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Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project

Interview with Steven Carper, Roman Martinez, and Quinton Johnson

Conducted by Stephen Maxner

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Transcribed by Tammi Mikel

NOTE: 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 Stephen Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an oral history interview with Mr.
2 Steven Carper, Mr. Roman Martinez, and Mr. Quentin Johnson. We're in Las Vegas, Nevada on
3 the 1st of October 1999. The time is approximately 4:30. Gentlemen, what I'd like you to do is
4 start on this side. Mr. Martinez, if you would, just give a quick biographical description of
5 yourself; your name, where you're from, where you grew up, that kind of stuff.

6 Roman Martinez: Okay. I'm Roman Alexander Martinez, born in Richmond, California.
7 Joined the Army right out of high school. I joined to be a chaplain's assistant.

8 Steven Carper: I'm Leslie Steven Carper, everybody knows me as Steve. I was born in
9 Miami, Florida, lived southwest of Miami. As a teenager I moved to Louisiana, then California.
10 In '63 I went to South Pasadena Junior High and High School, Pasadena City College for one
11 semester, didn't like all the demonstrators and March 1 of 1968 I enlisted in the Army
12 guaranteed aviation and I was a helicopter door gunner and crew chief.

13 Quinton Johnson: My name's Quinton Johnson. I was born and raised up in North
14 Carolina, in Seville in North Carolina. In '69 I was inducted into the armed service office of that
15 year. January of that year I was in Vietnam. I served with these two gentlemen, sent over there
16 as an Infantry soldier. After that I kind of got back home.

17 SM: The training that you all received, why don't you go around real quickly? Tell me
18 where you were, where your first training occurred, basic training, and what that training was
19 like in terms of was it effective, was it good, or was it bad?

1 RM: Okay. I was trained at Ft. Lewis, Washington. I joined to be a chaplain's assistant.

2 After basic training I was sent to Advanced Infantry Training and I figured that something had
3 gone awry because they didn't send me off to chaplain's assistant school. I was kind of
4 confused. I had caught the measles in basic training, so my eight weeks of basic training was
5 only seven weeks long because I had the measles and then I went into Advanced Infantry
6 Training and during that training period I got a different kind of measles so I only spent seven
7 weeks in Advanced Infantry Training so my training had two blocks of information gone and
8 they told me I would get that information on that job.

9 Wife: What about the climate? Wasn't there something peculiar about the climate?

10 RM: Oh! Ft. Lewis, Washington for preparation for Vietnam, training in the snow.

11 SM: So this was after your Advanced Infantry Training?

12 RM: Advanced Infantry Training was a weekend, I mean, I had a weekend off and I
13 redeployed to across the parade field to Advanced Infantry Training in Ft. Lewis. I joined in
14 January so I had my training in the snow at Ft. Lewis.

15 SM: And where did you go after Ft. Lewis?

16 RM: Straight to Vietnam. Two weeks of R&R, kiss everybody goodbye, and then off to
17 Vietnam. I was deployed to Vietnam on June 23, 1969 with holes in my training and not a
18 chaplain's assistant.

19 SM: So you didn't feel very prepared for Vietnam, obviously?

20 RM: No. I figured I was going to be canon fighter soon to die. But I was alter boy and a
21 choirboy prior to Vietnam so I figured like I was in touch with God and ready to go to whatever
22 adventures are ahead of me.

23 SM: Given your faith, did you ever consider conscientious objection?

24 RM: I told them that I was a conscientious objector. They put me in recon.

25 SM: You didn't, there was no recourse for that?

26 RM: Yeah. LBJ, Long Binh Jail or recon, so I gave up my Catholic background, I buried
27 myself in my alter boy and my God and participated in chili con carnage with the 1st Infantry
28 Division.

29 SM: Was that an expression that they used there?

1 RM: No. That was something that I used to do to try to lessen the brutality of it all. If
2 the people you were killing had souls it would hurt you too bad so they had to be subhuman and
3 it didn't hurt so bad.

4 SM: Okay, Mr. Carper, would you provide us with that information as far as where you
5 went into basic...

6 SC: I went to Ft. Ord, California for basic training. I enjoyed it. I had no idea when
7 they'd make us jog with full gear and we'd sing, 'I want to be an airborne Ranger.' I was never
8 airborne but I got stuck in the 101st Airborne! But anyway, the military every since the Civil
9 War we've had relatives in every war except for the Korean War and my brother in '66 he
10 volunteered for four years in the Infantry as 11 Bravo and he told me to find another job besides
11 being in the Infantry, so I figured aviation was a better way out. Fortunately enough I was able
12 to go to Ft. Eustace, Virginia to train in helicopter mechanics and crew chief school. That was
13 12 weeks, and then two weeks at 67 A1F which was a door gunner training school where you
14 just fire blanks at targets and it prepared me. I wanted to go to Vietnam and I did, and served 12
15 months in the 1st Air Cav and then came home not expecting to ever go back to Vietnam. I spent
16 four months in Ft. Stewart, Georgia, and then a buddy of mine who'd been with me since Ft.
17 Eustace, we both volunteered to go back. He ended up in the 1st Aviation Brigade and I ended
18 up with my two partners here, Roman and, I wanted to say Johnson, Quent would be better,
19 Quent. He thinks he's Quent Eastwood.

20 RM: ...machine gunner!!

21 SC: You can delete that out of there if you want!

22 SM: Do you think that the training that you received in those various locations before
23 you went to Vietnam the first time, that they were adequate, that they did prepare you for what
24 you had to do?

25 SC: Yes, really in detail.

26 SM: What about the blank training, as you put it?

27 SC: I'm sorry?

28 SM: The blank training, as you put it?

29 SC: Oh, the blank training and door gunner school, if you fired your machine gun at a
30 target that wasn't an enemy target...let's say they had to have a weapon aimed at you to be an
31 enemy target. Don't be trigger happy and just fire at every pop up target that they would have as

1 you're flying along in the helicopter. See, they wanted to see if you had good judgement and
2 that you could remain calm because at first when you're flying you think you're just going to fall
3 out. You don't know, really, but you're learning fast that centrifugal force will hold you in there
4 and so you can lean as far as you want, really, without wearing a seat belt. We never wore seat
5 belts. The pilots did, but we never did. You wanted to be able to maneuver around. If the pilot
6 got shot, you wanted to try to help him. If you had to give a lift to these guys, reach out. Let
7 them grab your wrist or your hand. Pull them in if they need help, because they're packing a lot
8 of weight and I totally respect these guys. I have to drop them off and then I could go home and
9 take warm showers and eat warm food while they were out there protecting us. So I really, I
10 have a lot of appreciation for my partners and I'd do anything for them. No matter what
11 situation they were in, if they needed us to come and help them, we'd be there.

12 SM: Mr. Johnson, would you do the same, please. Provide the basic information as far
13 as your training and stuff.

14 QJ: Well I went into the service in August of '69. Went through basic training at Ft.
15 Bragg and stayed eight weeks there. It really was ten weeks, right? Two zero weeks, and from
16 there I went to Ft. McCullen, Alabama. That's where I took my Infantry AIT training at and
17 from there I probably had 15 days leave time from there to Vietnam. I got over there I think
18 somewhere around the 4th of January and like I say, I wasn't with the Airborne unit. I hadn't
19 done any parachute jumping so but by being in the 101st they have to train you, you know, get
20 you equipped for whatever you got P'ed in so I had to go two weeks to what they called P
21 training, learning to repel, jumping from choppers and from there, about the 15th or 16th or 17th of
22 January I joined 2nd of the 17th Cavalry, B Troop and you play war games back here in the real
23 world in the United States, you get over there and all this stuff is for real. My first operation I
24 ran into an ambush and then I think the training really done some good. I thought they was kind
25 of mean and a little hard on you. You know, you were driven pretty hard and I think that was a
26 mind thing that you had to get a person equipped for, especially a young kid off the street that
27 come off the farm. You're on the street, you're on your parents anyway, so we really never did a
28 whole lot to really learn what really was happening out here in the real world and when you get
29 over there you have to grow up as far as firefighting and I think it really probably helped me save
30 my life and other people's lives too because old man raised fool but he didn't raise no damn fool.
31 I knew bullets when they come by! And that was the incident that happened. Probably a few

1 more steps and it would have probably been me. A lieutenant got shot in the leg that day and
2 that was good on the training and really fearful, too. You were really scared but the scared don't
3 ever overcome you. You know, you look upon yourself. You've got to do what you've got to
4 do. A scared person, you can't just go lay down. Even though all this stuff's going on, you got
5 to adjust for the situation and that's what I done and...

6 SM: So your training helped you?

7 QJ: Yeah, the training really helped me.

8 RM: When I say that I was short changed two weeks, the training was adequate. As you
9 can see, I'm still here. I missed two weeks of something good, but since I was sick they just said
10 I didn't have to repeat. I was glad that I didn't have to go through it over again so I just took that
11 little bit of a holiday off, but it worked.

12 SM: Well Mr. Johnson's point about his first experience with contact I think is a good
13 one to follow up on, so why don't you, Mr. Martinez, tell us about your first experience under
14 fire and what it was like and what were your experiences and how did it affect you?

15 RM: Okay. I was in the 1st Infantry Division. I was with a leg company for, I don't
16 know, maybe a couple of weeks when I got the scratch on my neck that put me in the hospital.
17 No contact, you know? When you're with a large unit, company sized unit, the enemy can hear
18 you coming so we just never did find anybody to make contact with. This was down in the III
19 Corps flat area, heavy jungle. A lot of it was chopped down by roam plow and I didn't see any
20 contact. After I came out of the hospital after ten days I came back and I was quite put off that I
21 wasn't a chaplain's assistant, you know, helping ammo in there and I complained about how I
22 joined the service to be a chaplain's assistant and I was a conscientious objector and I got
23 volunteered into a recon platoon so I was in country about a month and a half. No contact. The
24 only Vietnamese I'd seen was the soda girls and stuff like that so when I was in the recon unit,
25 on my first deployment they sent me out with resupply to the unit in the field and a weapon that
26 was unknown to me and sent me out to the field with another cherry guy that was sent in and
27 everybody else is wearing boony caps and I went out to the field with a baseball cap and these
28 guys about laughed us off the field, you know, 'What the heck are you doing out here with this?'
29 and so they threw away my baseball cap and gave me a boony cap and before we got our
30 supplies, our food, and got ready to set off we made contact. And one of the things during that
31 period, they were into the old Vietnamization stuff. We'd holler out, 'Chieu Hoi,' means open

1 arms, and if the enemy wanted to surrender, they would stand up and put their hand up in the air.
2 So we'd holler out, 'Chieu Hoi!' and if the person wanted to surrender they'd stick their hands
3 up in the air and we'd kill them. So that was my experience at 1st Infantry, I mean, first contact.
4 The guys I was with in the recon unit had been blown up severely and the guy that took me under
5 his wing, when he was a point man, had 25 men behind him wiped out in an ambush and he lived
6 through this so he had this great vendetta to live through. And he trained me to kill them all and
7 let God sort it out.

