nuts  
25 like Rambo in the various *Rambo* movies. So, we were feeling that we were getting no respect  
26 for our service and sacrifice. But I remember thinking that it turned around in 1976 with the  
27 national bicentennial celebration. That produced good feelings. And, toward the end of the  
28 1970s, and certainly in the 1980s, the feeling started to turn the country around as well. That we  
29 had done our service and it was honorable and by the Gulf War in 1991, as President [George  
30 H.W.] Bush said we had banished the ghosts of Vietnam. In other words, we had come back. The  
31 Gulf War was an exemplary case of what our diplomacy and our military power could

1 accomplish. I wrote a book on that, too, but that's another story. So anyway, that was the  
2 transition in my feelings that we had done our job, and we had served honorably, contrary to a lot  
3 of the criticism. A lot of people said that Vietnam was an immoral war for an immoral cause.  
4 Well, I never agreed to that. We were there thinking we were trying to help the South  
5 Vietnamese preserve their independence, their freedom against a monolithic government that  
6 was not kind to civilians, was not kind to religion, was not kind to human rights, the whole bit.  
7 We were fighting the just cause. I never had a problem with that. I still don't. I think we know it  
8 was terribly mismanaged by our civilian and some of our military leaders. And I've written  
9 books about that. They mismanaged the whole thing. But the initial aspiration to help the South  
10 Vietnamese was a positive one.

11 KC: Well, let me ask just a couple final questions here. You know, retrospective, looking  
12 back sort of thing. How would you say your time in Southeast Asia most influenced the rest of  
13 your life?

14 EM: Well, it was a major if not the major turning point in my life because service there  
15 gave me the experience and the knowledge of being on the ground. It also got me a lifetime  
16 career. They hired me primarily for the reason that I had been there and I could bring perspective  
17 to the Navy's new historical project. I became a historian and an archivist. It took me ten years,  
18 but I put together a book that was the first book I published on the Navy and the war. It covered  
19 up through 1965. I had a co-author, and he and I put that together and got it reviewed for  
20 declassification and got it published. That was the first official history of the Navy and the  
21 Vietnam War. So, I cut my teeth on that, and then I advanced up the ranks to head a branch at the  
22 Naval Historical Center. It was called the Contemporary History Branch. I didn't have my Ph.D.  
23 at that point. I was working on it part-time at George Washington University. I got my Ph.D. in  
24 1990. But anyway, I had this branch of historians, and it wasn't just to cover Vietnam. It was to  
25 cover all aspects of the modern Navy's history, the Persian Gulf War and various other aspects.  
26 The Tanker War of the 1980s. And my historians were all doing those things, and I was  
27 managing them and on the side kind of still doing some Vietnam work. Then when the Gulf War  
28 broke out, the director at the time said, "Okay, enough of this Vietnam stuff. I want you to cover  
29 the Persian Gulf War." So that took up the next five years. But I always came back to Vietnam,  
30 and it was probably the most relevant of all the work I've done on the Navy's history. I did  
31 another book, the history of the Washington Navy Yard. I edited a couple of books on Theodore

1 Roosevelt and his connection to the Navy and FDR and his connection to the Navy. But Vietnam  
2 was my lodestone, my guiding light. And once I retired in 2008, they kept me on board, on  
3 contract. And I wrote a history of the US Seventh fleet. Now, the Seventh Fleet, of course,  
4 started in 1945 and it's still in existence. It's the fleet that handles things out in the Western  
5 Pacific and the Far East. The Seventh Fleet history covered the Korean War, our involvement  
6 with China, but also a big slug of the Vietnam experience. So when that contract was done, I was  
7 fully retired and I went full bore back to the Vietnam focus. I've done three books since I retired  
8 on the Navy and Vietnam. So it definitely has defined my life and my career.

9 KC: Wow. And, quite a career it obviously is. Well, a last question for you. Again,  
10 looking back, and this is maybe the biggie of all questions. What's the legacy of the Vietnam  
11 War? What do we walk away with? What do we want to take away from it?

