

Interview with Ben Van Etten
Session 4 of 4
January 30, 2003

1 Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. Ben Van
2 Etten on the 30th of January, 2003 at approximately 2:50 Lubbock time. I am in Lubbock
3 Texas and Mr. Van Etten is in Alabama. Sir, why don't we pick up today's discussion
4 with some of the infiltration and exfiltration missions you participated in and if you
5 would just walk me through how those were.

6 Ben Van Etten: Okay, generally what we call infil or exfil was placing teams in
7 certain areas and they were sometimes rogue watch teams, sometimes they were teams
8 that would go in and infiltrate into the enemy areas just for intelligence gathering or for
9 various reasons like that. A typical one would be, usually I'd get a days notice, let's just
10 say we're working out of Lima 54 and we're going to run one out of there. I'd get a
11 day's notice that we're going to run an infil or an exfil and I would normally go up the
12 day. If I was the flight leader I would normally go up the day prior in a fixed wing
13 aircraft and spot a, what I would consider to be a suitable LZ or pickup zone and
14 normally what I'd do, I'd pick up a, I'd pick an area up maybe on top of a mountain or on
15 top of a hill because that way at least you're landing up high, you're not down below you
16 know where you could be fired at easier. So, and I would look at it and in the airplane
17 would be me and probably the Lao or maybe the American case officer, but at least the
18 Lao leader of the people that are on the ground where he would be able to speak to them
19 you know and give them instructions how to get over to where the pick up zone's going
20 to be. Then the day of the mission, usually we would have cover and that could either be
21 A1Es or T-28s, Lao T-28s and then let's say there's maybe a, depending on how many
22 people there are but normally a flight of three will do it, with two aircraft picking up
23 loads and one aircraft staying empty. This is on the H-34s, to be the SAR aircraft. The
24 procedure is we would fly to the area and somewhere en route either somebody in a fixed
25 wing aircraft, a FAC or maybe somebody aboard one of ours would probably contact the
26 ground people one more time and make sure that everything was okay and then also that
27 we were in-bound and probably give them an ETA. Once we got over the area then it
28 was a typical thing, we'd look for the signal of course. We never landed without a proper

1 signal and they'd be given the signal of the day, which it would be something they would
2 put out a panel for, like and make a letter like a Hotel or an I or and H or something, or a
3 Y or whatever and a color too, either red or white. And we would fly over to identify it
4 and if we could land all at one time, both at once, we'd land both at once or one at a time,
5 whichever we needed to do. We'd land in and pick them up and move on out. Now, the
6 only apprehension really that I would feel on an infil sometimes. You know you're pretty
7 sure that where you're going to land them on an infil is probably, there's no bad guys
8 down there real close because you think about it, it would take thousands and thousands
9 of enemy to be able to cover that much of an area. But on the exfil the only thing we
10 were always concerned with is number one whether that team might have been
11 compromised sometime during their mission, or whether somebody followed them up to
12 the, you know knowing that a chopper was going to come and pick them up and just lays
13 in wait for the chopper or if perhaps they were double agents which could be, happened
14 too, or they'd been captured and then forced to go back and make the, you know call you
15 in for the pickup. That never happened on any, and I was on many of them over the
16 years, but that was always you know a thought. Of course the procedure was, once you
17 picked up those teams and flew them back to the base area which, where there was Long
18 Chen or back to in this case, Lima 54, Luang Prabang, wherever. They would be
19 debriefed of course by their leaders and by our own case officers, of course we didn't get
20 involved in that, but the thing is. I mean the Air America guys didn't involved in that,
21 but the thing is what I heard, they would debrief and in some cases they would even give
22 them a shot of sodium pentathol before the debrief, just to kind of relax them and if they
23 told them what they wanted to hear and sounded okay they would probably give them a
24 months R & R in Bangkok and then they would return for another mission. Now, of
25 course if they didn't tell them, you know if they did suspect they were a double agent
26 well then of course they dealt with them however. I don't know for sure, but I mean I'm
27 sure that they were taken care of.

28 SM: By that you mean they were probably executed.

29 BV: Probably, yes.

30 SM: Now, these were all Laotians?

1 BV: Yes, all Laotian and the other thing is sometimes they'd be dressed up in
2 enemy uniforms and have enemy AKs and that kind of thing too.

3 SM: And you mean in NVA or Path Et Lao?

4 BV: Path Et Lao, yes.

5 SM: Did you ever have infiltration teams that were dressed up as NVA, that tried
6 to penetrate the NVA?

7 BV: No, never as NVA, but yes as Path Et Lao. And like I said, I think we talked
8 about before, the area that I didn't like to go into, one area that was the area up around 69
9 Alternate and where the Chinese Trail was because, and we had teams up there too that
10 we were watching them. You know they had, well they just, they didn't have much
11 activity to suppress them there, where the other areas at least they had some Air Force or
12 something that would bomb them occasionally and keep them down, but up there, there
13 really wasn't much resistance to them so they were kind of free to shoot at you if they felt
14 like it.

15 SM: Now, when you'd bring back the teams and they'd be de-briefed, were these
16 by American case officers, or were they Lao?

17 BV: Well, they'd be both. There'd be an American case officer would be present
18 of course, but I'm sure the Lao commander would be one of the main, or the Lao
19 intelligence guy would be probably one of the main debriefers since he spoke the
20 language better.

21 SM: Whose idea do you think it was to use the sodium penethol?

22 BV: I don't know. That's, that probably was an American idea, and I never saw
23 that happen but I heard that. I heard that a couple different times, that sometimes they're
24 debriefed and they, especially if there's any suspicion at all that maybe they were double
25 agents and that was always a chance. Anyway, that was the typical mission, and that was
26 about run the same way everywhere, you know whether we crossed over the Ho Chi
27 Minh Trail and picked up a team that was literally on the other side of the Ho Chi Minh
28 Trail, real close to Vietnam or other areas. One of our procedures now when we would
29 fly a flight across the Trail on some areas so that we would fly high over it at seven
30 thousand feet, and believe it or not the pilots wore parachutes and so did the flight
31 mechanic because, an H-34 which was a lot of magnesium construction with a 115/145

1 Av gas full of it, you took an air burst up that high, even if you could still fly it to get it
2 down, by the time you got down you'd be burned up being that high, so the idea if that
3 ever would happen they would just bail out. Of course unfortunately your passengers
4 didn't have that luxury, but that was the breaks, never happened but that was one of the
5 procedures that we could use.

6 SM: Now, did you ever have to make any kind of hot infiltrations or exfiltrations
7 or were they pretty much always pretty clean?

8 BV: They were always, the ones that I was on was always pretty much, there was
9 occasionally, a shot would be fired. Now one time I did take a team into an area, again
10 out of Lima 54 and right after we landed we got shot at going out of it from a direction
11 just north of us, which told me that the enemy had not only shot at us but they knew we
12 dropped off people down there. These teams are only like six or eight or ten guys, so
13 they would have been dead ducks you know. So I went back in after, one time I went
14 back in again and picked them up, took them back out of there, right after. We didn't
15 even have the other aircraft land. I went in and I just figured I could go in the opposite
16 direction from where the fire come from and be quick about it. Of course I had to relay
17 to the FAC or to the fixed-wing, I can't remember which aircraft, where they were
18 talking to them and told them to get back, reassemble, get ready to get picked up, which
19 we did and took them back in and planned it for some place else. But I made that
20 decision on my own, just to go ahead, figured it was quick enough to do it. Now, I
21 wouldn't have wanted to wait an hour, then go back after them because by that time then
22 the bad guys would have got in close to them, but I figured we had enough time to get
23 right back in there and get them back out again.

24 SM: Most of the infil/exfil work was with road watch teams?

25 BV: Yes, road watch or troop watch. Of course obviously the troops would
26 normally be around, the enemy troops would be around roads, some kind of a road.
27 When I say road watch, yes it would be different. It's not always the Ho Chi Minh Trail
28 or the Chinese road, it was, there's other routes that the enemy would be using, or areas
29 that they knew they were probably camped or bivouacked at, they would watch too.

1 SM: Now, based on that information or intelligence from a team, did you ever
2 engage in other operations to say, to disrupt any activity along specific routes that they
3 were using, the enemy was using?

4 BV: No, well other than, if they knew the enemy was using an area, sometimes
5 they would you know they would call in an Air Force or T-28 air strikes on it of course
6 and then of course that's where our Ravens worked with them up there in that respect, if
7 it was reported that there was some kind of activity without the team being compromised,
8 they would stay hidden but then they would go ahead and the Raven would go in and try
9 to spot what they were looking at, what they saw and then call an air strike on it. Now,
10 we had some of the, I had one guy in particular, I'm trying to remember his name, but a
11 customer that used to like to put tank mines you know, of his mine out. I think I told you
12 this along the Ho Chi Minh Trail area and then the, set them out one day and then go
13 back the next day to check his, to see if he got anybody or see if it was exploded then he
14 knew he got somebody. Now, another fact that you've probably heard before, that the
15 enemy that were, or the North Vietnamese that were driving the trucks and were the
16 gunners, the anti-aircraft gunners on the convoys going down the Ho Chi Minh Trail.
17 You know they only traveled at night and in daytime they would bivouac either in caves
18 or in wooded areas where they couldn't be seen, but they were chained to their trucks,
19 handcuffed to their truck steering wheel, or handcuffed to the gun or chained to the gun,
20 and that way it forced them to drive and forced them to shoot if they were attacked. And
21 then they were given so many kilometers that they had to make that night, you know
22 thirty kilometers, let's say or something down the road, at that point of course they'd be
23 released, given their rice and relax until the next day, and they they'd, given the same
24 thing. But the reason we know that is because sometimes we would go down and look at
25 convoys that had been attacked and burned up and the charred skeleton would still be
26 there chained to either the gun or the steering wheel. Had you ever heard that before?

27 SM: Yes, sir but that's interesting confirmation that you witnessed it in your areas
28 as well. Now, did you ever hear stories or witness the same kind of coercion among the
29 Path Et Lao or the Lao civilian populations, that forced them to provide support?

30 BV: No, I mean other than, the logical thing would be that the villagers that were,
31 for example the ones that were the Plain De Jars, which changed hands for a while there

1 every year just about. Either the NVA would be in there during the bad season when we
2 couldn't fly much up there and then during the better weather of course the Air Force
3 would force them back out. Of course the villagers would be more or less live and let
4 live and they're going to try to get along with whose ever, whatever military's coming
5 through there. And of course they were coerced into sharing their rice and sharing their
6 crops you know. That's all I'm aware of as far as what the enemy did with them there in
7 Laos, of course in Vietnam there's some different stories about how they intimidated
8 them by just killing the leaders and so on, to get the rest of the village to come around
9 their way. In Laos, they mainly were after food and shelter and labor, manual labor too
10 of course. Now, we had, I don't know if you ever heard this story or not but I think it
11 was around '70 or '71, when we knew that we were going to have to abandon the PDJ
12 again because the bad guys were starting their move again and of course they had armor
13 and artillery and were you know a lot of troops, and we literally evacuated the whole
14 population up there, of all the people that would have worked for them. So when they
15 got there, there wasn't anybody home, took them down, flew them in C-130s down to a
16 site down in lower part of Lao, what we call the lowland north of Vientiane of Site 272 I
17 believe was the site number on that. It was a refugee area but they didn't stay there.
18 Those people missed the mountains and as soon as they landed, a lot of them did, a lot of
19 them ended up walking back, which was a pretty good walk back up to the PDJ through
20 there.

21 SM: Was it a forced resettlement?

22 BV: Was it a what?

23 SM: A forced resettlement?

24 BV: Yes, forced resettlement, yes. They didn't, I know they didn't particularly
25 want to move, of course they didn't like the war either and that was a problem, when the
26 bad guys were there of course we would bomb them and shoot artillery at them, but of
27 course the Air Force stopped hitting the PDJ on a regular basis later in the war. In the
28 early days they hit it quite a bit but later, the Navy did too, but for whatever reason,
29 political reason they didn't go up that far north later in the, '71, '72 on.

30 SM: Do you think it had anything to do with the neutrality, the supposed
31 neutrality of Laos?

1 BV: Well, no because, I mean it could have been a way, yes because of the
2 Geneva Accords, neutrality. But if we were trying to, but heck we didn't follow the rules
3 earlier, and I don't know what would have changed it unless there was some pressure
4 from the press or something on it. I don't know the political reason why it stopped but I
5 know it did stop.

6 SM: That particular operation, where you relocated the entire population along the
7 PDJ, were you a part of that as well?

8 BV: Yes, I was. The way the choppers worked, we would shuttle the, there were
9 lots of small little village areas where they assembled people and then we would shuttle
10 low level with a helicopter across the PDJ to the Sin Quongsal airstrip, which was big
11 enough for a C-130.

12 SM: Okay, about how many people were moved, do you know?

13 BV: I would think around three or four thousand, probably that because I. One
14 day I know that I flew at least ten hours, and it was not only me other helicopters shuttled
15 nothing but. And I would take probably fifteen or twenty at a time and I shuttled them
16 low level, in other words so I didn't, it didn't take long. It was a ten-minute flight or
17 twenty minute flight to get them to that area. The PDJ was safe at that particular time so
18 you could fly low lever and its wide open, its like a big golf course up there, there aren't
19 a lot of areas for bad guys to hide out anyway, so you just, I'd pick one up and just fly
20 low level right onto the strip, drop them off, turn right around and you just keep making
21 that shuttle all day for like about ten hours of flight time, so that was a lot of shuttles, a
22 lot of folks, just for one helicopter.

23 SM: Now, as a result of the relocation of the population from that area, do you
24 know did they, when they went back to try to take back the PDJ, was it easier because the
25 enemy didn't have that support base to provide material?