8 Wife: What happened with your weapon that day?

9 RM: Oh, yes. First contact, the first bullet jammed.

10 SM: What kind of weapon was it?

11 RM: M-16, and I had to field strip my weapon lying in the elephant grass. When I got
12 up all these guys were throwing hand grenades and blowing up guys. We were hollering, 'Chieu
13 Hoi, Chieu Hoi,' and it took me quite a while for me to comprehend what we had just did, you
14 know?

15 SM: Was this the policy of just your particular recon platoon or was this recon policy?

16 RM: No, it was not policy. The policy was you take prisoners.

17 QJ: You get engaged into a...to Vietnamese, they so treacherous you couldn't trust them.
18 You know, he could say, 'Chieu Hoi,' and walk up to you and have a bomb on him and blow all
19 of you up. So you got to understand why you had your own life at stake. They had got so
20 treacherous they would send a little kid in there on you and we always show mercy for children
21 and women. They would send little five-, six-year-old kids in there with a bomb on him just to
22 kill 10, 12, 16, 20 GI. They really get the 20. It's really, really sad that we had to shoot them
23 guys because they said, 'Chieu Hoi,' but they fired upon us first and you probably remember
24 Lieutenant Calley. He was over there the same time we were. He was court-martialed back at
25 Ft. Mead, Maryland. They brought him back down there. It's coincidental when I was up at this
26 base and he were court-martialed for that. But they had his company, his platoon, pinned down
27 and these were supposed to be civilian. Supposed to be friendly. But why are they shooting at
28 him? He called back to ask for permission to fire upon friendly villagers. They denied him and
29 bullets popping all around you... He's got probably 30 or 40 mens out there. What he going to
30 do? He going to just let them sit down and murder his platoon? So he took it upon himself. He
31 left that village. VC in it, that's all they were.

1 SM: Mr. Carper, what about your first contact?

2 SC: I was, after I first had gotten over there I was a mechanic. A very disappointed
3 mechanic because I wanted to fly. I kept volunteering to fly or get into a unit to fly and then they
4 would use me on what they would call details and I would go off in another unit and fill in as a
5 door gunner to get experience and then after six months of being in Vietnam I was fortunate
6 enough to go to B Company 227th Aviation and we were starting to take troops into Cambodia.
7 This was in May of '69, in June of '69 and I was fortunate enough to have a 1st Cav
8 photographer that took a picture of our helicopter in Cambodia at home, and has cupid on the
9 front and it says, 'Lovebird,' that we had painted on there. I asked the photographer when I was
10 going home after being in the Cav for a year, 'Do you have any pictures of a...' he told me he
11 had pictures of helicopters in Cambodia and I said, 'Do you have one with Lovebird on the
12 front?' and he goes, 'Yeah, it has cupid.' He got in his briefcase and he pulled it out and he let
13 me have it. It's an 8x10 black and white and on the back it says, 'U.S. Cavalry photographer,'
14 and his name.

15 QJ: Were you in that picture?

16 SC: Ronnie is...it was on Ronnie's ship. I was the door gunner on the other side. Ronnie
17 [Oliver] was on the Arbor, he's from Arkansas. He was the crew chief so he was on the left side,
18 so I'm not in the picture. I'm on the other side of the transmission. But, still, that was our ship.
19 But that was my first experience going into Cambodia and we took fire and naturally you just
20 want...happiness is a warm gun. You know, you just make that 60 sing and that would make the
21 pilots happy as well as the Infantry.

22 QJ: Yeah.

23 SC: That fire could make them put their heads down and then you keep their heads down
24 after you get your Infantry on the ground. You're like their backup until you can get out of there
25 and then I don't want to say they're on their own because the gun ships keep making passes and
26 passing over to protect your Infantry.

27 QJ: It was nice, man.

28 SC: You could have branches falling off of the trees right next to your chopper. That's
29 how good the pilots were because in the 1st Air Cav they were called, 'Blue Max.' They had the
30 blue swastika on their trans cowling and the Cobra pilots in the 2nd of the 17th, 101st were just as

1 good as the Blue Max pilots. Mr. Aiken, he was one of...not Mr., Captain then, he just passed
2 away last Christmas Eve of '98. He lived in Texas.

3 QJ: He flew a gun ship?

4 SC: Yeah, he would always fly at my seven. There was one gun ship at the five and one
5 at the seven, both Cobras. They would fly a little higher and behind you and they were...all you
6 had to say was, 'Taking fire at 10 o'clock,' and they would fire those 2.75 rockets, shooting a
7 mini gun with a grenade launcher. And 20 mike-mikes.

8 QJ: They just cut out trees.

9 SC: There were occasions where they would fire their 20 mike-mike and the flashes,
10 when they would hit, I would think we were taking fire when actually we weren't taking fire. It
11 was just the 20 mike-mike going off.

12 QJ: They just want to go ahead and unload!

13 SC: Happiness is a warm gun! What can I say?

14 QJ: Yep. They looked out for us. I mean, we had a heck of a game on the ground, but
15 they were there.

16 RM: But you had the feeling of invincibility when you had two Cobras in your pocket. It
17 was like, 'We're the baddest! His balls are dragging on the ground.' You've got cannons and
18 these guys will sic 'em, and the bad guys go away.

19 SC: And they had the teeth on the front like in World War II and Asian or Oriental
20 people are afraid of the sharks. The sharks were coming in.

21 QJ: That thing had a cylinder about this big around and it had rockets. I used to load that
22 thing.

23 SC: 2.75.

24 QJ: How many rockets was in one side?

25 SC: I want to say 25? I'm guessing right now so I won't say. [Narrator meant to say 12]

26 QJ: He's packing two on each side. He's packing two of these canisters on each side and
27 they load it like little round cylinders and he could shoot each one of them. Shoot them at you.
28 Them rockets bad, cut the top off trees, now.

29 RM: Yeah. Make a big boom.

30 SM: So those were your favorite weapons, then?

31 RM: That was our toy, I mean, that was our backup.

1 QJ: These guys want to start...

2 RM: We were on the ground, but they...

3 QJ: We needed ground support.

4 RM: It's like having instant artillery, you know.

5 SM: Was it always there when you were on the ground?

6 RM: In B Troop we had them pretty much.

7 SC: They were with us.

8 QJ: Just go on in and come out. Pretty much, you know, like when we was out there
9 reconnaissance or most of the time reconnaissance, or other times any kind of aircraft will get
10 you secured.

11 SC: Right. That was one of our jobs.

12 QJ: And we had to jump and do that. And back up for the Rangers, most of the time it
13 was pick up time. They were supposed to not make enemy contact, no way.

14 SC: They were out there to observe.

15 QJ: They were out there to observe. But they would sneak in. There would be a call;
16 they would be smart. They would slip in on a dock and kill them in their sleep and stuff. We
17 were reactionary form; we'd pick them up when we had to fight them. When you lose contact,
18 radio contact, you assume something may have happened and nine times out of ten, it had. One
19 time we went out [?], this one kid, I think this was about his 4th or 5th time out there, four or five
20 days like that, he hadn't been out there at all. He was a new Ranger. Everyone got killed except
21 this one kid, but he was shot twice in the small of his back, he was shot in both shoulders, he was
22 shot in both legs. He was carrying a trick 25 and he was still running around out there.

23 SC: There were times that the NVA...

24 QJ: He'd just been hit at the right place. And they were shooting him with an AK-47,
25 too.

26 SC: They would keep the Rangers alive. They may kill two out of five but they would
27 not kill the other three because they knew that as long as they left them alive that the choppers
28 would keep coming in to try and pick them up, and so that was like a big brownie button if you
29 shot down a chopper, and especially if the chopper landed on the Rangers and it killed the
30 Rangers that were on the ground and the crew and if they had infantry on board to set up a

1 perimeter of any time. You'd get a big brownie button as an NVA if you shoot down a chopper
2 full of infantry and they land on the Rangers and kill them, too.

3 QJ: Well, you know, like killing ten birds with one stone. That's what they were after.

4 SC: Oh yeah.

5 SM: So why don't you tell us about Operation TEXAS STAR.

6 SC: Operation TEXAS STAR actually started in April. This is my recollection. I got
7 there in May of '70. Our main mission was aerial recon or to pick up any down aircrews or
8 Rangers that were just out there observing. There were, let's say they were found and needed to
9 get out immediately and when all attempts were made to get them out and no one else could do
10 it, they would send in the 2nd 17th B Troop. We covered the A Shau Valley, right out of Hue.
11 Any Marine, I don't know why they call H-U-E 'Hue'. It's 'Hue' and our A.O. goes through the
12 A Shau over to the Laotian border and over to the DMZ. Did I answer your question?

13 SM: Yes you did. So what were some of the operations that you conducted as part of
14 Operation TEXAS STAR, some of the specific actions?

15 RM: I'd like to share one - one that has done more to my psyche than any of them. I
16 joined the unit in the first part of April 1970 and this was maybe a couple of weeks later. We
17 were sent out to pick up one of our own downed LOHs, three crewmen, and we went out first
18 light. You know, they went down and I thought we were picking up live crew. The ship went
19 down and we were going to pick them up. So we get out before breakfast, and we're humping.
20 They put us down at the bottom of this hill and they told us it was near the crest so we're
21 breaking brush and I'm walking point up the hill and several hours passed on the way up the hill
22 and I start smelling these interesting smells like McDonald's, you know, like somebody's
23 cooking something and it didn't dawn on me because we were going to pick up live guys. I was
24 figuring, 'Maybe there's a villa around here where somebody's cooking meals,' you know and
25 I'm salivating like crazy. We break the brush and get into a clearing and we notice that the
26 clearing is not natural and in the middle of the clearing is a pile of ashes with three bumps in it
27 and then I found out what them interesting smells were. It was magnesium cooked GIs and we
28 set up a perimeter around the sight. Most of the guys started barfing their socks out and me and
29 this black forward observer, can you remember his name?

