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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Bryan Grigsby
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.
May 2, 2003
Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre

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

1 Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone; I'm doing an oral history interview
2 with Mr. Bryan Grigsby. Today is May 2, 2003; I am in Lubbock, Texas at the Special
3 Collections Library in the interview room. Mr. Grigsby is in Bordentown, Pennsylvania.

4 Bryan Grigsby: Uh-uh.

5 RV: Excuse me, New Jersey and it is approximately 10:07 AM Central Standard
6 Time. Mr. Grigsby, let's start with some basic biographical information; can you tell me
7 where you were born, when you were born and a little bit about your childhood?

8 BG: Well, pardon me, I was born June the 2nd, 1943 in Gainesville, Florida, grew
9 up in the university town there, went to grade school and high school and college there,
10 graduated from the University of Florida eventually, in 1971 almost ten years to the time
11 I started school there, changed majors four times while I was in college, one reason I was
12 in college for so long and the other reason was I was trying to avoid the draft by keeping
13 my 2S classification and when that ran out in I guess September of 1966 I discovered that
14 I was not 1A [2S] and I made a phone call to my friendly draft board there in Gainesville
15 and they informed that I was not only ready to be prime meat for that but I was number
16 one on the list for the December or November draft in 1966.

17 RV: Wow, wow. Let's talk a little bit about Gainesville, growing up in
18 Gainesville, what was it like growing up there in a college town?

1 BG: Well Gainesville, then back in the '50s and '60s was a lot different than it is
2 now. It was a small town, it had a center of town with a county courthouse with the
3 requisite Confederate statue out in the courtyard there and benches for old guys who I
4 now suspect were probably veterans from the timeline of the Spanish American war
5 which sit out there and chew tobacco, I mean it was straight out of a Steinbeck book.
6 And then you had the university, which was maybe two miles from there, which was a
7 totally different world. You know, it's a very progressive school and a lot of things were
8 going on there in the segregated south at the time that fortunately didn't get much notice
9 and so nothing much happened. Florida integrated very easily compared to other schools
10 around the south. So Gainesville was pretty much a small town in those days.

11 RV: Okay, how many siblings did you have or do you have any?

12 BG: I have one brother who's five years older than me.

13 RV: Okay, and tell me what your parents did for a living.

14 BG: Well my mom was a, for then typical stay at home mom. She did have a
15 college education, she didn't finish but she had gone to college at what was then Florida
16 State College for Women in Tallahassee. My dad had a Bachelor's Degree in business
17 administration with a minor in journalism and he worked at the University of Florida as a,
18 eventually towards the end of his career he was administrator for National Defense
19 Loans.

20 RV: Okay, so you had some immediate contact with the university.

21 BG: Yes, oh yes I grew up with it. Our house was within walking distance of the
22 campus.

23 RV: So it's safe to say that you're a Gators fan through and through?

24 BG: Yes, you could say that, yes. I'm, you know going back to my father and his
25 brother both got their degrees there as well.

26 RV: Well tell me about kind of growing up and going to school, and what kind of
27 student were you?

28 BG: I was fair to partly cloudy. I didn't do well in school. I now know I have
29 ADD which was not known back then and I really couldn't concentrate so I never
30 studied, I managed to get through it [high school] without cracking a single book just
31 about and then I tried to do it at the University of Florida, it didn't work there.

1 RV: Did you work in your youth any?

2 BG: Yes, oh yes I had jobs from the time I was fourteen. I worked as a carhop at a
3 Freezette diner and then I actually did so well at that they made me a short order cook but
4 I only did that on the weekends.

5 RV: And you did this in high school?

6 BG: Yes, this is what I did in high school. In college I got into, I'm a musician
7 too, I played in the high school band, played saxophone and I got into a rock and roll
8 group and played a lot of fraternity gigs around the campus and that helped pay for my
9 education. It also helped keep me from studying, but it helped pay for things.

10 RV: Okay, okay, what were you like in high school, did you play any sports?

11 BG: No, no I was, strictly I was in the band, band geek.

12 RV: Okay, and academically same kind of thing?

13 BG: Yes, you know Cs.

14 RV: All right, favorite subject?

15 BG: Favorite subject was probably band.

16 RV: Really?

17 BG: Yes, I mean I liked when we had, in grade school we had art classes I loved
18 that and I had no idea about photography at this point I should point out, I didn't have a
19 clue.

20 RV: Yes, I wanted to ask you about, so it hadn't hit you yet that it was
21 photography.

22 BG: No and my father was a very serious amateur photographer, had his
23 darkroom, I practically grew up in it and ignored it totally and my brother was an amateur
24 photographer and eventually he got a degree in chemical engineering at Florida and went
25 on to work for Eastman Kodak as an engineer.

26 RV: Now do you think all that time in your father's darkroom and just kind of,
27 did it absorb it and then it hit you later?

28 BG: No, no once we get to that I'll explain how it happened.

29 RV: Okay, all right. So, was there an expectation that you would go to college
30 or?

1 BG: Oh yes, oh yes. Gainesville High School was pretty much a college prep
2 kind of high school

3 RV: What year did you graduate?

4 BG: 1961.

5 RV: Okay, let me ask you how aware in 1961 were you of what America was
6 doing around the world and?

7 BG: Not at all.

8 RV: Foreign affairs, nothing.

9 BG: Nothing, no. All I cared about in 1961 when I started college was trying to
10 cage a bear illegally and look at the pretty girls.

11 RV: Well, tell me about your college experience, how long were you there before,
12 you said two years?

13 BG: Well, I was in and out. I went to Florida for a couple of years and managed to
14 get through my freshmen year despite you know I think a 1.9 grade point average and I
15 started my sophomore year and I just wasn't getting anywhere so eventually I discovered
16 there was a junior college down in Ocala, about thirty-five miles south of Gainesville and
17 I discovered I could pretty much get through it like I did high school, without studying.
18 So I did my two years there and got my Associate of Arts degree, came back to Florida,
19 which by then I think it was 1966, the winter of 1966. I started back to school and did one
20 semester as a junior and I always used to tell people I was, when they say "Well what
21 year are you are you at Florida," I would say "I'm a fifth year junior." And I changed
22 majors four times all total, I started off in journalism and then switched to business
23 administration and then switched to music and from music I went to broadcasting, they
24 now call it telecommunications.

25 RV: Why did you switch so much?

26 BG: Well, because I really didn't know what I wanted to do. That's the really
27 crazy thing about how I've ended up, that it took the Army to point me where I wanted to
28 go with my life.

29 RV: Okay, in your family was there any military experience at all?

30 BG: Not my dad, my dad had a bad heart and so he was exempt from World
31 WarII. His brother was a career Air Force officer. Before that the only one that I know

1 of, you know direct lineage was my great-grandfather was in the Spanish-American War,
2 he was in an Illinois regiment and he went to Cuba, but after the fighting and before that
3 my great-grandfather, these are Grigsbys was in an Indiana cavalry regiment and did the
4 whole war and I've got his records and everything.

5 RV: Did your uncle or any of these others have any kind of influence on you
6 going into the military?

7 BG: No.

8 RV: Or was it the pressure of the draft?

9 BG: It was the draft. I mean the draft hung over all of us's heads. You couldn't do
10 anything, if you dropped out of school for any length of time, they'd nab you.

11 RV: What did you know about Vietnam in 1965, '66, before?

12 BG: It started to enter my consciousness that it was out there, that we, oh my god,
13 we're actually in a war because I remember the end of the Korean War, I was ten years
14 old when it ended.

15 RV: What are your memories of that?

16 BG: I remember their being a parade in Gainesville of some kind and an outward
17 celebration amongst the people and then thinking to myself that I couldn't remember not
18 being at war.

19 RV: So that was, it was a positive reception for Korean veterans?

20 BG: Oh, yes, oh yes. Well I don't know that they had a parade for them, it was
21 just like people were setting off fireworks and stuff.

22 RV: So in '65, '66, you knew that there was a war going on, did you know, what
23 did you know about why the United States was in Southeast Asia?

24 BG: I didn't have a clue, I just knew I didn't want to be there and I used to say
25 very cynically about the war protesters that I felt the majority of them were doing it
26 because their asses were on the line if they had to go, not because they were ethically
27 against the war I felt there was more of a personal involvement and I always admitted
28 that was my reason, I just didn't want to go over there and get killed or maimed.

29 RV: So you weren't necessarily anti-war, you were just protecting yourself?

30 BG: You bet, you know you bet.

1 RV: So in your junior year you find out you are going to be drafted, is that right,
2 when you get back to University of Florida?

3 BG: Right. I get that so I decide I'm going to be pre-emptive about this and try to
4 take some control over what happens to me so I went down to the Army recruiter and
5 enlisted for three years instead of being drafted for two but I was going to go to music
6 school and be an Army bandsman. I figured you know what the hell, there's probably no
7 Army bandsman over in Vietnam which of course there were but at this point this was my
8 way of protecting my young ass.

