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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Gary Franklin
Conducted by Jonathan Bernstein
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Transcribed by Tammi Mikel Lyon

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

1 Jonathan Bernstein: This is Jonathon Bernstein conducting an oral history
2 interview with Mr. Gary Franklin. The date is November 1st, 2001 at approximately 3:20
3 p.m. We are in the Special Collections Library Interview Room. Mr. Franklin, can you
4 start off by giving us a brief biographical sketch of yourself?

5 Gary Franklin: Okay. Gary W. Franklin, I grew up in Hale Center, Texas. I
6 graduated from Hale Center High School and then I went to South Plains College for a
7 couple of years, went to Texas Tech here for about a year. Then I got drafted in
8 December '67 and went to Vietnam in June of '68 and made it the full year and came
9 home in June of '69. My parents farmed in Hale Center and my dad and mom both grew
10 up around Brownwood, Texas and then they moved to Hale Center in about 1953.

11 JB: Growing up, of course in the '50s, the sentiment of the nation at that time,
12 were you aware of the whole 'Red Menace'? Any thoughts about communism at that
13 time?

14 GF: Yeah, in the late '50s and late '60s when I was growing up in high school
15 and all, and of course that was the Cuban Missile thing that came up and the crisis down
16 there. The sentiment was that that was the main, major enemy of the United States was
17 that the communists were trying to take over the world, and I think there's a lot of truth to
18 that. They were trying to domino one little country after another until communism
19 dominated. I think they were a lot more fanatical about that than the United States was

1 about pushing capitalism. That kind of took care of itself if you just led by example, I
2 guess. That was the sentiment at the time, that the big nuclear threat from the Chinese
3 and the Russians and that communism had to be stopped.

4 JB: Let's skip ahead a little bit. When you were drafted; thoughts, impressions?

5 GF: Well I wasn't real excited about going, but I fully expected to be drafted. At
6 the time I was going to Texas Tech and a lot of people were graduating and as soon as
7 they graduated they were drafted just as soon as they were graduated. So, I decided after
8 about my third year in college that I would just drop out and get it behind me, and then
9 come back and finish my education after that.

10 JB: Once you of course were inducted, training, etcetera, how do you think
11 that...I guess describe training?

12 GF: Well I was inducted, and went straight to Fort Polk, Louisiana for basic
13 training. I got down there and got checked in and then was sent home for a week, they
14 closed the base for Christmas which I thought was kind of unusual. They could have just
15 waited two or three days later and saved a trip back and forth. But, that's the military.
16 They don't plan things like that. So I went back after Christmas and right back into basic
17 training and after basic training there, that lasted eight weeks, then everyone got some
18 kind of assignment for advanced training and it turned out that me and about three
19 quarters of the company were assigned to advanced infantry training, so we didn't really
20 go anywhere except they put us on a bus and sent us over to North Fort Polk which they
21 call Tigerland. There's a big gate there at Tigerland and a sign over it that said, 'Training
22 ground for the infantry soldier of Vietnam.' It was very true, and everybody told us, 'If
23 you're in Tigerland, your next destination is going to be Vietnam.'

24 JB: That's somewhat intimidating?

25 GF: Yeah, but it got your attention because training really was serious. You
26 wanted to learn all you could because like they said, you were fixing to be in combat and
27 it was going to be serious and anything you missed might get you killed. So the training
28 took a real serious turn there. It turned out that while I was there I was acting squad
29 leader there in one of the platoons, so I got picked to go to Fort Knox, Kentucky for three
30 weeks of advanced training in armored personnel carriers, the M113A1. So, I got a little
31 reprieve there. I got up there at Fort Knox and during that training they told us that

1 probably half would get to go to Germany and half would go to Vietnam. Well I got a
2 little excited about that because I would have much rather served in Germany than
3 Vietnam. It turned out that when I graduated, I was one of the half they headed for
4 Vietnam. So I got a 30-day leave and then was off to Vietnam. When I was there I also
5 had hopes that if I got sent to Vietnam that I would end up in a Cav unit and be in armor
6 and be in one of the personnel carriers and I wouldn't have to walk and carry a backpack.
7 That didn't turn out either. When I got to Vietnam I was sent up to Americal Division
8 and assigned to the 198th Light Infantry Brigade in the 1st of the 52nd Battalion in Charlie
9 Company to relieve or resupply the people. They lost a lot of people just before I got
10 there. They took Hill 434 and lost a bunch of people, so we were reinforcing the
11 company more or less. It's a light infantry company. The biggest equipment we had was
12 a $\frac{3}{4}$ ton truck, which stayed in the rear area, so I ended up carrying a backpack anyway.
13 After about three weeks out in the field, I was glad I didn't go in a track unit because we
14 worked with H Troop and F Troop and they just did not last. So, I was better off just
15 being a plain ground hounder.

16 JB: High attrition rates?

17 GF: Yeah, the track units. We had high enough and the track units were horrible.
18 I don't think they ever had anyone real experienced. Because of that reason we even
19 hated to work with them because they drew fire and they never seemed to be able to do
20 anything without us with them, and I think they had new people all the time. Track units
21 had a rough go in Vietnam, so I was glad I wasn't in armor or any of the track units. I
22 think the Air Cav would have been real good. They had a better attrition rate than we
23 did, but 1st Air Cav had so much firepower, they dealt it out more than took it.

24 JB: Now stepping back to training for a minute, had your instructors been to
25 Vietnam? Were you aware of that?

26 GF: The instructors in basic training hadn't. Once we got over to Tigerland and
27 North Fort Polk, most of those instructors were returnees from Vietnam and they were
28 real knowledgeable about what was going on. I understand that before they started using
29 those Vietnam returnees, the attrition rate of the losses of the early people over there once
30 they got to Vietnam was a lot higher. These guys, they really knew what was going on
31 and they were very knowledgeable and they trained us and taught us about a lot of things

1 that had been overlooked before because it was such an unusual type of war, guerilla war.
2 So a lot of our instructors in AIT were, and they were very good.

3 JB: So did they talk about counterinsurgency and stuff like that?

4 GF: Yeah. We had a lot of training on modified squad tactics and platoon tactics
5 and what would work because you got ambushed so much over there, and a lot of training
6 on things like booby traps and trip wires and detecting that and watching out for it. That
7 was a big thing. They had just started a new training which turned out to be beneficial
8 and it was quick fire with BB guns. We went out to little targets and they had small,
9 outlined targets set up that probably wasn't three or four inches large and they were about
10 six feet away and they gave you a little automatic BB gun and targets would pop up and
11 they would just quick fire. They taped a wooden stick over the sights of the BB gun so
12 you couldn't just aim; it was a point and shoot thing. We did a lot of practice like that
13 and that turned out to be one of the most beneficial things, too. That was really good
14 because in the ambushes in Vietnam, you most often didn't have time to aim the rifle. It
15 was just all quick fire. That was a big help.

16 JB: I'd never heard anything like that. That sounds interesting.

17 GF: Yeah, in early '68 they had modified the training tactics a lot in advanced
18 infantry training, especially at Fort Polk. I think some of the other forts where they had
19 advanced infantry, like Fort Bliss down in El Paso and in California and all, I think they
20 hadn't converted to it. Those people had to kind of learn as they went. That part of the
21 training was really good.

22 JB: As far as weapons training, you trained on the 16?

23 GF: Oh yeah. In basic training we trained on the M-14. Once we got over to
24 Advanced Infantry Training we trained on the M-16 and the M-60 machine gun and did
25 some training on the M-79 grenade launcher, and all the weapons we'd probably be using
26 over there. Then, we just had a day or so on the .50 caliber, but thank goodness at Fort
27 Knox on the armored personnel carriers, that was their main gun was a .50 caliber
28 machine gun so I got a lot of additional training up there. That helped in Vietnam
29 because every time we could we had .50 calibers out on the bunker line. The best unit of
30 course were the quad .50s.

31 JB: Halftrack mounted?

1 GF: They had some that were mounted in the back of a deuce and a half, two and
2 a half ton trucks. On several fire bases, on Professional and on LZ Buff, they had some
3 mounted basically to blow the bunker around them and they buried railroad ties vertical
4 in the hill and mounted the quad .50s on the railroad ties right at the side of the hill. They
5 made a pretty good target, but they could defend themselves pretty well, too. They were
6 stationary quad .50. I never did get to shoot one of those. They had specialized crews, I
7 guess. What they were was an old ball turret off of B-29s. I thought they were some
8 type of specialized deal and they looked like it, but they just took everything off of the
9 outside of the ball turret and they were electrically driven quad .50s and they were pulled
10 right out of B-29 bombers and utilized. They made a really effective weapon. I guess
11 that's the best World War II thing they ever had or did in World War II. They're still
12 using them today, I think.

13 JB: Yeah, .50 calibers pretty much are never getting phased out!

14 GF: Yeah, it's pretty hard to replace that old thing. It had the range and the
15 punch to do just about anything you wanted to do with it up to a small tank or something.
16 That thing hit hard.

17 JB: In the questionnaire you said you enjoyed the heavy weapons training. What
18 kind of heavy weapons?

19 GF: It was mostly .50 caliber. We got a little bit of class on a 90 recoilless rifle,
20 106 recoilless rifle. After I got to Vietnam we had an old sergeant that had joined up in
21 World War II. He was from Guam. We called him the Guamanian Gook. It was
22 Sergeant Seyama. He of course had been in the infantry since he was 16 years old in
23 1944 I think; it was the oldest man I ever saw in Vietnam that was tough enough to make
24 it in the field because of the heat and humidity, and it just wasn't a place for older people.
25 But he was so wiry it didn't bother him a bit. He gave us some additional training on the
26 90 millimeter recoilless, and really got us a good checkout on that. I guess that was about
27 the heaviest weapon we ever got to take to the field or use was a 90 recoilless. Against
28 bunkers with a HEAT round, which was an anti-tank round, it would really destroy a rock
29 bunker, and against personnel with a flechette round that we called a beehive, it had 900
30 tiny flechettes and it would really take care of personnel. It was really a lightweight

1 weapon. We didn't carry it but once or twice out in the field but we used it a lot on the
2 bunker line.