30 QJ: Was it Super?

31 RM: No, he was attached...

1 QJ: Sergeant Hollom?

2 RM: Hollom, yes. We bagged the three guys and it kind of pissed me off that the other
3 guys were either crying and puking so me and Sergeant Hollom was the ones that actually
4 bagged the guys and I did it with tears in my eyes and the flesh coming off of my hands when we
5 were putting them in the bags and it was grossing me out to think that I was salivating a little bit
6 before over the good smells of my brothers.

7 Wife: You forgot the part where you were close with David and Robert.

8 RM: Well, I had met them the night before. I did have pictures of us attaining euphoria
9 in the bleachers in an area.

10 QJ: They'd give us movies; remember they used to show movies up there? We had a
11 small theater. It was outside, you know, little bleachers you'd sit on.

12 RM: So we were out there and I had just met the guys the night before. These were the
13 guys that we picked up on that morning and it was just a real experience to find out that here this
14 is our brothers that we had to go pick up and then take back.

15 Wife: And it has ruined our family's barbecues every since. We barbecue fish. I'm not
16 kidding. We barbecue fish now.

17 RM: I used to have a real bad time at barbecues.

18 Wife: Real bad time.

19 RM: And didn't have any idea what it was until I was in therapy I found out.

20 Wife: And he would turn into a monster and the girls would have to go hide in their
21 bedroom and I'd lock their door and make sure that they had an escape route and where to go
22 and daddy would go nuts.

23 RM: I'm much better now.

24 Wife: He's much better now.

25 RM: Much better now.

26 QJ: Well you got to live through it. You know, it taught you a side of you. You get
27 something within you you got to live it out, and it don't just go away. A lot of people say, 'Well,
28 why don't you just go on and forget about it?' You just don't forget about it.

29 SC: They haven't been there.

1 QJ: You know, just like your childhood, you just can't forget about it. So there's those
2 spirits there and I imagine all of us will seek to a certain extent. There's no way around it. The
3 main thing is you come to terms with yourself and try to help yourself.

4 RM: You help each other, that's right. I try to share this with guys because there's a lot
5 of us who are not here that have died because we couldn't deal with it. 58,000 vets died in 'Nam
6 and over 300,000 have killed themselves and I'm sporting other kinds of scars, physical and
7 mental, and by the grace of God I'm still here.

8 QJ: Same thing here.

9 Wife: Amen.

10 SM: Did you conduct a lot of the aircraft recoveries like that or was that one of the most
11 extreme?

12 RM: Well that was my first and most extreme one. I have a feeling that I was on some
13 of these other operations that the guys were talking about.

14 QJ: But you learn to adapt to it. That first experience, I think it's emotional. You know,
15 you don't forget it and I think after that one you kind of like come to terms with it and you more
16 like accept it into yourself and the next time something happens its really not as bad looking as
17 that first one. Like that firefight, that first one I went to. Now I wasn't expecting that and my
18 mind was in nowhere that when that happened, but that woke me up and like when we picked
19 those Rangers up that time. They was missing one night and was gone all day, all that next night
20 and the day like that and the next morning we found them and it was smelling so bad we had to
21 put on gas masks. It's probably the one that y'all had to carry in.

22 RM: Yeah.

23 SM: What happened to these Rangers?

24 QJ: They got stolen in the middle of the night, the way I looked at it, you know, the
25 position of them. You got five or six men that would operate in a Ranger's team anyway so it
26 comes time of night you got to sleep. So four sleep, if there's five of them, four sleep and one
27 guards for two hours, wake another one up, the next one is on guard and he'd take over. He'd
28 stay awake for two hours and then the other four still sleeping. You'll get eight hours sleep or as
29 much as six hours sleep in rotation like that, but one that wake up from the sleep that ain't maybe
30 slept but maybe two hours or maybe four hours, he's subject to go back to sleep and then that's
31 what I played in my mind. When I look at where these guys positioned at, one be sitting up side

1 the tree, I imagine he didn't want to sit guard. He falls back asleep, and you don't know what
2 you do in your sleep, you don't know what you snore and nobody's going to tell you that you
3 snore. You never know you snore and these Viet Cong, they were professionals just like I said,
4 they crawled in and they killed them in their sleep. They surrounded them, I imagine, because I
5 saw how they were shot up, bullets all shot up in their head and mouth shot off and flopping
6 around, and you know, brains shot out the back of your head, and then you see this guy laying
7 there, laying on his back you know and blood just running down and all this stuff just explain it
8 for you. You know, you never forget it. You never forget that look like when they get that smell
9 on the human smell and the human flesh and in your mind you're saying, 'I'm picking this guy
10 up. I wonder who's going to pick me up,' is just the way my mind played to me. I guess that
11 was kind of like a defense. I was really praying to myself but it got so rough. I wrote my mom a
12 letter, I told her things real bad and if anything happened don't be surprised, you know, to me
13 because that's right before Sergeant Wall got killed and we really ran into a lot of contact, enemy
14 contact. There was a lot of bullets shot at us.

15 SM: And that contact would occur when you'd go in to rescue a downed unit or a
16 downed aircraft?

17 QJ: Yeah, there's mostly a time when we ran into a reconnaissance or most of the time
18 they feared those helicopters, those helicopters with the white rings around those tailbones
19 because those with the blue, they feared them. They feared that helicopter because they knew
20 what those things was all about and they knew if they killed them they knew what was coming.
21 We just didn't have those gun ships, those helicopters flying down. We had phantoms, too.

22 SC: Fast movers.

23 QJ: Yeah, we had some phantoms come in a couple of times. I think you was already
24 gone, you had got wounded at Long Binh. This was somewhere around in Quang Tri, yeah, we
25 was up in Quang Tri when this happened, somewhere around August or September of that year
26 and this phantom worked out, I mean this thing was on me. He came in, man...

27 SC: August.

28 QJ: ...and he dropped them two rockets and they're big rockets, them things rock like
29 that man when they go to the ground...

30 SC: Napalm.

1 QJ: This fool was uphill, and he works out and he comes back around and you could see
2 on the other side this green when this man gets through working out [?] rockets, they probably
3 bigger than this table around and when he got through working out and when his clearance go
4 away, you going to see him laying on the ground, so we had power. We had tremendous power,
5 and then we had the mortars. The mortars, you know, a couple of times we called in mortars
6 attacks, brought in mortars a couple of times and it was probably smart. First time you got to
7 send a mark around and it explode on top of your head and you adjust it now. You want it to
8 explode over your head so they'll know exactly where you're at. Mortars don't play. Wherever
9 you drop it, if it's on you, you know, it'll hit you quick.

10 SM: And most of these operations were during the day, correct?

11 SC: Majority were during the day.

12 SM: Did you do operations much?

13 SC: Oh yes.

14 RM: We did layovers, but it wasn't actually an operation that we deployed. You know,
15 we were there.

16 QJ: It was more like, well, Westmoreland, he flew out and snooped around. He was
17 nosy. He found something he didn't like or he didn't see or somebody shot at him, he called the
18 blue. We was his boys. They shot at him, and we jumped in there. It's just the way it were.
19 And he was a little snooper, now. He had a little LOH like the one on Magnum PI, that little
20 bubble? That's what he rode and that thing was fast. It was the only helicopter that could fly
21 upside down, right? It could turn all the way over and come back and keep going.

22 SC: It was like a bumblebee.

23 QJ: I don't know whether the ships would do that or not.

24 SC: No, I wouldn't want my...it would be too much torque.

25 QJ: It might break something?

26 SC: Yeah.

27 QJ: But it was the only helicopter that I knew of back then that could really maneuver
28 around fast and shoot down. It was a pretty quick helicopter, and small. What, did it hold two
29 people?

30 SC: Two to three. You could have a pilot, co-pilot, and a gunner in the back.

31 QJ: In the back of it?

1 SC: Yeah. It would balance things off if the mini gun on the other side.

2 QJ: Okay. But that's most of what was going on, and I was mostly in contact with just
3 reconnaissance.

4 SM: What would be the purpose of those operations, usually, when you would go out on
5 a recon?

6 QJ: He saw something that he want to check out. I mean, it could be anything.

7 SC: Search for enemy was the main thing. That's why you were there.

8 QJ: We hunted them. That's what we did, we hunted it.

9 SM: So what size was your team on recon?

10 QJ: 30 mens in this troop, B Troop. It was four troops, A, B, C, and D.

11 RM: We didn't go out 30 men at a time, though?

12 QJ: Yes it was, it was 30 of us!

13 RM: 30 of us?

14 QJ: Think about it. There were five or six of those helicopters that was carrying us out.
15 It was 30 of us. It was a bunch of them, man. It didn't really seem like 30 men. We probably
16 went in small because out line unit was about 150 men.

17 Wife: But you were always in the lead ship because you were doing point so you didn't
18 see what was behind you.

19 QJ: There was four back there.

20 Wife: You never thought about the guys behind you.

21 QJ: You never thought about it. I think what got me into counting them, I never thought
22 about it walking point. This is after you had got wounded, I started walking point and you
23 recounted. See, I always flew the first chopper in and come out on the last chopper. I had to
24 make sure all the men's on the chopper and whenever they dropped it off right on us, they get 20
25 minutes and these guys, they were saying it was impossible for them to get back to us but they
26 got back to us and we were on the last...I rode that last chopper out and we were in the air, that
27 was before we got that shrapnel on that fire fight we jumped in. He slipped and when I jumped
28 on the skid I hooked that little bar, you know one of those little bar things...

29 SC: Strut.

1 QJ: Yeah, I wrapped it on his back and then we lift off the ground because we didn't
2 have no time to get out. There was like a three 10,000 pound bombs and you drop it on Las
3 Vegas you probably won't have nothing left, you know?

4 RM: Make a mess.

5 QJ: And we wasn't really going to drop it on our own but we was so close to it, the
6 sound wave would have killed us. You know, like you take a .24 to the side of a glass and
7 shatter it? Well, your body can't take it. But these guys got us out of there.

8 SC: I ask Captain Yearwood did anybody have a briefing prior to this mission because
9 we were in the middle of...they were dropping bombs!

10 QJ: What we had to do is secure this helicopter to a Chinook, come in and change it, and
11 then fly back. We didn't want the enemy to get over to this like the gauges and instrumentation
12 and gauges and stuff. This stuff was when helicopters was over a million dollars, so they didn't
13 want the enemy to get any part of this helicopter to know what we were really using. So they
14 would go to extremes to save those helicopters and they had already, by my understanding, they
15 had got all the way back to camp and when they got the word that [?] dropped. We was
16 something like 50 miles out there or more. We was a long ways out there.

17 SC: We were refueling. We were topping off with fuel and I could hear it on the radio
18 and they asked Yearwood, since we had just been there, if he would go back and so he just gave
19 it an affirmative. He was going for the mission, and he never turned down a mission, and so we
20 were on our way back to pick you guys up.