9 RV: Now you could choose where you wanted to go.

10 BG: Well you could choose the training, didn't mean that the Army would
11 actually use you and in fact because the band was such a great dodge all their allotments
12 for bands around the world and the country I guess were full so the deal was I would go
13 to this music school, the Naval School of Music at Little Creek, Virginia and as an Army
14 bandsmen unassigned, which who knows I might have ended up being an infantryman
15 anyway with a saxophone.

16 RV: Right. So did you remember what the recruiter told you, say hey look you
17 know do this and you will at some point get into the music part of the Army?

18 BG: Well, he was pretty truthful, as I recall he was pretty straight with me. He
19 said you got a good chance and I didn't know at the time if you could read and write and
20 had some college that they'd probably find something besides the infantry for you but
21 with my luck I didn't want to take the chance. So I went in originally as an Army
22 bandsman and so from there I went to basic training Fort Benning, Georgia.

23 RV: Tell me what your parents thought and your family thought about you going
24 into the military.

25 BG: Well you know they weren't real pleased. They were, you know they were
26 concerned about my safety more than anything else. We didn't have a lot of discussion
27 about the war itself or the reasons or anything and the anti-war protests actually hadn't
28 come to the University of Florida and they didn't get there until around the time I started
29 back to school in 1970 interestingly enough.

30 RV: So tell me about basic training, where was it?

1 BG: All right, it was at Fort Benning Georgia and to put in succinctly it was like
2 living a nightmare for me.

3 RV: Really, why?

4 BG: Well you know I've thought about this and you asked me if I was ever
5 involved in organized sports and because I wasn't I hadn't been trained by good old
6 coach in the football or baseball team, you know I hadn't learned to take that kind of
7 group abuse. And I've told my wife this story that you know you wake up from a
8 nightmare and you look around, oh, it's not true, I'm okay. Well in basic training, I
9 swear to god, every night I used to dream about being a civilian and back in college and
10 doing, and playing in band and stuff and then I would be jarred awake at three o'clock in
11 the morning by this awful reality that this was what was real. So imagine going that
12 through eight weeks which is essentially what I did.

13 RV: So psychologically is was very difficult for you?

14 BG: It was more difficult than anything else in the Army including going to
15 Vietnam.

16 RV: Really?

17 BG: Yes, it was a real traumatic experience for me. It was tough, it was very
18 tough and I learned a lot about myself as a result of that I think, that I could do it.

19 RV: I was going to ask you, how did you react to military discipline after you got
20 over the psychological trauma part of it?

21 RG: Well, some of it I was pretty good at because being in the band you learned
22 to march and I knew all that and I got lucky, they made me a squad leader, mainly
23 because I was one of the biggest guys in the, I'm 6'2, biggest guys in the platoon and so
24 it was really funny I was standing, now you've got to remember, I'm thinking I'm going
25 to music school at this point so I took my saxophone with me to basic training because I
26 didn't know if I was going to get a leave or anything and I would be going directly from
27 there to Virginia to the next school. So I'm standing in the company area with my duffle
28 bag of my brand new uniforms and stuff and a tenor saxophone case and they guy took a
29 look, maybe that's what got me the job, he said, "What the hell is that?" So anyway he
30 made me a squad leader and then the guy who was our platoon leader, as a squad leader
31 you're an acting corporal, you wear an arm band with corporal's stripes and then there's

1 an acting platoon leader, student platoon leader who wears a buck sergeant's stripes. So
2 the guy who was our platoon leader, one night we were sitting in the squad room, we had
3 squad rooms as opposed to staying in the bay and he looked at me, he said, "I've had
4 enough of this shit, I'm going home, you want to come with me." I thought he was
5 kidding. The guy went AWOL and we never heard from him again.

6 RV: You decided not to go?

7 BG: Oh, I, you know I'm not stupid I knew what, you know I knew I was going
8 to have to get through this and do it. At this point I had resolved, I was going to put my
9 head down and grunt my way through it. So they made me platoon leader.

10 RV: Wow. How did you react to that leadership role?

11 BG: Oh, it was all right. I ended up yelling at these guys so much, not because I
12 was being mean to them but just to get their attention. We had a lot of guys who were,
13 honestly borderline stupid in the platoon, a lot of poor white trash and rural blacks who
14 had maybe finished high school and were, I mean I was twenty-three years old and they
15 were all like eighteen or nineteen, most of these guys. And it was funny, the guys who
16 had college tended to be older than were in our platoon as well. But anyway you know
17 they just, they didn't get it and I tried explaining "Look, if we cooperate with each other
18 we'll get through this a lot easier" which was my bottom line, let's see how we can get
19 through this with as little harassment from the authority as possible and they didn't listen.
20 So I ended up, I couldn't even talk and eventually another guy took my place as platoon
21 sergeant and he was actually career oriented and going to OCS and wanted to make a
22 career out of the Army so that was a good thing for him.

23 RV: Tell me about your training, what did you actually do?

24 BG: Well, you know the funny thing is they screwed over us so much and kept us
25 so tired, me anyway that I really didn't learn a whole lot, I was half asleep most of the
26 time which I understand is part of the training because you have to learn how to function
27 when your body has reached its limit but at the same time we were there supposedly to
28 learn something. I've noticed, I've done stories as a newspaper photographer story over
29 the years that they lightened up on that in later years because they discovered that nobody
30 was learning anything. But anyway we were taught you know how to use an M-14 rifle,
31 didn't, we didn't have M-16s yet. We were taught some stuff about chemical/biological

1 warfare, we were taught how to salute, we were taught how to march and did a lot of that,
2 you know some basic military courtesy stuff, it was very and then I think there was some,
3 the ten commandments of the infantryman I can't remember what they were, I never
4 memorized them but you know that kind of stuff. It was very low level.

5 RV: How did you do with M-14?

6 BG: I did all right, you know I wasn't, I didn't get the bolo badge and during the,
7 that's like the lowest medal you can get, I got in the high middle, which I think back, you
8 really in my case didn't want to do that well. You know if you prove to them you're like
9 a great shot they might want you in the infantry anyway.

10 RV: Did you think that at the time?

11 BG: No, I didn't. But you know you think about these things later, I don't even
12 know if the Army ever you know thought about that. They got some guy that's going to
13 clerk school who maxxes out the marksmanship test and they say "Wait a minute, you
14 know we could use this guy in the infantry, not at a typewriter," but that's apparently not
15 how the Army thought either.

16 RV: What would you say was the most challenging aspect of basic?

17 BG: Physical training. I was pretty much out of shape, I was a heavy smoker by
18 the time I was twenty-three and I felt like I was an old man with these guys. In fact my
19 senior drill sergeant was only about six months older than me.

20 RV: Really?

21 BG: Yes, because like I say at twenty-three, you know these guys joined the
22 Army when they were eighteen so they'd already been in for five years and they'd made,
23 this guy was a sergeant first class. So it was tough, I finally got into shape and I lost
24 about twenty-five pounds too.

25 RV: Okay, tell me about your training, your instructors, had any of them been to
26 Southeast Asia at this point?

27 BG: Yes, some of them had. I don't remember exactly which ones but yes, some
28 of them were, had been over there.

29 RV: Did they talk about it?

30 BG: Not really except you know you better learn this stuff or you could get killed.

31 RV: How would you rate the training overall?

1 BG: Well, I have no yardstick quite frankly to, you know they taught me how to
2 fire the weapon, how to take it apart, you know they taught me how to salute officers,
3 that's about all that seemed to be important you know at the time. Most of these guys
4 who were going to stay in the infantry would go on to advanced infantry training where
5 they'd really, you know get, learn, get their lessons, for their really important. Basically
6 basic, there we go repeating the word; basic training was there to convert you from a
7 civilian to a military person. And that is probably the main goal they have is to get you
8 out of your civilian mindset.