26 BV: You know, I don't know. That evacuation happened I think around '71 and I
27 don't think that we ever really did after, maybe a little bit in '72, I'm not sure, that we
28 ever really retook it again for the duration. What had happened that the enemy had
29 gotten stronger. When we first took it in '68 or '69, which was the first time that they'd
30 taken in since '62 when it was given, during the, when the country got spilt up. There
31 was a lot of interesting stuff there, because the same people had been there all those years

1 and they had the Communists had been there, along with the, whoever the local
2 population was. But then every year they, from like '69, '70, I think it was just three
3 years that we traded back and forth. I think that was all the duration of it, so that last
4 time, even after we moved the villagers out of there, I don't believe we ever went back
5 and actually retook it again. The villagers did, a lot of them did go back on their own
6 because they missed the. First of all they like the higher elevation, and of course that was
7 their home and that's why they really didn't want to get moved to begin with. Of course
8 they, and they didn't like the war either so I don't, I think it was just kind of, some of
9 them were happy maybe to get their wives and kids out of there, but anyway.

10 SM: Don't the, isn't there a degree of, I hate to use the word animosity, but I can't
11 think of a better word for it. But there's the lowland Lao and the highland Lao don't
12 necessarily get along, do they?

13 BV: That's true; not only the high and the low, but there were other ethnic
14 divisions there. You know I maybe incorrect but I think there was like eight or nine
15 separate languages in Laos, besides what we consider Lao, and a lot of the people that
16 lived there didn't understand each other. So, to a Laotian or especially to a Hmong or
17 Mayo, their country is their mountain, they could care less about the rest of that, what
18 would be the Kingdom of Laos, or even French Indochina prior to that. That's one
19 reason they were really good fighters with Vang Pao's guys because they were literally
20 fighting for their own land, you know their own neighborhood, especially at first. Now,
21 after they got some areas that got pushed out of, then they little by little got pretty much
22 wiped out after about an eight to nine, nine year period, I think he started out with over
23 ten thousand soldiers, and at the end I'm not sure what was left as far as your, I mean
24 there's either old guys or young people and not too many in between. They just finally
25 got killed.

26 SM: Was there very much evidence of forced recruitment of young men into the
27 Path Et Lao?

28 BV: Not that I'm aware of, no I don't think so. There could have been but I'm not
29 aware of it. Now, some of the other, you know as I mentioned before. The infil/exfil
30 business was one end of what we did but of course we also just had daily resupply and
31 support missions that we used, like if I was working with USAID just moving rice and

1 moving refugees and moving whatever building material or taking American USAID
2 workers into a village area that they're going to you know help build a school or help
3 them with medical help and that type of stuff. So that gave me an opportunity to see a lot
4 of interesting, different types of, talking about different tribes, different costumes, or
5 different wear and so on. But as it would be, I always, I didn't take enough pictures. I
6 always said well, next time I get back here, I've go to get a picture, these guys have
7 tattoos on their foreheads or these guys have bones in their ears, there's some, there was
8 an area down near Cambodia that they had bones in their ears, you know it's kind of
9 interesting. Unfortunately I didn't get back a lot of times, they weren't there any more,
10 they had to get moved.

11 SM: Now, you've mentioned already that you do have some video footage
12 though. Is that of similar operations?

13 BV: Well, yes it's, like I said, I'm going to get it all, my wife's gone, I told her
14 the other day, I said look at that, we're going to send those out to you guys and let you go
15 through it and she said, "Well, I'll just to have to get them for you, but as soon as I do, it
16 will be another week or so, I'll get them all. What it is my daughter-in-law is, or my son
17 is having his fourth daughter today so she went there for the birth.

18 SM: Wow, well congratulations.

19 BV: Yes, it will be our ninth grandchild.

20 SM: But you had a super, like an eight-millimeter video camera?

21 BV: Yes, there were super eight, eight millimeter, and what I've done, those little,
22 I don't know what are they fifty foot rolls, or twenty-five foot rolls. I spliced all them
23 together back in the old days, we've got great big reels of miscellaneous stuff back when
24 the plan was someday I'm going to edit this stuff, and also I have a whole bunch of
25 slides, she reminded, said you know we've got a bunch of slides too, so I'll go through
26 those too because there's probably some of them too of that area over there.

27 SM: Well, yes we can digitize those for you too, if you donate the originals to the
28 archive.

29 BV: Okay, yes these are just the regular old thirty-five millimeter slides used to
30 put in one of those viewers, and I've got a bunch of them, so I'll.

1 SM: Yes, we have a special scanner just for those. So, if you're interested in
2 having the digitized.

3 BV: Yes, absolutely. I'm just, I'm just concerned that I've waited too long on
4 those darn eight millimeter, of course they haven't been out of the cases but that stuff
5 gets brittle after so many years, and I hope you can get something out of it. Then again
6 you're going go to through and say, oh, shit, because for example I think our wedding,
7 my wife and I's wedding is one of them at Camp Walters. We got married there on the
8 base during the, when I was going through flight school so I think that's in one of them
9 and then some pictures of our kids when they were, but a lot of them were in Thailand
10 with our kids, so you may be interested, you know whatever you want you got. And I
11 noticed some Vietnam shots too, that I took when I was over there too in Vietnam,
12 besides Laos.

13 SM: Outstanding. You know a little while ago you mentioned some of the Raven
14 FACs that you worked with, what did you think about them?

15 BV: I thought they were super gutsy guys. Even, I was pretty in awe of their
16 heroics. You know anybody that would, hour after hour after hour, fly low level just
17 looking, hoping that the enemy will shoot at them, of course the enemy knew what they
18 did too, if they did shoot them they would bring some P back on them usually, but I
19 thought they were pretty good. I picked up one that got shot down one time, got his toe
20 shot off up in the, in fact this is out of Lima 542. I think his name was Gallagher but I
21 don't know for sure, I believe it was. It's been so long, his last name, but anyway he got
22 shot in the toe, and for some reason he wanted to make a forced landing on a sandbar in
23 the Mekong River, up a little bit, not too far from LP. I'm not really sure why he didn't
24 want to fly back, but anyway during his landing he ended up putting the thing, it landed
25 okay but then it stuck right up on the, the tail went up and the nose went down and the
26 prop dug in, and that's how it stayed. He climbed out because they flew in to pick him
27 up, but they went in and recovered the aircraft, there was enough of a sandbar to put on
28 another prop and to get in there, lighten to load as much as they could and somebody flew
29 it on out later but anyway, I was very impressed with them.

30 SM: Now, I don't think, the various stories that you have written yourself and you
31 sent me some, have we talked about "Christmas Eve of 1970," I don't think we have?

1 BV: No, maybe not. That was, I'm not sure if we have or not.

2 SM: I don't think so, I don't think so. This was the Santong?

3 BV: Yes, no this was actually at Hmong Suy is where actually I was working out
4 of. I was working out of San Tong, Lima Site 20 because they actually were the supply
5 point for Hmong Suy was kind of like in their territory there and Hmong Suy was a Loa,
6 well it was a small town but it was also a Lao outpost or a Lao garrison and then from
7 there they would re-supply due east of there, probably between five and ten miles was the
8 Plain De Jars and the various outposts that surrounded the Plain De Jars, which we would
9 re-supply out of Hmong Suy sometimes. That was my mission for the day was to shuttle
10 supplies and ammo up to those various outposts, and the very first one I landed at I got,
11 took a recoilless rifle round just short of the aircraft and it ricocheted up through the
12 aircraft and got me too, but I think I did tell you about it because I was talking about.

13 SM: Yes, your wounds.

14 BV: Yes, my wounds and then my flight mechanic being the, that was his first
15 flight as a full, signed off crew chief and he was a guy that I'd known in the Army as a
16 matter of fact, his name was Charlie Brigham.

17 SM: And he was okay.

18 BV: He's okay, yes. I just couldn't, I knew he had to be dead because that was,
19 you can just imagine a tremendously big blast, loud, you know knocked your eardrums
20 out and along with half the aircraft. My right window got shattered and the instruments
21 did and everywhere the shrapnel it was doing something, but anyway the aircraft still
22 flew. I flew it back to Hmong Suy from there and was picked up by a porter and taken
23 down to Udorn hospital. The Air America doctor met us. We had a Chinese doctor,
24 Doctor No. Did I give you the story about Doctor No?

25 SM: No, I don't think so.

26 BV: I've got to send you some more stories I guess. I wrote a story, he was; let
27 me tell you about him. Our flight surgeon in Udorn, we had several but one of them was
28 an old Chinese gentleman named Doctor Kau, we called him Doctor No, you know kind
29 of like the story, like James Bond and the. He was probably in his 70s and pretty good,
30 he was good for just normal routine flight physicals and anything serious you wouldn't
31 probably go to him, but anyway. The story about him was that, I'll send it to you but it

1 was, we had a lot of jokes about him. He, for example, he would always; he liked to
2 think he was funny and say. If you go in with an ailment and you say, “Doc, I’ve got
3 this problem” and he says, “Well, did you ever have it before?” And you’d say, “Yes”
4 and he’d say, “Ha, you got it again.” That was when he’d laugh and then he’d usually
5 say, “When you had it before, did you see a doctor?” And you’d say, “Yes,” and he’d
6 say, “What did the doctor prescribe?” and you tell him, he’d say, “Okay, I’ll prescribe
7 that” and that’s usually how he handled it. One time he prescribed eardrops for this guy’s
8 hemorrhoids, I remember that. And another time, I had, one of the pilots named John
9 Ford, did you ever hear of John Ford by any chance?

10 SM: Yes, sir I’ve heard the name.

11 BV: Okay, John was one of the senior pilots there, but he was always telling
12 stories about Doctor No, and one time John was standing there in the middle of his office,
13 or his examination room getting a flight physical and John was standing there just in his
14 shorts and Doctor No had a stethoscope on, he’s listening to him and then he put the
15 stethoscope on John and then he put it on himself, then he put it back on John, then he put
16 it back on himself again. Suddenly he jumps up and he grabs his bag and runs out the
17 door and says, “Oh, I think I have heart attack, I go see doctor.” And he’s gone and
18 leaves John there by himself. I don’t know if John signed off his one physical that day or
19 not, but that’s a Doctor No story anyway. But anyway he met the porter at the runway at
20 Udorn when we got back and took one look at me and it really wasn’t that bad, I had
21 blood on my leg and you could see where the wounds were there, but it really wasn’t that
22 big a deal, but he says, “Oh, you better go the Air Force.” So he drove me over to the Air
23 Force, a little hospital they had there at Udorn. That’s where I stayed for a couple of
24 days.

25 SM: And then you just went back to regular operations?

26 BV: Yes. Actually when I got there it was just a couple little piece of shrapnel he
27 pulled out with tweezers you know. There was one, the deeper holes that he left it in
28 there, he couldn’t get to it, and it’s still there as far as I know because he said someday it
29 may work itself to the surface, but if it does then just go to the doctor and have them cut
30 it out. But he said to get to it, it would have done more damage to my tendon there than

1 it would have been worth. He said, since it was part of a round it was sterilized anyway
2 coming out of a projectile.

3 SM: Well, while you were flying throughout Laos and Thailand, did you ever fly
4 around VIPs, visiting U.S. Congressman, Senators, that kind of stuff?

5 BV: No, I never did. I never really hauled any of the big VIPs; they would
6 probably go on a Huey if they would come in. We really didn't have that, I mean in the
7 fixed wing there. You know I told you in Vietnam I got to haul some of the USO stars
8 that were coming over there, but in Thailand and Laos I didn't personally. You know I
9 never really saw many, even. I was either working, which I was up country flying or
10 when I was home we'd go, probably take a trip, we'd go down to Bangkok or be playing
11 golf or something, so there were really, never saw anybody coming or going, of course
12 the spook types, you know the director of the CIA or something like that came over.
13 They were always so clandestine anyway, even us employees wouldn't know they were
14 in and out. The only big event that happened up in Vientiane when Ross Perot came over
15 in his, he brought a 727 aircraft over there, with some wives, POW wives and a bunch of
16 Christmas gifts. I don't know if this was '69 or '70, hoping to get them from Vientiane
17 up to Hanoi to give to the prisoners up there, but they never got through. They never
18 allowed them. They came over and landed in Vientiane, stayed there in Vientiane for a
19 week or so at Christmas time trying to get permission to get on up into Hanoi, but that
20 never happened. I don't know if you ever heard about that or not.

21 SM: I heard about his activities but I didn't realize he had actually flown into
22 Vientiane.

23 BV: Yes, he actually flew over there, yes he flew over and brought a lot of the
24 wives with him. You know quite a, you know fifteen or twenty and then a lot of gifts and
25 things for the, and a lot of reporters, a bunch of reporters. They really got the prices
26 inflated the White Rose, I remember that.

27 SM: Oh did they really? And, let's see. You said it was very quiet when major
28 intelligence leaders came over, Director of CIA or whatever, to your knowledge, did that
29 happen very often?

1 BV: No, I really don't know. I'm sure it did. I'm sure that they were visited by
2 either higher-ranking people out of Vietnam or Saigon I mean, or Washington, but I
3 really wasn't involved.

4 SM: They kept it pretty quiet.

5 BV: Yes, I wasn't involved or aware of it either.

6 SM: Let's see, the other stories that you sent, one of the very interesting one of
7 course was the rescue story that you told, with the OB-10.