21 SM: This is your pilot that never turned down a mission?

22 SC: Right. He was our platoon leader, which was...he was a platoon leader of the lift
23 section and also being that he was an Army Infantry Ranger, he would go out in the field with
24 the blues, too. In fact, that's what he did after the second time I was shot. His other six months
25 of his tour he spent in the infantry.

26 SM: Okay, and what was his name again?

27 SC: Captain John Yearwood. In your roster it says that he was a Cobra pilot. If he flew
28 Cobras it was after I was with him.

29 SM: He flew Hueys when he was with you?

30 SC: Right, and he was...he really thought a lot of his men. We'd do anything, like I say,
31 anything at all to protect them, to pick them up, to get them out of a bad situation. Captain

1 Yearwood, if he had to, to save intimidating two other air crews, he would rather make three runs
2 to pick them up than to endanger the lives of eight other crew men and two other helicopters.

3 QJ: He would. That's what's great because we knew this man would die trying to save
4 us. See what I'm saying? So we give him the utmost. When they come in, we all open fire.
5 They come in shooting, we already shooting.

6 SM: Sounds like your unit had good morale.

7 SC: Oh yeah. It did, it did.

8 QJ: They kept us in good morale.

9 SC: I felt like we were a bunch of cowboys.

10 RM: Yeah, with Cobras in our pocket!

11 QJ: We had showers and they would give us things of what we were accustomed to
12 living in the United States, and that right there was for one reason, to keep our morale up. When
13 you take the morale away from the man, you ain't got no man.

14 SC: Important factor that we didn't do in the 1st Air Cavalry was we didn't...okay, the
15 Infantry, when we'd pick them up and drop them off, I never really got to know them like I knew
16 these guys because back at Camp Eagle they had a hooch or a little house just like we had and so
17 we were more together as a family as where in the 1st Cav I could have gone in and out picking
18 troops up and dropping them off. I would recognize them, and they always knew me for having
19 an ice chest with cold sodas and I would offer them cold sodas and just give me the can because I
20 don't want it flying up in my rotor blades when you get out and throw it on the ground!
21 Anyway, I admit I spent a lot of time on stand-by which I had a hammock I would set up and
22 have a radio going and cold sodas and I had it made compared to these guys. I didn't have to
23 burn leeches off me with a cigarette.

24 Wife: Roman always talks about the big differences staying in the jungle wet for like
25 three weeks at a time and having his own hooch and that really was a big difference in his morale
26 between the 1st Infantry and the 2nd of the 17th.

27 SM: So the physical comforts in B Troop were much higher?

28 RM: I went to heaven.

29 Wife: That was his just reward.

1 QJ: Without being in the hooches, you know, you got to shampoo your socks and shoes
2 off and how you feel. You have mosquito net but you still got jungle rot though. You get that
3 fungus.

4 RM: Hey, if you don't sleep with the same wet clothes for three weeks!

5 QJ: ...to get them off or what it's called, when you got back off a wet operation, the first
6 thing you do is pull your clothes off and search for leeches.

7 SM: What was the longest trip that you took out into the field, the longest time you were
8 away from your hooches?

9 QJ: When we went to Quang Tri that time. When do you leave in '70? Did you leave...

10 SC: November, the end, near the end of November.

11 QJ: You were pilot flying for us when we went to Quang Tri, to that DMZ.

12 SC: We sure got a lot of souvenirs. I, at home right now, still have an NVA pack, pith
13 helmet, and I did have his shirt and shorts and first aid kit, but those were stolen.

14 QJ: We stripped them all, we stripped them all in here. We got all the useful stuff off of
15 them we could and we took all their clothes, if you know, you got a problem picking them up
16 and the longest time we stayed up there I think we was really up there for about three and a half
17 days. They were just dropping our food out.

18 RM: The time I was there...

19 QJ: You could hear them moving at night. You could hear them moving. You be quiet,
20 your ears go a long way. They go further than your eyes. I know a lot of people say, 'I'm scared
21 in the dark!' I'd rather be in the dark than be in the daylight. When you're in the dark, you ain't
22 going to know where I might be. But, you might see me in the daylight, I might move, you
23 know? But dark is your best friend.

24 SM: That's interesting you say that because of course part of the adage of comments
25 made about the Vietnam War was that the night belonged to Charlie. The Viet Cong and the
26 Vietnamese were the ones that took advantage of the night and American soldiers tended to just
27 operate during the day.

28 Wife: Tell them about your rest over night.

29 RM: This is with the 1st Infantry Division that we had night defensive positions where
30 you set up ambush or to fight or you had, you know, rest overnight where you're not going to set
31 up an ambush but you're just going to pull back and protect yourself. But our recon unit, we

1 developed something even beyond that. We called it the hide overnight where we'd go set up an
2 ambush and then we'd go a couple of clicks away and crawl into some thicket and hide and then
3 we'd just listen for the boom because our claymores were self-actuating with white phosphorous
4 in the trees and hand grenades and claymores, so if anything fell into our trap we had physical
5 evidence. We'd go back in the morning and see how many bodies were still kicking because
6 usually they're pretty devastating. If it was a big enough unit that they'd pick up the pieces
7 before we got there then we'd just get the hell out of Dodge because...but usually it would be
8 just a small unit, maybe three or four and then you'd go out there and you'd have all your
9 evidence right there.

10 QJ: One time we went out, you probably remember this, too. I'm trying to think that we
11 were somewhere over next to Laos.

12 Wife: Or in Laos?

13 QJ: It might have been in Laos.

14 Wife: Yeah, because he was wounded in Laos. It wouldn't be surprising.

15 QJ: Just helicopter had got shot down and it was so late this outing, we jumped. We
16 didn't spend the night, okay?

17 SC: A LOH?

18 QJ: No, this was a Huey. I don't think it was one, it wasn't one of ours.

19 SC: It was our AO?

20 QJ: Yeah, probably got our AO. We never found a pilot, co-pilot, the gunner, or the
21 crew chief. It didn't crash and explode. I mean, it crashed.

22 SC: It hit the trees?

23 QJ: More like just grabbed on.

24 SC: Fell apart?

25 QJ: Yeah. It was still kind of together but the props, a couple broke.

26 SC: Oh, okay, the rotor blades?

27 QJ: Yeah. Broke down. But the instrument gauges and stuff, it wasn't destroyed but
28 you could tell it crashed but not enough to explode or to kill those guys because we never did
29 find them, but we spent the night and we heard noises all night. We shot all the men this night.

30 SC: Okay, now everything was intact?

1 QJ: Yeah. We moved down from that chopper and formed a perimeter. It was kind of
2 like no one knows, like, we were in the mountain, back up the trees kind of tall, you know the
3 trees are tall over there, you know here they're like...but maybe about two or 300 meters from us
4 was a line company and we didn't know they was down, right, but through the night, it got dusky
5 dawn and we put up those claymores so we got...and I can't think of this kid's name, he was
6 slim and tall. He went out, and nobody heard it, and you know you're paired off anyway, you
7 know, you're always two and you maybe go maybe 25 feet, two more, where you could be in
8 visible sight of each other but not too close just in case any more stuff comes in, maybe you got a
9 better chance of surviving. He goes out and we heard some noise. Sergeant, I ordered, and I was
10 on top of it, I was in the perimeter with it, inside, you know, I was inside with the lieutenant and
11 trick 25, they already set up in the center of the perimeter and I was the point man so I was in the
12 center talking to Sergeant, and we heard something. We really heard some noise but then all of a
13 sudden we heard something right there. 'Sergeant,' I said, 'did you hear that?' I said, 'Shhh...'
14 and all of a sudden you hear some [makes cracking noise], now you know limbs breaking. I
15 said, 'Now what is this?' By this time you know, you're trying to zero in on where this noise is
16 coming from but this guy, man, he was crawling over the top of this stuff and it was why. He
17 would step on something and break it. Why he went out there after that black dog, don't ask me,
18 because we put the bad word out, put those claymores out, you supposed to go put those
19 claymores out and come on in. That's at dusk to dawn. It's hard to see at dusk to dawn and
20 everybody does the same time, and man, we opened up fire. I helped shoot the man, too, but he
21 was real fortunate he was kind of tall and slim and what we was shooting at, we was shooting
22 down. One bullet hit him in the elbow and we heard him when he went, 'Ooh!' and I said,
23 'Damn!' I said, 'Will you go...' I said, 'Is all our mens accounted for?' And then he started
24 shooting up those [?], you know, your flare-ups. You shoot up your flare-up and we got to ease
25 it down and we got to calling the names and all of a sudden we said, 'Wait a minute, we got one
26 man missing!' I can't think of this guy's name for nothing, but I got his face. But the bullets
27 were hitting in front of him and they ricocheted and it knocked rocks and stuff into his stomach,
28 but he lived. He was real fortunate that a bullet didn't hit him in the head. One of them hit him
29 in the elbow. That was the only...I kind of...that disturbed me. I think he got to saws it off, too.
30 Because me and him both, he was the first one to open up fire and I opened up fire right back
31 because we done what we were supposed to have done because we could have been surrounded

1 so the Medevacs get him out, gets him out. You know that let him know where we was at with
2 all this going off. That makes me more worried, so we're moving all around. Then we find out
3 that the line company not far from us. They gets in contact. They gets in contact. Then here
4 come this helicopter. It must have been called in support for them not even knowing we over
5 there. They, 'Boom, boom, boom, boom,' you know how they fly in, and 'Whooooom,' and
6 they come back around and this one chopper gun ship comes and he was just fired up and he just
7 made a hard left turn, banked in toward us and fired a rocket. Hey man, that thing hit the
8 treetops! It hit the treetops right on top of us. It wasn't a stick. This one was a gun ship. This
9 one wasn't no Cobras, man. And then we got, the lieutenant got on the 345 and was trying to
10 give our position and then they called back and said that nobody engaged at our coordinates that
11 we was out there. This man didn't even know that we was out there!

12 RM: Friendly fire.

13 QJ: He was firing at random because these line units, they're like, you know, the jungle
14 speak. It's like from here, what, 1,000 meters? How long would it take you to travel 1,000
15 meters?

16 SC: Depends on the jungle.

17 QJ: That's what I'm talking about. It's so thick, man, it might take you all day. All day,
18 but they really wanted that [?] but this gun ship didn't know we was out there. We out there
19 because that helicopter went down late that evening before, that evening before and that drawed
20 us out there and this line company already 1,000 meters from us.