9 RV: Now could you choose where you were going to go after basic, did they have
10 this set up for you?

11 BG: Well, yes I was set to go to this music school, I signed up for that and so
12 here's where fate stepped in because while I was in basic training I had turned down,
13 they'll offer, guys with college, any amount of it would be offered the chance to go to
14 Officer Candidate School which I had no intentions of doing that for a variety of reasons.
15 One, it was tough, I would have to first go to AIT, advanced infantry training, spend you
16 know two more months of harassment and then go to Officer Candidate School which is
17 like I know two or three more months of intense harassment and then you go over to
18 Vietnam and the life expectancy of an officer was like a week and a half or something. So
19 you know I knew enough to, this is stupid, I don't care to be saluted that badly and then
20 the other was warrant officer flight school, they offered me that which is basically
21 helicopter pilots. And those guys, I mean that's a hellaciously dangerous job and I didn't
22 want any part of that so after I turned all that down, this crew of guys came around for
23 other types of jobs in the military. And I got interviewed by a group from the White
24 House communications agency and basically what they were offering was change from
25 music from one of these schools that we're interested in and you could end up working at
26 the White House, wearing civilian clothes and following President Johnson around. So
27 they had a job specialty, which was audio specialist, and since I'd been working a degree
28 in television production I was somewhat familiar with some of that stuff, I said yes, I'll
29 do that. And the deal was I would go to, I would pass a top secret security clearance and I
30 would go to school at Fort Monmouth New Jersey to the signal school, so there's where I
31 turned left from music and I thought wow, this will keep me away from Vietnam. Here

1 again it's the self-preservation principle at work at all times. So I passed apparently the
2 security clearance and I went to Fort Monmouth and I did, a delightful time there, it was
3 like going to college again.

4 RV: What kind of tests did you have to take to pass, getting the top-secret
5 clearance?

6 BG: I have no idea. They interviewed people that knew me back in Gainesville
7 and I guess checked to see if I had a police record and interviewed friends and family.

8 RV: Okay, so tell me about.

9 BG: And I also took a lie detector test.

10 RV: Okay.

11 BG: Which was interesting.

12 RV: How so?

13 BG: Well I'd never taken one before and like I say, I was half asleep all the time,
14 these guys are asking me questions and I can barely stay awake I'm so tired. I mean after
15 you, you go on two or three hours sleep a night, seven days a week, you know, your body
16 even at the age of twenty-three tends to start to fail you.

17 RV: Yes, sir. Tell me about Fort Monmouth and signal school.

18 BG: Well, Fort Monmouth is, I've been back, it's not far from where I live now.

19 RV: Is this in '67 still?

20 BG: This was in '67. I joined the Army and started basic end of January of '67,
21 got out of there first part of March, went home on leave for a couple of weeks and then
22 went to Fort Monmouth I guess towards the end of March of '67. And it's near the
23 Jersey shore, near Asbury Park. I had a car because I thought I would be going to
24 Washington DC from there, my parents gave me a car to use so I was able to get off
25 campus after class and they didn't mess with us, there was a minimum of Army Mickey
26 Mouse as we used to call it. They basically wanted you to be there to learn and they had
27 some pretty top secret stuff going on there, it had security clearance to even get near it.

28 RV: Such as what?

29 BG: Satellite communications, the photo school was there, although I was going
30 there as an audio person so I went to basically radio school and was taught how to

1 operate a radio control board and we took some lessons in theory, this stuff was out of the
2 same book I had read for college so it was pretty easy for me.

3 RV: Was this mainly classroom instruction?

4 BG: Oh, it was all classroom and they also gave us some very basic lessons in
5 photography, basic, mainly because they thought we might work as a sound man with say
6 a motion picture camera. So I got to the time of graduation and I was also supposed to
7 you know graduate high in my class which I did and I got a set of orders for Fort Shafter,
8 Hawaii and not Washington DC. So you know I had a phone number to call at the
9 Pentagon so I called the number and I asked them, "Well what happened, I'm not going
10 down there?" And they said, "Didn't anybody tell you, we filled our quota on your
11 MOS." They didn't tell me that could happen, which you know fortunately that's what
12 happened because then I ended up in DASPO which was where my orders were sending
13 me, to go there as a sound man with what was primarily a motion picture documentary
14 photo unit.

15 RV: Okay, did you know anything about DASPO at this point?

16 BG: No, no I didn't know a thing. I know that the civilian guy who was sort of in
17 charge of our section, the audio section was familiar with it, he said "Oh, yes they get to
18 travel all over the place, temporary duty" and that's all I knew.

19 RV: How did that suit you?

20 BG: Well, you know the prospect of going to Hawaii sounded great but then I was
21 thinking in the back of my mind, geez this puts me a hell of a lot closer to Vietnam, so I
22 had mixed feelings and I didn't know where these guys went either. So you know I went
23 home because at this point I needed leave to unload the car and going to Hawaii I wasn't
24 going to be coming back very soon so I went home for two weeks, took care of all that
25 and then I had orders to go to Oakland Army Terminal and from there shipped over to
26 Fort Shafter, Hawaii.

27 RV: Did anybody at the radio school basically, at Fort Monmouth talk about
28 Southeast Asia duty or was it just simply learning the skills?

29 BG: Just learning the skills, like I saw it was like college and we'd go to class for
30 about six hours, seven hours and then our time was our own. We had weekends off so I
31 spent a lot of time hanging around at the boardwalk at Asbury Park.

1 RV: What did you do?

2 BG: Nothing - smoked. I mean I only made like, you know I brought home maybe
3 sixty dollars a month and back then a beer could cost you a dollar and a quarter so you
4 know your parameters were limited as to what you could do. I could always get
5 somebody [who] wanted to ride over to the beach and they'd put a buck's worth of gas in
6 my car, which back then was you know three or four gallons and you know that sort of
7 kept me sane getting away from the post because I really, I felt trapped. Every time I
8 would leave that front gate in my car I would feel like a weight had been lifted off of me.

9 RV: Wow, it sounds like psychologically you really just did not enjoy the military
10 part of the service.

11 BG: I didn't like the fact that my life, the control of my life had been taken away
12 from me that basically they owned my ass.

13 RV: How long?

14 BG: How long did I feel that way?

15 RV: No how long did they, was your enlistment, was it a two year?

16 BG: Oh, it was three years.

17 RV: Three-year enlistment.

18 BG: Yes, you enlist for three. See, I checked my options, I could have enlisted in
19 the Navy but that was four and I didn't want to do that so I figured I'd take my chances
20 with the Army.

21 RV: Okay, okay. Well tell me about after you go home on leave you fly out to
22 Hawaii, what was it like when you first got there?

23 BG: Well, first I went through Oakland Army terminal which was another
24 hellhole where basically it was twenty-four hour a day details and harassment and it was
25 like this large holding facility for mostly guys going to Vietnam and they generally didn't
26 have to spend as much time there and they didn't get screwed with as much, they were
27 pretty much left alone. But those of us that were going to other places in the Pacific area,
28 we were doing KP and you know all kinds of stuff that the Army does to keep you busy
29 and I was there for about two and a half days. And then I got to Hawaii and I was really
30 rung out and tired, back to my basic training status of almost mindless and it was a whole
31 different world. We had some great NCOs and officers, it was very professional and my

1 feelings about being in the Army except for homesickness being so far away from home
2 began to ease and of course you know Hawaii, the place is an incredibly beautiful place.

3 RV: How did the DASPO guys receive you when you first got there?

4 BG: Oh, they were very nice to me. I had another guy from my class at Fort
5 Monmouth went there and got there a few days before me as a soundman.

6 RV: What was his name?

7 BG: Talmadge Harbison, a bit of a character, Talmadge B. we called him.

8 RV: So you had a familiar face.

9 BG: I had a familiar face, yes and you know we, at that they, we lived in the
10 barracks and, but we had just a small squad room for the DASPO guys, we were like
11 separate from all the rest of them and we were also at that time exempt from details
12 because we traveled so much the feeling was that you'd get some guy set for KP and then
13 he'd be on a TDY trip somewhere so they just didn't assign us KP. Unfortunately some
14 of the guys bragged about this to the permanent party guys there in the barracks and the
15 bitched to their first sergeant and by the time I got back from my first trip guys were
16 pulling KP and we'd also been moved out of that special room to a larger platoon sized
17 bay where you know we were mixed in with guys from other units that were permanently
18 stationed at Fort Schafter.

19 RV: How many men were in the DASPO unit?

20 BG: I would say around fifty, I don't know if there was ever a solid number on
21 that. We were a detachment; we weren't a company or anything like that.

22 RV: And what were your duties specifically there in Hawaii, what were you told?

23 BG: Basically busy work, you know, packing film to go here or there you know
24 picking up cigarette butts occasionally or it was just sitting around doing nothing and the
25 days were extremely long, doing some training occasionally.

26 RV: So you were trained ready to be a soundman on the motion picture unit.

27 BG: Well I was a sound man I could you know mostly just do a radio station
28 sound man but yes we got some training on the equipment we were using. At this point
29 I'm still just a sound man and did some double system sound where you're hooked up
30 electronically to an Arriflex BL camera and did some production and played around with

1 that and learned how to use the Nagra which is a professional still in use sound recording
2 machine.

3 RV: How did that all come to you, was it difficult to learn all the equipment or
4 was it fairly easy?

5 BG: No, I mean it's just a tape recorder.

6 RV: [Laughing] Okay.

7 BG: It wasn't rocket science. You know I think learning to be a motion picture
8 cameraman is a heck of a lot more difficult.