3 JB: Yeah, I was going to ask if it was a bit cumbersome for an infantryman?

4 GF: Yeah, one mission in the field we knew we weren't going to need our
5 mortars. We had a mortars platoon that carried an 81-millimeter mortar and we all
6 carried rounds for it. They carried the base plate and the tripod and the mortar tube and
7 usually two or three rounds, and we carried the rounds. Everybody carried one mortar
8 round nearly, so we had our own mortars out in the field. This one mission we knew we
9 weren't going to need mortars, so they took the 90 recoilless and it turned out to be
10 invaluable on that mission. The 90 recoilless was actually a lighter weapon and the
11 rounds were lighter than the mortars, but we rarely took it. We usually took that 81-
12 millimeter so we had our own little artillery out there. It was most effective for
13 illumination at night. They had about 45 minutes to get set up in the field to be really
14 accurate. So we had to stop so they could set up. We didn't do that very often. They
15 were pretty good at night defense and mostly for illumination if we had to have
16 illumination at night. That was kind of our heavy weapons and that was about the
17 heaviest we ever took.

18 JB: Now arriving in country, what was your first impression?

19 GF: The heat. They flew us from Fort Lewis, Washington to Yokota Air Force
20 Base in Japan. For fuel, we laid over there, and then on to Vietnam. I think it was a 17-
21 hour flight. We arrived into Cam Ranh Bay, and Cam Ranh Bay was like a peninsula
22 which was probably the safest place in Vietnam because it was about five miles of mine
23 field and open sand between Cam Ranh Bay and the mainland; nearly impossible to get
24 there except by boat with any kind of...that you could attack. But it was all sandy. We
25 got there about eight o'clock in the morning and my first thought was, 'This is killing
26 heat!' I looked over at one of the buildings there and you had the reflection off the white
27 sand, too, so that made it even worse, and the building was a wooden structure with a
28 metal roof and it had a thermometer underneath it and it was 139 in the shade and high
29 humidity. I thought, 'This is going to be terrible!' The heat was bad for about the first
30 month or so to get acclimated to the heat and humidity. It was bad, especially in June and
31 July, the hottest part of the year. It seems like we would lose, it seemed like someone

1 every mission, would fall out due to heat exhaustion or they would pass out and we had
2 to get them dusted off and usually by the time they got back to Chu Lai with the higher
3 altitude and the cooler air, they were okay.

4 JB: Ever happen to you?

5 GF: No, I got light headed a couple of times and had to sit down in the shade and
6 rest a little while about my first month, but I never did get dusted off from heat
7 exhaustion or heat stroke. But every once in a while the division would lose somebody
8 due to heat stroke every once in a while. It was just too hot for carrying a backpack and
9 not being used to it in that 120 degree heat in that 100% humidity. Because of that they
10 had started something new about four or five months before I got there and they flew us
11 from Cam Ranh Bay up to Chu Lai and Chu Lai they had established a reception center,
12 and it was right on the South China Sea on the southeast corner of the perimeter of Chu
13 Lai and everyone coming in the country there that was going to the Americal Division
14 spent a week there at the little reception center. They had some people that were veterans
15 from the field and they kind of went over a review of your training a little bit about booby
16 traps and the local people, and it gave you a week to get used to the heat and humidity.
17 They had found out it did work because they were losing less people due to the heat
18 exhaustion and all out in the field after they started that. They gave people a little bit of a
19 chance to get used to it. I think it really hit people really hard if they went over there in
20 the summer, or probably worst in the winter, from the northern part of the United States.
21 Those guys came over there from a situation where it was 30 or 40 degree high in the day
22 to over there when it was 110, and it was too much to adjust. That was a good program,
23 too. I don't think all the country had that. I think only Americal Division had set that up.

24 JB: Late in the war, 101st had something as well. But, those are the only two
25 programs that I'd heard of. So when you arrived in country, did you know you were
26 going Americal right away?

27 GF: No, we had no idea where we were going. They made a decision at Cam
28 Ranh Bay and they sent about 20 of us to the Americal I guess, and it was basically who
29 had the heaviest losses got the new people. That's why I ended up at Charlie Company in
30 the 198th Light Infantry Brigade because they had just taken that hill and Alpha Company
31 and Charlie Company had pretty heavy losses about three weeks before I got there. So,

1 we were kind of replacements for their losses. One of the guys I came in with was Bruce
2 Fint, the one I talked about that got hurt. Two months after I got there he got hurt on
3 Bunker 13 there with me and he came home. I think of the three I think I went out with
4 Charlie Company that all came in country at the same time, Bruce lasted two months and
5 got hurt, and the other guy I think lasted two months and got killed. I was the only one
6 that lasted the full year and came home. There were about 30 of us that headed up to
7 Americal Division that were with me. It turned out to be I guess a good place to be if you
8 were going to be in the infantry. In the infantry and the field, it was a pretty good place
9 to be.

10 JB: Let's see, so when you arrived you were just a rifleman?

11 GF: Yeah.

12 JB: How soon afterward were you chosen to be an RTO?

13 GF: Oh, I became Tim's RTO, the guy I told you about down in Michigan? He
14 had decided I'd carry a radio after I got hurt on Buff so I'd been there about two months,
15 and I was a rifleman and point man before that. Of course riflemen were usually point
16 men. I was a rifleman there for about two months and then after I got hit in the shoulder
17 and the hip, why I spent about a week and a half at 91st evac and they sent me out to the
18 field, and Tim decided then that I'd probably do better while I recuperated as an RTO. I
19 found out later that part of that too was that he and Ordway thought that was the best way
20 they could train me to be squad leader, to know what was really going on all the time. So
21 I carried a radio for Tim there for about two months I guess. They were kind of plotting
22 against me I think.

23 JB: I'm getting a little ahead of myself here I guess. What was it like walking
24 point?

25 GF: Well at first it was really scary but after a while you got used to everything.
26 Somebody said one time that the loneliest thing in the world was a point man in Vietnam,
27 because everyone tried to stay about ten to 15 meters apart, just for sniper reasons and
28 booby traps. As a point man, they wanted you out there about 50 to 75 meters. It's kind
29 of a lonely feeling out there, but after being there for a while I realized that the point man
30 wasn't usually the one getting ambushed. It was the center of the element and they were
31 pretty smart. They let the point man go by and then when they'd bust an ambush, they'd

1 bust it on the guys behind you because that a way, especially if they could hit the guy
2 next to the radio, then they'd try to get the squad leader and the RTO and then everybody
3 was in a mess. It was dangerous from the point that if you walk straight into an ambush,
4 and they had no choice, they wouldn't let you go through. But if you were walking by,
5 they often let you by. That happened to me once, too. I think a modification I would
6 have about being lonely; it was the loneliest thing in the world was being the point man
7 in Vietnam at night. Daytime wasn't near as spooky as at night. At night you'd often
8 lose visibility of the other guys. We tried not to do that but that sometime would start to
9 really worry you if you couldn't see the guys behind you or you lose sight of somebody
10 for a while. I got really good at scanning and detecting trip wires and stuff like that and I
11 really had to look after that.

12 JB: Did you encounter a lot of booby traps?

13 GF: Yeah, we found a lot of them or ran across a lot of them. That's where we
14 lost probably most of our casualties, mines and booby traps. They were real sneaky
15 about it I guess you would say, they were real slick as to ways to set up mines and booby
16 traps. When I got over there they had taught us about punji pits and they had these little
17 ankle crushers, the little box that would turn in on your ankles and we found one of those,
18 but the wood was starting to get kind of rotten. What they would do, they just built a
19 wooden box, mostly out of teakwood, but they would put two planks in it and the planks
20 would have nails driven from the back side, usually double wood so that the nails
21 couldn't push back out. They'd drive the nails in one piece of wood, nail another piece
22 of wood behind it to hold the nails, and then would put it on big nail hinges. You'd step
23 in the center and your own weight would turn it in and your own weight would also drive
24 the nails right through your ankle and they called it ankle crushers. We found one or two
25 of those but they had gotten pretty rotten. We found a few of the punji pits you would
26 step in. By the time I got there in the middle of '68, they had discovered explosives and
27 they didn't mess too much with the bamboo punji pits and that sort of stuff because they
28 were...well, the Russians were giving them a bunch of Bouncing Betties I guess and anti-
29 tank mines. They had a lot of that to play with. We were giving them a lot of dud
30 artillery and bombs. I think they had an almost unlimited cache of explosives to mess
31 with and they didn't build too many punji pits and stuff anymore. They just didn't mess

1 with it. Well one thing we ran into a lot there south of Chu Lai, we were working the
2 areas around Pink Ville area where Calley got in trouble. We worked that area a lot when
3 I first got there and there were a lot of villagers, a lot of Viet Cong, and a lot of that area
4 the French had mined it and there were little French mine fields everywhere and the
5 French didn't record anything. They didn't have any records. So, we found them the
6 hard way. We found a lot of them at night. We'd be in the middle of a French mine field
7 and somebody'd get a foot blown off and we wouldn't know how to get out. We
8 wouldn't know which way was out. It was usually just blind luck. We slowly were
9 getting all those minefields recorded just from people having feet and legs blown off.
10 But, a lot of that, it wasn't the Viet Cong. It was the French. I guess they thought they
11 would defend an area and they just mined it and they didn't even make records of it.
12 They were getting fairly sophisticated with their mines and stuff, and their booby traps.
13 We had several times other squads, we didn't ever have it happen, but they would have a
14 small mine or booby trap that would blow half of somebody's foot off or something and
15 then there would be a delayed fuse for a minute later and they might have a 105 Howitzer
16 round or even a 250 or 500 pound bomb buried and so they knew as soon as somebody
17 got half a foot blown off all their buddies was going to rush up there to help them, and
18 about a minute later the big one would go off and take everybody. That happened a few
19 times to other sister platoons and stuff. That was something we always worried about. In
20 fact, we got to where if somebody would step on a booby trap, we'd wait a minute or so.
21 We figured they probably wouldn't bleed to death anyway within a minute or two, so
22 we'd wait.