21 SM: Why did the chopper engage your unit?

22 QJ: Well, he didn't know we was out there. When he fired that round he was just
23 protecting his self, no doubt. He come in working out and he turned half a round and he just shot
24 that rocket. But we just shoot up the area, really, is what we do.

25 SM: But what was the provocation? You didn't fire on him, did you?

26 QJ: No, we didn't. He said, he didn't know we was out there.

27 SM: Oh, okay. He was just firing because maybe there was something there?

28 QJ: Yeah.

29 SC: They call it the line element.

30 SM: Because the line element...

31 SC: Right.

1 QJ: You got a line company right here and he's on the side. He come in, he's going to
2 work this perimeter out. We said not here. It's easy for him to come in and fire all through here
3 and then all of a sudden he fire over here, too. You fire anywhere outside of where these
4 people's at.

5 SC: You're trying to protect these people inside.

6 SM: The line company, were they getting hit pretty hard?

7 QJ: He said they was under pretty heavy fire.

8 SM: You weren't close enough to hear what was going on?

9 QJ: I think a Medevac did come in. Somebody got shot. I never did know whether
10 anybody got killed in that operation but I do know that the first aid chopper come in, the
11 Medevac chopper come in. I don't know how many he took out of there. But when the
12 helicopter come in, they was still a pretty good ways away, we could still see the helicopter. It's
13 really dangerous on the helicopter. I mean, flying alone is dangerous, but when you hover.
14 These machines here could stand still in the air, just stand there. Well, you're sitting ducks.

15 SC: You don't think of that part, though.

16 QJ: But you a sitting duck.

17 SC: You think of getting the troops out. You don't think about how, 'I'm worried
18 because I'm going to get shot at.' You just get them out.

19 QJ: But you're sitting ducks!

20 SC: You can go home and count the holes later.

21 QJ: But you be counting, I know you find them when you get back!

22 RM: And then they start peeing all over themselves!

23 QJ: One way to bring that chopper out of the air, right on top of your head!

24 Wife: Didn't you go out without any oil one time?

25 SC: Oh yeah. We made it back and maintenance told Captain Yearwood, 'I don't know
26 how this helicopter flew all the way to Phu Bai across the A Shau Valley because there's no
27 transmission fluid in the transmission and it should have frozen up,' which means the rotor
28 blades should have quit, and Captain Yearwood couldn't understand it. Not until '95 did I tell
29 him, 'I was praying all the way, sir! I pray for everybody on the ship and I leave myself for last
30 and I'd say a prayer before we'd go in and then I'd pray for them after we came out of there.'

31 QJ: I think you sound like me, now.

1 SM: Did the hydraulic line get hit or something? What happened? Why wasn't there
2 transmission fluid in it?

3 SC: It took at least ten rounds in the transmission. I happened to be very lucky, it was
4 very fortunate that I was hit at the very beginning of trying to insert the blues on a hilltop
5 because it knocked me on the floor and then in turn they continued to fire but I fell so fast to the
6 floor because it came through the wall around a tumbler and it hit me in the upper thigh on the
7 left and it knocked me to the right and lucky enough the blues, they were out on the skids ready
8 to jump and then they were smart enough, because we always had the smartest ones with us
9 because they had the most experience, they stayed on board and then Captain Yearwood just
10 pulled pitch and we got the heck out of there. But I can remember laying on the floor and Walt,
11 he ruined a brand new pair of my nomecks and I could, I would always be observing the gauges
12 in case something would go wrong or looking for a place to sit down if we needed to in an
13 emergency.

14 SM: And this is the first time you were shot?

15 SC: Yeah, it was the first time I was ever shot. I've been shot at a lot but it was the very
16 first time, actually, that I was hit.

17 SM: What were you hit with?

18 SC: It was an armor-piercing tumbler that made a big hole and then I kept it in my thigh,
19 my right thigh. It stopped about an inch from the right side. I kept it in my thigh for a year and a
20 half because in the hospital there were surgeries that needed to be done and this was one of the
21 surgeries that only hit flesh so I just wanted to go back to my unit. So I would go to therapy
22 every morning and the guy thought I was crazy because he says, 'You have clean sheets, nurses,
23 movies, you're safe here. I don't understand why you want to go back to your unit.' 'Because
24 they need me. Captain Yearwood...I have to get back to helping, and that's what I'm trained to
25 do and I'm not doing any good sitting here in the hospital so I want to go back to my unit.' So
26 actually they sent me back before I should go back because I came back with a cane and I would
27 not pass the flight physical if they gave me one but I was a fast talker and was able to persuade
28 Captain Yearwood that he needed me and so he just said, 'Well, if we get shot down you're
29 going to have a hard time running from the bad guys,' and I just told him, 'Well I'll probably
30 outrun you anyway,' so he let me go with them.

31 QJ: Captain Rosenthal tell you that?

1 SC: No, Yearwood.
2 QJ: Yearwood?
3 SC: Uh huh. The captain...
4 SM: What about the...I'm sorry.
5 SC: Go ahead.
6 SM: No, no.
7 SC: Yearwood, he really...his men were before...let's say his men were being shot at.
8 He would throw himself in front of the rounds if he could. That's how much it meant for him to
9 get his men out and I really respect him.
10 SM: Were all the officers and NCOs in your units like him?
11 SC: Well he was a West Pointer. He did not have to go in the military. He had an older
12 brother and his dad were both killed in the military. He was an only son now with his brother
13 gone. He did not have to go to the military but he volunteered, went to West Point, became an
14 Airborne, Infantry, Ranger, Aviator and then I would always add at the end, 'Texan,' because he
15 was a tall Texan and he still to this day chews that chaw in his upper lip.
16 QJ: I'd like to see that man.
17 SC: Yeah, I would too.
18 RM: But I don't think all of the officers were as...
19 SC: No...
20 Wife: Especially the NCOs, huh?
21 SM: What about the NCOs?
22 RM: Some of them deserved to die.
23 Wife: He used to follow Roman around with his pistol cocked.
24 RM: No, his carb 15.
25 Wife: Oh, his machine gun?
26 RM: So yeah, sometimes the enemy wasn't little yellow devils, you know? Some big
27 white devils! No, but I thought of it.
28 SM: Not in B Troop while you were there, no one was fragged?
29 RM: No. Fantasized, fantasized it maybe.
30 QJ: Nobody what now?
31 SM: RM: SC: No one was fragged.

1 SM: NCOs, officers, anybody? Anybody fragged?

2 RM: Fragged.

3 SC: Oh, Gits was hit by shrapnel from a frag, but not from his own men.

4 RM: Oh, not from his own men, no, no, no.

5 SC: No one was ever fortunate enough to take out Sergeant Ard.

6 QJ: Oh no, man, he was too fast, man. He was an Alaskan, too, man, he used to hunt
7 polar bear, he told me.

8 RM: Hey man, I was going to give an ice cube...

9 QJ: I believe this guy, man. This guy here had to swim from somewhere, Sergeant Ard
10 did.

11 SC: He was a polar bear.

12 QJ: Hey, he could run, too.

13 RM: He was a frosty...

14 QJ: Nobody like him. Nobody like him. You know, 4th of July...trailer loads of beer
15 and we got all kind of drunked up off this beer so we decided, well, we throw these warrant
16 officers and the captains into this cold water after we drink the beer so we was going to get
17 Sergeant Ard. Yeah, we was going to give him a bath. Well, everybody took the water and,
18 'Where did Sergeant Ard go?' He done disappeared, you know. Somebody said, 'Oh I seen him
19 up there in his barracks, so we going to go get him.' There was 15 of them, we going to get him.
20 We going to rinse him in this water. Man, Sergeant Ard looked and seen us coming and he took
21 off running and I broke out the craft. There was about four or five of us pretty fast, you know. I
22 kind of passed on by most of them. Started going up the hill, the rest of them was backing off,
23 slow going up the hill, so I was kind of gauging on you know, 'Everybody else couldn't hardly
24 make it up this hill, up the hill to the mess hall.'

25 SC: When they usually ring the...

26 QJ: Yeah, what it was...yep, yep, yep.

27 SC: When you get your hand on the mess hall door, low and behold the scramble horn
28 would blow.

29 QJ: Would go off.

30 SC: And he wouldn't get anything to eat.

1 QJ: He turned around and looked back at me and he said, 'I figured you'd be the one to
2 try to catch me,' he said, 'But I got something for you, too.' And he ripped this, I wondered
3 what did he have on this gas mask for, he ripped his gas mask off, out his pouch, and slapped it
4 over his head, and he pulled that pin and that gas we go through, he had gas. He said, 'I got
5 something for you too,' he went, 'Poof!' and I said, 'Oh no! Gas!' and I was down the hill a
6 running man, but he was smart. He figured somebody might run him down.

7 SM: Why didn't you like him?

8 QJ: Why did I catch him?

9 SM: Why didn't you like him? The main NCO?

10 Wife: He was a maniac.

11 SC: He did not like black or Mexican people. He didn't, okay, and I had black and
12 Mexican people as my partners and he was, he would make them walk point just so he could get
13 them eliminated.

14 QJ: I mean, he would walk along with you but he tell you up front.

15 SM: Did that happen a lot? Did you run into a lot of NCOs like that?

16 RM: He put me up front.

17 QJ: He played Army. The Army couldn't do nothing to him because he played Army.

18 SC: By the book.

19 SM: But were there other NCOs like him, other people in your unit?

20 SC: No, I think Sergeant Ard stood out more than anybody.

21 QJ: He was the only one who was like that.

22 Wife: There were other bigots in the service, but...

23 QJ: He was prejudice to everybody, you know, I mean he might not be prejudice to races
24 or prejudice to colors but there was something he disliked so you were prejudice. I mean, it's
25 color. But it's really bad when it's a human being just like the color of your skin and I don't
26 think that's too good because if you going to judge a book by looking at the color, you going to
27 miss the whole pages, you know? There's a story behind every book and it's the same thing for
28 humans and you got a brain up here and everybody criticizes and it's bad that you walk on top of
29 it just because I look, you know, you look like you might be a beatnik. You got a beard on, I
30 don't like you. But then in return, I can't like you if I don't get to know you. If I get to know
31 you, I should make the decision then whether I like you or not. You know what I mean?

1 SM: The reason I ask is of course one of the things about the Army especially later in the
2 war is the accusations and the comments that there's a lot of racial tension, tensions between
3 different groups of people in the Army.

4 RM: In our unit it wasn't...

5 SM: It seems like...

6 RM: We were all free, OD you know?

7 QJ: Probably in some places, but it's not directed to B Troop 2nd and 3rd Cavalry. I can
8 say if a person wants to be racist when you come in this company, he changes because he never
9 showed it. Of all the people I met he had to change. If he went our way, he had to change
10 because I never met anybody, to me, that was really racist. We were really together and I speak
11 about it today if black and whites were together back here in the United States like we was in the
12 United States...