9 RV: Okay. Well did you know that you'd be going TDY over to Southeast Asia
10 at this point?

11 BG: By then I found out that yes, we in fact had a permanent team over there and
12 the guys rotated in and out for three months TDY tours and there was also another
13 permanent team in Bangkok, same deal and then, but I got a team, my first trip, I got
14 there in August and left in September on my first trip and we sent a team over to South
15 Korea to take a look around, nobody had done anything there I guess for quite a while so
16 I was on a small team that went over there.

17 RV: This is your first time being in Asia, what was your?

18 BG: Yes. I mean I thought Honolulu was pretty strange but after going to Korean
19 and then coming back, man it was like the good old U.S. of A.

20 RV: How much time did you spend there in South Korea?

21 BG: We were there almost three months.

22 RV: Okay, so it was a regular rotation?

23 BG: Yes we flew into, well first I have to, this is the beginning of my awareness
24 of photography because the still photographer on our team was a guy named Dick
25 Durance and Dick had worked for *National Geographic*, freelance to them and he was a
26 very intense, committed photographer. And as I got to know him I began to pick up on
27 some of his emotional involvement about photography and so while I was there on that
28 trip I bought my first camera which I sent you guys, a little Minolta.

29 RV: Let me ask you stuff you wrote about, how did you get emotionally tied into
30 still photography?

1 BG: Well, I didn't happen all at once, it was a gradual thing, I had a lot to learn
2 and I was slow learner but I was interested enough to buy a small, a cheap thirty-five
3 millimeter camera and began playing with that. It had automatic exposure function and so
4 I didn't have to learn a whole lot about F-stops and shutter speeds, I had to learn that
5 later. But I was there strictly as a sound man and so the three months I was there you
6 know we did stuff like go to Panmunjom and record the meetings there and we also
7 wandered around the country and around the south part of the DMZ photographing
8 installations and training that was going on there.

9 RV: Could you photograph what you wanted when you were?

10 BG: Oh, we could yes. There was no prohibition against me. We were never
11 anywhere that I guess that security conscious.

12 RV: Okay, what about your assignment, you were given an area to go to, where
13 you given a specific subject matter?

14 BG: Well I think it was, I was never involved in that planning part of it because I
15 was just a PFC at the time. We had like an officer who was a, I think he was a captain, we
16 had an NCOIC who was a sergeant first class, Dick was a Spec-4 and then Craig Farrell
17 and I were both PFCs so that was the makeup of the team. Dick was their still
18 photographer, oh and Harry Breedlove was there too, he was a staff sergeant at the time.
19 And so I was there as strictly the sound man, Dick was stills, Craig and Harry were
20 motion picture and Paul Moulton, the sergeant in charge was there to be in the sergeant in
21 charge and Captain Penny was there to be the officer in charge. They would get
22 assignments from, I don't know if they were moved from Hawaii to them but everything
23 came out of the Pentagon and they would say, well like there was an artillery refurbishing
24 outfit there in Korea where they'd take all the ordnance and refit it and had civilians
25 doing it to make sure it still worked because this stuff went back to the Korean War. The
26 whole country was like one gigantic military stockpile.

27 RV: Really?

28 BG: Yes, and I wouldn't be surprised if it isn't still that way and from the DMZ
29 south of Seoul it was like you know military bases all over the place, one large armed
30 camp. And you know we photographed Korean training, South Korean training, we
31 photographed storage facilities, we probably did something on the Armed Forces radio

1 and television station there in Seoul. You know we just did all kinds of stories,
2 documentation, they wanted to see how this stuff was, worked and what it looked like
3 and that kind of thing.

4 RV: Okay. What was your impression of the Korean people?

5 BG: Oh, I liked them. They were you know, they weren't resigned to their fate,
6 they're a hard working people and that's why I'm not surprised that their country is like
7 an economic powerhouse now. It was, of course it was, when I got there, we got there in
8 the middle of the night so my first impression when we driving from Kimpo Air Base
9 which was outside of Seoul physically was the smells because I couldn't see anything
10 except what was in, there were no lights until you got into the city so all you could see
11 what was the head beams of the truck I was riding in would show you, you know it was
12 very, it was almost like you know a Martian rover going across and looking through that
13 perspective it was very limited, so it smelled different.

14 RV: What do you remember it smelling like?

15 BG: Well, it smelled like human manure and fish because they still moved their
16 waste around in carts and stuff and they still actually used it for fertilizer for their food,
17 which is why we couldn't eat anything there.

18 RV: What do you mean you couldn't eat anything?

19 BG: Well, you'd get parasites. Apparently food that's grown with human waste
20 carries some kind of parasites in it, which don't kill you, once you get used to them
21 you're okay. Apparently one of the first things we did in Japan when we occupied them
22 was to switch them over to chemical fertilizer after World War II.

23 RV: Now where did you all stay and live?

24 BG: Well at first we lived at a place called Walker Hill, it was an in-country
25 resort and we lived at Matthew House which was one of the major hotels there, which
26 was, had been designated for use for in country R & R so we lived pretty good. We had
27 to, it was difficult in the sense that we didn't have an office to work out of do, it was just
28 that hotel rooms. All of our equipment had to be stored at AFKN radio because nothing
29 was secure there, unless you locked it down it would be stolen so that's how we operated
30 for that first trip. Later on they moved into a, in fact we moved into it, came back on a
31 regular rotation in '68 into a villa which we rented from, I don't know if he was a general

1 or what but that was in town and then that was a place we could secure our gear and
2 everything and operate as a team.

3 RV: So you were there until December?

4 BG: Yes, roughly.

5 RV: And you went back to Hawaii.

6 BG: Went back to Hawaii and then I was cross-trained as a still photographer. At
7 this point they had decided that just having the sound man do sound was a waste of a
8 body and you know I really wasn't into it at this point although I'd picked up something
9 of Dick's enthusiasm I still wasn't a believer yet. So they cross trained us, they handed
10 me a Rolleiflex camera and a light meter and I got some directions from a kind of
11 grumpy sergeant named Jack Yamaguchi who had gained fame as it turns out, he was one
12 of the two DASPO photographers that was involved in the battle that the book *We Were*
13 *Soldiers Once* spun off of some of their film footage when they were there. But anyway
14 Jack showed me the basics of it and then my next trip I left and went to Vietnam in the
15 end of February of '68.

16 RV: Okay, did you feel pretty confident with your new camera or was it?

17 BG: Oh, no I didn't have a clue.

18 RV: Was it; was that part of your assignment when you went into Vietnam to
19 actually be a still photographer and a soundman?

20 BG: Yes, and a soundman and I did both. From then on out wherever I went you
21 know I would do sound when it was required and I would shoot stills. And within about
22 three days of getting there I was sent out with Chuck Abbott on a search and destroy with
23 the 25th Infantry Division. And we went up, flew up to Cu Chi and at this time this was
24 like still within the parameters of the Tet Offensive, the famous one and it wasn't safe to
25 drive even though Cu Chi was only about maybe twenty miles outside of Saigon, so we
26 flew on a Chinook and I didn't know that Chinooks were very loud and I didn't have ear
27 plugs and so when I got off the Chinook I was principally deaf for about an hour and a
28 half.

29 RV: Before we talk about your first assignment, what was your first impression of
30 Vietnam and Saigon?

1 BG: Well it looked pretty from the air and when you look down at it, it was hard
2 to believe that this was a war zone because we flew in on a commercial airliner, we flew
3 on charter jets, I was on a Pan American flight that took us from Honolulu to Wake
4 where we landed and refueled to Clark Air Force Base where basically most of the people
5 on the plane got off it and virtually all the people in the first class section got off it. And
6 those left on board it was only about an hour's flight from Clark to Saigon, were military
7 guys. And so we just moved up into the first class section. So we saw it from the air and
8 you know of course the paranoia, I had no idea, I knew what I'd seen on television, I
9 started watching the news and my impression of the was what Walter Cronkite told me
10 about it in black and white. Yes, we got off the plane and in those days there was no, you
11 got off of, you went down a ladder and walked across the tarmac to the main terminal
12 building and when we got in there we noticed a big hole in the ceiling where apparently a
13 rocket had gone through earlier that morning. So that was like, yes there's a war here.
14 And everybody was armed to the teeth still in town because of the Tet Offensive, they
15 hadn't lifted a lot of curfews and stuff and so we all, actually the funny thing is we all
16 carried .45s with us, in the, I mean on the plane over there, can you imagine doing that
17 now?

18 RV: No.

19 BG: And we all had briefcases, there was thing in DASPO that when you went on
20 a TDY trip you had to have a briefcase. So here we are all GIs carrying briefcases and
21 then in that we had our orders and our .45s and of course you know all our cigarettes
22 because we all smoked back then and you know I think about that now, nobody, you
23 know our orders said we were authorized to carry the weapon which of course was not
24 loaded, nor did we have any ammunition for it. But I think about that now, there's no way
25 you could do that.