23 JB: Survivability! That makes sense.

24 GF: Well you didn't help them if you get blown away with them. Luckily it
25 never happened to our squad or our platoon, but it happened quite a bit. Just before I left
26 they lost about five people at Chu Lai because they'd bought these cigarette lighters at
27 the PX and they were Zippos and they were sold to people out there at the PX. Well, the
28 little village named Anton, and some of it came from Bin Sanh too, they would engrave
29 them with your unit emblem, Americal or you could buy one with the 198th emblem, but
30 they would engrave these real pretty Zippo lighters and I think they were about five
31 bucks a lighter, about 3.50 just the plain lighter and about five bucks for the engraved

1 one. Well they had three people got killed there in Chu Lai and it turned out they were
2 having the charges go off in their pocket, either their shirt pocket or their pants pocket,
3 and it would either kill them by stopping their heart or blew the femoral artery out from
4 their pants pocket. They figured out what was going on when one of the Air Force pilots
5 bought one of those lighters and the first thing he did was lit a cigarette with it and set it
6 on a shelf back at his hooch, the first time he ever used it. He turned around, he's
7 smoking a cigarette and the thing blew up up on that shelf and he just got a little shrapnel
8 in the head, and that's when they figured out it was the cigarette lighters. They went
9 back over to the PX and pulled them all off the shelf and about three quarters of them had
10 the cotton in there where you put the Ronsonol fluid, the cotton had some C4 in it. They
11 had pulled about half the cotton out and packed it with C4 and had a little detonator
12 underneath the fuse. So when you struck it, it lit the fuse, and about five seconds later it
13 burned down to a little detonator and detonated that C4. Of course they went hunting for
14 the guy that engraved the lighters, and he was long gone. They were real sneaky. I think
15 one of the nastiest tricks, almost totally impossible to detect, there at Chu Lai, there were
16 I think 6,000 Vietnamese that worked there, big base, and they cleaned hooches for the
17 officers and filled sandbags and did whatever they could be hired to do, and military
18 trucks had a big three and a half inch gas cap, and they would pick up one of our
19 grenades, because at the mess halls or whatever there was always ammunition belts or
20 stuff laying around with grenades attached to them, and some south Vietnamese would
21 pick up a grenade and put a rubber band around the spoon, pull the pin, and drop it in the
22 gas tank, and put the cap back on. It would take about a day and a half for the gasoline to
23 eat the rubber band up, and then they had not only the grenade, but in the jeeps the gas
24 tank's right underneath the seat and it would usually have a half a tank or a full tank of
25 gasoline. That thing would go up and it would blow the jeep nearly in half. That was
26 something the guys back at Chu Lai had to worry about. I don't know how you could
27 have kept them out of it; I guess put locking gas caps all around. Then they'd have
28 thought of something else.

29 JB: Were you primarily operating out of Chu Lai or at a forward base?

30 GF: I guess we never really worked out of Chu Lai. When I first got there there
31 was a brigade firebase about three or four miles south of Chu Lai called Gator and we

1 worked out of Gator there. It was kind of a large firebase and we had really a tent for the
2 whole squad and we just operated day patrols and ambushes out of there. That lasted
3 about a week. Then we moved from there to a fire base, LZ Dottie and LZ Buff and we
4 worked out of there. We were either on bunker duty, and they had artillery or mortars,
5 and Dottie was another artillery base too. It was a very low hill. They could drive trucks
6 down there off Highway 1 and then turn right off of Highway 1 off of Dottie and
7 resupply right up to the two and a half ton trucks, deuce and a quarters. So they didn't
8 have to fly everything into Dottie. I guess the whole rest of the year we worked off the
9 artillery firebases, off the LZs. We spent a little time on nearly every one of them around
10 there I guess. We stayed there south of Chu Lai, which is primarily a lot of villages and a
11 lot of Viet Cong until 17 of September, so we were there about three months after I got
12 there. Then we went back what we called north. We went up there on an operation
13 called Burlington Trail and we were to reopen the road between Tam Ky and Tien Phuc
14 Special Forces Base. It was an old French Special Forces about six or eight miles west of
15 Tam Ky manned by I think they had ten or 15 Green Berets and they were training
16 advisors to what they called CIDG, Montagnard unit. They were some good fighters.
17 They were the only really good fighters I ever saw of south Vietnamese. The standard
18 ARVNs weren't worth a dime, but those Montagnard's were a pretty tough unit. They
19 had good habits because they had American advisors and I don't think they had anybody
20 over a south Vietnamese lieutenant. They didn't have any real officers except those
21 advisors and they were Green Berets and they were pretty good. Up there weren't many
22 villagers. It was nearly all what we call a free fire zone. They had been told a year
23 before to get out. The ones that stayed just stayed at their own risk. There were a few
24 hooches and villagers around there, but mostly up there just fighting the NVA. They
25 were determined not to let us reopen the road and we were determined to reopen it. We
26 stayed there until 9th of March, '69. We stayed there nearly seven months, yeah, about
27 seven months. We got in a big fight there in a brigade base camp and the whole battalion
28 pretty well got chewed up, so to rebuild again they pulled us out and moved us back
29 south of Chu Lai back where I started at, back around Buff and Dottie. I spent my last
30 three months down there. I spent my first three months there and my last three months
31 there and the other six months was up what we call up north, north of Chu Lai. We spent

1 pretty much the whole year out in the field working off firebases. I didn't understand
2 why at first; it made more and more sense as we went along. The two best companies in
3 a battalion were Alpha Company and Charlie Company. Bravo Company was kind of
4 okay and Delta Company never seemed to get their act together. So Delta Company
5 spent about three quarters of their time on the firebases and Alpha Company and Charlie
6 Company and usually Bravo, we spent about three quarters of our time out in the field.
7 So we would be out in the field about three weeks and then back on the fire base maybe
8 three or four days and then back out in the field for three weeks.

9 JB: How long would a standard operation last? How much food would you take
10 out in the field?

11 GF: We usually packed C-rations and food for about four days, which would be
12 12 meals, and sometimes we usually got resupplied with food and ammunition every
13 third or fourth day. One of the Minutemen helicopters would bring out mail and C-
14 rations and ammunition, whatever we needed, and they'd take personnel back and forth.
15 Sometimes we'd have somebody go on R&R or we'd get new guys come in the field and
16 they'd bring them out. The normal missions for us out in the field lasted two to three
17 weeks normally. It was real normal for Charlie Company to spend two or three weeks in
18 the field and two or three days on the firebase and another three weeks out in the field.

19 JB: Now when you're going into an AO, were you pretty much just [foot
20 slogging it] out there or were you heli-borne?

21 GF: Most of the time we just walked off. It all depended on the mission and
22 where they needed somebody. Sometimes they would air lift us from one part, we'd be
23 out in the field and they'd say, 'Find a good LZ, we've got six or eight helicopters on the
24 way and we're going to move you,' and we'd go from one LZ, we called the LZs, they
25 were just landing zones, wherever they picked us up, the pickup zone or wherever, they'd
26 pick us up and take us somewhere else. But, sometimes we'd leave if they had a mission
27 come up real quick and they needed us somewhere fast for blocking or to go relieve
28 somebody, try to help another company, they would pick us up with the helicopters and
29 take us out. Most of the time we just walked back to the firebase and walked off the
30 firebase and it kept the helicopters I guess freed up so they could resupply and Dustoff.
31 We did a lot of airlifts. Several times during the year they picked us up with a CH-47,

1 Chinooks and took us out on them. We didn't really like flying on Chinooks. They
2 relied too much on the hydraulic systems. If they lost hydraulic pressure, the party was
3 over. They flew primarily, the Chinooks lifted artillery pieces and ammunition and the
4 little single axel water trailers which we called water buffalos, nicknamed, they brought
5 them out to the hill. The Chinooks usually stayed busy just moving things back and forth
6 and picking up downed Slicks. Every once in a while they would want to move. They
7 could get us in two good lifts and they would just move us with a Chinook instead of the
8 Hueys, and a lot of that depended on how secure the LZ was. If they were absolutely
9 sure, like sometimes they moved us from firebase to firebase and we might go in a
10 Chinook, but out in the field normally they dropped us off in the Slicks because the
11 Chinooks, when they got slow and low, they were real targets. They didn't take
12 punishment very good.

13 JB: Big target, too.

14 GF: Yeah, they were big. They had a couple of door gunners but they were not
15 very used to defending themselves like the Slicks were and they weren't agile. They
16 made terrible targets. I think some of the door gunners and pilots I talked to, they didn't
17 really like flying the Chinooks, but that was their job.

18 JB: I've heard some mixed reviews on that. It seems to be the tendency and they
19 were just too slow and too big.

20 GF: Yeah, just too big a target. If you could damage one rotor bad, the whole
21 thing is going down because they overlapped and they were geared together. With a
22 good load, and the heat and humidity in Vietnam, they couldn't maintain level flight with
23 one engine down. They had two engines for supposedly for safety and they needed the
24 power, but one engine got hit. What they were going to do was a nice glide. They could
25 do a powered glide and they really couldn't maintain altitude. We had one, I know
26 luckily it was only the air crew in there, but they took some hits with a .51 caliber headed
27 back to Chu Lai and they were right beside their maintenance building and were just
28 setting down, they were hovering and just setting down. They ran out of hydraulics and
29 lost control of the thing and it rolled on its side about 20 foot off the ground and went
30 right straight into the side of their maintenance building and killed the whole crew, and
31 they were right there. But, it had been a Slick, they could have just made a little 20 foot

1 auto rotation and set down and got out. But the Chinooks, they were just more of a
2 target, more of a handful to fly I think. They were good workhorses and I guess they still
3 are.

4 JB: There was a unit at a base close to where I'm from back in New York so we
5 get them coming over all the time.

6 GF: One thing we didn't like about them, it's already hot in Vietnam and when
7 you load up the back ramp that rear rotor is low and both jet engines right on you and
8 God, it must be 250 degrees climbing into one of those things. It would burn you alive.
9 The trips we had in them were all pleasant trips.