8 BV: Yes, that was. Actually I went after an OB-10 but the guy I rescued was a
9 Sandy pilot, an A1E pilot.

10 SM: Sandy?

11 BV: Yes.

12 SM: Why don't you go ahead and describe that real quick.

13 BV: Okay, of course I really probably tell it better written down, but it's a,
14 typically a rescue, an SAR rescue of a downed U.S. Air Force guy was not obviously
15 planned. It was impromptu and the only reason that, see they had their own SAR
16 capabilities with their Super Jollys and their Sandys and so on, which that was their
17 business. But we were there, and if I'm working an area and then one of those happened
18 to be shot down near me, well it's a lot easier for an Air America aircraft to just swoop in
19 there, get the guy up, in some cases, like I did, move them at least to a safe area until they
20 get there. If he's shot down that means that obviously there's bad guys around and he
21 could get captured or maybe wounded anyway, needs to be evacuated as quickly as he can.
22 So, one time I was flying from Thailand, actually to Laos. I was getting ready to go out
23 for a rotation and I had on board my aircraft some other Air America pilots that were
24 going for, they were just dead heading on my aircraft to take over another airplane that
25 would be left for them someplace. In fact this was going to be going to Pakse, Laos, so
26 en route I was near Savannakhet and normally when you've got a load like that you
27 refuel, Pakse is a long ways from Udorn so I had to refuel. So I was getting ready to
28 refuel at Savannakhet and got a call on our frequency, just in the blinds that is, any Air
29 America aircraft, read this in the vicinity of, and they named an area which wasn't too far
30 from me, could you possibly come and help with a rescue, we've got an aircraft
31 immediately shot down and we might be able to avert a capture. And I answered, I said,

1 “Yes, I could be available after I refuel.” I had to get refueled and everything and get out
2 there. He said okay, he give me instructions, said “After you refuel contact,” this was
3 actually King was the airborne controller at that point, in that area, which was a real high
4 C-130 and King said to re-contact him again after I refueled, which I did and dropped off
5 my American passengers, other than our crew so I’d be empty and went on out that
6 direction, thinking I’d probably be able to assist the Jollys or be kind of a backup for
7 them. So I called, he said “Okay, head out toward,” actually he gave me a DME I think
8 reading from Ubon, or anyway it was an instrument heading, it was during the smoky
9 season, but he was just go out the route to the Ho Chi Minh Trail which was either route
10 nine or route twenty-three, one of those areas and orbit west of the road, don’t cross the
11 road because that area’s very heavy anti-aircraft right now, and wait for instructions,
12 which I did. I flew out and about three thousand feet and went into orbit and, because the
13 Jollys were, the Sandys were already down there in the area and the Jollys we en route
14 from NKP, so as I was orbiting I could hear the Sandys talking and I called one of the
15 Sandys and I said, “Go ahead and give me the coordinates in the open, where the guy is”
16 so I could quickly plot it and probably swoop in and get him if I needed to real quick, and
17 he said, “Negative, I can’t give you that.” He said, “Stand By the Jollys are coming
18 anyway, they’re going to make the pick up.” I thought that was good with us. Anyway,
19 as the Jollys got closer I could hear them with an ETA, they called with an ETA of fifteen
20 minutes or something and then he said, but then one of the Jollys had some kind of a
21 maintenance problem and so they both aborted the mission and returned to their base. So
22 I got back on the horn and I said, “Okay, Sandy, I’m still here. Let me go in and pick
23 him up, if you’ll give me exact coordinates where he is.” He says, “Standby, I’m going to
24 go in there and take another visual on him,” which he did and he picked up fire the first
25 time he came up, he didn’t get hit and the second time he got shot down is what
26 happened, he picked up fire, caught on fire and announced that he was going to eject.
27 Well, I hadn’t seen him yet because of the smoky conditions, I was probably only a mile
28 or from him but I had never spotted either one of them, Sandy One or Sandy Two, so I
29 wanted to, I figured well, now, I’ve got another guy to pick up too. I said, “Head to 270
30 before you eject,” so at least he would eject out toward me somewhere on that side of the
31 road and he said, “Negative, I’m heading south and I’m ejecting right now.” As he was

1 doing this, there's a UHF radio on our aircraft that had a direction finder on it so when
2 somebody's broadcasting on that frequency you can go ahead and turn the knob to the
3 heading direction and a needle will point to where that sound came from, which I did and
4 it showed him about like 080 from me, which was about where I figured he would be
5 anyway. But I still, I wasn't sure how far and I hadn't seen him yet but I, when that
6 happened I went ahead and started a dive to get down on the deck and then head into that
7 area and my crew was willing to go, because we figured we're not sure what we're going
8 to run into, and so once he ejected he made, a few minutes later he made a call that he
9 was okay, but he was. As we were heading back toward that area, well then we finally
10 got to the road and it was really wide at that point. It was like an eight lane highway and
11 here we are low-level, out in the open, I mean there was no cover right there and I'm
12 figuring oh shoot, we're going to get shot at here, but we didn't. Lucky, at that particular
13 spot there wasn't anybody, so we got back over the jungle again, on top of the trees,
14 which was great because at least you're, and we're moving so fast, we're probably going
15 about one hundred and thirty knots, and I was headed in the same direction as his last
16 signal and in the distance I could see finally the billowing flame wreckage of his aircraft
17 coming up through the jungle, the black smoke and the fire, and I figured okay, well then
18 he's going to be a little bit left of that because the aircraft probably flew on for a few
19 seconds after he ejected. So, and sure enough I turned a little bit left of that and he called
20 me, said, "I hear you coming, I can hear you, you're headed right for me." Then I looked
21 up ahead and I saw him in the, they have orange parachutes. I saw his orange parachute
22 in the trees, but he's stuck in the trees. He's hanging from about, you know he's
23 probably still fifty feet in the air hanging there under these triple canopy really what it
24 was. Anyway, I came in over him and got ready to drop the hoist down with the
25 penetrator on it so he could get on it, but we couldn't get to him. I'm hovering there and
26 we're lowering the hook down and unfortunately this wench I had I had was a real slow
27 moving one too, so it seemed like it took forever to get down to him and it was down to,
28 of course the crew chief or the flight mechanic is actually operating that because he's got
29 a good visual, I'm up there trying to hold the aircraft steady and my copilot was with me
30 and he'd meanwhile pulled his Uzi out of the case and had it on his lap with his window
31 open in case he needed it. I think as I said in my story that if a squad of NVAs came

1 charging out of the jungle with A-Ks, that one Uzi wasn't going to do us much good, but
2 anyway he had it ready. So, anyway he couldn't reach it, we got the hook down to him
3 and he's trying to reach it and he's dangling there in the tree and he just couldn't. You
4 know we couldn't quite get it to him, where he could get a hold of it. So, what we had to
5 do was pull it up, all the way back up again and let him, there's a rappelling device in his
6 backpack, and he rappelled on down to the ground, moved over enough where we moved
7 over and got it down, a little open area there and got it down to him, hooked him up and
8 got him back up. Well, during all this process a round went off over us, a big blast of
9 some kind, like an air burst or a round of some kind. Like I said, I don't know whether
10 he was shooting at us or trying to lob it down on us or shooting at the other Sandy, which
11 was circling around us to cover us. But anyway it went off fairly close, so of course we're
12 still trying to get him up and finally he's coming up closer and closer and I'll be darned
13 another round went off, but yet we hadn't seen anybody yet. What was kind of amazing
14 is looking down through the triple canopy of the jungle itself, the floor of the jungle was
15 relatively open, you know where they could have come charging through there pretty
16 easy without being in a whole bunch of brush, but anyway we got him up and finally into
17 the aircraft and I'd been hovering there at that point, for I think we figured thirty-four
18 minutes to get him out and the fuel, with the whole trip coming out there and orbiting for
19 so long and waiting, I was darn near out of fuel, there's a thirty minute warning light, low
20 fuel light on those aircraft, it had already been on for darn near thirty minutes and we got
21 him out finally, we got him in the aircraft and I announced to King that we had him. He
22 said, "Roger, don't re-cross in the same spot," he said "Head south and then re-cross near
23 Saravane" which is a town about twenty, thirty miles away from us and I said, "Negative,
24 I don't have enough fuel for that and if I run out of fuel I want to run out on the west side
25 of the road, not back here on the east side." And I'd called for fuel to be brought out to
26 us too and there was a clearing on the friendly side, you know relatively friendly that we
27 figured we could land in there and we'd meet them there, which I did. We flew back
28 across it without incident and landed and met the other aircraft. Meanwhile another
29 aircraft had also joined us from Air America but he stayed in orbit west of the road, he
30 just stayed there just in case I got shot down, then he would, he'd come in and get us, but
31 he didn't need to as it turned out. There wasn't any point in him coming over there with

1 me because that was bad guys and there's no use becoming a target if you didn't need to.
2 So anyway, we got him back and as we're refueling, of course I'm talking to this young
3 pilot that I just picked up, Sandy One, an Air Force Captain and of course first of all,
4 we're feeling real good about getting him and also we're feeling good about making it
5 okay, I'm feeling so alive, so at that time there was a rumor going around with the Air
6 Force that Air America received a ten thousand dollar bonus every time we made one of
7 those rescues, which is not true and actually it would have been a good deal for the Air
8 Force, because when they tried to make a rescue, if they ever got him, if they got him that
9 was great, but usually they lost a couple other crews and aircraft in the process, so ten
10 thousand would have been a drop in the bucket compared to the millions that their
11 rescues normally cost them. But anyway, we got, so I told him I said, you know I'm not
12 going to take you back to NKP, I'm going to bring you down to Pakse and he says "Fine"
13 and I said, "Because I'll tell you the reason is because you know you're worth ten grand
14 to me and my crew and our last pick up we didn't get paid for, so I want to make sure I'm
15 going to turn you over to the right guys."

16 SM: That's right; we're going to hold you hostage until they pay.

17 BV: That's right and he believed it. He said "Whatever," he says. Anyway, we,
18 anyway we refueled and flew him back down to Pakse and some Air Force rep met us
19 there and of course that was quite a day, that was 18th of March, 1972 which was, some
20 days you always remember because it was pretty monumental and that wasn't the end of
21 it. We had another mission that same day up on the Bolovens that was also pretty hairy.

22 SM: Let's talk about that in a second, a couple of follow-up questions. On a
23 mission like that, where you have to go in, when you go in to pick up an Air Force pilot,
24 when you get back did you get debriefed?

25 BV: No, not on that one. That one even made press, and I got a nice letter from
26 the commander of the Seventh Air Force out of Vietnam saying that if I'd been active
27 duty I would have been recommended for the highest award or something like that, just
28 an "attaboy" you know, that was all on that. I would debrief the FIC of course, like I
29 always, well every time you come back from a trip or a mission or action of some kind,
30 you debrief with the FIC and that way they've got a record of you know, where the
31 enemy was, what happened and so on, so they could.

1 SM: But that was to be passed on to other pilots that were on subsequent
2 missions?

3 BV: Affirmative, other pilots and probably operational reports for somebody you
4 know but no, there wasn't anything special about a debrief on that.

5 SM: What about other missions, were there any particular types of missions
6 where you would get a more detailed debrief by an intelligence officer?

7 BV: No, not after the mission. Prior to the mission you know we would have a
8 briefing, normally what's going to happen and where the bad guys are and what the
9 objectives are but after action there really wasn't much you know unless there was some
10 kind of lessons learned scenario, but there really wasn't on this case, to me it was pretty
11 routine, you know something we trained for and do often, therefore we can do it. Those
12 are, you're always optional on those things. I mean obviously if you feel that it's just
13 completely too unsafe to do a mission, well you just don't do it. Of course that was
14 really, should have been the same way in the military too but anyway.

15 SM: Now did you object to very many missions?

16 BV: Never, I never, sometimes I would have a better idea how we're going to
17 conduct it but I never aborted and I never objected, or never aborted one because of
18 weather either as a matter of fact.

19 SM: How well received were your ideas to make a mission better per se?

20 BV: Oh, it was normally; I think I had a real good reputation with the customer,
21 with people I worked with, that I would normally give it my best.

22 SM: So they listened to your advice.

23 BV: Yes. They guy that was my copilot on that particular flight was a guy name
24 B.J. Ruck, nice guy, ex-Marine pilot, I think he was an F-4 pilot and a helicopter pilot too
25 over in Vietnam, and. But he was my, he was also Captain but I was senior to him so he
26 was my, the co-pilot and B.J. and I got in several together like that. It was funny, the
27 flight schedule's just happenstance. You don't necessarily fly with the same guy every
28 time. It's just however happens to work, but every time he was assigned to fly with me,
29 it was funny. It got to be a joke because we always seemed to run into something like
30 that. We either, the aircraft took a round or two, or we got shot at or an SAR came up or
31 we had a, I think he was flying with me on that one where I had to go back and pick up

1 the Laotian team up there, because they were likely to get attacked when we dropped
2 them off, and missions like that, so we kind of joked, oh no we're assigned together
3 again, let's get our of here, something's going to happen. Anyway, he came back, back
4 to Ohio or Iowa, I'm not sure where. I've got his address but I think it's, oh, it's Iowa or
5 Ohio and is a high school teacher, recently retired from that.

6 SM: Okay, now did you ever do hot re-fueling or was it always you shut down the
7 aircraft completely and refueled?

8 BV: Generally it was cold refuel, but occasionally it was hot refueling, very
9 seldom, not often. I liked hot refueling because that way you didn't have to shut down so
10 that way you kept what they call the money machine turning, on my flight, even if you're
11 on the ground the flight time continues until that blade stops, helicopter, so taxi time and
12 everything is. Actually the way you're supposed to log at, at first lift off, whatever that
13 is, and then finally the shut down is the end of the flight. But normally we would hand
14 pump it in from a fifty-gallon drum into the aircraft, take about three drums, three to four
15 drums, three drums usually.