13 SC: This close and as tight knit.

14 QJ: ...we wouldn't have no prejudice. I mean, it would be so nice. It would. Maybe we
15 wouldn't have the killing, the robbing, people pulling this direction, people pulling this in the
16 whole United States, we the people. We are the people.

17 SC: We would be a very strong country if we had the relationship...

18 QJ: Stronger.

19 SC: ...stronger, if we had the relationship across the country like we did in the 2nd of the
20 17th and B Troop.

21 QJ: We really would.

22 SC: We could run the country.

23 QJ: Yeah, control it.

24 SC: Yeah.

25 QJ: Not saying that this is bad, this is good. If anybody pass along, if it don't fit our
26 pockets, what do we need with it? If you can't, let's take for instance some things were taken
27 from the government, you know, you'd buy an automobile, usually you'd itemize deductions,
28 you'd take the interest out of that deduction, or if you borrowed money from a finance company,
29 you could itemize...

30 SM: I was curious about some of the specifics about your injury that you received when
31 you were injured, Mr. Martinez.

1 RM: Okay, I was wounded on Father's Day 1970. From my recollections we were sent
2 out to check out the bomb damage on an NVA base camp or hospital and they had bombed the
3 area quite severely and we were out there to check out the bomb damage and it was one of our
4 longer flights out to this place and I almost thought it was in Khe Sanh, that's in South Vietnam,
5 but the guys were telling me that no, we were across the border in Laos and during the checking
6 out this bomb damage we went through an area that was not bombed and I passed it back that
7 they missed this part and we went down into a little ravine and I didn't see anything. I heard
8 some shots fired and the next thing I knew my arm stopped working. I didn't realize it at the
9 time but it was a hand grenade wound but I thought it was a ray gun because I felt the electric
10 shock hit me in the left arm and just put me...knocked my arm out of commission. I continued
11 shooting with my right hand, changing magazines, about four magazines while I was down
12 getting...I don't think that we took any more fire but I did put out a lot of bullets. A medic came
13 and patched me up at out there where I was wounded but nobody came out to get me except for
14 the medics so I don't know who the medic was but I have a lot of respect for that cherry boy.

15 Wife: Yeah, he was a new one because the regular medic was out.

16 RM: Yeah, he was on R&R. They said he went from the battalion. A cherry medic. He
17 shook harder than me with a M-16 going.

18 SC: Rock and roll.

19 RM: It was on, yeah, put a lot of...

20 SM: How long did it take you to recover?

21 RM: 13 months to get my thumb to wiggle, so it was about two years I guess.

22 Wife: Two and ½, plus a month in Japan.

23 RM: Two ½ years.

24 SM: So you were taken out of combat at that point?

25 RM: Immediately, yeah. They were...they promised me a hook.

26 SM: I'm sorry, a hook?

27 SC: They were wanting to cut his arm off.

28 SM: Oh, amputation?

29 RM: Yes; cut the radial nerve and I bled like a stuck pig. It took them three compressed
30 bandages and two tourniquets to stop the bleeding and when I went walking back into the unit, I
31 didn't feel any pain, and I was holding my arm up with my M-16, I was pushing it up in the air to

1 stop the bleeding by holding your arm up, so I'm using my M-16 to hold my hand up and half of
2 my body is red and the other half is camouflage, so I looked like a Christmas tree. That was my
3 last day in combat.

4 Wife: Just before he went out into that little ravine he took his last photograph with his
5 camera and it happened to be of the entrance to a bunker complex. It was a hole.

6 RM: A spider hole.

7 Wife: A little tunnel entrance, and he kept saying for years and years, 'Doggone, if I
8 hadn't shot my last shot for that stupid tunnel entrance, he could have taken a picture of me red
9 and green.'

10 RM: I gave somebody my camera and told him to take a picture of me and there was no
11 more film. But I just looked really drastic.

12 SM: We talked about their injuries. Were you ever injured, Mr. Johnson?

13 QJ: Talk about what now?

14 SM: Were you ever injured?

15 QJ: No. Fortunately I never got injured.

16 SC: ...put a shield around you.

17 QJ: Yeah, he did, he really did. I wore a Buddha hat just like that one right there, just
18 like Poncho Villa, I had this part turned up and...I had this part turned up back here and I had a
19 white cross.

20 SC: Protection.

21 QJ: Everybody told me a white cross will get you a bullet between my eyes and I told
22 them if it was God's will I'll get one between the eyes, but I'm not taking the cross off.
23 Mysteriously I packed that hat in my duffel bag and when I got back to Washington State that hat
24 disappeared. I never saw the hat no more and I wore that hat the whole time I was over there. I
25 have pictures of me and it's hanging off the back of my back on my head.

26 SC: Yeah, Quentin Eastwood here was never shot but he could go [makes a blowing
27 noise] down the end of his barrel a lot...

28 QJ: Hey, I was one of the baddest M-60s that ever went through there.

29 SC: Oh, I thought it was me!

30 QJ: Was it you?

31 SM: What about your second injury Mr. Carper?

1 SC: We went to get a Ranger team that no one else could get out and I knew we were in
2 the area and we were trying to drop ropes to them because we couldn't hover down any closer
3 and North Vietnamese Army regulars were keeping three of the five alive so we would keep
4 making attempts to get them out but that was when Captain Yearwood received injuries to his
5 face, couldn't see. I got shot, did bone damage that time but it was no reason to say ouch. All
6 you could really think of is to keep your trigger finger pulled back, have your 60 singing, and
7 when the helicopter did three 360s I felt confident that the perimeter was getting sprayed
8 sufficiently and it would secure the Rangers on the ground except for we started going down
9 towards them, so Captain Yearwood saved the day. The co-pilot had frozen. He came out
10 without a scratch. He did not respond when Captain Yearwood was yelling at him to take the
11 controls, but Yearwood could see. It's like a windless blanket of horizon between the jungle and
12 the sky and he took the controls and flew us all the way back to Phu Bai. That was my last flight
13 and I really respect that man a lot.

14 QJ: Yearwood I respect. He's a good guy.

15 SC: Yes, definitely, and when I woke up I saw two of the Rangers that we were trying to
16 rescue that were #2 and #3 beds over and I ask them how in the hell they got out of there, and a
17 LOH had swooped in there after we left and came out of nowhere, came in so fast, picked them
18 up and they were gone. Had them back to safety. So I was so happy to see those two Rangers, at
19 least two out of the five had made it. If it was an officer that was with them I wouldn't see him
20 anyway because even in the hospital they didn't put the officers with the enlisted personnel.
21 Now and then you would have an enemy soldier that was wounded but then you would just
22 torture him with your mind if you could by making gestures like cutting his throat and it would
23 make him a nervous wreck, but he could have shot my partner so if I could, at all possible, I
24 would have loved to have killed him but I would have been court marshaled for it because they
25 wanted to question him and get him well, question him. I just thought of something in the 1st Air
26 Cav that I could add a little bit. When the South Vietnamese Army would take prisoners up and
27 question them they would take them up in pairs and would push the first one out to make a point
28 with the second one that he better start singing and it didn't bother me at all to have them pushed
29 out. It was all part of the war. It was against the Geneva Convention, but a lot of the things they
30 did to our men it would be like the Japanese in World War II. They would skin them alive.

1 QJ: It was against the Geneva Convention to dismember a human being but they did it
2 anyway.

3 SC: Right, and they would leave them hanging from a tree.

4 RM: With their penis in their mouth. That kind of shit kind of pisses you off and then
5 you just retaliate with full force.

6 QJ: And then they get bamboo and they cut up spikes and you step on it and it's poison.
7 If you laid on bamboo, it's really poisonous. If you step on it and it punctures you, you're going
8 to die.

9 RM: They'd put the brown stuff on it, man.

10 Wife: They'd fire harden the bamboo and then put the brown stuff on it. The sickest one
11 in the group.

12 SC: So they didn't live by the Geneva Convention, or they didn't fight.

13 QJ: They didn't fight no fair fight.

14 SM: You mentioned that happened in 1st Cav. It didn't happen much in B Troop?

15 SC: No.

16 SM: Good.

17 SC: No, no. Not at all. If there was a scout that was Vietnamese he would be on our side
18 and I would never push him out.

19 QJ: Yeah, a scout. One of those guys we didn't kill, I can't think of his name.

20 SC: Was he Vietnamese?

21 QJ: Yep, Vietnamese. I'm trying to think of his name. Yeah, I cut his hair.

22 Wife: That was the one that went down with Roman. They both picked up different
23 pieces of the same hand grenade.

24 QJ: We had two of them. One was an interpreter and one of them was a scout.

25 SC: Right, yeah.

26 QJ: So I had two devil scouts. One of them was a pretty good guy. One of them, he was
27 a damn NVA. You could tell he was scared and they bring him back to Georgia I think and they
28 trained him because they know the terrain features. Chieu Hoi mean they surrendered on our
29 side and want to go back and be willing to lead us through the terrain and this one kid, Sergeant
30 Ard was out there on this operation, and this guy was going to shoot me. I knew he was going to
31 shoot me. He wouldn't participate, either. He'd be first, he'd be second. I want to walk point,

1 and by this time you was gone. You probably still there, but you didn't see this because you was
2 flying the helicopter. We chopped through this thicket and when we'd get to a bunk cable we'd
3 go get the bunk cable, but you don't be running. You taking your time moving along because
4 you like, 'Well I'm doing something,' and we got to an old little thing and we cut through that so
5 I handed him the machete and I said, 'Hey, your time to chop chop.' He couldn't talk English
6 either, and he said, 'No, no, me no chop.' I said, 'Okay, that's cool. I chop through this and next
7 time we can trade off. Next time we get to a thicket it's going to be your turn to chop,' so
8 Sergeant Ard done whooped him self in the back for some reason or another. So he gets up there
9 and I said, 'Hey buddy, your time to chop chop.' He said, 'Me no chop.' I said, 'Oh yeah,
10 you're going to chop through here.' I said, 'You're not going along just for the ride.' Them are
11 the words I said, and you could tell, I couldn't understand the words but he went to mumbling
12 something but his eyebrows kind of went like that and he...he wasn't allowed to carry around the
13 machete. We were allowed to carry a round in the chamber and on lock and load, but you got to
14 be safe with it because you don't want to kill your fellow men but this guy, he locked and loaded
15 around with it in his chamber and Sergeant Ard got up there. I think he got there on time
16 because I was going to shoot this guy. I wasn't going to let him turn around and aim that gun at
17 me. I was going to shoot this guy and he took the gun from me and put it in the back and I told
18 him to keep him away from me because I looked at his looks. People's eyes will tell you things,
19 now, and I looked in his eyes. When he locked that round in there...