10 JB: I guess getting back to being in the bush, could you describe the incident
11 where you were wounded?

12 GF: Oh, on Buff? The first time?

13 JB: Yes.

14 GF: That was the main time. We had been warned and we were on 100% alert
15 that there as a buildup of NVA and Viet Cong in the whole area and they had captured
16 some people and they knew sometime during the week that they were going to try to hit
17 Bin Sanh. Bin Sanh was a fairly sizeable village on Highway 1 and the ARVNs had kind
18 of a regional headquarters there. Then we had LZ Dottie was there close, a big firebase,
19 and Buff was a fairly good-sized firebase. We had 105 Howitzers, our own 81-millimeter
20 mortars, and four deuce mortars, and it wasn't too big a firebase at the time. We had 3rd
21 Platoon and 2nd Platoon were there. The captain and 1st Platoon were over on Dottie. So,
22 we were on 100% alert. It happened to be that I was on a bunker next to the corner
23 bunker. I was on bunker 13 and we had a flood lamp unit that they had flown out. This
24 thing was an Army jeep with a generator in the back and a big flood lamp that looked
25 kind of like a large, huge television camera kind of, or not the camera but the television.
26 It was a flood lamp that could generate a million candlelight power, and supposedly this
27 guy told us when they backed up there beside our bunker, they got a little behind our
28 bunker and beside it, and he said, 'They wont shoot at this because it will blind them.
29 This thing puts out so much light!' You see the same thing on the front of the tanks, on
30 the M-60 tanks now. But, the tanks could go for two and a half million for I think a
31 minute and it would discharge the batteries and would eventually kill the tank so they

1 couldn't do it for very long, but the little generator they said could go a million
2 candlelight power and he said, 'They won't shoot at this because it will blind them and
3 they can't even see to shoot at it.' Well about 2:30 that morning they suddenly hit LZ
4 Dottie over there and Dottie was maybe three miles away. It was right on Highway 1.
5 Boy, it was taking a pounding. They were taking incoming rockets and RPGs. We had
6 the radio, we were listening to them, and we should have been paying more attention to
7 our own perimeter, but we figured we might get hit, but we thought we were ready and we
8 were watching Dottie and about 2:30 they hit us with mortars and started mortaring Buff
9 real heavy and the guy popped in the jeep, cranked up the generator, and he turned that
10 spotlight on and it was on about three seconds and somebody had good enough vision to
11 hit it because they hit it with an RPG and just blew the whole back out of the jeep. I
12 think some of the shrapnel I got back in my shoulder I think came off that jeep. But they
13 just blew the back end out of that thing. It was a good thing we had, with me and Bruce
14 Fint, we were the two Charlie Company grunts there, and then we had the two guys that
15 ran the flood lamp. So, we had four people in our bunker. No, we had five. We had a
16 black kid named Spence. They blew that thing and we were just taking heavy mortars,
17 and from the next morning I could tell at sometime they hit the front of our bunker with
18 an RPG, one of the B-40 rockets, because it blew about one layer of sandbags off the
19 front of the bunker. We were on the radio and everybody was yelling for illumination
20 because we couldn't see a thing and then they blew the corner bunker beside us which
21 Calentine was in. It turned out later it killed both of them instantly because they made
22 the mistake of being inside the bunker, which is an almost suicidal mistake, especially if
23 you get mortared. The first thing you want to do is get on top of the bunker because
24 normally by the time the mortars hit, they were already inside the wire. They would
25 crawl through the wire or something and Ordway said what they did that night, they
26 found the next morning, they took a bunch of metal stakes and they laid them on the wire
27 and they pushed the wire down and somebody had crawled in there and checked it for trip
28 flares already. But they tried that and they were already inside the wire and as soon as
29 the mortars hit they were past the bunkers on our side. They got inside there and were
30 throwing grenades up in the mortar pit which kept the mortar guys from getting out and
31 getting us illumination. They blew the bunker number 14 there, they threw about a 40-

1 pound satchel charge in it and detonated it. Calentine and the other guy were both inside
2 the bunker. In fact, Ordway said he was in a hammock asleep. It killed both of them.
3 Our platoon medic, which I found out was Doc Schwamn, I didn't know him very well
4 but I'd only been in country about two months when all this happened and been out with
5 Charlie Company about a month and a half. He grabbed his medical stuff and he was in
6 bunker 15. He was in the other one near the corner. He grabbed his medical bag, he
7 should have taken his M-16 with him, but he went running towards 14 because he
8 thought he could get over there and help the guys, Calentine and his buddy. Well, just
9 when he got there he realized there was someone standing in the middle of the bunker in
10 all the rubble and the bunker was blown completely in except for about half the front
11 wall, and it turned out that it wasn't one of our guys that was standing in the middle of
12 the bunker, it was an NVA and had an AK-47 and he shot Doc in the stomach and hit
13 both femoral arteries. He made it back to bunker 15 and I think Ordway was down there
14 with him, and they got down in the bunker, got flashlights out, got his medical kit, but
15 when he saw where he was hit he said, 'Guys, I'll make it about a minute and a half and
16 I'm going to bleed to death.' And he did. There was a pool of blood. There was about
17 five gallons of blood over there in the bottom of that bunker. I can't imagine a human
18 having that much blood, but he bled to death in about a minute and a half. He just said,
19 'Somebody hold my hand,' and in about a minute and a half, he was gone. So, I found
20 out by the battalion daily staff reports that they trained a 106 recoilless rifle on bunker 14
21 in case more people got through the perimeter and they really overrun that corner, they
22 were just going to bust the place with a 106 recoilless and a flechette round. We fought
23 for I guess about 20 minutes, and the ones we didn't kill coming in, we killed coming
24 back out. Fortunately, those guys had been at the mortar pit, I think there was two Viet
25 Cong or north Vietnamese, it's hard to tell because they came through the wire stripped
26 down to just their underwear so they could feel everything. So, they didn't have their
27 uniforms on and really couldn't tell if they were NVA or Viet Cong. But, they were from
28 the 403rd Sapper Battalion. I've got one of their little hand made cigarette lighters,
29 which was probably beat out of one of our airplanes I imagine. It's a little hand made
30 aluminum lighter. They just had grenades up there and they threw all the grenades and
31 they tried to run back out and we killed them going out. We dusted Fent off about 3:30

1 that morning after things died down. We got some illumination about the time the
2 fighting was over. Our mortar guys never could get out there and get the gun [tube]
3 going and they finally got us illumination from Dottie. One of the 105 Howitzers fired
4 over to Buff and got us illumination that way. We got the situation quietened back down
5 and we dusted off Fent and one of the guys that run the flood light there with me took a
6 mortar round right between the legs. I think we had two mortars actually hit our bunker,
7 but one of them was when Fent got blew unconscious, we built us a little fighting
8 position in the front right corner of the bunker and we sandbagged it, we double
9 sandbagged it. It was big enough one person could get in there, and we had all our
10 grenades strung around on top of it, and a nice little fighting position. Well, it saved our
11 hide, but not because we got in there to fight. One of the first mortar rounds I think hit
12 inside that fighting position and it blew the sandbags off and blew all the grenades out of
13 the way and hurt Fent pretty bad but it probably saved the other two of us. One of the
14 guys had a 60 millimeter mortar, it was either a mortar or a good sized grenade went off
15 right between his legs. It turned out he bled to death on the way in. I think he was
16 conscious when we got him on the Dustoff but that was about 30 minutes after he got hit,
17 and he was dead on arrival when we got back to Chu Lai at the hospital. We got them
18 out of there about 3:30 and then the other guy from the flood lamp and I stayed there until
19 about 6:30 the next morning after sun up because we were low people and we weren't hit
20 that bad. We weren't bleeding enough to where it was a serious problem or anything so
21 we just stayed there and defended the bunker. It was nearly out of personnel. I think
22 they had two or three other wounded really bad too in some of the other bunkers there on
23 Buff. It was the first time that we got overrun or something and the first time things got
24 really serious for me. Its kind of unusual, I went into I think it's a 312 surgical, I think
25 that's what it was, but there in Chu Lai they had a regular hospital. It's mainly just
26 surgery. They didn't keep people there very long. If you were hurt real bad they sent
27 you to Japan or the United States. If you were hurt a little bit like we were, they sewed
28 you up, cleaned your wounds, sent you over to 91st Evac and you stayed about a week
29 and a half there as kind of recuperation. I got in there and when I got in there I was
30 thinking I was hurt pretty bad. I got in there and we had 14 guys there in triage being
31 prepped and what they were doing with most of them, they put us on hold. They checked

1 us over real quick and said, 'Sit down in that bed and we'll call you when we get to you.'
2 Most of them were trying to get them strong enough for surgery, and out of the 14 there I
3 think nine were unconscious and they lost about five before they could even get them in
4 surgery. Sometime there I got to thinking, 'Well maybe I ain't hurt at all! This is not
5 bad!' Those guys were hurt. They were really torn up pretty bad. They hit about nearly
6 every one of the major firebases in Americal Division that night so they had wounded
7 from all over. I found out then that the surgery and everything is not like MASH on TV.
8 They don't pick out every little piece of shrapnel and everything. They find what really
9 might do some future damage and what's hurt real bad, cut artery, cut vein, a piece of
10 shrapnel near your heart, piece of shrapnel near your spinal column. Anything else they
11 leave in place. It's already hot and cauterized, and if they don't think it's going to hurt
12 you much they just leave it. They didn't really have time to mess with it, really. They
13 had people hurt ten times worse than you were, so they were rushing through people there
14 just as fast as they could. I wouldn't say the medical care wasn't good, those guys were
15 mostly young, drafted doctors and by the time they came home they were probably super
16 surgeons. They were really good and I think they were really conscientious about what
17 they did. They just had their hands full so much that they didn't have time to take the
18 time to do anything special. They patched you up, and away you went.

19 JB: So how was the time staying at 91st Evac?

20 GF: Got chewed out a lot! Over there they were senior medics and those guys
21 were pretty experienced. What we found out, I didn't know it when I got there, I knew
22 that officers only had to spend six months in the field and just plain old grunts spent a
23 year, but they had such a hard time keeping officers alive, they were losing so many
24 officers, it was such a tough job, that they only had to spend six months in the field, and it
25 was the same way with medics. They spent six months out in the field and if they lived
26 that long they got to rotate back to a job back in Chu Lai, either working in surgery or
27 working over there at 91st Evac or something like that. Those guys were pretty
28 experienced. I knew they were busy. They always had somebody they needed to take
29 care of, so I kept getting up and going and getting a book or something. They deburred
30 my wounds, which is they just cut the skin on the outside and cleaned it up, because
31 shrapnel makes a real jagged, torn wound. So they deburred my wounds and then they

1 wait about three or four days to see if you get infection. Vietnam was notorious for
2 infection. So, if you didn't get infection, they sewed you up. If you did get infection,
3 they sent you to Japan. I didn't get any infection so they sewed me up over there at 91st
4 Evac. During that first three or four days I kept getting up and going and getting me a
5 book or something to do because I get so bored and mainly I was just real stiff and sore,
6 and it would break my wound open and it'd start bleeding again. Then I'd get the bed
7 messed up and then I'd get chewed out. After about the second day I gave up and I'd just
8 call when I want something because I realized that I wasn't saving them any trouble.
9 They were spending more trouble changing my bandages and cleaning my bed up than
10 anything else, so I'd just call and, 'Can you go get me a book?' I got chewed out a bunch
11 over there. That was pretty entertaining, too. At least I got out of the field and got hot
12 food for a while. Once I was there, and I never got wounded that bad again. I didn't
13 really want to. Once in there is enough!