16 SM: Now, did you do cold refueling primarily because of safety reasons?

17 BV: No, well yes, we just didn't have a hot refueling apparatus available. Most
18 places we were just a fuel-site, someplace where we had fuel stashed that we'd refuel at.
19 There were some different areas that we had fuel drums already stuck there. Sometimes
20 we'd carry them with us and then drop them off to use for refueling if we worked some
21 area that there was no refueling.

22 SM: I didn't know if because you were using a more volatile fuel the static
23 electricity that's built up by the spinning blades, if that was more of a safety issue than
24 say for a Huey.

25 BV: Yes, actually the aircraft, you know static electricity type, when you land
26 there's a grounding apparatus, even though you've got tires, there's still a little grounding
27 piece of, usually it was like a piece of fabric, metal fabric that would hang down and
28 ground you. The other thing is of course before you refuel you grounded; you would
29 ground your equipment, especially if you're refueling out of truck. The static electricity
30 really didn't, from the blades turning would be something that would be in the air, I mean
31 but as soon as you touched down it was gone. Now, if you're doing a sling load

1 operation and somebody's trying to hook up a load on you, they may get a little static
2 discharge as they're doing that. So to prevent that what you do, you keyed your FM
3 microphone and the radio and that would discharge it too, or should discharge it, if there
4 was any. That's an old trick that you, you know on all helicopter, Hueys and all of them
5 you just go where up, you would discharge yourself, or if I was coming for a sling load
6 pick up sometimes, if I was concerned about that I would land first then pick up for the,
7 that way it would discharge it, so whoever was handling the load wouldn't get a shock.

8 SM: Now, you mentioned logging time, and how that was supposed to work, were
9 there any instructions or restrictions on what you could put in your logs, your flight logs,
10 about what you were doing?

11 BV: No. We had a code that was used that was just part of the log, depending on
12 who the customer was, there was, I don't even remember what they were now, but that
13 was about it. I mean as far as where the coordinates, where you went, usually you would
14 or it was Lima Site, you just put the Lima Site, you know Lima site 32 on there or
15 whatever, and then the next landing would Lime 08 or Tango 08 or something and you're
16 time in between and you're landings. I pulled out one of my old logbooks the other day,
17 it was funny. We used to log, even in the Army, you used to log your landings, they
18 would count that, in later years they didn't count those, well maybe some civilian pilots
19 logs they still might, but anyway by 1972 I had, or not it was '73 I had logged 27,000
20 some landings, it was, because I used to have a guy in flight ops at Air America keep my
21 logbook for me, one of the. I just paid him you know a couple bucks a month to keep my
22 logbook up, which made it pretty neat and he did a much neater job than I would have
23 done on it. So, well I've probably got about five or six logbooks now, but back for the
24 one I used back then.

25 SM: And even though this was supposed to be the secret war in Laos, you weren't
26 prevented from writing that kind of stuff in the open?

27 BV: No, there was no, well of course my logbook was, you know that's no big
28 deal, but the flight, the flight log that you would turn in after each flight, the maintenance
29 log, of course that stayed with them.

30 SM: Okay. Now if you would, why don't you go ahead and describe how your
31 day continued on the 18th of March in 1972.

1 BV: Okay, after we got to finally made it down to Pakse and that's where our
2 original destination was anyway, the main air ops customer down there was a guy named
3 Jim Butler, and his call sign was Grey Fox. Super guy, retired Air Force Colonel, and he
4 was the air ops customer. We just landed and shut down; of course a lot of people came
5 out to meet us because they knew we were bringing in the downed pilot and everything.
6 It was a big deal. And then Jim says, "Okay, guys, form in my office. We've got another
7 mission this afternoon. We need to brief for it." So, we had three aircraft and again I
8 was the flight lead down there, usually the senior guy was the flight lead and at that time,
9 by '72 I was you know fairly senior because we'd have so many new. I started in '68, so
10 I had several years as a helicopter pilot as many of them as were coming and going, it
11 didn't take you long to get fairly senior. So I was the senior guy, at least in H-34. So we
12 went into the briefing room and in comes the customer, the case officer who was a guy
13 named Jim Lewis, whose call sign was Sword, and he's unfortunately he got bumped off,
14 I think in Africa some place. He continued with his, you know after Southeast Asia he
15 continued with the same type of work. But anyway he was an ex, I'm sure Army or
16 Marine, but probably Army guy, you know real good soldier type, but he was, he was
17 really so mission oriented, which was fine, but the thing is he wasn't that concerned with,
18 I don't think with the safety of the aircraft crews, so you had to take what he told you
19 with a, you know when you put your own judgment on top of it, because whether he was
20 telling the whole truth or not. Anyway, the mission was to pick up some wounded guys
21 up in the Bolovens Plateau that had been, being literally chased around the Plateau by the
22 bad guys and the bad guys again had much more firepower than they had. So they were
23 getting a lot of casualties and they had a bunch of, quite a few wounded, walking
24 wounded, and wounded to be evacuated and brought back to Pakse. So, the plan was, the
25 spot we were going to, really was on the, the Plain de Jars is east of Pakse. Pakse is right
26 on the Mekong River in Laos, and right by the Thai border, the southern Thai border and
27 Pakse was just due east of that, probably twenty, twenty-five miles up into where we
28 were headed. Of course down at the river level, it's fairly low elevation. I don't
29 remember what it is, probably five hundred feet or so, that far up the river, but anyway
30 the Bolovens is three thousand feet. A lot of it is or higher in some areas, but where we
31 were headed was about three thousand feet. So, they were going to, the troops were in an

1 open area at this end of the Bolovens Plateau in a suitable place for landing, and
2 supposedly not much enemy action right around there, so we would go up there. The
3 plan was that we would go up high, as we always do. We flew you know three thousand
4 feet above the ground, circle the area, get the right signal. After we got that I would land
5 first with Jim, with Jim, Sword and he would get out, I would take off again and go back
6 into orbit and he would sort out the wounded, do a triage down there and get the, I guess
7 the most serious get out first. So and then make sure the load, we didn't get overloaded.
8 So, I did that, took off overhead, he called me back in about five minutes and said they
9 were ready. A couple things that were kind of, not alarming, but I knew that we had to be
10 cautious of and the first time we landed, it was pretty, it was dry and a lot of red dust flew
11 up when the helicopter landed and it would have been a giveaway to anybody observing
12 from any of the little mountain tops around there, that a helicopter had landed. So I
13 figured that's, if anybody's watching them that's going to alert the bad guys. Anyway, I
14 took off, came back down again, in the same way, I told my crew chief that, who was a
15 guy named Jim Nakamoto, that we didn't want to try to, wanted to take as little time as
16 we could on the ground there. I would go in first with the other two aircraft would remain
17 in orbit and as soon as I took off, then the next aircraft would come down and pick up a
18 load and then we'd continue to shuttle our loads back and forth from Pakse until we
19 either got them all out of there, or in case we started taking incoming. Anyway, I landed
20 and as they were loading the people, there were a lot of litters and everything lined up
21 right next to this pad I was going to land on, the load, so I landed right there with them,
22 real close to them, so it wouldn't take them long to get up in the aircraft. Some of them
23 were in litters, some of them were able to walk, and as they're loading them, a round
24 went off behind me, back behind me quite a way, or an explosion went off and I knew
25 that if that was an artillery round for example shot from someplace that the next one is
26 probably going to be a lot close, so I told the other, I told B. J. Ruck, I said you know
27 we're going to give them about ten seconds here and then we're going to go and I hope,
28 and of course it I told the crew chief, I said get Jim, or get Sword in the aircraft and we're
29 going to have to bug out of here before that next round hits. Well, the next round did hit
30 before we could get loaded and it hit right on top of the people that they were loading,
31 right next to the aircraft, and because of the people standing there and the bodies laying

1 there, the round, they absorbed, the round was absorbed in them and didn't get us,
2 luckily, but it was pretty amazing because it literally flew bodies into the air, all
3 directions. So I took off, hoping that Lewis, that Jim, as it turned out Jim was in the
4 aircraft, although he did get a shrapnel wound in that one, but took off out of there. And
5 you know an H-34 recip engine that high, three thousand foot elevation with a load is
6 really hard to struggle to fly to take off and gain altitude. So we're lumbering out of
7 there and gaining altitude and air speed, get going, and another round went off under us,
8 they were trying to apparently shoot us out of the air now, and it went off right under us,
9 but it was a, not a big round but it was like a sixty-two millimeter mortar or something
10 like that. Then also looking out my window there, on the strut of the aircraft, the wheel
11 strut, there was a soldier hanging onto it and this guy was, his back was covered with
12 blood and he'd taken impact apparently from the first explosion, had ended up grabbing
13 the strut and hanging onto it and continued to hang on as we took off. So, I figured I was
14 watching him as we were flying out and figured well, he's going to let go here in a
15 minute. We were hundreds of feet in the air now and he's going to be gone, but Jim, our
16 crew chief, managed to reach out there, grab him by the shirt and yank him into the
17 aircraft, which saved his life. Yes, it was pretty impressive and he did live as we found
18 out later too, he was not that, so anyway we got back to Pakse that night and checked the
19 aircraft wasn't hurt, I think it might have had a couple small holes but there wasn't any
20 damage and meanwhile the people that we were supporting would be on the march and
21 get to a better area for the next day and we'd resume the mission in the morning. So,
22 quite a day.

23 SM: Yes, sir. How much longer were you in country?

24 BV: That was 18th of March '72 and I was, I left in the fall, you know end of
25 September, first of October, or October I think of '72.

26 SM: So, just about six more months.

27 BV: Yes, about six more months or so.

28 SM: We've been talking for a little bit over an hour, why don't we take a quick
29 break.

30 BV: Sure.

1 SM: While you were serving in Thailand and Laos, how much information were
2 you receiving about Vietnam and how close attention was being paid or your circles, in
3 Air America, the CIA, how much were you guys watching what was happening over
4 there?

5 BV: Actually, not a whole lot. We obviously were aware of the relationship
6 between the Vietnam excursions into Laos and the Ho Chi Minh Trail and you know
7 efforts that affected us. But as far as how the war was going and what was going on in
8 Vietnam, there really, to me anyway there wasn't much other than what I read in the
9 newspaper, which I, you know we'd be up country for six days at a time and I'd get back
10 and probably get a little of the news, but we really didn't get that much news anyway
11 there. We didn't have, I'm trying to think, we didn't have any, we had the *Bangkok Post*,
12 that was the only English speaking newspaper or the English reading newspaper in that
13 area and it didn't really do much. I mean it was just more local stuff than it was about
14 Vietnam so, of course I often, during my tenure there would travel back to the States and
15 I can still recall, you know I went to school at the University of Washington, and was in
16 ROTC there in fact and I went back on a visit, one to my trips back and some of my
17 buddies were still going to law school there. So I went out to see them and took my wife
18 with me and couldn't believe a couple things that happened. One, the darn protesters had
19 burned down the ROTC building there, which was really amazing I thought and then the
20 other was, well the university district, which is you know the area right around the school
21 there, which is a neat area, these so-called flower children walking, this is Seattle in the
22 wintertime, where it's kind of rainy and wet and cold and going around barefooted with
23 flowers giving out either leaflets about anti-war or giving out flowers just to everybody
24 walking along. I'm thinking, this, I didn't really, but I was kind of amazed at how the
25 kids could be that way, but I said boy, they've got to be on, smoking something. Then I
26 would have, I would be questioned when I got back in the States, you know my either
27 friends or relatives, just a little bit about what's, why do you think we're at the war there,
28 what's going on and this kind of stuff, but really not a lot. Of course most of my friends
29 were ex-military anyway, or military, so they were, they weren't really anti-war. So
30 anyway yes, in country, in Thailand and Laos there really, really wasn't a whole lot,
31 really, anything more than just normal news type stuff.

1 SM: Okay, well were you surprised at how the American people were reacting to
2 the Vietnam War?

3 BV: No, not really on the big picture. I mean it was no mystery that to most of us,
4 that the method we were going about fighting that war was not the right way to do it. And
5 I mean it certainly didn't take a, even when I was there early, in '65, in Vietnam, we were
6 there at that point as I mentioned before to get it won and get it out of there, and thought
7 we were doing the right thing and even the methods of fighting at that time because we
8 were just building up our forces were limited but that was okay because we figured it was
9 going to get better. But, not being able to pursue the enemy wherever we needed to, not
10 being able to attack them wherever we thought we needed to, you know fighting them
11 like a military would fight and then trying to fight it as a politician back in Washington
12 using that method to fight in the war, which was obviously the wrong way to do it and
13 anyway, that was. I just kind of would not, I mean I would not disagree with the anti-war
14 feeling generally. I did disagree of course with the cowards running to Canada and things
15 like that, but that was another story. A few of them, what I could do to pay them back
16 later I did too. I was a chief pilot for an airline working out of, and I had a lot of job
17 applications, I would screen those applications for, especially with pilots to see what they
18 were doing during the war.

19 SM: Really?

20 BV: Oh, absolutely and if they didn't answer right, now I didn't expect them all
21 the be in Vietnam but if they were, I'd always questioned what was your situation, and if
22 I figured out they were some kind of a draft dodger protesting weak individual they
23 certainly wouldn't be hired, hands down.

24 SM: Well, when you were there, let's see, when you were in Laos, were you
25 flying in support of any of the operations that occurred across the border from Vietnam
26 into Laos in particular for instance Lam Son 719?