26 RV: Right.

27 BG: So we got there and we were greeted by you know went through customs and
28 got to the door and one of the guys from our unit, Rick Rein was there to pick us up and
29 he was driving a Navy van, which it turned out why because we weren't there legally so
30 we stole or bartered for stuff.

31 RV: What you mean you there legally?

1 BG: Well, we weren't attached to anybody, we had no, part of the deal that made
2 DASPO work is nobody owned us in the host countries and so we did what we wanted.
3 They couldn't, for instance, make us go shoot the general's party which was a favorite
4 thing that photographers would do, especially at Tan Son Nhut where you had all the
5 brass, they wanted pictures taken of themselves. So anyway, we had, it was a Navy van
6 and it had this screen wire on all the windows and it dawned on me that that was to keep
7 grenades from going in because you're driving through town, you were subject to
8 terrorist attacks. And so Rick drove us to the villa and from there we, over a couple of
9 days we got our jungle gear and stuff and got acclimated and you know settled into our
10 digs there.

11 RV: Let me ask you a couple of questions before we got forward. At this point
12 why did you think the United States was in Southeast Asia or in Vietnam?

13 BG: I guess at this point I thought because I believed, I thought we were helping
14 the South Vietnamese keep their country. I mean I had no impression of the South
15 Vietnamese government or you know people didn't talk very highly about the South
16 Vietnamese Army that basically didn't fight, over the years I've come to realize that's
17 partially true but not totally and that the reason those guys didn't fight was because they
18 were getting screwed and there was no reason to die for your country when your country
19 was screwing you. And that you know the government was basically just to the right of
20 being totalitarian.

21 RV: So stop communism story?

22 BG: Yes, basically, yes. I guess I, that was that I felt our reasons were for, yes.

23 RV: Did you personally agree with that?

24 BG: You know I didn't have any feelings one way or the other, again this was just
25 part of Bryan's self-preservation thing. I mean I was very up front with myself and it
26 wasn't, I didn't consider myself a patriot or a hero or anything, you know I'd gotten, my
27 luck had run out and I was in the Army, so I was going to make the best of it.

28 RV: How did you feel about being in a war zone?

29 BG: Well I didn't like it, I mean you know it was scary but you know we were,
30 certainly we lived better than the guys out in the field. Which, you know that's the thing
31 that's always interested in me about this war and the veterans who, it seems like every

1 veteran you ever see seems to be this haunted looking heavy combat veteran of the worst
2 of it, when in fact out of all the troops that were there only one in seven was actually
3 involved in direct combat, the other seven were in the rear with the gear, or some form of
4 rear, whatever the rear was there. So you know we lived a lot better than those guys and
5 you know we had, we had air conditioners in our room and we had maid service of a sort
6 and....

7 RV: This is at the villa?

8 BG: At the villa, yes. I mean we were out in the field, you know we lived
9 different degrees of experience; I mean everything from sleeping on the ground to in tents
10 on cots.

11 RV: Tell me about the villa, what was it like?

12 BG: Well the villa was three stories high, it was, didn't really stand out much,
13 there's a picture of it in the collection, just typical for that neighborhood. We were, I
14 guess a couple of miles from Tan Son Nhut Air Base and that was why we were where
15 we were at because it was close to our transportation for getting around the country and it
16 was our office and home. Downstairs was a dining room and a kitchen and a front
17 reception area which served as the NCOIC's office and then a little enclosed room that
18 was the OIC's room. Then the next floor was sleeping quarters that were sort of ringed
19 around a large room that was used for all kinds of packaging stuff, you know working on
20 gear and at night showing our movies, we could get movies from the exchange system
21 there at Tan Son Nhut. And then the next floor up was all sleeping quarters and then
22 above that was a rooftop area where we'd go drink beer and at night, at that time watch
23 flares dropping around the perimeter of the city and stuff like that.

24 RV: What was your impression of Saigon itself?

25 BG: Crowded and dirty and smelly, like all the, you know these old, the vehicles
26 that were running the streets there weren't maintained to current standard, they certainly
27 wouldn't do well now. It smelled like exhaust fumes and it was very crowded, there were
28 a lot of refugees and then you saw a lot of beggars and being a country boy of a sort I'd
29 never seen street beggars. I have since, after living in Philadelphia know that it's not
30 uncommon in big cities, but there were a lot of beggars, people in just unbelievable
31 circumstances and there was nothing that you could do for them and you learned to just

1 ignore because you couldn't help them all and what little you could do for them wouldn't
2 matter much anyway.

3 RV: How much contact did you guys have with the Vietnamese civilians in
4 general?

5 BG: Well, mostly it was with our maids. We had like a, we had three, sometimes
6 four maids, females that worked for us. One was an older woman we called Mama-san
7 and then she had niece or a daughter or something that sometimes worked there who was
8 very young who we called baby-san and there was two women of indiscriminate age that
9 we called Sam and Gus. The NCOIC started calling everybody those names because they
10 couldn't pronounce their Vietnamese names, it was just easier. Their level of English
11 was pretty limited so we didn't have lengthy conversations with them, let's put it that
12 way.

13 RV: They were okay with their nicknames?

14 BG: I don't think they had a clue what we were saying, it's like calling your dog,
15 you know the dog learns the sound and okay.

16 RV: So tell me about your supplies there, you kept all your equipment there; you
17 had all your meals there?

18 BG: Yes, we shopped at the, we all, with our TDY money, pardon me I'm really
19 congested [coughs]. We were paid per diem, it was \$780, I guess that was a month, we
20 got \$26 a day, which we thought was a huge amount of money at the time and out of that
21 we paid, we all chipped in and paid the rent and the food. And then the deal was though
22 you had to earn that \$26 a day by being in Saigon so they couldn't keep us out in the field
23 all the time because otherwise we wouldn't earn any of that money that helped run the
24 joint, so that was how it ran. And so we shopped at the Cholon PX which was open to
25 civilian government employees and American military and then the maids would do the
26 cooking and the cleaning and the laundry.

27 RV: What kind of weapons, go ahead?

28 BG: Well, I was going to say I told my wife this, I had forgotten about it until I
29 started writing about it again for the archive that we actually had two refrigerators, one
30 was for food and stuff and the other one was for beer and sodas. And we all, you know
31 we all, beer was rationed so you could, you know each person was authorized like I don't

1 know, four cases a month or, I don't know, two cases a month or something, so you'd use
2 your ration card to keep the refrigerator full of beer, nobody much cared about the sodas.

3 RV: Right. So what kind of weapons did you have there?

4 BG: Oh, it was a motley assortment. We had our .45s which we carried from the
5 armory at Fort Shafter and then they had scrounged up a couple of M-16s and some M-1
6 carbines which were like World War II vintage and that was it. And you know when you
7 went out on a combat assignment where if you were going to go out on the ground you
8 know you'd take one of the M-16s or the M-1s, otherwise for most stuff that we did we'd
9 just carry our .45s.

10 RV: Did you feel safe there at the villa?

11 BG: Safer than out in the field but never totally safe. No there was always a low,
12 kind of a low level of paranoia anywhere you were in country. The only place I ever felt
13 totally safe was at Cam Ranh Bay.

14 RV: Really, why?

15 BG: Well, because it was so big. They just couldn't get to you there.

16 RV: Okay. Why don't you go ahead and tell me about Cu Chi, your first
17 assignment going out there.

18 BG: All right, well Chuck and I flew up there in a Chinook and we made contact
19 with the Public Affairs, or PIO I guess they called it then. We used to jokingly call PIO
20 pubic inflammation orifice and we made contact with those guys and they lined us up
21 with a unit to go out with the next day. So we spent our first night there, we stayed in the
22 PIO hooch which was you know the enlisted guys and they were always, their people
23 were in and out of the field, there were a couple of empty bunks that Chuck and I could
24 use and we, I seem to recall we went, we went over to the Enlisted Men's Club which
25 was pretty nice actually, it was a prefab kind of building, being, staying with the PIO
26 guys we were close to the center of everything at Cu Chi.