14 JB: We've been going for about an hour. Would you like to take a break?

15 GF: Yes, I guess so.

16 JB: I reloading again asked the guy if he liked flying the Skyraider because to me
17 that was an old fighter plane, big old radial engine, big old 14 foot propeller, real
18 airplane. He said when they first assigned him to Vietnam for air support, the Air Force
19 thought they would have to order the young lieutenants into them because they thought
20 everybody wanted to fly the Phantoms, the jets, and he said, 'It didn't turn out to be the
21 truth.' He said he had never seen a person in a Skyraider below the rank of Bird Colonel,
22 because they'd pull the rank and they got in the Skyriders and he said he loved them.
23 He felt safe in it. He told me that he had taken a B-40 rocket one time right straight in the
24 engine cowlings, and he thought he was in trouble, but he'd always not worried because
25 he had his armored plate unless a sniper could actually hit him, and even the control
26 surfaces, they had torque tubes backed up by cables with hydraulic assists and any one of
27 the three systems could easily fly the airplane. It got a little stiff with the cables but he
28 kept the speed below two or three hundred miles an hour and still easily flyable. But he
29 said he saw the smoke coming in this B-40 rocket went right straight into his engine and
30 knocked three cylinders completely off of it. He was streaming oil and I think he said he
31 had 160 gallons of oil, but he said he was streaming on and blew three cylinders off and

1 he said, 'Man, I must have been down to 2,000 horsepower!' He went back to Chu Lai
2 and he was back in the air the next day. Put him on a new cowling, three cylinders, he
3 was back in the air. He loved the Skyraider, and we loved to watch him; fantastic
4 airplane.

5 JB: Well I guess we can talk about air support a bit. Was it primarily Phantoms
6 you were working with?

7 GF: It was primarily. It's probably 50% A-4 Sky Hawks and Phantoms. We've
8 got some Sky Hawks even off carriers I understand. But, the Navy had a wing of Sky
9 Hawks there at Chu Lai and then there were always Marine Phantoms coming and going.
10 The Air Force had a big wing of Phantoms out of Chu Lai there and I think they flew
11 missions both for us and up north. We got to see a lot of air shows with Phantoms and of
12 Sky Hawks and Sky Raiders.

13 JB: How about helicopter gunship support?

14 GF: We had both. Out of Chu Lai there there was the Sharks and the
15 Minutemen, and the Muskets, the Muskets, I nearly forgot about them. We loved the
16 Sharks just because they had a big mouth on them and we thought all gunships ought to
17 have a big tiger mouth.

18 JB: I'm actually working on a model of one of their ships right now.

19 GF: Yeah, one of the Blue Ghosts I think. They worked all around Chu Lai. We
20 had some Cobra gunships. Most of them were the old UH-1 Alpha, the old Huey
21 gunships. I talked to some of the helicopter pilots and they liked both ships. They liked
22 the Cobra because it was hardened but they liked the Huey because their own gunners out
23 the side could cover their six when they left the target. They could shoot behind them,
24 and which the Cobras couldn't do. They just had to rely on their armor plate. We had
25 quite a bit of both. We had one, and I found a little excerpt there in the Battalion Daily
26 Staff Journals for March the 3rd to the 6th, I think it was on March 5th. We had one of the
27 gunships come over and one of the Minutemen I think was supporting us north of Tien
28 Phuc...it was north of Professional and east of Tien Phuc and they took some .51 caliber
29 hits in the rocket pod and it set off one of the rockets and the staff report said it burned
30 one of the loader and side gunner's face a little bit and two of them caught shrapnel. It
31 wasn't very bad shrapnel, and what I remember was one of the gunners crawled out there

1 on the pod and was kicking the pod trying to kick the pod off that gunship because it was
2 smoking like crazy. It was on fire and they still had six or seven rockets. It turned out to
3 be quite a show because he was circling around and around up there and first thing they
4 did when they got hit it was kind of an explosion and a bunch of smoke came off that
5 rocket pod on the right side of the old gunship, and of course he fired everything he had,
6 not in any certain place. He just hit the button and tried to fire all the rockets and about
7 six of them left at one time and went God knows where. He still had two or three rockets
8 in there I think and then that gunner climbed out there and he kicked the pad for about
9 five minutes and he finally kicked that thing off. It was just dangling already and he
10 kicked and beat around on it and it finally left before it blew up and it went down into the
11 jungle. The helicopter gunships were real effective. They were slightly vulnerable I
12 guess to .51 caliber fire and small arms fire, but very few gunships I saw got shot down.
13 I saw a lot of them just plain old resupply, and they got shot down a lot, usually just auto
14 rotate in and got somebody hurt or shot up or something and had to extract them with a
15 Chinook and they'd all be back in the air in a day or two. The gunships support was real
16 good.

17 JB: I guess operating as the RTO you'd be coordinating everyone?

18 GF: I did a lot of talking with them when I was RTO. That only lasted a couple
19 of months and then Tim was getting real short and going home and for the last around
20 seven and a half, eight months I was a squad leader, so I spent a lot of time on the radio
21 then calling in artillery or gunships or whatever. I didn't know until I read some reports
22 that I received this last six or eight months from Dan Young in the 1st of the 52nd, but our
23 artillery there in Americal Division was rated as one of the best in Vietnam. They were
24 good, but I didn't know how everybody else was. All I knew was our artillery was
25 normally very good, real accurate. They could really put a round where you wanted it. I
26 think part of that was pressure on them because about my fourth month there we figured
27 out that the standard procedure was to call first round 100 meter aerial bursts of smoke,
28 white phosphorous, and we'd have a 100 meter aerial burst and by that we could tell
29 where the HE was going to hit. The whole idea was safety. You called a first round 100-
30 meter aerial burst, and then you made sure that you were on target. Well, the NVA, they
31 knew as much about where the artillery was going to hit as we did. They would see the

1 first round of white phosphorous at 100 meter aerial bursts and they knew when the first
2 HE round was going to hit and they'd be gone before it hit. So we gave up on that after I
3 as there until I guess it was about October '68. We started calling first round HE on the
4 ground and we'd just call HE on the ground, first round, and make sure that we knew
5 where we were, where we were calling artillery, and made sure that artillery understood
6 that they'd better hit where we called it. Somebody was going to get hurt, and I think that
7 was one of the reason they were real good because they had to be. Our artillery support
8 was real good. I only heard of one instance, and I think it was before I got there,
9 somebody screwed up and they got an errant round into Charlie Company and wounded
10 four or five guys. A 105 Howitzer round came right into the perimeter and I don't know
11 if it was an artillery mistake. It could have been whoever called it in. That sometimes
12 happened too, call the wrong coordinates. Another sideline to the artillery, we were
13 getting the first ones we were calling those aerial bursts, a lot of them were going
14 halfway out or even after they hit the ground. They were duds and they discovered the
15 reason was they came out with a new artillery round which was setting itself by
16 barometric pressure. They were supposed to adjust the barometric pressure to current
17 barometric pressure and then by that it would trigger the round to go off at the right
18 altitude. In Vietnam the heat and humidity I think was just eating the barometric sensors
19 up and they were going off. They were going through a cloud and go off. They'd go off
20 1000 feet in the air; they were totally undependable. So they went back to the old rounds
21 they had in World War II.

22 JB: PROXIMITY FUSES?

23 GF: Proximity they set the timer. They set a time and calculated the distance and
24 they went 100 meters off the ground, so they went back to that. It was accurate. It
25 worked. It was one of those brilliant ideas that just didn't work, got over there and tried
26 to use them. We had a pretty good affection with the artillery guys, the cannon cockers.
27 They could really save your hide. Fortunately, all the ones there in our Americal
28 Division, as far as I worked with, were really good artillery people. They were quick to
29 do what they were doing.

30 JB: So when you found out you were set up to be squad leader, how'd you feel
31 about that?

1 GF: I didn't feel like I was ready.

2 JB: Right.

3 GF: What happened, Tim was going home and Ordway was one of the fire team
4 leaders, and I was carrying the radio for Tim. I was the RTO. They got a little pow-wow
5 and I knew from what they'd been talking about for the last three weeks they were going
6 to decide who was going to be the squad leader. I naturally figured it was going to be
7 Ordway because he only had about four months left in country, and they got through their
8 little pow-wow and I said, 'Okay, who's it going to be?' and they said, 'It's going to be
9 you,' and I said, 'I don't think I'm ready for that,' and Ordway said, 'I'll train you. Don't
10 worry about it.' What they decided was since he just had four months left that he was
11 going to be a short timer pretty quick, too, and I still had nearly eight months left and so
12 Ordway's going to train me since he was an experienced guy, and he did. He'd answer
13 and advise me on anything I needed to know. He made sure I didn't screw up. So, I
14 became a squad leader pretty early in my career or my time in Vietnam. I was a squad
15 leader for about the last seven months, and it worked out, and it didn't help Ordway that
16 much anyway because about the second month we got a new lieutenant. We got a couple
17 of guys hurt and all of a sudden we had to have a squad leader in I think the second squad
18 and he was it, so that didn't work very long. You did whatever worked at the time for
19 everybody. Whatever was important for the platoon, that's what you had to do. His idea
20 of just shamming into becoming a short timer and going home and never being a squad
21 leader didn't work out. It worked for about a month and a half or two months and then he
22 spent his last couple of months as a squad leader, too; same platoon, but it had to be done.
23 That worked out. He was a real good experienced guy and taught me a lot of things, and
24 somehow Tim came home. Tim was wounded I think four times, and I was wounded
25 three times; everybody I knew was wounded three or four times nearly. But Ordway
26 came home and he was there the whole year, from January '68 to December '68 and was
27 never wounded, which is miraculous how he did that. He was lucky. It was pure blind
28 luck.