27 BV: No, I was aware of it but we weren't in direct support of it, no we were not.

28 SM: How about missions into Cambodia, did you conduct any yourself and did
29 you support the Cambodian incursion?

30 BV: Yes. No, not the. The only Cambodian missions that I did were again with
31 teams and people trained by our CIA guys. Down out of Pakse there was some, what

1 they call a PS site, one right near Pakse called PS Seven, which was a camp especially for
2 Cambodian folks to train them and then send them back in there. I used to fly them back
3 into their Cambodian site and I don't even remember the name of it, but it was a site
4 within Cambodia that we would shuttle them back into, not too far in but it was in
5 Cambodia and I worked that mission whenever I was down there I would work it,
6 probably three or four or five times a year and support them of course at the Lao side too.
7 But I never got, I never got, other than just shuttling between the two places I never got
8 involved in any other activities and I don't know of any Air America that actually went in
9 there and did you know like a combat assault in Cambodia or anything like that.

10 SM: Okay, well while you were busy in mid-March of 1972, of course the
11 Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese were also quite busy as they were engaging in their
12 Easter Offensive of that year, while you were in Thailand and Laos, did you hear very
13 much about that offensive and how that was progressing?

14 BV: No, not really, just it was a. You know after that many years it was just the
15 same old routine as far as the American side, it was just, you know you react where you
16 need to. You take the land and then after you take it you leave it and then go back and
17 retake it again whenever, and keep doing their sweeps and things. Of course it was just a
18 patchwork type way of fighting a war, just, it was not right, it was not the plan, the big
19 picture was all messed up anyway. You know war is hell, when you get killed, whether
20 it's by a bullet or by what, you're dead and so if you're going to be subjected to that, to
21 dying and subjected to, you're putting your life on the line like that, you need to at least
22 be able to fight it the way it needs to be fought or don't do it, one or the other. But you
23 just can't do it, like being a little bit pregnant, you either are or you aren't.

24 SM: Yes, sir. Okay, well a couple of just general in country questions that came
25 to mind. In particular, did you ever encounter any strange or bizarre wildlife; did you
26 have any problems with any kind of wildlife?

27 BV: No, I saw elephants some times, and other than snakes. There were a lot of
28 snakes in Thailand and Laos, but I really didn't encounter, I mean really encounter any.
29 You know flying day after day you're going to see things once in a while, but you
30 brought up something that just reminded me of something else, which I might mention.
31 In Laos and Thailand, but in that part of the world, there were a lot of kids idealistic type

1 kids that they're traveling around with backpacks, some of them wanting to be or
2 probably pseudo-reporters or wanting to be reporters, and other ones just curious I guess
3 and just being kids, or young people, but were really in harm's way more than they
4 realized. I remember even in Luang Prabang, which was kind of isolated, you don't just
5 take the road from Vientiane to Luang Prabang. I mean there was a road but it's not a
6 normal thing to do, you'd fly, you got up there to get there. But anyway on several
7 occasions up there I met people, one time this couple that I'm not really sure what their
8 nationality was, whether they were, one of them might have been American or there
9 were, there were various ones during the period of time but I mean they were from, they
10 spoke English. You know they were either American or South African or something, but
11 or Canadian, but backpacking and just kind of live and let live and I don't think that they
12 even understood that if they got out in the boonies and got picked up by the Path Et Lao
13 or the NVA they were goners. It wasn't like they were going to just love them, but they
14 didn't, they're still so idealistic they didn't understand that I don't think. I've got kind of
15 a funny story to relate on that, I'm thinking of that one couple too, anyway we saw
16 people like that a lot, and what we would usually do is let them come into our hostel and
17 have a shower and maybe have a meal, a real meal because they were just kind of living
18 up, most of them apparently didn't have any money, and they were just kind of living
19 along the way but as an adventure but that's a heck of a place to have an adventure during
20 the war years. But this one couple, I was with three or four other Air America pilots
21 including a couple of our resident animals and also another guy named, it was a real soft-
22 spoken guy named Phil Jennings was his name, he lives up in Belview, Washington, but
23 he was only there for a couple years. But Phil and I and these other guys were at this
24 Chinese type restaurant in Luang Prabang along with this couple and we're, we had
25 dinner and this was like one of these sidewalk type café dinner places, it was good but it
26 was just pretty primitive, and so after that we all went over to this bar type place where
27 they, you know all the bars there were also combination bar whore houses but they were
28 you know where you could, you know have a drink, sit there, you could dance if you
29 wanted or whatever you wanted to do, but anyway we're all sitting around the table
30 drinking with this couple, and at the end the bill came, and of course in kip it wasn't
31 really that much money. You know, five hundred kip was a dollar so it might have a

1 couple thousand kip for beers all night and this couple, oh yes, Phil Jennings, the guy
2 that's really soft-spoken. The other guys are acting their part as animals most of the
3 night, but Phil hadn't said much, he's just being a real kind of polite guy and finally he
4 looks at the girl, or the guy and the girl and he says, we're dividing up the bill and he
5 says, "And for your share, you're going to have to strip," which was really funny coming
6 out of him, but anyway it really alarmed this young couple and she's going through her
7 backpack pulling out these five kip notes and ten kip notes and one kip notes and trying
8 to get enough money together for their. Yes, I thought it was pretty funny. Anyway.

9 SM: Now, how many people did you encounter like them, would you estimate?

10 BV: Oh, there were, occasionally there was. You know you probably heard the
11 story about Anne Darling, right.

12 SM: I'm sorry, who?

13 BV: You've heard that name, Anne Darling?

14 SM: No, I don't think I have.

15 BV: She was a reporter. I'm not really sure if she was freelance or what. She was
16 in Vientiane a lot and she wanted to get up country or somebody there, but they couldn't
17 unless they somehow thumbed a ride with locals you know somehow. So, she thought
18 she was going to have some kind of a big expose story typical of drug running, like the
19 movie, *Air America* movie and I don't know. I'm trying to remember if I ever did see her
20 or not, but anyway people like here would hang around at the bars in Vientiane, places
21 they could get to, or Pakse or Savannakhet, areas that they could get access to and just
22 kind of sit there and hoping to get a story about Air America about how the war's going
23 or something, for CIA. And you could always spot them, because I mean first of all they
24 were strangers and usually they were dressed up in some kind of a I don't know a little
25 vest type outfit like a hunting vest type thing that none of us wore but a reporter would
26 wear. And they're kind of observing or they'll come by and have a drink with you or try
27 to have a drink with you, they're just kind of picking you information. So, the normal
28 procedure for most of us was if we spotted one of these guys we would, say we're sitting
29 at a table right near them and one of us would say, "Hey, George how many babies do
30 you think we killed today when we went ahead and napalmed that hospital and that

1 orphanage?" You could just tell their ears were pricking up, just to kind of egg them
2 [laughs].

3 SM: So, that's how mis-reporting occurred?

4 BV: Yes, and then sure, big story, next thing you know *Life Magazine* has some
5 kind of a big expose.

6 SM: Right, compliments of you guys.

7 BV: Yes, compliments, its all just baloney, anyway.

8 SM: Now, did you, when you would do that, did you actually witness them
9 writing things down?

10 BV: Well, one time there was a guy, he really had a little notebook and he was
11 taking notes and that's one time we said that. Now, whether he either heard us or wrote
12 that I don't know, but it was kind of because we were, we kind of winked, everybody
13 knew, we all knew what we were saying and since he was a stranger he was probably
14 sucking it all in.

15 SM: Now, did you get sick very often over there?

16 BV: No, I didn't. I had the, everybody had like the amoebas.

17 SM: You're talking about amoeba dysentery?

18 BV: Yes, amoeba dysentery, but they called it amoebas which really was a, oh
19 you're always on the verge of maybe diarrhea but sometimes you got it, sometimes you
20 don't, but quite frankly I would kind of get that way sometimes when I was back in
21 Udorn, but when I was up country flying I felt pretty good. The food was good and
22 flying, getting up in the clean air for your work is always better too I think and then you
23 felt good. Of course at that stage where you're young and healthy and you'll feel pretty
24 good anyway, so actually getting sick from the food or from, of course you were careful
25 on the water, you know at home we filtered our water, we went out we normally, we
26 wouldn't drink ice water. You'd drink canned drinks or beer or something. So, the
27 family too, the kids were all there with us, and we never really go till, the normal once in
28 a while. I'll tell you another interesting story; did you hear about the, have you heard
29 about the. First of all there's a place in Bangkok called the Bangkok Christian Hospital
30 back there?

31 SM: No, I haven't heard of that.

1 BV: Okay, it was the run by the Seventh-Day Adventists I believe and it was an
2 option where you could go ahead and use that if you needed to use a hospital in Bangkok.
3 Anyway, one of the things that they had was what they called the amoeba cure and what
4 it was, usually if you're going to go back on home leave for a month or so, you would
5 take the cure. And the cure amounted to taking about twenty pills a day and a lot of the,
6 some of the pills were like arsenic and things like this that would, somehow by taking all
7 these pills and sulfur drugs and stuff and antibiotic, you would kill the amoebas in you.
8 So, when we were getting ready to go on home leave, so we went down to the Bangkok
9 Christian, my wife and I both decided we were going to, she'd had it and both of us had,
10 we knew we had some amoeba dysentery like everybody else, so we decided to go ahead.
11 But to take the cure you've got to go through a quick little program and the program is, a
12 part of it is they give you three little cups, like little Dixie cups and you've got to go into
13 the bathroom and have a bowel movement and fill those three cups up, one with the first
14 part, one with the second part and one with whatever you can get at the end, but the way
15 that it. We still got it somewhere in a notebook or scrapbook here, they give you these,
16 of course its Thais, I mean not Thai, yes it was Thai doctors and people translated it to
17 English, the description of how you fill your cup and its really comical, you know about
18 getting it on your hands and doing this and that and the way it was written it was cute.
19 So, anyway, we went ahead and did that and then got the pills and started taking them.
20 Of course, one thing, when you're taking pills like that you can't drink; you're not
21 supposed to drink. So I got back to the States and I was on the amoeba cure and I went to
22 visit a good friend of mine that I'd known in the Army, a guy that I'd know over the
23 years, another pilot, of course I drank Scotch back then, so he pours me a great big
24 straight Scotch on the rocks, about a whole glass full and hands it to me and I didn't even
25 think anything, I just gulped about half of it down and the next thing you know my eyes
26 are dilated and I need to cage my eyeballs and man, I realized I was having a reaction
27 from the drugs and from having that alcohol. So I had to decide either I couldn't drink or
28 I had to quite the cure so what I did, I quite the cure of course. I never really did resume
29 it. The only way you can really get over the amoebas if you lived over there quite a
30 while is to get back into clean living here in the States.

31 SM: Now, did it go away on its own for you?

1 BV: Oh, yes.

2 SM: How long did that take?

3 BV: Not long, I really, actually I never really felt that bad even when I was living
4 there. We had pretty good food and I ate at the local, especially when I was up country
5 I'd eat at the local noodle stands, walking home from the bar in the middle of the night,
6 coming back to the hostel I'd stop at one of these little push cart noodle things where
7 they've got these, they look like dumplings but they're filled full of vegetables and some
8 meats and things and they give it to you, they roll it up in some newspaper and give it to
9 you and they're good, I'd eat those there all the time, they never bothered me.

10 SM: Okay, now did the cure work for your wife?

11 BV: I don't think she stayed on it either. I think she agreed with me, she said that
12 we might as well relax and have a drink and not worry about it. All of us were not really
13 ill, she's pretty healthy too and she'd usually come home during our tour, when she came
14 home to have a baby one time, our fifth child.

15 SM: Did she feel more comfortable having it in the States with the medical
16 facilities?

17 BV: Yes, well there were a couple, that was part of it and the other thing, she's an
18 RH negative and I was positive so there's also a possibility of a problem there so she
19 wanted to come back to the same doctor that she knew in Mineral Wells, Texas, her
20 family doctor. She'd already had one of the, yes Jeff was from, our first two were born in
21 Germany and then the third one we adopted and the fourth one was born in Mineral
22 Wells, so the fifth one she went back there in Mineral Wells to have Chris. He was the
23 most expensive baby we had. He, the first, Ben or Susie, both in the Army, they cost me
24 around, I think Ben's bill is \$4.75 and Susie was premature and had a lot of hospital care
25 and I think she cost about \$75. She was only three pounds when she was born, so six
26 months. But anyway, and then Jeff was whatever I paid normal paying for him back in
27 the States and then Chris cost about ten grand because I bought a house and moved her
28 back there with the kids for three months while he was born, then she came back after
29 three months.

30 SM: Okay, well during your last six months, what kind of operations did you fly,
31 did anything change?

1 BV: Well, things were getting a little bit hairier and that's kind of one of the
2 things that convinced me that maybe I need to go ahead and hang it up. I had that,
3 several close calls. Of course that mission on the 18th of March of course that was not
4 real close but we started having, the enemy started bringing in sightings of shoulder fired
5 missiles, SAMs, the SA-7s, of course that was a concern and the op tempo, well not
6 really to op tempo didn't change any but what happened is there was a lot more enemy
7 action type things. We had a few more aircraft crash in the end of '72, the summer of
8 '72, more fatalities and all that added together kind of, well maybe I'm, maybe it's time,
9 I've had so many close ones, maybe it's time to call it a day. I was kind of ready to come
10 back and stop that flying for a while. But as far as, toward the end of course since I was
11 getting kind of short, I was kind of given a little more latitude on missions, I mean the
12 RON locations and so I think I mentioned that Tony Poole had moved into Thailand then,
13 he was working at Pits Camp, Pitanoluke, which is in northeastern Thailand, or
14 northwestern Thailand I mean and so I worked over with him a lot and I got several trips
15 in a row with him working in that area.

16 SM: What kind of work did you do there?

17 BV: It was, they had a training camp there, training teams to go into Laos, so I
18 did support, helicopter training with them, you know flight infils/exfils, stable repelling,
19 did a lot of repelling, stable helicopter or parachute jumps with them with static lines.