20 SC: He was serious.

21 QJ: Yeah, he wasn't going to chop either, man.

22 SM: Were there any incidents of fratricide, or your men being killed by each other?

23 QJ: This guy, he was a...this guy supposed to be your friend and your buddy and you
24 don't sleep or all that but you're in this war together and he's supposed to be leading you through
25 this terrain and I could tell this guy, he didn't want to be there. He was an NVA that probably
26 Chieu Hoi'ed to save his life and he went through all this American training and sent back over
27 there and he still was a Chieu Hoi. He wasn't a Chieu Hoi in my opinion. He would have run.
28 If he could have got back, he would have left us. If he could have killed us and got away, he
29 would have did that, too.

30 SM: Well, I mean that and friendly fire incidents where, you know, like the helicopter
31 that spun around and shot that rocket in the trees above you? Were there ever any incidents

1 where you came into contact with other American units or even elements within your own unit
2 and you started firing amongst each other by mistake?

3 QJ: No. The only time we did that was that time I told you we shot our own man up,
4 that...

5 SM: Yeah, that one guy out in the perimeter.

6 QJ: Other than that we never ran into contact with any of our other mens.

7 SC: I have an interesting aspect of it, and I thought that I did see and two Rangers
8 confirmed it that leading that element was one tall blonde haired American white and two
9 Chinese that were leading the NVA and I knew I saw an American down there that wasn't with
10 the Rangers and I thought, 'No,' because it all happened so fast but he confirmed it in the
11 hospital that there was one blonde haired white American and two Chinese, tall Chinese, well
12 Chinese were tall as opposed to Vietnamese anyway, and they were leading the element, and all
13 that did was want me to kill...but I never got an opportunity to after that. I was just in the
14 hospital.

15 SM: Is it possible that he was Russian, the white guy?

16 QJ: Well what we were thinking, I don't think there's any Russian's blonde, true blonde.

17 SC: Well, if the Rangers would say that he was American, they knew he was American.
18 They weren't just spreading a rumor. They had confirmed that probably even before the Rangers
19 were discovered. They probably knew he was American and they could give a description of
20 him, and he did have a bounty on his head, too.

21 SM: I imagine he might have got captured and to save your life he had to do what he had
22 to do and then later on he could have turned to their side. You don't ever know. People do that.
23 You don't know what you might do on a mental stress.

24 SM: Why don't we get to some of the post-Vietnam experiences you had. I guess we
25 should probably do this one by one. Mr. Martinez, how did the Vietnam affect you most? How
26 was it important in your life?

27 RM: I buried the war for almost 20 years. Going to the Wall back in '89, the first time I
28 went back here, and I was trying to remember somebody who was my brother who really
29 touched me and I couldn't remember his name. All I could remember is Jungle George. He was
30 from Georgia, and a lady at the Wall looked through the computer and date of casualty, rank, and

1 all this kind of stuff until I narrowed the names down from like 200 names to like 35 and this
2 name kept jumping out at me, George Wall.

3 Wife: How was George significant?

4 RM: Because George was a guy I befriended over there and he was a recent, his wife
5 was pregnant and he was getting ready to go home. He was supposed to go home before I was. I
6 extended in country. I got wounded two days later, and George was killed and my survivor guilt
7 went up because I felt like if I hadn't got wounded he wouldn't have had to go to the field that
8 day and he would have been able to go home and see his little girl and it probably would have
9 been me, so I thank God for just taking my arm instead of my life. I didn't realize the survivor's
10 guilt was so prevalent until then. It took a couple of more years before I got into therapy by the
11 urgance of my wife. Found out that the war had done some real deep seeded psychological
12 imbalances in me. I had a master's degree in social work and I had no idea how posttraumatic
13 stress had worked on me. Luckily my second wife got me into therapy and come to find out that
14 all the weird behavior that I had participated in was triggered by Vietnam memories. The toasted
15 buddies related to barbecuing at home and the survivor's instinct on how to kill rather than be
16 killed was very deep seeded and unfortunately anybody who was perceived by my psyche as the
17 enemy could die, be it wife, neighbor, brother. The enemy must be destroyed, so it took a while
18 for me to get over that. I was very much of a peace loving person but if the pin was pulled, bad
19 things would happen. So luckily now, better living through chemistry, VA, and its new
20 medications has helped me to get a handle on my violence and I was trained to kill at a very
21 young age and it was good to be trained like that in war, but unfortunately without an off switch
22 it's really hard to go back to...

23 QJ: Normal living?

24 RM: Yep.

25 SM: Were you proud of your service in Vietnam?

26 RM: Not until recently. I guess it was mid '80s. My Purple Heart wasn't even on my
27 discharge so I got my upgrade and come to find out that I got air medals, bronze stars, Purple
28 Heart, and I knew I was into all kinds of funny stuff while I was out there and I had this old [?]
29 syndrome ready to jump on a hand grenade at a moment's notice or blow up without a hand
30 grenade, so it's really good to be alive and see my brothers still here with me. It's almost 30
31 years that we're here older and wiser and tamer.

1 SM: Mr. Carper, how about you?

2 SC: I didn't have a drinking problem until I came home from Vietnam. I held a lot
3 inside. I did a lot of traveling, hitchhiking, drinking heavy. I would stay indoors, not answer the
4 phone, not answer the door if someone knocked. I wanted to be left alone. I found it better that
5 way, I thought. I didn't realize that socially that I was impaired and I was in a, I was like a turtle
6 going in its shell trying to protect itself and I tried to go to college. I couldn't concentrate. Not
7 until '93, '94 was I able to go to college and get anything out of it and actually enjoy it because it
8 was no longer something that I needed to support my family, it was a hobby. I'm married to the
9 same wife that I had from the beginning and I have four children, four grandchildren. Last year
10 my granddaughter, who's the oldest of the grandchildren, wrote a term paper. She knows that
11 grandpa went through a lot and sometimes needs it quiet. I know that she wrote something
12 about...I can't even talk.

13 QJ: Well you want to know how it affected me?

14 SM: Uh huh.

15 QJ: It kind of affected me. I'm the type of person, I think I'm in control all the time. I
16 go through all this stuff, all the stuff I see, it kind of bothered me. When Sergeant Wall got
17 killed, I was on R&R when he got killed. He was a real nice guy, we was real close and when I
18 got back I discovered that he had got killed. That bothered me for a while. I guess it made me
19 stronger. He was a little older than I were in the company. That makes me what they called an
20 old timer and these new kids, they looking up to me so I start walking point. We had quite a bit
21 of trouble like that but the real trouble was when I got back home. I drank a little more alcohol, I
22 drank last month. I probably drank everyday if I could have got my hands on it, not knowing
23 that I had that problem. I got back home I got my old job back and I married my girlfriend and I
24 still continue to drink. It's a party time I thought, but it wasn't partying time I don't guess. I
25 think I'm just drinking trying not to have this stuff in front of me and thinking it's all behind me
26 but it was really just beginning. I ran along in, I wrecked cars, I fought them, I go to court and I
27 pull my own defense counselor, I win the case but then I got a white headed judge. These guys
28 jumped on me one time. You know, I was the type of guy, I didn't like violence. This guy
29 jumped on me for another guy so I kind of beat him up but about six or seven jumped on me and
30 I kind of cut up two of them. They triggered that back out of me and like I tell a lot of them,
31 there's two of them and the other one you don't want to call him up because if you call him up

1 you going to answer to him, and that's what happened. They called him up and I did some
2 damage to those guys. Well I had to go to court for it and the judge told me, said, 'You got a
3 pretty wife, you don't need to be out there. You need to stay at home and work,' which I know I
4 got a pretty wife, I'm thinking, and I'm going to be at home with her but I just want to go out to
5 a club with friends and take a couple drinks. I'm not going trouble...but then that kind of gave
6 me a rude awakening. I start looking back at myself. It's hard for one to see themselves, so I
7 started looking at myself. I said I won't get out and go to school, I hadn't done any of that. So
8 the year's '74, I start preparing to try and get into some schooling. '75 I enrolled in ACC in my
9 home in North Carolina for three years of transportation maintenance and then two years later I
10 took another year of industrial maintenance and mechanical technology, which I started getting a
11 little better. During that time me and my wife got separated and that's another thing kind of
12 jiggled me because my behavior was nothing less than the results of what left me in Vietnam.
13 You know, I left and like I say you're a trained killer and this stuff just don't leave you and all
14 the stuff you seen just don't leave you. It just brings the violence out of you and if you jogged
15 that memory and just hit that one key it just turns you on and I think that's the bad part about
16 coming back into the world because you got to adjust to everything and people want to ask you,
17 'Did you kill anybody? How many did you kill?' I mean, you want to talk about it and try to get
18 it off, but hey, I know how they got killed. I know I was shooting a pow-pow or automatic and
19 we picked up dead bodies, so to yourself you be saying real loud, 'How many did you kill?' But
20 you ain't going to come back here and brag about it. It wasn't nothing to brag about but it was
21 something that you need to talk about it because you find yourself not talking about it because
22 they ain't been over there. See what I'm saying? The only someone that you can relate to is
23 another Vietnam vet and you didn't run across them that much. It was probably isolated like all
24 the rest of us. If you want inside your home while your country's outside doing devil's business,
25 the old folks call it, and that's about the worst part of the experience I got out of the Vietnam
26 War. They tie you up for years at home, and I got a good wife. She put up with that for a long
27 time. A lot of times she'd get up, I'd wake up in the morning and she'd be on the sofa and I
28 would be wondering, 'Why you on the sofa?' She would say I fought in my sleep. I never
29 realized, I never remember it.

30 SM: Are you proud of your service?

31 QJ: Huh?

1 SM: Were you proud of your service in Vietnam?

2 QJ: Oh yeah, oh yeah. No doubt about that. It learned me that we have power. We
3 never been a weak nation. No doubt in my mind we could have won that war in one week from
4 what I seen about that arc light dropped on that mountainside that day. We could have dropped
5 that on North anytime and maybe they didn't want to kill innocents, you know, because we were
6 always sentimental and that's what they played on, I interpreted, that when it comes to kids and
7 women we was...and innocents, we was always sentimental. A lot of us got killed because of
8 that.