29 JB: I've completely gone away from all my questions. It's just been great! Oh,
30 in the questionnaire, it asked if there were any weapons or equipment that you didn't have
31 [?].

1 GF: Well, not other than the 90 recoilless which we couldn't carry in the field
2 anyway. Well there was a weapon that they took away from the infantry units before I
3 got there. They had come up with an M-79 canister round so the M-79 guys could walk
4 point if they needed to and basically what it was, it turned an M-79 into a .40 millimeter
5 shotgun and they did it with a plastic cartridge on the front of the round instead of the HE
6 and it had a little small, solid center part that was loaded in double aught buck, and then
7 the outside part caught the air that came out, so this thing you would bust the M-79
8 round, the sleeve, it wouldn't get out there just a little way, the air stopped it basically just
9 as soon as it came out the end of the gun. It was just to transport the buckshot down the
10 center of the barrel. Then the double aught buck would go and hit about like a 12 gauge
11 shotgun and it gave the guys something really good for point man in the bush, or to bust
12 something close in. The down side of it was it was lead. It was basically double aught
13 buck lead. Well the North Vietnamese, they started screaming it was a cruel and
14 inhumane way to kill somebody because they were having a lot of guys die from lead
15 poisoning. I never did understand that anyway. I mean, there's no nice, sweet way to kill
16 somebody. I really didn't feel bad about killing anybody. They replaced that round with
17 buckshot round that had steel shot and the steel just wasn't heavy enough. It would
18 splatter somebody and make them mad and hurt, I'm sure, but it wouldn't knock
19 somebody down like the old double aught buck lead shot would. The steel shot, after
20 some bad experiences, they quit even ordering the stuff. They'd just throw it away and
21 we didn't put an M-79 man on point anymore. I wish we could have had those. We did
22 get something I thought was super about the September-October of '68, we got M-79
23 illumination rounds the first time and they were a long, white end on the old M-79
24 grenade and it gave you illumination so you could go up about two or three hundred
25 meters a little parachute illumination and then you could have your own illumination in
26 there with each squad.

27 JB: It must have been great instead of waiting for the mortars?

28 GF: Yeah, it was great. You didn't have to call artillery and wait for mortars. If
29 you needed illumination really bad, you could pop your own illumination right out there
30 on an ambush or something. That was really great. Another thing I found out we had
31 after I got back down at Fort Hood, I was looking at out of boredom, I was on night CQ

1 and I'd go in there and look at all the classified books and weapons and stuff and I found
2 out we had small tactical nuclear mortars, we had all kinds of things that we wouldn't use
3 because it was nuclear weapons. But, they also had a gas vapor bomb, and even a gas
4 vapor artillery shell I think, which it just exploded and released gas, and then the
5 detonator, when the mixture was just right, would detonate it and it had concussion that
6 would kill everything down to about 50 meters in tunnels. It would wipe out everything.

7 JB: Looks like we've been using that lately in Afghanistan.

8 GF: I hope they are. Same thing. They tested these things and they said, 'Oh my
9 God, that's inhumane,' because basically the concussion was so severe that somebody 30
10 meters into a tunnel or bunker or something, they would blow up. They said in this film
11 that the concussion usually stopped their heart and then the implosion, when the
12 concussion was so severe, when it let off, you would pop. It sounded like a great weapon
13 to me. They never used it in Vietnam, and it would clear the tunnels and the spider holes.
14 Boy, it would have been a great weapon. They were scared to use it because it would
15 have been inhumane. I hope we're using it over there now. I think we used it in Iraq.

16 JB: I believe so. Yeah, a little bit, the fuel air explosives.

17 GF: Yes, that's what it is, gas vapor, fuel air. The film I saw was unbelievable.
18 It was a 500-pound bomb and they dropped it and detonated it in the forest in Georgia,
19 and it cleared the area for about an eighth of a mile around, like the spokes of a wheel,
20 and the trees just snapped at ground level and popped onto the ground. It just slammed
21 them down. It was one of their tests. They had sheep buried in spider holes, which
22 caused another big stink because the humane society got involved in it. It killed all these
23 sheep. That was a weapon I wish they'd have used. We could have cleared areas with
24 that and not had to kind of go in there and dig them out of the tunnels. Usually we
25 couldn't find them and then they would end up ambushing us later, you know. Boy, they
26 were master little tunnel rats.

27 JB: Did you get any M-203 grenade launchers when you were there, because I
28 know they were just starting to come in in '68. That's the grenade launcher mounted
29 under the M-16.

1 GF: The M-16? We had some of those but we didn't use them. We tried them
2 and didn't like them. They fired an M-79 grenade round underneath and I think a three or
3 five shot magazine.

4 JB: Oh really?

5 GF: Yeah, they were mostly automatic.

6 JB: This was one of the experimental ones, then?

7 GF: Yeah. They had just a long magazine. I think it made like three grenade
8 rounds. In the jungle they got caught in the vines and stuff all the time because they were
9 heavy, made it difficult to move. You had two weapons to clean instead of one, and they
10 jammed quite a bit. We carried selected people. We had maybe three or four in the
11 platoon and we tried them for about a month or so and you hated them. They just weren't
12 a good operational weapon in Vietnam, maybe in the desert or something they may have
13 been great, but at the time we just went back to each squad having the M-79 grenadier
14 and he just carried the old M-79. Those didn't work out very good. Some of their ideas
15 worked great and some didn't. We got to watch them test a 7.62-millimeter mini gun on
16 a little LOH. That was interesting. He worked out on a hill there north of us. He came
17 in about three times and tested it and I think they took it off and never tried it again.

18 JB: Really?

19 GF: Yeah. That thing had so much push from the recoil, you know, 6,000 rounds
20 a minute, it did good on the Cobras and all but they tried it on a little LOH, it was going
21 to turn these LOHs into super gunships I guess. They fired that thing out of the side and
22 he started going all over the sky. He couldn't even...they had to shut it down pretty
23 quickly because he was spewing guns everywhere. He's coming our way! He's
24 throwing stuff everywhere! He couldn't even control it once he opened up that mini gun,
25 so that didn't work. I guess by mid '68 they had some perimeter defense over at Dottie
26 because it was such a big artillery firebase and they had 2,000 gallon J-4 Blivet to refuel
27 helicopters with. It was a big full rubber blivet. They had I guess it was a track equipped
28 with 40-millimeter ack ack.

29 JB: Duster?

30 GF: The old Dusters, pom-poms. Over there they had a track with 40 millimeter
31 Dusters and they had a deuce and a half with quad 50s and they rigged up a 7.62

1 millimeter mini gun on the back of a three quarter ton. When those three ripped loose,
2 boy, they tore the world apart!

3 JB: I can imagine!

4 GF: They were awesome when they opened up. But, they were just blown
5 around the perimeter of Dottie. If one side was in danger of getting run over or
6 something, they'd just drive over there and blast away and you don't have to back up. It
7 was scary when they let go, get all three of them together. Those worked real good.

8 JB: So after I guess this is eight month as a squad leader, you became a platoon
9 sergeant?

10 GF: I was on and off a platoon sergeant at different times. We got an older
11 sergeant named Riper and he was about 35 I guess, and he couldn't even carry a full
12 backpack. He carried his own stuff but he couldn't carry smokes and claymores and
13 mortar rounds and all the other stuff we carried with us just because of his age. He just
14 wasn't up to it. He wasn't really experienced enough to be a squad leader and he was an
15 E6 so we made him platoon sergeant. Platoon sergeant is mostly just keeping up with the
16 roster, passing out C-rations administrative stuff, you know. For a long time there, on
17 and off, I was platoon sergeant and squad leader both. I just did both jobs when I needed
18 to. For about three weeks when Muff was in the hospital, for about three weeks there I
19 was squad leader, platoon sergeant, and platoon leader both; I mean acting platoon leader.
20 I was still a Spec 4 then, so I got to be all three for a while. It wasn't that much fun. I [?]
21 platoon leader.

22 JB: How many guys did you have in the platoon at that point?

23 GF: We normally were about to keep 18 to 25 guys in 3rd Platoon. I can
24 remember getting down to 12 or 13 once or twice and I can remember having 28 or so a
25 couple of times, but normally we ran around 22 to 25 men if we were able to keep that
26 many in the field. We thought we really had a lot of people if we could get 25 people in
27 the platoon.

28 JB: Really?

29 GF: Yes.

30 JB: Man.

1 GF: We didn't even get close to what the Army considered a standard fighting
2 unit. A standard fighting unit would have been a 12-man fire team and two in a squad,
3 and then you would have three squads, you'd have a platoon of nearly 100 people. Well
4 that was about the size of our company normally. We'd run 70 to 100 people in Charlie
5 Company. We just couldn't keep that many people out in the field all the time. We were
6 constantly getting new people, somebody'd be on R&R, somebody wounded; just never
7 could keep that many people out in the field.

8 JB: How was accepting new people into the platoon or into your squad?

9 GF: Well we was always glad to see new people come in because we were
10 always needing people. I really had a squad with quite a few experienced people, thank
11 goodness, and everyone tried to help the new guys learn what was going on and train
12 them as fast as they could, hoping that they'd become experienced. Unfortunately, most
13 of the new guys didn't last anywhere from a day to two months. It was hard to get new
14 guys trained enough to get them experienced enough to last. They were accepted real
15 good. One thing I know was true, even in my case as a squad leader, you didn't get close
16 buddies with a new guy until he was there two or three months, because he just didn't
17 last. That kind of made it tough on the new guys, too. I was one at the time, and your
18 first thought is, 'Do I have the plague? Nobody wants to chum around or be buddies
19 much with me.' Well, they're all scared you're fixing to get blown away. So, you had to
20 kind of get over about a three-month hump. We was always glad to see new guys
21 because we were always needing personnel, even if all they knew was to follow around
22 and shoot a rifle, that was a help. It seemed like we had a lot of turnover of new guys,
23 and you always had a core of old guys that seemed to last. I think from my experience
24 and at least in our company, our platoon, the new guys were really welcomed. I was
25 always glad, I guess we were real fortunate, the guys from 3rd Platoon were a real close
26 bunch of guys, all buddies and kind of like a family. My buddy in Kentucky, he
27 remembered once he and I were doing something, we were squad leaders and I guess
28 we'd been to a briefing or something. I don't know what we were doing; I was on a
29 firebase. The mail arrived and we were close enough platoon where if mail arrived, if
30 somebody wasn't there, we'd read their mail for them. We'd let them know what it said
31 when they got there. But, if you didn't get your mail first and open it, liable to be

1 somebody else reading it. 'Hey, you know what's going on at home?' Well Jerry and I
2 got back over there and the whole squad, or the whole platoon, was eating cake. We
3 were lucky; a cake that got there was usually a week old but still tasted good. Sometime
4 it is kind of half squashed and a lot of times they never got there. A fresh powder cake, if
5 the guys in the rear could smell it, they knew what it was, they'd open it and eat it and it
6 would never make it to the field. Anyway, the guys were sitting around eating cake and
7 we walk up and somebody says, 'Hey Gary, we saved you a piece of cake. Grab a piece
8 of cake!' We thought, 'Oh, this is great.' One of them said, 'Happy birthday, Jerry!' It
9 was Jerry's birthday and the guy said, 'Your aunt sent you a cake, wrote a nice note, too.'
10 They'd already opened the care package. Luckily for us they at least saved us a piece of
11 cake for Jerry's birthday.