20 SM: Were there the PARU, the PARU in Thailand?

21 BV: You know I don't know. Again it was a CIA camp, and Special Forces, there
22 was some Army Special Forces there too, the town is called Pitsanalou and the camp was
23 called Tango Six-0-Three, it was Pits Camp is what it was called. I think I mentioned
24 before that after the day's work I would fly Tony back home. The town was like ten
25 miles and I'd land in behind the hotel, in behind his house or the hotel there where I was
26 staying and I was flying the helicopter there and used it so shuttle back and forth to work
27 on, so it was pretty neat.

28 SM: That is, using helicopter to shuttle from home to work, interesting.

29 BV: Yes, otherwise it was around ten miles on a road to get up into Pits Camp.

30 SM: And you're saying Pits Camp?

31 BV: Pits Camp, yes, I think its P-I-T-S Camp, Pits Camp.

1 SM: Let's see, when you were flying those types of support missions, and you
2 said there were some Special Forces personnel there, did you yourself ever then fly the
3 infiltration missions taking them from Thailand into Laos?

4 BV: I never did that. This particular camp, they were training them and I don't
5 know if they even, if they flew them to Laos with a helicopter or what, they probably
6 flew them to Laos with like a 123 or a 130 and then into some area there, like Long Chen
7 and then from there they were divided out into wherever they were going to go.

8 SM: When you were flying into Laos, did you ever encounter or transport any
9 U.S. Special Forces soldiers there?

10 BV: No. No U.S. Special Forces,. I, of course the American customers you know
11 were with us but, flew with them. You know I told you the story already about the camp,
12 the guy I flew down there out of southern Laos, out of Ubon area, I mean southern
13 Thailand into Laos, remember we got shot at, that was one of our other episodes. Do you
14 recall, when I called the air strike in on the one guy with the AK?

15 SM: Yes, sir.

16 BV: That's the only time I did it then, I wasn't supposed to do it then.

17 SM: Are there any other operations or missions or things that we haven't
18 discussed yet about your time in Thailand and Laos?

19 BV: Not that I can really think of. We did a little bit of training with the Thai
20 police, I can remember flying with them a little bit but I don't remember what the
21 circumstances, near Udorn and I flew missions one time out of Bangkok when I was first
22 there, I went down there and actually I was flying the CIC aircraft, that white aircraft they
23 called the White Elephant, and I don't really recall it was some kind of a mission with
24 somebody, somebody wanted, it was a night mission, the guy wanted to go out and use
25 some kind of a starlight scope or something that he was using, so I just flew him around
26 and around Bangkok but other than that there was, it was pretty cut and dry, going to
27 Laos, doing the five to six day shuttle distance with re-supply and people and taking the
28 bodies back to the village and whatever they needed, pretty much the same routine all the
29 time.

30 SM: Well, what did it feel like leaving for the last time?

1 BV: We had a lot of friends there, in fact still keep up with quite a few of them, so
2 we had, there were a lot of farewell parties and it was, we were anxious and looking
3 forward to getting home. We were, we were leaving a lot of friends but we knew that we
4 were going to keep up with them and I was wanting to get back and get into the, believe it
5 or not into the hardware business in Mineral Wells, Texas with my father-in-law. He was
6 already in the, been in the plumbing and hardware business for years but he wanted to get
7 a new, build a new store and expand it, so that's what I did. And it didn't work out, but
8 that was the plan so we were looking forward to that. I do remember though coming
9 back we stopped in Hawaii for about a week. See the big thing, whenever we got out of
10 there, either going to the States or Hawaii, I mean it was like going to McDonalds and
11 going to all, doing all the things that you couldn't do in Thailand, and eating all the food
12 that you couldn't get there. So it was like driving, going to the grocery store or another,
13 or to a drive-in restaurant to another, so we stayed in Hawaii, it was fun. We rented a car
14 and stayed at a, that time we stayed at the Holiday Inn there and just worked on that with
15 our kids, five kids.

16 SM: That's a good-sized family.

17 BV: Yes, they traveled with us all over. We had, I think we figured they had
18 thirteen round the world trips, four of them did, when they got out of there.

19 SM: When you got back to the States in late 1973.

20 BV: '72.

21 SM: I'm sorry, late 1972. Of course at the end of '72 and into early '73 the war in
22 Vietnam took an interesting turn with the Linebacker Two campaign, the finale, the
23 conclusion to the Paris Peace Accords in January of '73 and in essence an end to the
24 American involvement in Southeast Asia. You had made a decision at an appropriate
25 time, and you were pulling out just as the U.S. was, what did you think about the way we
26 got out of Southeast Asia?

27 BV: Well, a couple things, one is, when I, of course left Vietnam I thought we
28 were on the road to winning that one when I left there in '66, went over with Air America
29 and was with a much more professional mission. I mean the mission was much more
30 open to us, everybody knew what the mission was and we had a part in it and we could
31 see the big picture and understand what we were doing, which was great. Everything was

1 working good over there. Looking back though, when I got out of there and how Vietnam
2 was deteriorating and of course I had a lot of friends that had been over there for
3 probably their third tour in and out of Vietnam and how things had gotten worse as far as
4 the operations, the method of operations, so I was, my opinion was we either need to win
5 the war or get out of there and that was a personal opinion and when I went to Laos, or
6 when I was with Air America, I went there, at least initially for the money and for the
7 adventure, because it was an adventure, and I was at the height of my flying game back
8 then in those days and I felt really good about flying there and everything. Not
9 necessarily for the cause, I mean other than obviously I was for the war effort but that
10 wasn't my main motivator, after working with them and living there and being there for
11 years, of course I became more dedicated I guess you could say to not only the job, the
12 money, the adventure but also the cause. Anyway, but yet more and more disenchanted
13 with they way the war was operated in Vietnam. We did so much, as you know, so much
14 in Laos with so little, and if you want to figure dollars spent man they got much more
15 bang for the buck on our deal than they did in Vietnam. Vietnam was to me such a waste
16 of manpower and effort and money, especially after leaving those people. We built them
17 up and protected and trained and supported, et cetera and probably egged them on into
18 the war and then we abandoned them, which was not good. Especially abandoning a
19 cause that we'd already lost 58,000 of our own guys and not finishing it, just pulling out,
20 but anyway that was a decision, that's what we did. So there was mixed feelings in that
21 respect.

22 SM: Well when you left I guess Thailand in '72, did you feel like you had
23 accomplished something?

24 BV: Well, yes I felt that, we could tell, we knew at that point and that was of
25 course Vietnam was too that little by little we were losing Laos. You know, I mean the
26 enemy was getting stronger and we hadn't gotten any stronger of course and our
27 indigenous Army up there, mainly the Laotian Army or the Mayos, backed Vang Pao's
28 people were getting more and more beat up as time went on, the attrition was taking
29 them. So it was not a good deal for them, that's why at that point a lot of the effort was
30 being made to try to go ahead and evacuate out of there as many people as we could,
31 even earlier, even before the end of the war, give them an opportunity to get out of there,

1 either go to Thailand or go back to the States. Because Thailand was doing all right, they
2 had their problems too with insurgents in the border areas and everything but they pretty
3 well had a handle on it. At that time the Thai government was pretty much, of course still
4 is pretty much pro-U.S. and doing what we, doing their effort, doing their end of the
5 whole effort down there. I like the Thais, I like the Thai people and the Laos better than
6 the Vietnamese in fact, because you know the land, they call it the Land of Smiles, you
7 probably saw that when you were there, everybody was happy and smiling and having a
8 good time. Of course they're and they like Americans, at least they sure did back then, I
9 assume they still do.

10 SM: They do.

11 BV: And anyway, and the Vietnamese I never really could quite trust. I never
12 felt, even though I have Vietnamese friends, I never, I always felt that they, they weren't
13 quite as trustworthy as, and maybe I was wrong in my perceptions but that was my
14 thinking anyway. Even the Vietnamese that were in Laos, that lived there. Anyway,
15 leaving there, and at the end of it was to me was kind of a cheap way, not cheap, but just
16 kind of a bad way to get out of it, just leave, say okay, you've got it, you have the
17 controls and knowing very well that they weren't going to be able to hang in there very
18 long without us, which they didn't, couldn't.

19 SM: I would imagine your feelings in that respect only grew when North Vietnam
20 took over South Vietnam in '75?

21 BV: Yes, well I, you know everybody figured that was coming eventually. They
22 weren't going to stop all of a sudden just because, especially because we were gone now.
23 I thought the whole effort was kind of a waste of resources and a waste of, destroying
24 there, or tearing up a beautiful country like both Laos and Vietnam.

25 SM: Well, what were the most important things you took away from your
26 experiences there, just as a person?

27 BV: Oh, I don't know. I guess just the whole sense of travel, adventure of being
28 there, of being a part of it, of being first hand. You know the helicopter pilot especially
29 to me is probably like what the World War I fighter pilot was flying the bi-wings. You
30 know we're close to the ground, we're flying slow, you've got a good visibility really
31 what's going on and then you've got a, together you've also got to combine a certain

1 amount of skills in order to survive that kind of environment and so me, that was a boost,
2 kind of an ego boost I guess that during that period of your life your not only physically
3 and mentally sharp, you're doing something that's hard to do and you're doing something
4 that perhaps is saving lives, which you know you think over the years, all the many lives
5 that are probably saved because you were able to give them a helicopter ride to safety or
6 to the medical facilities or whatever, a rescue from something, of course I continued that
7 in the Army which was kind of interesting too, but anyway, later years in the Army,
8 especially as a dust off pilot up say in New York.

9 SM: Well, when did you, okay you came back to Texas and attempted to make a
10 go at the hardware.

11 BV: Hardware business, that's right.

12 SM: Business, when did you go back into the military, into the service?

13 BV: Let's see I was back in '73, end of '72, '73 I was in the hardware business
14 and then they turned around and closed Camp Walters, Fort Walters there in Mineral
15 Wells, which killed that town so I moved to Fort Worth, got in the real estate business, I
16 don't know if I went through this before or not but, which I'd already had an experience
17 in that and got with a nice land development in Fort Worth and bought another house. I'd
18 already bought property in Mineral Wells, which I still had, I couldn't sell but moved the
19 family over to Fort Worth at this land development, nice place up in Eagle Mountain
20 Lake, if you're familiar with Fort Worth, I don't know if you are or not, but.

21 SM: Not very much, no sir.

22 BV: Anyway, northwestern Fort Worth, but that was in '74 and you know what
23 happened in '74 was the oil crunch and mortgage money was not available and the
24 housing market dropped and there was a pretty good recession, and anyway I had a
25 couple bad hands dealt right in a row, so then, the only way I could really make decent
26 money at that point then was go back to flying, so I went to Iran with Bell helicopters as
27 an instructor and that thing turned to crap in a hurry, the family was with me over there
28 too but that didn't work out real well.

29 SM: How long were you in Iran?

30 BV: I was there in '75 right before the Shah fell.

31 SM: Okay, so for just less than a year or?

1 BV: Yes, less than a year.

2 SM: And you were training Iranian pilots?

3 BV: Yes, Iranian, training their pilots to fly, I was teaching primary flight.

4 SM: Fixed wing or rotary wing?

5 BV: Rotary wing, gun ships and Bell helicopter products and Hueys and the OH-
6 58, the Jet ranger and that was an interesting time. My family was with me but we lived
7 in Esfahan, which is up at the six thousand foot level in central Iran and I could tell then
8 there was going to be a problem. Of course our students spoke English and they were the
9 cream of the crop with the Iranian people and the Air Force and Army people, but I could
10 tell there was going to be a problem and it should have been, the ambassador to Iran at
11 that time was Richard Helms, a former CIA chief and he should have been smarter than
12 the way they handled things. It was obvious to us that were living there and it should
13 have been to him and anybody else that there was going to be a problem. There was
14 unrest, the Shah was trying to modernize his country and it was inflation and a lot of
15 Auslanders or a lot of foreigners there and the local religious folks didn't like that and on
16 and on and of course it was ripe for the Ayatollah to come back in, especially after the
17 Shah got sick, was evacuated out of there. So we were there, and everybody here, but
18 then when I got back from there, still I joined the Army, I got back in the Army Reserves
19 a little bit. I started flying what they called IR, Air Division Ready Reserve which meant
20 that I could go fly for like a month of a year with some unit someplace and I was working
21 in the flight, civilian flight business at the time and doing that too. The Army was giving
22 me inquiries of whether or not I would be interested in coming back on active duty
23 because they were short of pilots, short of experienced pilots at that point. After Vietnam
24 there was a big rift and everything, so they lost a lot of their experience. But I kept
25 thinking if I did that that would be kind of like admitting defeat and kind of a come
26 down, especially after being an Air America pilot, go back and being an Army pilot. So
27 anyway, but I finally did it; it took until 1980 when I went back in. I was only, at that
28 time the kids were all in high school, or most of them teenagers anyway, several of them,
29 three of them were in high school, or four of them and with five kids and trying to make a
30 living flying helicopters and I was actually chief pilot for a company. The money was
31 good except I was gone all the time, I had to travel where the business, we had aircraft

1 offshore, we had aircraft in the mountain states up in the northwest and Montana and
2 Wyoming and I was the chief pilot so I had to go around and make sure we had the right
3 crews and trained in the right places and so on to work with the customers but I was
4 never home anyway, the point. So, and the kids needed a dad at home so I decided okay,
5 I'm going to go back in the Army for, I think I had to give them either three or four years,
6 I don't remember what it was, and that will get the kids through school and I'll just treat
7 it like another flying job and once we get out of the Army, I mean once that is over we'll
8 get back and doing whatever and that was 1980. Well, I retired in '97, so I enjoyed it, I
9 always did and enjoy the Army and I really enjoyed when I went back because I had so
10 much flight experience that I was, that was another ego thing, I mean everybody would
11 look to me for advice and for training and for whatever. So, I stayed I, got all the jobs I
12 wanted and had a real good career, as you know ended up in the hall of fame.