27 RV: Were you on sound or still photography?

28 BG: I was doing still, that's right; this was my very first still assignment.

29 RV: And this is, how many days had you been in country when you did this?

30 BG: About three days. So we went to the Enlisted Men's Club and you know we
31 caged a couple of six packs, took them back to the PIO hooch and we were just sitting

1 outside, drinking our beer, sitting on sandbags that ringed the outside of these tents and
2 shooting the bull with the guys who lived in the tent. And I can remember the
3 conversation was about, one guy was talking about, well they were getting incoming
4 rounds a lot at this point at Cu Chi and he was talking about sandbagging and what made
5 the best bunkers and you know how many layers of sandbags and then PCP metal
6 sheeting and then more sandbags did you put to make the best bunker. And I remember
7 this one guy said, he says, "When I get home" he says, "I'm going to sandbag my whole
8 motherfuckin house," I mean, you know it was almost pleasant. You know we were
9 sitting out there, it was dusk and there was these little puppies, they were, all bases had
10 dogs, American, I say American dogs, they were Vietnamese dogs that had been adopted
11 by the troops and there were some puppies out there tussling around, we were watching
12 that, it was very pleasant. So it finally got dark, it was time to lay down and so I went
13 inside and I noticed these guys were all getting on their bunks and they weren't getting
14 undressed and it was hot in there, it was stifling hot but nobody get undressed. In fact
15 many of them left their boots on. So I took note of that, said hmmh, so I left my boots on
16 and sure enough, at some point later on after I'd drifted off to sleep all of a sudden I
17 heard these explosions and then this siren and somebody yelled "Incoming" and all these
18 guys started running out the tent door down to the bunker that was right next to their tent.
19 I was a pretty dedicated beer drinker in those days so I grabbed my cigarettes and what
20 was left of my six pack and went out the door and Chuck was just ahead of me but he was
21 slow enough that when we went down the hall I landed on top of him. So we got down
22 there and I think, you know got a beer and then passed around the rest of the beer to the
23 guys that were down there. We were listening to the, I think somebody had a radio,
24 listened to Armed Forces radio and waiting for the all clear which finally came and we
25 went back up and it happened again. You know about the time you drifted off to sleep,
26 BOOM and everybody ran down, this time, and I've written this so this is why I
27 remember it, somebody, they took a head count, where is everybody. Well, there were a
28 couple of guys missing that didn't come down, they were like long timers who figured if
29 they'd survived the initial onslaught of rockets that it was over pretty much because it
30 was harassing fire and they didn't come down. And so we waited a minute or two and it
31 was quiet and then all off a sudden, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, more rounds came in, then

1 you heard two sets of feet hit the wooden floor of the tent and two shapes came flooding
2 down back into the bunker, you know after that those guys were with us. So this went on
3 a couple more times during the night, so that was the kind of life they were living and
4 about the time I really got good and asleep somebody woke me up and it was time to go
5 out and get on a Jeep and ride out to the perimeter and meet up with the unit that we were
6 going to go on this operation with.

7 RV: That was your first experience with combat basically?

8 BG: Yes, that was it, yes.

9 RV: How did it feel to you?

10 BG: It was scary. I mean yes, you always think that every rocket or mortar's got
11 your name on it, it's a very personal thing and I never took it lightly, never took it for
12 granted.

13 RV: Never got used to it?

14 BG: No, never got used to it.

15 RV: Okay.

16 RV: So tell me about what happened at Cu Chi when you first went out in the
17 field.

18 BG: Okay, well it was still pitch dark when we got the jeep that picked us up and
19 took us somewhere just outside the perimeter of the base and what appeared to be a
20 cemetery and this is where these guys were hunkered down, this unit. I don't know if
21 they'd assembled there, I got the feeling they spent the night there because I remember
22 there were small fires and there was gear and equipment all over the place, it was very
23 dark, it was hard to make out, it was very confusing. And you know we got introduced to
24 somebody and you know they asked us if we had gas masks and we didn't so they said
25 well, there's plenty laying around, just grab one. So Chuck and I both grabbed a gas mask
26 and of course I mean what is this about and so we, no it started to become dawn and I
27 started making my first pictures and those copies of those picture, original prints are in
28 the collection. And the first shot was of some guys sort of in silhouette waiting on a
29 small rise in the ground, I made a picture and I really like I said I hadn't a clue what I was
30 doing, point the light meter and you know point the camera and the shutter on this
31 camera, it's a twin lens reflex so you have to look down--hang on a second, [I have to]

1 kiss my wife, we both work [at] newspaper[s] so we work odd hours, she's just now
2 leaving for work -- so you know I couldn't even hear the shutter so the helicopters came
3 and they picked us up and I don't guess we were going to go very long because the guys
4 started putting on their gas masks right away so I made one picture of the guy sitting in
5 the door and then I put on my mask and it didn't work. And I'm going holy Christ, what
6 kind of gas are we talking here, so a medic gave me a chest wound bandage to put my
7 face, he said, "Just put that over your face," nobody still has told me what's going on. So
8 we start to come in and we come in fast and this is just like watching it on television and
9 I've written this too, I almost felt like I was a scene from a Walter Cronkite war report
10 whereas you know the camera's seeing me go out the door. So I jump out of this
11 helicopter, holding this thing over my mouth and I could smell this tear gas, that's all it
12 was and by the time we hit the ground it was mostly dissipated. So I started trying to
13 make pictures and like I say I didn't have a clue what I was doing, just sort of an
14 instinctive kind of thing. And I don't remember how long we were out there, it was like
15 time just really, when you're in a situation like that, for me anyway, was like time was
16 really screwed up and my awareness of my surroundings were pretty much restricted to
17 within my direct vicinity, you know like a small, if you drew a circle around yourself that
18 was say fifteen feet all you know, that was my world. I was concerned, you know I'd
19 heard about you know punji sticks you know and booby traps and all that so I'm trying to
20 walk you know, sort of follow in the footsteps of the guy in front of me. We're in like
21 what's apparently dry rice paddies, this was in February, I guess that's their dry period, I
22 don't remember but there was no water around. And then there were tree lines and then
23 there was just sort of shrubs and it was pretty open country and when I got to looking
24 around I noticed that there were armored personnel carriers and tanks in the, this was like
25 a huge sweep. They called it Operation Tran Hung Dao, that was a major, apparently a
26 major operation in the war. It was basically as I understood it later to clear out enemy
27 troops that were in around Cu Chi and also Tan Son Nhut to get rid of these guys that
28 were firing rockets and mortars into Tan Son Nhut at night because there was still a lot of
29 enemy activity in that area even though they'd taken a terrific ass kicking during Tet.
30 And so that's what we were doing there and so at some point we started taking sniper fire
31 and the whole group just sort of ground to a halt and I remember hearing, I was near a

1 radio operator saying that somebody had [been] shot and then apparently an armored
2 personnel carrier got hit by a rocket propelled grenade and everybody pulled back and I
3 made a picture, it shows the smoke spiraling up in the air from this thing and like I say I
4 don't know if we were there, three hours, five hours or what. It was, you know we started
5 early in the morning and it seemed like it was after, in the afternoon when we got done
6 with these guys because when the armored personnel carrier got hit the crew got out but
7 they were burned before it exploded. I remember when the thing exploded watching the
8 back door on it which weighs several hundreds of pounds go sailing up hundreds of feet
9 into the air, it was the damnedest thing, it was like it was a kite. So when these guys
10 came back, they brought them back, the medics to a collecting point, we happened to be
11 right there, they called a Medevac in to bring these guys out. At that point Chuck and I
12 decided that it would be a good time for us to go to, it might be the only opportunity
13 otherwise we'd be spending the night with these guys and neither one of us were really
14 prepared to do that. We hadn't brought a lot of equipment with us for sleeping out you
15 know. So anyway we went back to Cu Chi and spent the night again, another night of
16 incoming or what not and then managed to get out the next day and go back to Tan Son
17 Nhut and back to the villa.

18 RV: So it was a one-day deal?

19 BG: It was a one, yes we were there like over a period of three days but we were
20 out in the field with these guys for a part of a day. So that was my first look at the
21 elephant.

22 RV: What was your impression?

23 BG: Well, you know it could have been a lot worse, it was nothing like the
24 movies and I've said, you know the stuff that gets portrayed in movies is the absolute
25 worst that could ever be in any situation and most, I don't think it happens very often, at
26 least not in Vietnam.

27 RV: What do you mean, can you be more specific?

28 BG: Well, that kind of intense, you know I mean the stuff like in *Platoon* and *Full
29 Metal Jacket*, those are like the very worst most intense combat situations like you know
30 Normandy Beach for some of the guys that landed on Omaha Beach but those things
31 weren't, it wasn't that way all the time and it didn't happen to everybody but those are

1 what, you know it makes for great story telling and great movies because those are the
2 intense experiences in combat. I think I read once somebody said that combat or war,
3 being in a war zone was like eons of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror.
4 And so you know that combat operation certainly, you know that experience impressed
5 the hell out of me at that time but compared to some other things you know that have
6 happened to infantry men over there, it was certainly, it was nothing. But that was my
7 first look at it. Then after that we just did a series of non-direct combat assignments. I
8 know, I've got a list here, we went up to Camp Evans, which was way up near the DMZ
9 and did a soldier's Christmas, which was a film that we were working on for the
10 Pentagon which actually was I think finally put together and sent out as part of the big
11 picture TV series, I don't know if you remember the *Big Picture*, it was like an Army
12 production that they used to show like at three o'clock in the morning on TV when they
13 had to do their public service stuff and that was, we produced these kinds of films. I think
14 some of that's actually in that combat photography video that you guys have. But
15 anyway that was one things we did where we, you know we made it up because it wasn't
16 Christmas time but I think we had like a chaplain giving services and there was a shot
17 that Harry was doing where had a bunch of helicopters fly over, it was like a movie
18 production. And then we also, while we were up there did an artillery support story for an
19 operation that was going on. And then later, a few days later, oh let's see, that was in the
20 17th, then we went down to a place called Rach Keim, sounds almost Israeli and did a
21 story called Task Force Builder where they were building homes and stuff I guess.