12 JB: Was there a lot of rear echelon tampering with mail?

13 GF: Not so much with the mail, but packages, and I don't know if it was our
14 company people or just battalion or just the Army mail in general, but yeah, a lot of the
15 stuff, we'd get a letter from home and it would say, 'Did you enjoy the pie we sent last
16 week? Did you get it?' We probably got one out of ten, cookies, anything that could be
17 smelt or they could figure out it was a good cake or pie or something would never make it
18 out there. We didn't have a real good relationship I guess you could say with the rear
19 echelon base camp commandos because we thought they lived the luxury life, and they
20 seemed to always have things we didn't. They took advantage of the situation I guess
21 you'd say. We went once during monsoon season and was trying to get poncho liners,
22 and those things were fantastic because they'd keep you warm even when they were wet,
23 you know the camouflage poncho liner? That was the best thing the military had was
24 those poncho liners. We couldn't get any. Finally found out they had got a big supply
25 the last month before. Our supply sergeant back there had given them to his girlfriend
26 down in [Anton] so they all went on the black market, and a lot of that stuff that should
27 have been out there, like ordinance and weapons, a lot of it ended up being sold or given
28 to the villagers by one of the rear echelons and then one time we had a big weapons
29 cache. We found way over 100, mostly bolt action and little carbine and SKS rifles but
30 they were decent rifles, and we tagged them all, tagged one for Colonel Stention, and
31 then the captain got first choice and we just worked our way down by rank and privilege

1 and everybody tagged one and the captain called the armorer back in Bayonet and told
2 him they were on the way in and the colonel knew about them. We got a count of what
3 they were for intelligence and they were supposed to go in and fill out the paperwork for
4 us because we tagged every one of them with our name and all this stuff and they were
5 supposed to register them so we could bring them home. We had a nice bolt action SKS
6 souvenir. Well, about half of them got retagged on the LZ Professional when the chopper
7 stopped on Professional, and they took some pictures and stuff, I've got a picture on the
8 internet from Alpha Company, one of the guys in Alpha Company took a picture of the
9 weapons cache and about half of them disappeared on Professional or retagged. They got
10 back to Bayonet and I think only Captain Hall was the only one that got a rifle, the
11 colonel and the captain. All the rest of them went out to base camp commandos. They
12 registered them for themselves and sent them home. They just took advantage of the
13 situation they were in back there, did things we couldn't do. They could go to the PX and
14 buy stereo systems, akee systems, real cheap, and we didn't have a chance to go to the
15 PX. Because of things like that there were just some hard feelings. They weren't real
16 popular with us. Every once in a while, especially Captain Sorenson who was the young
17 German, we'd get on the fire base, we paid \$6 a month, or everybody chipped in, to buy
18 beer for stand down or something and he'd call in and say, 'We've got 70 people on the
19 fire base, I want 70 beers.' Well, we'd get Ballantine or something. We'd go back there
20 to Bayonet to the supply room, they had stacks of Budweiser and Coors. They'd drink all
21 the Bud and Coors and send out the Ballantine, the junk. So, we just didn't have real
22 warm feelings toward the base camp command. Of course they kept their distance from
23 us. We usually came in from the field, we'd been out there for two weeks and we were
24 grungy and smelt and they all kept their distance from us and that was fine with us.

25 JB: Now I was reading in the after action report that you had given us...

26 GF: Oh yeah, Burlington Trail?

27 JB: Yeah. At one point Charlie 1st of the 52nd was up-conned to 1st of the 1st Cav.
28 Were you actually working with the 1-15th?

29 GF: Yeah, that was F Troop. The 1st of the 1st Cav was F Troop track unit. They
30 had two tanks they couldn't seem to get out there; well, they'd get buried in rice paddies.
31 The track units weren't real good in Vietnam and tanks were almost worthless. They

1 couldn't push their way through the jungle, they couldn't get through elephant grass
2 even. They'd go out in rice paddies, they'd bury up, they'd try to go down the highway
3 or something and it would blow the whole track off on a Russian land mine. Tanks just
4 weren't worth much in Vietnam. The track units, they got by except that they just drew a
5 lot of fire. We were up there working with F Troop, F Troop in the 1st of the 1st Cav. We
6 worked with them and H Troop, which was the 17th Cav I think. You probably read some
7 stuff in there about H Troop. They were an almost mirror image of each other. F Troop
8 worked more closer up to Danang, around Tam Ky and all. We worked a lot with them.
9 Once we went back south of Chu Lai, down around Buff and all, we was working with H
10 Troop, 17th Cav. You ever watch F Troop on TV?

11 JB: Yes, same kind of outfit?

12 GF: Same bunch! I swear they transported those guys from the television
13 program to Chu Lai and put them in tracks. They were the same bunch of guys! They
14 couldn't do anything! They'd say, 'We're sending F Troop out to help take this certain
15 hill,' and the captain would say, 'We don't need them! Keep them at home!' They had
16 to have something to do I guess. First thing you know, there they were, and we were out
17 there to meet them. You had to watch them or they'd run over you. They didn't pay any
18 attention to infantry guys. You had to watch them constantly just to not get run over.
19 Then they drew all the fire. At one hill they called us, 'Got to go help F Troop!' 'Well,
20 what's the problem?' 'Well, they've been up this hill three times and they get driven
21 back off,' you know. Captain Hall says, 'Well send them somewhere else and we'll go
22 take the hill.' 'No, they'll be there to support you.' 'We don't need them!' They had .50
23 calibers and stuff. They had a lot of firepower, but good Lord, we just didn't enjoy
24 working with F Troop, or H Troop either. All my guys, I left on the 6th of June. We had
25 a platoon. My buddy in Kentucky had just got hurt and he wouldn't ever go back. He
26 had two months left and he got shot in the leg. His last two months around Bayonet. I
27 left the platoon with my squad leader Billy Chenault and the platoon out there and they
28 were anywhere from three to seven months. They were a pretty experienced platoon. 3rd
29 Platoon was a bunch of veteran people, and I thought, 'They're all going to be okay.' I
30 didn't feel quite so guilty about going home and just leaving them there. But, I got a
31 letter from Billy Chenault on the 23rd, a week after I came home. They were working

1 with H Troop, the Cav unit, and been working with them a bunch for the last few months
2 down there. They could work around those rice paddies and all down there south of Chu
3 Lai. It wasn't in the jungle mountains. One of them ran over a Russian anti-tank mine I
4 think and wounded about half our platoon. So about half the guys I knew were gone
5 within about a week after I was there. I found out I think they all went to Japan for about
6 a month and then came home, but none of them got killed. Then on the 19th they were
7 riding back to the night perimeter with H Troop. They'd been out taking the hills or
8 something and they were supposed to go set up the night perimeter somewhere else and
9 our platoon jumped on a couple of tracks and just riding with them and they just turned
10 into this night perimeter and Bill Oberly who was at our reunion, he was with them, and
11 he remembered well enough up until the thing blew up. He remembered until it
12 detonated what went on. But, he said they pulled up there and stopped and it was one of
13 the ammunition cans, you know, like M-16 ammunition, a little can with a lid? The lid
14 was laying there on the ground, which they all thought was pretty curious. So the track
15 commander, he tells the driver, he says, 'Check that out!' Well, he climbs up out of that
16 hatch, you know, the driver's hatch, and jumped off the track and jumped right on top of
17 it, and it was a pressure released device on top of what they thought was a gallon of
18 explosives, the size of a gallon drum, and killed him and wounded the rest of the platoon.
19 The only one left out there was Billy Chenault and he lost his hearing I think in one ear
20 completely for about a month and a half or so and Billy had 82 days left I think, and I
21 don't think Billy ever went back out either. So within two weeks, thanks to H Troop, the
22 whole platoon was wiped out. The same day, in a separate incident, Captain Manchester,
23 he got shot through the butt with a .50 caliber. When I heard that, I figured it tore his
24 legs off. Usually a .50 takes a limb. If you survived it, it takes something off. But, Jerry
25 Collins was still over there and he jumped in the jeep and saw him when he came out of
26 surgery. It went right through his butt, missed his hipbones, and just tore his butt up real
27 bad. So within two weeks there, everybody I knew including the captain, Mike
28 Medanials was hit that second time when that piece of shrapnel went in his lung and
29 deflated his lung, so a lieutenant, captain, everybody was gone within two weeks. I just
30 didn't like working with the tracks. They were bad news.