13 SM: Yes sir. Now, did you participate in the Gulf War?

14 BV: Yes, I was, not only the Gulf War, I was in Grenada, I was in Somalia, I was
15 in Haiti, I was in the, now the Gulf War.

16 SM: How about in Panama?

17 BV: No, I missed Panama.

18 SM: Well, let's do this chronological, so you were in Grenada?

19 BV: Well, when I was back in the Army, first I was special ops, I went back in
20 with what they called SOCON back then, Special Forces and trained with them.

21 SM: At Fort Bragg?

22 BV: Yes, at Fort Bragg, yes and didn't deploy. I mean the only deployments I did
23 with them was training deployments but I went with them with an aircraft, we'd put an
24 aircraft in a C-141 and fly it out there with them and then we'd put it together and go take
25 on to whatever mission they were going to, stay a few week or so and then come back,
26 that was kind of neat and then did a lot of sky diving type stuff, I mean I would fly them,
27 and also static line drops and then stable and repelling type mission goggles. So, about
28 that time when I was at Bragg they were forming the Task Force 160.

29 SM: I was just going to ask you that, if you were a member of Task Force 160?

30 BV: Yes, so they were just, well, yes, comes back to, so I'd been at Bragg for just
31 about three years and the Task Force 160 had just formed about a year earlier and they

1 had about three or four major accidents right off the bat and all of them were pilot error.
2 The problem was, these guys were eager, young and eager and they were just flying the
3 aircraft was getting ahead of them and they were crashing and running into the wires,
4 they ran a Chinook into an island up in Michigan, killed everybody on that one. They
5 had another one offshore on Virginia Beach that crashed offshore and then another wire
6 strike at Fort Camel. Anyway, they were killing themselves, so the Wing commander
7 who was General Lutz at the time at Fort Bragg, the Special Forces and then General, oh
8 what was his name, he wrote a book in fact. He was two stars at the time, he made four
9 later, but he was in charge of the SOCOM operation, the special ops and that type of
10 thing.

11 SM: Was it Downing?

12 BV: No, they called it JSOC, no it wasn't Downing, it was Schofield, Scocroft or
13 something, something with an S, Schulty, does that sound like.

14 SM: Shelton, was it General Shelton?

15 BV: No, it wasn't Shelton it was.

16 SM: It was General Suddeth, Sudeth was in charge of SOCOM at one point.

17 BV: Yes, this was when he was a two star and actually Lutz was only one star
18 then he made two stars, but General Lutz who has unfortunately died, I like him. I flew a
19 lot with him at Fort Bragg. Anyway, Schulty I think his name was.

20 SM: Schulty?

21 BV: Yes, he mentioned to me, he said why don't you think about going over and
22 flying with the task force guys and being a little, putting a little age into their outfit over
23 there and I said, you know that sounds neat. So I went over there and of course you had
24 to go through a bunch of testing, even to get, even for me to get in that unit. You had to,
25 especially swimming, you had to be able to, and I was a good swimmer, but you had to
26 be able to swim with all your gear and then you had to swim underwater like I don't
27 know, fifty feet or so and you had to tread water for five or ten minutes and all these
28 swimming tests, but I passed and then a regular PT test, which you had to, which I
29 passed. So I went over there to start training with them and the deal was they were going
30 to move my family from Fort Bragg to Fort Campbell, but meanwhile I had a hernia
31 operation come up that I needed to go back to Fort Bragg for, so I went back there and

1 had the operation done and recuperated, took over, they double hernia, in fact they cut
2 one side, then about a month later they cut the other side. So it took about two months to
3 get all that done and healed. Anyway, Linda reminded me, says you know you've
4 already, what do you have to prove? You've already done this kind of stuff, we've got
5 all these kids, the idea was to be home with them, and of course as you know the training
6 for those pilots you're gone all the time, because you can't be flying in the familiar
7 terrain because that way you, because that's their claim to fame to be able to navigate at
8 night, low level within a few second to each checkpoint or each LZ or whatever. So you
9 train literally all over the world for that kind of stuff, so you're gone all the time. I said
10 you know, you're right, so I wrote them a letter of resignation, because you're got to
11 resign from that outfit and you could join it forever, once you're in it, and I've got good
12 friends that have been in it for ten years or longer. I told them thanks, but not thanks. So,
13 now I'm up for reassignment with the Army. I'd already decided to stay in. I'd been
14 given, I was just in for a short contract and I decided somewhere during that time to go
15 ahead and stay in so I did and I, so the Army called me, my branch back in Washington
16 says well, now where do you want to go? Or I mean not where do you want to go, they
17 asked me, they said, "Would you like to just stay at Fort Bragg?" Because I was in
18 SOCOM there but the said, "The 82nd needs a maintenance test pilot really bad and
19 they're short on" and so I said, "Sure." That way I can just stay right in the same quarters
20 and moved over to the 82nd and became the test pilot for them. That why I said, then
21 Grenada came up; so, when Grenada came up I didn't go down with the deployment but I
22 did go down for like a rotation to do maintenance with them. They only deployed some
23 of the people down there but anyway; I was there for that one anyway. So also prior to
24 that I don't know if it says, it probably doesn't on that, I don't know if it does on that hall
25 of fame citation, but I was on the U.S. helicopter team too back in '81, first time we were
26 ever in it we won it, we formed a team.

27 SM: That competition was in Germany, is that correct?

28 BV: That was in Poland.

29 SM: Oh, in Poland. I'm sorry, Poland, okay.

30 BV: We trained and made the team and did that. But anyway, after that, after
31 three more years with the 82nd, I went to Germany and worked there with the 5th Corps

1 and then of course Desert Storm came up, and again our unit went to Desert Storm but I
2 was like a maintenance test guy and we deployed all of our Apaches and everything over
3 there, except in order to get the aircraft over as quick as they needed to be, they had to
4 cannibalize parts off of a bunch of aircraft to get the ones over there to go.

5 SM: You're talking about the Gulf War?

6 BV: Yes, for the Gulf War. Yes this is for Desert Shield; remember Desert Shield
7 then Desert Storm? So I helped our unit deploy and I helped the other units. I was what
8 they call the AVIM, the maintenance support for the whole 5th Corps area and so they, I
9 stayed back along with a platoon of maintenance guys, literally to go around Germany
10 and police up all of them. The hangar crews they'd left everywhere and my instructions
11 were either fly them back or truck them back to Hanau, fix them up, you know get them
12 flyable and then take them down to what they call close loop at Ramstein Air Base and
13 stick them on a C-5 and send them on over. So that's what I did for the duration of the
14 war was keep the other aircraft going back to them, which I just as soon have gone
15 because all the whining from the wives and stuff back there, everybody at that time,
16 which was absolutely ridiculous, I knew, everybody, all of us knew it was, but there were
17 going to be ten thousand body bags coming back, and all this, just like you hear the
18 whiners right now about Iraq, about this war which isn't going to happen, I'll guarantee
19 it's not going to be, it's going to be just like that last one. There'll be very few casualties.
20 But anyway.

21 SM: Well, while you were a test pilot for the 82nd, then you had to be rated in all
22 the aircraft that they had in their system.

23 BV: Yes, well I flew; actually I flew the Cobras, the '58s and the Hueys. I did not
24 fly the Blackhawk at that time. They had just got the Blackhawks in, but they had
25 Cobras, their gunships are, they didn't have Apaches yet, they were still.

26 SM: I was just going to ask you that, what about Apaches?

27 BV: No, they didn't have them yet.

28 SM: Did you eventually get to those?

29 BV: No, we, in Germany I didn't get rated in the Apache, I supported the
30 Apaches. We maintained all the aircraft over there so I got to fly it a little bit but I didn't
31 ever get rated in the Apache.

1 SM: Now, throughout all this experience, were you able to utilize any specific
2 lessons from flying in Southeast Asia, or just the general aviation experience that that
3 was the most important thing?

4 BV: Just general, I don't think Southeast Asia other than taught you how to
5 navigate and how to keep from getting shot, but you learn that anyway pretty quick after
6 you got shot. Of course Air America was even more, but not really. When I went back
7 in the Army I had ten thousand flight hours, which was by far the high time pilot and then
8 of course when I retired I had fourteen thousand, that was definitely the high time, all
9 time high time pilot of the military, of the Army.

10 SM: Really?

11 BV: Yes.

12 SM: That's amazing.

13 BV: I've got that record too yes, so it's a. Now there's some guys that fly for the
14 airline you know and then in the reserves that have like twenty thousand hours but that's
15 all airline time that's hot helicopter time.

16 SM: That's amazing.

17 BV: Yes, so it's a lot of helicopter time.

18 SM: Yes, sir. Now, did, when did you retire?

19 BV: '97.

20 SM: In '97.

21 BV: Yes. I was fifty-seven, I was the oldest guy still on flight status and the
22 oldest flight class, earliest flight class still on flight status.

23 SM: That's just an amazing career.

24 BV: Yes, from there I was going to say that I got back to, first assignment back
25 after Germany was Fort Drum, 18th or the 10th Mountain Division and then of course
26 Somalia came up. Again I was the, I didn't stay in Somalia because I was what they
27 called the AMO, the Aviation Maintenance Officer for the whole, for all, everybody, the
28 senior one so I had to make sure that we had three rotations over there to Somalia and
29 back and I had to make sure that all the parts, pieces, spare aircraft, civilian contractor, all
30 that was en route and in place, so that was really my, that was a big job. That's actually
31 what, from there I ended up going to, I thought was going to be my retirement tour. I was

1 going to go New Orleans and be the advisor for the national, I was the National Guard of
2 Louisiana and their aviation and their trainer, the regular Army trainer for those guys.
3 Meanwhile Haiti came up so we had a detachment that went to Haiti from down there and
4 I got them ready to and got them all equipped down to Haiti. Then I got promoted, which
5 I didn't think I would, I thought I was going to retire, so when I got promoted to W-5,
6 which is, there's not very many of them, and so I said, well that's great, but then the
7 Army said well you can't stay in New Orleans a W-5. You're going to have come back
8 to the real Army. You can go ahead and pick your post anyplace you can find a slot for
9 yourself. So I said well, I might as well go back to Fort Bragg, my kids other than one
10 were already settled down there in that area so I went back to Fort Bragg for a few more
11 years and retired.

12 SM: Did your kids go in the service as well?

13 BV: No, my oldest boy went to military school. He was, in fact he got his, he was
14 a Lieutenant when he was eighteen. He got it early, reserve lieutenant, but he's now a
15 high school teacher in Fayetteville. In fact his wife is having a baby today or tonight. In
16 fact between our calls Linda called and the baby's still, she's been there all day but the
17 baby hasn't come yet.

18 SM: Have they induced?

19 BV: Yes, they've induced; she's up to like a seven on her dilation right now.

20 SM: That baby will be out any time now.

21 BV: Any time, yes. But anyway, Ben wanted to, he went to military school and
22 he wanted to be Special Forces, which he did. He went into Special Forces, he couldn't
23 be a pilot because he wore glasses, but I was at Fort Bragg when he was a cadet and when
24 he was, actually back when he was a reservist later. So I would let him fly with me a lot
25 and then when I was in the 82nd he used to jump, see everybody in the 82nd jumps, even
26 the pilots, but I didn't, if you're old like me you didn't have to, so I didn't jump and Ben
27 jumped in my spot, which was funny, his name is the same so mine Ben Van Etten, he
28 was a lieutenant but instead of a, I was a W-4 then. But anyway, he, I would give him, I
29 would just tell my commander let my son, he's qualified, they said sure he can jump in
30 your spot. So the roster would come up with my name on it, it was his name really, so all
31 the younger guys, "Ah-ha the old guy's going to bust his butt today out there." So he got

1 a lot of jumps with the 82nd and I flew him, when he was, he was in the Reserves then so
2 his unit would jump into one of the LZs for a weekend drill at Fort Bragg, you know one
3 of the drop zones out there, and I'd fly him out there during the week with an OH-58
4 observation and show him and say, okay here's where you've got to set up your, here's
5 where you should set up your guns and here's where you should do this, give him a little
6 recon of the area, a little heads up. Anyway, his wife didn't really support what he
7 needed, the support he needed for, to be a Special Forces guy. He was Reserve Special
8 Forces but he was on active duty quite a bit with them, so he finally is teaching school
9 full time.

10 SM: Well, that's great. Let's see, other Vietnam War, Southeast Asia War specific
11 questions. The only one that I really have left is do you think that we as a nation have
12 learned everything that we can from that experience, have we taken away the appropriate
13 lessons?

14 BV: Yes, I'm sure we did, at least the military has. Unfortunately most of our
15 politicians now have no military experience, prior experience so they can't really relate.
16 Some of them do you know; some of them still can, which you kind of wonder about and
17 you hope it doesn't get into the state sometime where you're going to have another
18 situation, which I don't think would happen, where they're trying to run a war from
19 Washington. For Desert Storm, Desert Shield Schwarzkopf and team were given pretty
20 much full carte blanche to run it the way they needed to run it and I'm sure that this one
21 will be run the same way, if and when, but I was, of course I was in Sarajevo too. I don't
22 know if you know.

23 SM: No.

24 BV: Oh yes. I was there with MPRI, have you ever heard of MPRI?

25 SM: MPRI, no.

26 BV: Military Professional Resources Incorporated, that's the, the CEO is General
27 Bono and General Saint, have you ever heard of him, Carl Bono was the chief of staff of
28 the Army.