22 RV: Were you doing still or sound?

23 BG: Well I finished these notes, that's the thing, when I did sounds I don't have
24 any captions but when I did, most of the time I saved my captions, I think I was doing
25 sound, I'm not sure. And then the next one, in April I went out with the 11th Cav, spent a
26 day riding on an armored personnel carrier on Operation, it's pronounced in English
27 Quiet Thing, Q-U-Y-E-T T-H-A-N-G, and spent the day with them and really didn't
28 make any contact or anything, they were ferrying some South Vietnamese troops around.
29 But the interesting thing about the 11th Cav is their commanding officer was George
30 Patton Jr. who was then a colonel. And then we did a story on Cu Chi perimeter defense
31 and another one later on aerial surveillance devices; we flew down to Vung Tao to do

1 that. I remember doing some heavy drinking with some kiwis from New Zealand. There
2 were only a few of them there, there was only a couple of hundred, they were part of an
3 artillery unit and they were drinking long after I left and got up, they were on a little in-
4 country R & R and after I left them, we were eating, we were staying in a hotel there in
5 Vung Tao on that trip, Vung Tao is like a beach town and they were still raising hell you
6 could hear them. Then we went to a place called Long Phan and did fixed wing aircraft
7 and then the next thing I got a note of is the ARVN airborne repel NVA/VC attack on
8 Saigon and that was what was known as the May Offensive and that was my next combat
9 experience.

10 RV: Okay, let me ask you a couple of questions before we get to that. What was
11 your impression of the American soldier, what, like morale wise and just motivation wise
12 and being in Southeast Asia and Vietnam?

13 BG: I think it was the same as mine, just doing their job and trying to survive it.
14 This was not the professional Army that we had in the Gulf War, this recent Gulf War,
15 nor was it the professional Army that first went to Vietnam. After ten years, or I mean it
16 wasn't ten years, five years of this and pretty much the professional Army was gone
17 except for senior NCOs and the officers and what not, everybody else was pretty much
18 first time around I think. But there was no, it wasn't the dope smoking, long haired you
19 know hippie revolution, fragging Army that I've read about, I never saw that. But then I
20 was done with it before that started up I think.

21 RV: Right, so you heard nothing of fragging?

22 BG: No, no that was, because I think that started like in 1970 and on.

23 RV: Yes, it was later, it was later.

24 BG: Yes, things got really bad.

25 RV: How did the men react to having a photographer and motion picture guys, all
26 you guys out in the field with them?

27 BG: Well when we were in the field, as in the bush, you know, they were you
28 guys got a great job kind of thing. But a lot, most of the stuff we did was not out in the
29 field, it was like at base camps and stuff. So you know these guys were rear echelon
30 types themselves, although they didn't have air conditioning, they lived in a tent but they

1 didn't hump the boonies, as they liked to say that the grunts did. So they had it better
2 than the, you know the combat line troops.

3 RV: Did you sense any tension between those in the rear and those out in the
4 field?

5 BG: I never saw them mix and I was never around, very briefly once. You know I
6 think the grunts kept to themselves, you know they were quartered, they had tents to stay
7 in when they were back at this base camps but I don't think they mixed around with the
8 rear, and they had their own rear echelon guys, you know they had their company clerks
9 and what not.

10 RV: Right. Can you describe exactly what kind of equipment you were carrying?

11 BG: Well at this point, you mean military gear, I was probably carrying a, I
12 usually carried a .45. That first trip it was on a pistol belt with a regulation holster. I had
13 a ditty bag that I carried a lot of stuff in, I used as a camera bag and personal effects bag
14 that's, it was a World War II Marine Corp vintage bag I picked up at a surplus store in
15 Honolulu before I went on that first trip. Because we pretty much had to scrounge for
16 ourselves a lot of stuff.

17 RV: What was that, why didn't you have the uniform supplies that you needed?

18 BG: Well I mean that was something that they just didn't have. I mean we got
19 jungle fatigues and we got canteens and pistol belts and web gear and all that, but we
20 fitted our own particular needs. And a lot of time we didn't use that because like I say
21 the majority of the assignments that we did were you know done at base camps so we
22 didn't have to, I mean it carried, we'd have a canteen and stuff because it was hot, you
23 wanted water but not a lot of extra stuff because you didn't want to have to lug it around
24 quite truthfully and you know we wouldn't have carried an M-16 if we didn't have to into
25 combat but the troops liked to see us better armed. Our sergeants used to say if it gets so
26 bad that you need to start shooting, there's going to be weapons laying around to be
27 picked up off the ground. But anyway, I mean everybody had their own approach, this
28 was mine and so I didn't carry a whole lot of stuff.

29 RV: Did you have a flak vest?

30 BG: I did and sometimes I wore it and there's actually a picture of me wearing it
31 in the cemetery fight during this particular time period we've reached, May the 6th, 1968,

1 that Harry Breedlove, we were like taking pictures of each other in the cemetery firefight
2 and that's where this recording that I sent you guys came from too.

3 RV: What about your DASPO equipment?

4 BG: Well we, at this point we were still using these twin lens reflex cameras, two
5 and a quarter, twelve exposure and you carried a light meter and you know an extra film.
6 That's it, that's all I needed to carry. Motion picture cameraman, depending on which
7 motion picture camera he carried, carried more weight because the film itself would cone
8 in, like, if it was the small combat camera like say Chuck used at Cu Chi that's an old
9 filmo, which is a hand cranked camera which actually dates back to World War II and
10 even an earlier model was used as a newsreel camera in the 1930s and that I think carried
11 a fifty foot load of film which is like six minutes. And then the Arriflexes could carry
12 larger film loads but those guys would carry them on their shoulders or you know if you
13 had a tripod which you didn't carry a tripod in combat obviously but there was an
14 Arriflex BL and Arriflex S, one was larger than the other, I think the S was the smaller
15 one. So they had to carry these four hundred foot loads of film, so they had a bit more to
16 lug. And then if I was carrying the Nagra, that was all I would carry it, and a couple of
17 extra five inch reels of audio tape and you know a microphone, which came in handy
18 later on when one of members got hit and used it as a tourniquet.

19 RV: Okay. Why don't you go ahead and talk about the May Offensive?

20 BG: All right. Well the May Offensive was probably the most combat, it was the
21 most combat I was in and it was like over about a four-day period and it started on May
22 the 6th. It was sort of like, the general impression was they were trying to repeat the Tet
23 Offensive although it wasn't nearly as intense, but they did attack in Saigon and the
24 Cholon area and around Tan Son Nhut air base, they attempted to attack the base again.
25 And by the time we got there, along Plantation Road, and this was like a commuter's war,
26 we could drive to it in the jeep. Harry Breedlove and I, I'm trying to think of the other
27 photographer's name, Ed Hawes, were sent out to this fight somewhere along Plantation
28 Road. It turned out that the South Vietnamese troops were in the French national
29 cemetery, which was an old war cemetery next to the perimeter wire of Tan Son Nhut air
30 base. And we, I remember we parked our jeep in front of the *Stars and Stripes*
31 newspaper facility which was actually just down the street from the cemetery and there