1 JB: Now the guys in your platoon, were they mainly draftees or were there any
2 regular Army guys?

3 GF: Except for the officers, I can only remember one guy in our company who
4 was regular Army, RA, and he was a crybaby because he signed up to be radar or
5 something and what they promise you and what a lot of people didn't figure out, you
6 could join up for four years or something, and they finally lowered it where you could
7 join up for only three years. Well you could join up and they promised you a certain
8 MOS and a school; they didn't promise you that you wouldn't be in infantry. You would
9 think that once you got all this training that you would end up at that, but he was a trained
10 radio operator, and he got out there and they were full so they sent him out to Charlie
11 Company. Everybody in the Army, just like the Marine Corps, basic MOS is 11B. He
12 was a whiner. He didn't get any sympathy. He joined. But, about 99% of the company
13 was draftees except for a few of the officers and most of those guys were ROTC or
14 something and they were pretty much draftees too. Not many of them stayed in, just the
15 captains I guess, captains. Most of them are career. One of our better captains was the
16 German, Sorenson, he came up from 11th Brigade. He came up from a rifleman. He
17 went up to an acting platoon leader and they gave him a field commission as a 1st
18 Lieutenant and then after six months I think as the platoon leader in the 11th Brigade he
19 came to Charlie Company as a 1st Lieutenant, as our company commander. He was a 1st
20 Lieutenant for a month or two and he finally got promoted to captain, but he came up
21 through the ranks as an NCO. He was pretty gung ho. I think he was only 20 years old,
22 and he was going to make a career of the military. One of the guys from Washington,
23 Ron Vandenberg, had got a letter from him about ten years ago and he only stayed in
24 about five or six years and got out. I think his year and a half in Vietnam kind of wore
25 him out. He was gung ho when he first got to us and I think by the time he was a captain
26 for six months he was getting really tired. It wasn't fun anymore. I heard a lot of them, I
27 don't know if it happened to Sorenson, but I heard that a lot of the field promotions,
28 when you came back stateside, they switched you back to an E6 or an E7. You didn't get
29 to keep your field promotion because you weren't trained as an officer and a gentleman,
30 which I think was an atrocity because that was probably some of the best commanders I
31 had. But, I heard that happened quite a bit.

1 JB: I heard a terrible story relating to that. A guy was a platoon sergeant in B
2 Troop, 17th Cav and he had been in Korea, got a field promotion, made it to Captain, was
3 passed over three times for promotion to major, and they knocked him back down to an
4 E6 because of field promotions.

5 GF: I didn't know they did that. Muff, who was our acting platoon leader for
6 four or five months and an assistant, tried to train about three lieutenants, they offered
7 Muff a field commission and he didn't even want to talk about it. He said, 'A year's all I
8 can take. I'm going home.'

9 JB: Did they offer you one as acting platoon leader?

10 GF: No, I was only acting platoon leader for about three weeks because Muff
11 was...actually, he wasn't wounded. He went down to Anton because he had venereal
12 disease, Chancroid. That cured him of going to the village a lot, I guarantee you. Three
13 weeks in the hospital and they got it cured up, and he didn't even want to look at a
14 Vietnamese woman anymore. They didn't make me officer. They tried to get me to re-
15 up once, and I thought, 'That would be insane!' They said, 'We can get you a job as a
16 truck driver or a cook,' and I said, 'No way! I'm going to go home. When I get out of
17 here, I'm going home.' One of my friends at work, he got drafted and he got to spend his
18 time in Germany. He was lucky. His captain over there in Germany was a 2nd Lieutenant
19 in Vietnam and his first sergeant in Germany was an E7 was a captain over there in
20 Vietnam, and the same thing happened to them. The guy spent a year and a half in
21 Vietnam and was still promoted up to a lieutenant first and then a captain, and he got a
22 captain and his 1st Lieutenant, one of the platoon leaders was there, and they went from
23 Vietnam to Germany and when they rotated him to Germany they busted him back to an
24 E7. He made fast promotion up to an E7 but they took away his field commission when
25 they sent him to Germany and his 1st Lieutenant who was a platoon leader there with him
26 was promoted to captain and he was a captain in Germany so they had a role reversal.
27 Steve said that the one thing you didn't do was say anything bad about the 1st sergeant
28 because he said you could say anything you wanted to about that captain but he would
29 not tolerate anybody bad mouthing or saying anything bad about his 1st Sergeant who had
30 been his captain in Vietnam because he thought the world of the guy. He said, 'You want
31 to get in trouble fast, just say something bad about the 1st sergeant and boom, you are on

1 rotten duty for the rest of your tour.’ He took care of the complaining real good, quick.
2 Germany was cold at the time and hot in the summer I guess, and he said guys would
3 bitch, and he’d say, ‘Hey, I can have you out of here tomorrow. You don’t like
4 Germany? I’ve got a nice warm spot for you. I can have you on the airplane tomorrow.’
5 So, they didn’t have a lot of complaining in the company in Germany. They were a
6 bunch of happy people. But, I thought that was kind of an atrocity what they did to those
7 officers; field promote them and make them think they were going to be able to stay in as
8 officer and then they rotate stateside or something, and then boom, they’re back as a
9 sergeant.

10 JB: Especially if you’ve got combat experienced officers.

11 GF: Those were some of the best officers they had.

12 JB: Well, we’ve been going for two hours.

13 GF: My buddy in Kentucky, Jerry, he got wounded just before I came home and
14 he ended up with a Silver Star and all that, and he had kind of a tough time with the VA.
15 I didn’t mess around with the VA much when I got home, I didn’t need to. But, he had
16 shrapnel in his leg that needed to be taken out and he went to the VA and his records got
17 destroyed. The worst thing, which really didn’t go well, was when he got a notice to
18 come in and talk to the induction board about being drafted, and he called and said,
19 ‘Guys, I spent two years. I went to Vietnam and got wounded. You can forget that.’ And
20 they said, ‘Well, we don’t have any records that you served.’ He said, ‘That ain’t my
21 problem. You’re government employees. If the government lost them, you find them.’
22 He really didn’t cooperate, but he wasn’t in the cooperative mood when they mentioned
23 drafting him again. He said a couple of months later, a sheriff who is one of his ex Boy
24 Scouts came through there and told him he had a warrant for him and had to go down and
25 talk to the draft board. Jerry said, ‘I’ll talk to them, that ain’t a problem.’ It’s tough for
26 him to do because he was a kid that Jerry had kind of raised, an ex Boy Scout, and he was
27 the sheriff then, and the first thing he did was deputize Jerry to try to keep him out of
28 trouble mainly. As a sheriff’s deputy you could get away with a lot of things. But, he
29 went down there and they told him, ‘You’re going to have to come up with some proof
30 that you served in the military or you’re going to have to show up for induction,’ and
31 Jerry said, ‘You’re government employees; if you lost my records, you find them. I ain’t

1 proving nothing. Screw you.’ They said, ‘We’ll just put you in prison for a couple of
2 years,’ and he said, ‘No, you better make it a lifetime because when I get out, whether it’s
3 two years or ten years, I’ll burn you out of your house and I’ll kill you and your family
4 both. I’m not screwing with you.’ They asked the sheriff, they said, ‘Did you hear that?’
5 and he said, ‘I was looking out the window. What did he say?’ He didn’t hear a thing.
6 But, what they did, which I think was a true atrocity, somehow they evidentially found
7 his records because after six years you got your permanent discharge, and he got a
8 dishonorable discharge. They somehow, because he threatened them or something,
9 something they did, the draft board did, they screwed around and got him a dishonorable
10 discharge. Well his dad, who was a sniper in World War II, and landed on the beaches of
11 Anzio wrote the congressman in Kentucky and the senator both and they had an
12 investigation and it ended up they fired two of the people in the draft board and they got
13 that turned over, so he did get his honorable discharge.

14 JB: That’s disgusting, that’s really disgusting.

15 GF: Yeah, that’s an atrocity. I was telling Muff about this when I found Muff up
16 there in Chicago and I knew Muff came from 11th Brigade. He was infused after about
17 six months. Muff said, ‘Well if Jerry’s got problems, I’ll call Colin,’ and I said, ‘Colin
18 Powell?’ and he said, ‘Yeah, Lieutenant Powell. He was my lieutenant in 11th Brigade
19 before I came up to the 198th.’ He said, ‘Colin’s a nice guy.’ I said, ‘I know Colin’s a
20 nice guy, but he’s okay! We’re getting his records restored, he’s got an honorable
21 discharge,’ and he said, ‘Well that ain’t right.’ He said, ‘I’ll write Colin.’ He said, ‘I’ll
22 write Colin and Colin will take care of this,’ and I said, ‘You really know Colin Powell?’
23 and he said, ‘People don’t believe that. I saw him about three years ago. He remembers
24 me, I was a squad leader for him in Vietnam.’ He said, ‘Colin can help, he’s a nice guy.’
25 ‘I think Colin’s busy.’

26 JB: Just a little right now.

27 GF: Yeah, just a little busy right now. He said, ‘He’d take the time!’ and he
28 probably would. He’d probably do anything for Muff, but we don’t have to get Colin
29 involved in this. We’re getting some action. A captain that was at our Charlie Company
30 reunion, he was captain after I left. I left there in June and he got there in late August I
31 guess, late August. Captain Manchester got shot through the butt with a .51 caliber and

1 they got a new captain and he lasted they said four hours and somebody stepped on
2 another big booby trap and killed him and about 30 guys. They said it was an officer
3 from Delta Company that stepped on the booby trap. Since he was a brand new officer
4 and a brand new captain they loaned this supposedly experienced lieutenant from Delta
5 Company over there for about a week and he stepped on a booby trap. So, Terry Garden
6 took over after that and he told Jerry to help him get his records established and all that,
7 and that he would call one of his lieutenants from Vietnam. Terry Garden was a captain
8 over there and he retired as a full bird Colonel about three years ago, and he said that all
9 of his promotions, every time he talked to the board and he put in for promotion, it
10 always went back to his experience with Charlie Company. He credited Charlie
11 Company with his success. He was a West Pointer, and a great guy because the guys
12 loved him and we didn't love all our captains. They just loved Terry Garden so he must
13 have been a great captain. He said he'd call his lieutenant, which is a brigadier general
14 now in the Pentagon, and he said, 'I'll just call him and tell him about your...' he took
15 Jerry's name, address, social security number, all this stuff, and he said, 'We'll go from
16 the top down. Things move faster that way,' which I'm sure is true. You get the
17 Pentagon involved and it's going to be a lot faster than working from the Kentucky VA
18 up. So I think Jerry's getting some fast and accelerated action on his benefits and stuff,
19 which I hope is true. He certainly hasn't been treated right for the past 31 years.

20 JB: Would you like to keep going?

21 GF: No, I better head back to work and check things out and get to the house, I
22 guess.

23 JB: I guess we'll formally end this. This concludes the interview with Mr. Gary
24 Franklin.