29 SM: I've heard of Saint

30 BV: And Saint was the chief of USIMIR. Anyway I went over there for the
31 aviation end of the, in the Bosnian Federation Air Force back in shape, which I worked

1 there two years. Linda was with me and our dogs were with us. Great experience; we
2 lived in Sarajevo and we had a flight school going for their pilots and that. Part of the
3 aid, the train and equip program was we gave them fifteen Hueys and support equipment
4 and then I was there as the chief of maintenance. So my guys trained the maintenance
5 test pilots and trained the mechanics and set up a maintenance squadron similar to a U.S.
6 squadron and trained them similar to how we would, that's what they wanted. They
7 wanted to operate like a U.S. unit or a NATO unit would operate. Very receptive, very
8 excellent students, real happy we were there with them and as far as I know, I hear from
9 some of them now, they're still doing fine.

10 SM: What was your impression of that part of the world?

11 BV: Well, the former Yugoslavia and actually that part of the world too, but even
12 worse I think in Yugoslavia was the mentality is during the Crusades time, unfortunately;
13 the ethnic cleansing, the problems, the conflicts. When Tito, when it was Communist and
14 Tito was in charge he kept a pretty iron rule over that country. Of course Yugoslavia is a
15 big country, for eastern standards, bloc standards it was pretty well developed, but really
16 crude compared to western, but anyway a beautiful country, real mountainous. You
17 know they had the Olympics there in '84 in Sarajevo, and a beautiful area on the Adriatic
18 down, of course that's mainly Croatia on the Adriatic, but neat area, but totally
19 devastated. There was probably not a building in all of Bosnia that wasn't either leveled
20 or put full of holes from the war, and some places whole villages were completely
21 leveled, some places villages were literally wiped out after they cleansed, including the
22 cemeteries were tore up and anything that might. Of course the Serbs, which are the ones
23 people, Belgrade put Yugoslavs down, which are actually Orthodox Christians by
24 religion but they were the bad guys of this war and they thought that they, Milosevic was
25 one of their leaders and their idea was if they could kill everybody else they could have
26 the country, which was ridiculous you know but that what, and prior to that they were all
27 living together and marrying each other. The Bosnians as you know are Muslim and the
28 Croats are Catholic, but the Muslims there are not like the Middle Eastern Muslims,
29 they're what they consider European Muslims. Most of my students were and I mean
30 they drank, they partied and they didn't pray five times a day and they were just like

1 normal folks and they wanted to be treated that way. It was an interesting time, beautiful
2 country, but devastated by the war.

3 SM: Well, is there anything else you'd like to discuss today? We've covered
4 quite a bit of ground?

5 BV: Well, no expect believe it or not when I got out of Bosnia I got hired out of
6 there to go down to become part of the State Department drug eradication program there
7 in South America. I worked out of Patrick Air Force Base and made of course trips to
8 Bolivia, Peru and Columbia.

9 SM: Now what time frame was this?

10 BV: This was just last year.

11 SM: You did this last year?

12 BV: Yes, I was only; I've only been up here less than a year. But as soon as I took
13 that job, I took, I was the manager, the maintenance logistics manager for the whole
14 operation and a lot of aircraft to support, about two hundred aircraft down there, down
15 range. It's a State Department operation but I knew as soon as I took that job I had made
16 a mistake because it's a no-win and its one of these blame, everybody blames the.

17 SM: Why aren't we winning this war?

18 BV: Well, and they blame me for example. If they didn't have parts somewhere
19 in Peru then it was my fault because I'm the logistics manager even though there's all
20 kinds of type customs problems. I had pilferage; I had a billion problems but that didn't
21 matter. Right away so I started, I figured if I'm going to keep working this kind of
22 business I need back with the Army and that's why I'm back up here. I went ahead and
23 made an inquiry and got pulled up here. But anyway, but I did get a chance to get a good
24 visual of that war on drugs down there.

25 SM: You did?

26 BV: Yes.

27 SM: And what was your impression?

28 BV: It's, if you want to talk first of all Bush's war on terrorism, he needs to go to
29 Columbia sometime. That's where your, that's the crux of a lot of your terrorism because
30 they're using the drug trade for their revenue. Of course most of your druggies are
31 terrorists anyway. We, our method now, for the last few years has been spraying their

1 crops with, spraying the coca down there and killing it, which has helped, at least in
2 Columbia, now Peru and Bolivia we actually go in to support their Army with aviation
3 support but they go in there with machetes and actually just cut it down, so it's a little
4 slower process. But Columbia has definitely made a dent, we get a lot of aircraft shot at,
5 we're using OV-10s rigged up with spray equipment down there, and then helicopters
6 and helicopter gun ships, and a lot of those have been given through foreign, FMS,
7 foreign military sales.

8 SM: What do they spray?

9 BV: Its actually Roundup. And really there's all this talk about, I don't know if
10 you've seen *60 Minutes*, where because of our spraying down there these kids are getting
11 warts and everything, but that's a bunch of baloney. Roundup is very safe, and they
12 really dilute it but it really works well. It's not like Agent Orange or DDT or any of these
13 other herbicides they might use, so it with. It definitely kills the crops so they've got to
14 be careful that they don't let it on anything besides what they're trying to spray. What
15 the problem was.

16 SM: What do they use to make it heavier than air?

17 BV: They put oil with it; mix it with some oil and water.

18 SM: Any kind of specific oil, do you know?

19 BV: I'm not sure, its just oily. I'm not sure what it does.

20 SM: So it makes sense to use something that would be inert like vegetable oil or
21 something like as opposed to.

22 BV: Yes, that's like, that's right.

23 SM: As opposed to a petroleum-based product.

24 BV: Yes.

25 SM: Like they use kerosene to cut Agent Orange.

26 BV: Yes. It's working, well. In fact we have aircraft right now from that same
27 operation in Pakistan doing the border of, the Afghanistan border and the plan is, in fact
28 they may be.

29 SM: They're eradicating the poppy?

30 BV: Yes, the poppies there. In fact they may already be in, probably are in
31 Afghanistan now, but you we've got some helicopters spraying over there.

1 SM: What do you think about this idea overall though that, just the concept of a
2 war on drugs and how many billions and billions of dollars have we already thrown down
3 this hole?

4 BV: Well, I don't know. That is a problem and the thing is, as long as there's a
5 market, and unfortunately we're the biggest market, there's going to be production. You
6 know if they would either, maybe in some respect maybe they ought to try to, if people
7 are going to have to do it maybe they ought to try to legalize it, but then the problem is it
8 goes, well they say well, yes we legalized whiskey or alcohol, but the problem, from
9 alcohol you pretty much stay at alcohol, from drugs you get into all kinds of these
10 synthetic things that really, well even drugs they pretty well kill your brain, of course so
11 does alcohol, anyway that gets into problems. Of course some of that right now is
12 because it is an illegal situation and so people that are going to be outlaws anyway are
13 going to be probably bad guys anyway but I don't know, we need to fight it in Columbia,
14 which we are. We're helping them. We're helping their Army a lot, and their police. I
15 don't know whether they're, I know they're gaining but its going to take a while. You
16 know it's a real shame, have you ever been down there?

17 SM: Not to Columbia, no sir.

18 BV: Okay, well Columbia, especially Bogotá is a, there's twelve million people in
19 Bogotá right now, because its so full of refuges from the, because they can't live in the
20 countryside. The countryside, the outland is pretty much controlled by the bad guys. So
21 if you, they tell you, you will grow coca, you know you can't grow tomatoes because
22 they won't let you use the road the got them back to town to sell them, things like that,
23 but anyway. Bogotá area has a lot of big, beautiful buildings. Columbia is a very fertile
24 country and they had a lot of other things going for them throughout history until the drug
25 trade came in the last ten to twenty years, and that's pretty well killed everything else in
26 that country and Peru and Bolivia kind of the same way but not as. I think they're
27 winning too in that respect, of course what happens is we wipe them out in Columbia
28 they're moving to Brazil and moving to other countries down there, but, or in some, and
29 again as long as there's a market, there's going to be an incentive to produce it. I know
30 quite frankly I don't know what the whole, what the thing is, a lot of people think well
31 maybe we ought to pull our troops out of places like Germany and areas that they're not

1 needed or appreciated any longer and put them along our border, along our various
2 borders to protect us from not only drugs but illegal immigrants coming in, but I don't
3 know. Anyway I, to sum it up anyway, like I said, I have been lucky to stay pretty
4 healthy and have a pretty long career in the flying business in one way or another and of
5 course I'm still at. Of course now I'm doing depot repair work for our Chinook
6 helicopters, which are really the mainstay in Afghanistan. So we've got to keep them
7 flying. Anyway, I don't know. The big picture is, I think is that first of all the U.S., like
8 it or not and a perfect example are the Balkans. Without us there, there would be
9 nothing, they'd be back fighting again. As long as we've got a, of course NATO's there
10 now, its what they call the S-4 which is a contingency of about twelve to thirteen
11 different countries in there, some troops in Bosnia and in Kosovo, but the thing is right
12 now, as soon as we pulled out they would kind of revert back I think. So we've got to
13 have, but they were still losing until the U.S. presence got there. What's amazing to me is
14 that we allowed the war in Bosnia to go on as long as it did. At the time you know
15 Somalia had happened and we had that unfortunate thing with *Black Hawk Down* and I
16 think that Clinton at the time just plain didn't want to take a chance of doing anything
17 more. You know that we might lost some more guys so that's why I think we held off of
18 going to Bosnia as long as we did. We finally did, we finally, at least our bombing got
19 the Serbs away from Sarajevo, got them back, or pull back, it's. The U.S. is needed, like
20 it or not, just like this thing in Iraq right now, its who else is going to do it? I heard some
21 bleeding heart today on a talk show with John Hanadese talking about how it should be
22 up to the world court to decide, not for us to unilaterally go bomb anybody or invade
23 anybody without everybody else's permission, well bullshit. If we don't do it nobody
24 else, you know the French aren't going to do it. The Germans aren't going to do it, look
25 at their record. And so it has to be done.

26 SM: Do we want the Germans doing it?

27 BV: Well, Germans are good; this is politics. The German problem is politics,
28 and young people that don't know any better, just like in South Korea, all your little
29 protesting farts are young people that have never known anything but the good life. Let
30 them go live in North Korea for a while and see what life is really about. Anyway, they
31 want to be flower children and think they can live in peace and get along with the

1 commies up north, but that's not going to happen as long as the commies are there. You
2 know not to get one a soapbox because I sure could, my wife accuses me all the time, but
3 we, the U.S. has defeated Nazism. Without us that wouldn't have, we'd probably be
4 speaking German. We defeated communism, we'd all be speaking Russian if then on,
5 and for the world and who else, who else was going to do it? They called Reagan a
6 cowboy just like they're calling Bush right now, well they may, they can call him
7 whatever they want but he was not a cowboy he was a guy with a lot of insight that knew
8 how to get it done and he challenged Russia and quite frankly and they fell. The Soviet
9 Union is gone. And that's the same with Iraq and after Iraq, yes they'll say, well war is
10 next, well wherever we have to. I'll guarantee these fanatics don't want anybody to have
11 freedom in any country, particularly in Europe. That's why I cannot understand why the
12 French and the Germans haven't joined with them, and they probably will, with the rest
13 of Europe as a united Europe against, with us on this thing because they like freedom.
14 They should enjoy freedom and that's what this all about, its about freedom and no
15 freedom. Can you imagine if a nuclear weapon or if one of these you know bubonic
16 plague or whatever got let go in the city of Los Angeles for example and it wiped out the
17 city, even the 9/11 thing caused a heck of a, was a part of a cause of a big recession,
18 which we're still in. Think what it would do for a worldwide recession if a big city like
19 that went? Just think about it you know, all the repercussions. Everything would shut
20 down, worldwide practically and of course that's what they want, and that's what they're
21 going to do if they get the opportunity and that's why we've got to stop it wherever we
22 can. You may not agree with that, but that's what I, I don't think it takes a brain scientist
23 to figure this thing out.

24 SM: I'll hold my own opinions until after I turn off the recorder, since this is your
25 interview. So this is about your views, but I appreciate you sharing this with me. I mean,
26 its.

27 BV: Well, I don't want to, and again of course we could get off really quick, if
28 you want to turn it off go ahead.

29 SM: Well, it's up to you. I mean the thing is your perspectives now I think are
30 probably very much a reflection of your experiences in the military service, especially in
31 Southeast Asia.

1 BV: Yes, I've seen mad guys at work and again communists that was against
2 communism there, communist inspired and it's pretty fanatical. You can see when
3 people are even whether they're Vietnamese or whether they're whatever now, of course
4 Iraq is not communist but it might as well be. They've got a dictator that's, and it should
5 be obvious to the Iraqi people, if they're really starving, if they're really without
6 medicine, they're really without all that and yet they can see that he's built, what is it,
7 twenty-eight monstrous big palaces now, some of them are hundred of acres, just for
8 starters, shouldn't that be obvious to anybody, he's not really the great guy but yet
9 they've been brainwashed to think he's like their Uncle Ho.

10 SM: Well, while yes, it's a shame.

11 BV: Yes, it is. It's a, and its got to be stopped, the thing is, I hear a lot of these
12 bleeding hearts saying, we ought to just wait, we've got him contained, let's just keep the
13 embargo on him and he'll just go away. No he's not, but the problem is. Now he, yes, he
14 personally probably is never going to attack us like 9/11, but somebody else sure would
15 that he could arm, if they could, but he's, because he has an address but some of these
16 people that don't have an address would.

17 SM: All right, well let me go ahead, I'll go ahead and put an ending on this now. Thank
18 you very much sir this will officially end the interview with Mr. Ben Van Etten.