9 SM: How about you, Mr. Carper, were you proud of your service?

10 SC: Oh, I just stood with the family colors. I was just another generation. My brother
11 and I both continued on the name and the...as far as volunteering and doing our job for our
12 country, we did that and I didn't even think about it until somebody said, 'It seemed like you did
13 more than you were supposed to.' I mean, what is more? I don't understand that. That's just
14 like what is normal? I don't know. It all depends on the individual's outlook but I was really
15 happy with the job I had. I had a job to do, I did it to the best of my ability and it came to where
16 the pilots knew that when they came out to fly my helicopter they didn't even have to pull a pre
17 flight because they knew that the helicopter was not going to fall out of the air because of a
18 mistake I made. I mean, I'm human, I do make mistakes but as far as the helicopter being
19 flyable there was nothing wrong with it because I would go over it with a fine toothed comb or
20 we would not be in the air. I think we talked earlier about when we were in situations where it's
21 not the best and let's say we were injured or whatever, as long as you remained calm you can
22 still do your job to the best of your ability and I'd never really thought of being proud of what I
23 did but I guess with the 1st Cav and the 2nd 17th Cav, 101st, if you look back I guess my relatives
24 would be proud of what I did and what my brother Chuck did. It's hard for me to think of being
25 proud of what I did. I'm thankful that I'm here and still alive and without God protecting me I
26 wouldn't be here right now and there's a reason for us being together right now. There's a
27 reason for us sitting here talking about this that for years upon years we couldn't share with
28 anybody.

29 SM: Maybe I should ask you in a different way. Are you proud of what we did in
30 Vietnam, the United States, and what we were fighting for?

1 SC: Yes, but we, I could say I, I'll say I because I'm speaking for myself and not
2 everyone else. We did have to fight with one hand behind my back at times in the 1st Cav but
3 thanks to men like Captain Yearwood, instead of getting permission to fire if we were fired upon
4 you returned fire. He'll accept the responsibilities of...let's say if anything negative happened,
5 but flying usually in the area that we had and into areas that we flew into, there were no villages
6 or civilians so we didn't have to worry about that like we did down south in the III Corps. To get
7 fired at and to try to request permission to return fire seems stupid to me.

8 QJ: ...calling for permission to fire back, somebody's going to kill you.

9 SC: I know one night I can, I don't know why this just came to my mind but there was a
10 helicopter that was flying at night with no navigation lights and we discovered that it was a
11 Russian made helicopter. The Cobras were trying to get permission to fire on it and I had my M-
12 60 aimed at it and there was a moonlight out but what was crossing my mind is this is a Medevac
13 helicopter taking wounded back in to get help so I didn't say anything to any of the rest of the
14 crew but in my mind I thought, 'Just let them go. They're already screwed up. They're not
15 going to be any harm to us. Let them go.'

16 QJ: Is that the time that the gun ship couldn't catch that...

17 SC: They flew across into Laos and we let them go. [Narrator says they were just south
18 of the Khe Sanh Air Strip].

19 RM: They had some pretty fast ships, though.

20 SC: Yeah. This Russian helicopter was really clicking probably 120 knots anyway with
21 no lights on and why shoot it down, even though the gun ship pilots really wanted to shoot it
22 down, just so they could put a different kind of mark on their Cobra? I was personally, myself, I
23 was glad to see that the helicopter did get away because there was no soldiers on board there that
24 could have been any harm to us, really, unless they were on the ground. It's possible.

25 SM: One last question. What should we, as a nation and as individuals, learn from the
26 Vietnam War?

27 RM: If you're going to get into it, get into it. Don't namby-pamby. A ten year long fuck
28 around was abomination. I thank God that our technology has allowed us to get through one
29 scrimmage without putting any grunts on the ground. That was sweet. The 100 hour war, that
30 was nice, and I pray that we never have anything that...when we came home to being spit on for
31 our duty to our country, that was one of the reasons I hid out because going back to area around

1 Berkeley, California, and being called baby killers and warmongers and stuff like that, we didn't
2 want to do it but we had a job to do and if we didn't do it to the best of our ability we would be
3 dead. I feel that we have done our duty above and above the call of duty and you're real modest
4 but there's a term for it, it's super arrogant. Doing above and beyond the call of duty, and we
5 had to be that proficient to live and to keep our brothers alive and we fought for that.

6 SC: That was important. That was the most important job I've ever had in my life.
7 Period.

8 SM: Do you both feel the same, Mr. Carper, lessons that we should learn from the
9 Vietnam War, any others?

10 SC: I'm sorry, you caught me off balance here and my brain is about to shut down like a
11 computer.

12 SM: How about you Mr. Johnson?

13 QJ: What was most important?

14 SM: What should we as individuals and what should we as a nation learn from the
15 Vietnam War experience?

16 QJ: We should learn, like Martinez said, we shouldn't have a long-term war because I
17 don't think it's sensitive to put human lives out there. If it's a war, if you can't negotiate and
18 come to terms, peace terms, if you're going to go to war, go to war. I mean, and it's bad looking
19 at it that way but why feed people's lives over a period of years when you could end this in two
20 or three weeks? Because I take for instance Saddam Hussein. The man halfway crazy. You
21 know, the Bible says the smaller nations supposed to arise up in the East and they supposed to
22 rule the world, and he going to designate his self as this smaller nation and this is most likely
23 what he's all about because he got oil and he knows the world is supplied off this oil, the demand
24 is after this oil, and it's plentiful to him. Too plentiful because he want to talk all this noise and
25 then we fire upon him and he turn around and smack Israel. You know, if I talk junk to and you
26 turn and smack around..., I mean what is that? And I looked at this man and then in the end
27 after they country's booming and all, he likes all these oil wells. Man, they said the skies were
28 black for months. The seashore, man, I mean oil slick. I mean, just all on the beaches. If you,
29 and this world is pretty rich, it's just real wealth on this world and this man is part of this wealth,
30 why would he do that? I mean, for what reason, I mean, psychologically you could buy anything
31 in this world that you want to with money. He got the oil wells, why not just go ahead on and be

1 peaceful and sell all this oil and it be a rich country if that's what he want? Why would you want
2 to rule the world, anyway? To my knowledge, to my recollection, I would say people like that is
3 kind of like sick, you know. They don't need to be in control of anything, just like Hitler. He
4 didn't have no remorse for human beings because he just killed and threw them inside ditches.
5 Why would you want to olive branch something like that? So I look at the Vietnam War and all
6 the stuff going on, we should learn, and I hope we did, that we should never go beyond that
7 boundary again because human beings is a fragile, beautiful things in life. We're human beings,
8 and I don't think nobody should be abused and I don't think nobody should be fearful of this or
9 that, but you got crazy people in this world and then like nuclear gas. If this stuff escape out it's
10 going to travel the face of the earth. I mean, we can be all protective and secured... All the
11 countries are buying up this stuff and I think this is getting real serious. It's escaping out. It
12 attacks the respiratory system. It do you like flu like symptoms. I mean, these guys exposed to
13 this heavy radiation, this plutonium and stuff, these guys probably going to die. You see what
14 I'm saying? They going to die pretty quick. But this stuff is going to travel the earth. It's going
15 to travel the face of the earth. It's going to come over here. There's probably some already.
16 They talk about a new virus out, a new flu bug out, what do you think it is? Nerve gas. It's a
17 flu-like symptom and that's all this stuff that's in the air that people's getting. It done hit me
18 twice, because I used to catch the flu and I knew the difference between the flu and this stuff and
19 this stuff got flu-like symptoms but it's not doing me like flu. I mean, it's totally different than
20 what I ever had. So the nation, we done got in a bad fix really. The world, from people like
21 Siam and other people that want to have this power and they want to store up all of this nuclear
22 warheads for power. You shoot one over here, we going to shoot one back, and it's done got to
23 the point where man going to destroy mankind.

24 SC: Man's going to destroy the earth.

25 QJ: No, he won't destroy the earth; he ain't big enough for that. But, that gas can kill
26 everything up on it.

27 SC: Oh, I hear. I see the light at the end of the tunnel of what you just said, and what I
28 said. Man's going to destroy man.

29 QJ: Mankind. That's what he's going to do.

30 SM: Mr. Carper, have you thought of anything as far as what you think we should learn
31 from Vietnam?

1 SC: Just no matter what situation you're in always give it your best. I don't care what
2 my neighbor says. I personally, my wife said I should care. I'll say a prayer for them, but if they
3 want to gossip behind my back, that's fine with me. They're going to do that anyway, that's
4 true. But I would not sell my experience that I had with these gentlemen for any amount of
5 money in the world. Money doesn't mean happiness. Money pays bills, money will help the
6 country, but the true feelings I have inside here that Vietnam taught me was to care more about
7 these chosen few, and I try to instill this in my children and they just see that I did my best to
8 raise them. I want them all to go to college. I really want to thank my wife because she's been
9 a great support to me all these years. She's been like my nurse. I've had my own personal
10 nurse, and she can respond to my thinking even without me saying it. She responds and I
11 appreciate that. I really do, so Vietnam veteran, or just a veteran itself, I think we did learn a lot.
12 We did grow up a lot in a short period of time and if I had it to do over again, I'd do it again.

13 RM: I think I'd want to be a wimp!

14 SC: No, that's not in your personality! That's just like when I was in mechanics, I
15 wanted to fly.

16 RM: I used to hate wimps, I tell you, I used to hate wimps and now I find out that I hate
17 wimps because I really wanted to be a wimp.

18 SM: Mrs. Martinez, you want to add something?

19 Wife: It's real important to me that the nation as a whole takes away from the Vietnam
20 conflict the fact that it affected our entire nation and not everybody served. Let's face it, some
21 people got out of it. I think that it's the duty of every citizen to serve their country one way or
22 another. I served through the Red Cross. I was an Army brat so I was raised with it. I think that
23 true citizenship has to come with service in one way or another and there needs to be an
24 underlying respect and support of our veterans because of their sacrifices. Clinton is so ready to
25 take the budget of the veterans and throw up roads and other concerns that they've forgotten the
26 promise that they made when these men signed up. I think it's time to respect and honor the
27 sacrifices they've made and keep the promises as a nation. If you're going to have a war, let the
28 warriors fight it, support them. Don't be nitpicking behind their back and saying oh our budget
29 can't handle it because this is not what made this nation strong. It was the warriors that made
30 this nation strong. That's how we got the vote. That's how we secured the vote for 18 year olds
31 because these little young ones went out there and fought before they had the vote, even though

1 it wasn't fair, even though it wasn't right. They sought justice for their fellow Americans, and
2 that commands respect.

3 SM: Well I guess that should conclude our interview then. Thank you very much.