12 EM: The legacy of the Vietnam War. First of all, there's Sun Tzu. He was a Chinese  
13 strategist who wrote a book called *On War*. And he said that the two things that are very vital to  
14 any strategy is number one, knowing your enemy. And number two, knowing yourself. And we  
15 screwed up in both of those areas because we underestimated our enemy. I use this a number of  
16 times. A quote from Secretary of the Navy Paul Nitze. He was a very important figure in the  
17 Cold War. And he made a statement when he was Secretary of the Navy. This was in 1964. He  
18 said, "We're not going to have a problem with these guys, this third-rate, little country of North  
19 Vietnam. They don't have any military power. We'll have our way with them." And Lyndon  
20 Johnson said basically the same thing at various times. He said North Vietnam was a "third-rate,  
21 piss ant little country. They're not going to stand up against the United States." The other thing  
22 was that we underestimated the support that would go to North Vietnam from the Soviet Union  
23 and from the People's Republic of China. They stuck with the North Vietnamese through the  
24 whole war, poured all manner of weapons, ammunition, fuel, diplomatic, every kind of support  
25 you can think of to keep the North Vietnamese from being defeated, the North Vietnamese and  
26 the Viet Cong. The communists in South Vietnam suffered horrendous losses at various times,  
27 like during the Tet offensive of 1968. A lot of Vietnamese communists were killed and wounded,  
28 but they hung in there. So we underestimated the enemy's will. The other thing is the  
29 overestimation of our ability to change that situation. We decided that we're not going to invade  
30 North Vietnam because we were afraid the Chinese would intervene like they had done in Korea,  
31 to our shock and surprise. We weren't going to invade North Vietnam. We were not going to

1 invade Laos. We're not going to invade Cambodia. This was the earlier thinking. And so the  
2 enemy basically had sanctuaries in those countries. And from those sanctuaries, they periodically  
3 came into South Vietnam and caused hell and then went back, licked their wounds, and got ready  
4 for the next time. We overestimated that we could win the war by just holding South Vietnam. It  
5 was a war of attrition. And a million Vietnamese died, but we lost 58,000 Americans. And the  
6 American public said, "We can't and won't sustain this. This is not right. We're not winning, and  
7 we're losing all these young people." We overestimated our ability and the ability of the  
8 American people to keep fighting. We were in there for ten years, in one estimation. You can go  
9 even further back from the first advisors that went in in 1954. So, we made big mistakes, Lyndon  
10 Johnson and his secretary of defense Robert McNamara. The latter ran the Ford Motor Company,  
11 but he really had no knowledge of military strategy or anything of that sort. Lyndon Johnson, the  
12 same thing. He thought he could fight the war and keep it quiet. At the same time, he wanted to  
13 keep the country focused on his domestic agenda, including passage of the Civil Rights Act of  
14 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Carry out his Great Society social programs and fight  
15 the war at the same time. You can't do that. If you're going to fight a war, that needs to be your  
16 primary focus. And he never could figure out "What do we do next?" He would just kick the can  
17 down the road saying "Let's try this. Let's try that." You can't do that. You've got to have a  
18 strategy that makes sense. And not be dithering. So anyway, that's my view.

19 KC: Well, is there anything else you'd like to add before we bring it to a close?

20 EM: Well, I would like to say that I really appreciate this opportunity to put my views on  
21 record. And, having gone down to the Vietnam Archive when Jim Reckner was in charge, but  
22 also Steve Maxner, I've had very good experiences with the Texas Tech Vietnam Archive. I  
23 went to many conferences there, gave talks and took part, and I really applaud the effort to  
24 preserve the memory of the war from all sides. I always remember that we had anti-war folks  
25 there at various conferences. You had General Vang Pao, the Laotian Hmong leader, at one point  
26 speaking there. Admiral Zumwalt as well but all manner of folks connected with the war in one  
27 way or the other. And we should thank Congressman Sam Johnson for all his support to the  
28 Vietnam Center. We thank him for preserving that archive and your volunteers and your  
29 professional staff to keep that a place where the Vietnam War can be remembered for all of its  
30 aspects. So I really appreciate that. Indeed, the archive was a great help to me when I worked on  
31 one of my Vietnam books, *Admiral's Under Fire*. I remember that Ms. Montgomery was very

1 helpful. I know there were others, too. They enabled me to use the materials from the Zumwalt  
2 collection, which was beneficial to my work. So anyway, thank you and keep up the good work  
3 there and give my regards to all.

4 KC: I will do. I appreciate the kind words.