1 were a bunch of press were there and they were all sort of just milling around. And so we
2 walked in the back way and we sent Ed up to the top of a building to get aerial shots of
3 the cemetery and I was doing sound so Ed was shooting motion picture and Harry was
4 shooting stills. And there's a picture of Harry, a great posed picture, it was crazy stuff to
5 do but with him holding an M-16 in one hand, he's down in a ditch and he's got his
6 camera up in front of him and its really kind of cool. And I had, I had brought, I had
7 brought with me my little Minolta camera and so I shot his picture and then he said,
8 "Here, you run over there to that tombstone, I'll take your picture." So here we are in
9 this firefight taking each other's pictures. So it wasn't too terribly bad, you know I shot
10 sound and I copied a little bit of it, I wish I'd have copied more of it for myself. There's
11 like a three-minute snatch of it in your archive. And basically you know we were there
12 for a couple hours and then finally they pushed the enemy out of wherever they were and
13 got to be lunchtime. So Harry said, "Let's go back to the villa and have lunch." So we
14 go back to the villa and have lunch and while we're there our captain, or lieutenant I
15 should say, the OIC Rick Griffith decides to reconfigure the next team and he's going to
16 go out and lead us. So it's me and Harry and I think Ed Hawes again, I'm not sure and I
17 was shooting stills now and Harry was shooting motion picture and the lieutenant was
18 carrying an M-16, so he was sort of our security. We went back to where we had been
19 before and the fighting was pretty much gone from the cemetery and so we went further
20 down the road, or no, no, there was stuff going on still in the neighborhood and I
21 remember that I made one picture of some ARVN medics running across, well first they
22 ran across near the wall of the cemetery, which, the wall of the cemetery like ran parallel
23 to Plantation Road and then they ran back and they had a guy's body and I remember I
24 took the picture and it's in the collection of his arm hanging down. Then right after that
25 the lieutenant discovered across the street and underneath a schoolhouse the ARVNs had
26 captured a couple of VC or NVA, I'm not sure what they were, so we ran over there and
27 made pictures of that and I got a couple of nice pictures out of it and then we proceeded
28 to go, I think its still Plantation Road sort of swung around to the right out towards, I
29 guess they called it Plantation Road because it went out to all the old French plantations
30 but it was also the road to Cu Chi, into that area. And I'm trying to remember, I
31 remember there was like a deuce and a half parked with a fifty caliber machine gun

1 mounted on it and we ran over there to take pictures of it and I know Harry got pictures,
2 you can almost see the lieutenant, or you can see the lieutenant and I'm like crouched
3 behind him and then Harry got hit by shrapnel. So he goes down, so we run over there
4 and give him first aid and I take a picture of him and the lieutenant and Harry's down on
5 the ground and then later the ARVN medic comes along and does a little more
6 professional job of patching up the hole in his leg. And, this all stuff is kind of mixed up,
7 I've written about it and I sort of like took a little artistic license and sort of lumped it all
8 together rather than saying, oh on day three, blah, blah, blah, but anyway we went back to
9 the jeep and on the way back to the jeep I turned around and I noticed there was a Shell,
10 Shell oil station, Shell filling station just down the street a ways and the S had been
11 burned out of the sign so the sign just said hell and it was engulfed in all these flames and
12 I said, "Harry look at that" so Harry sat up and he made a shot which is in that video,
13 combat photographers and I shot a still picture of it. That was sort of a turning point for
14 me professionally because when I saw then I realized that there could be things in
15 pictures that said more than what was there. Basically the old axiom war is hell, well
16 there was a visual representation of this burning building, you know debris around it and
17 the word hell. And Harry's motion picture is stunning, he starts with a wide shot and
18 zooms in real close on the sign and its, you know I've seen it used in some of the
19 histories of the Vietnam War. So that was sort of the high point of that day and after that
20 it was sort of mixed up. I know I went out with, we became, we got a name, those of us
21 that went out with Lieutenant Griffith, we were called Griffith's Guerillas and I actually
22 sent you guys a, the original or a copy original of the little certificate I drew up, you
23 know you put your name on it, it made you an official member of Griffith's Guerillas. I
24 was drawing cartoons back then about life in DASPO and that's stuff in the Archive as
25 well, I did it out of boredom. Anyway, so the next day or so you know we were in and
26 out, going to places and the last day it was myself and Ed Hawes and Sergeant Alfred
27 Batungbacal and the lieutenant and we went to Cholon and this was like the day after a
28 bunch of Australian journalists had been murdered in the same area, they were in a jeep
29 and they accidentally came up on a VC checkpoint and they tried to back out of it and
30 they got shot up and I think there were five guys in the jeep and four of them were killed
31 and the fifth one hid under the bodies until it was safe and he made a run for it. So we

1 were in that same neighborhood and we were totally by ourselves and that was really
2 spooky.

3 RV: You were aware of this?

4 BG: Oh, absolutely it was like you know my heart was beating. I was always the
5 driver on these expeditions, so anyway.

6 RV: Why were you always the driver?

7 BG: I don't know, I guess because I'm a good driver because I said, you do it
8 Grigsby or maybe because I was the lowest ranking guy, that's what it was in that group.
9 Anyway we finally came up on a military operation that consisted of ARVN troops and
10 American armor and there was this one road they were set up, a tank was set up as a
11 blocking force and this column of ARVNs were going to go down this road, it was a little
12 bigger than an alley but not big enough to be a full-sized, I'm not sure, it was, I always
13 called it an alley but when I look at the footage it looks bigger than that. But anyway we
14 go down this thing and the lieutenant takes Sergeant Batungbacal and they go up with the
15 point. Now, Sergeant Batungbacal is carrying an Arriflex BL which is, its on his
16 shoulder, it's a big camera and so they go up front and I fell back to the center, I had no
17 intentions of going up front and at this point I'm carrying the Nagra again and Ed is
18 somewhere along there too, he's shooting stills. So the lead elements get ambushed and
19 the lieutenant gets shot, gets shot in the arm, shoulder, arm, somewhere in that general
20 area and so you know I'm headed, I don't know this yet, I'm headed back, I'm running
21 sideways, I'm literally afraid I'm going to get shot in the back, get back to the tank and
22 then turn around and we see, you know the lead elements of the ARVNs running you
23 know as fast as they can back towards us and there's Sergeant Batungbacal helping the
24 lieutenant back who's been shot. So we get the lieutenant back to, he, we get him back to
25 the tank and the shooting stopped at this point and so we go into a little house, a
26 Vietnamese house that's right there to take a look at his wounds and do it you know out
27 of sight in case there's snipers or anything. We got in there, we cut his, I don't guess we
28 did anything we just see, he wasn't bleeding too badly but decided to put a tourniquet on
29 his arm. So I took the microphone cable and I wrapped it around his arm and then took
30 the microphone and used it to lever this thing tight enough to stop any possible blood
31 flow. So we had him all set and we took him back to 3rd Field Hospital and left him off

1 there. And so at that point and this was all at the same time period that you just talked to
2 that Ted Acheson was wounded, so we had three guys get wounded like in the space of
3 about four days during this week in May, so that kind of made us legendary in the
4 DASPO annals.

5 RV: How did you guys feel about getting into combat like that, was there, were
6 there more of you that said yes, heck with it, I'm going to go out there or was it kind of a
7 comment like, we're just going to go do our job?

8 BG: The lieutenant told us to do that. I won't go any further than that. None of us
9 would have been in that situation had, where you're hanging out, you're ass is hanging
10 out going through those neighborhoods of Cholon for instance, that was very stupid but
11 the lieutenant was very determined and very dedicated to getting good footage and you
12 don't tell an officer no, you do you get court martialled.

13 RV: Did you guys resent the lieutenant for this?

14 BG: Truthfully, yes. Yes, there was a lot of resentment towards him.

15 RV: But you couldn't really do much about it.

16 BG: No, I mean he was in charge. That's how it works, you know even Sergeant
17 Breedlove who was a sergeant first class or Sergeant First Class Alfred Batungbacal with
18 all their years of service can't say no to an officer and that's the big difference.

19 RV: Could you guys sit down and talk to this guy and say?

20 BG: No, no he was. I really didn't intend to get into this because I didn't want to
21 sully the guy's memory and he lived within fifteen miles of me and I haven't seen him.

22 RV: We don't have to go into it if you don't want to Bryan.

23 BG: No, it's just one of those things you know and I got some good pictures out
24 of some of it, but yes, and so that was actually, once he was wounded we didn't do a
25 whole lot more with that. I did do one more assignment near the Y Bridge, I got a note
26 with the ninth division and they were just mopping up and I remember one incident and I
27 don't know what happened to the pictures of that, I never saw them, except that I have a
28 picture of myself that was taken by another one of our guys, Talmadge Harbison took my
29 picture, that's in the collection. That shows the camera and everything and I'm not even
30 wearing a flak jacket in this picture but it shot this sort of mopping up around the Y

1 Bridge, which was south of Saigon I guess. And then you know within a couple of days
2 my TDY was up and I went back to Hawaii.

3 RV: Did you have any experiences at Khe Sanh at this point?

4 BG: You know its funny, I don't have that written down because I was doing
5 sound and that's why. I didn't get on the ground at Khe Sanh but I got within six hundred
6 feet of it in the air.

7 RV: Okay, can you tell me about that?

8 BG: Well, yes we were, that's funny, I think that's on another, we, I'm just
9 looking here at, god there was a lot more we did, geez we did tracker dogs, we did Jewish
10 Passover services, Easter services, rebuilding in Hue.

11 RV: This is all in the first tour?

12 BG: Yes, the first trip, Firebase Bastogne we went there, fixed wing aircraft, let's
13 see. We were doing a thing on these guys who were repacking the parachutes for
14 dropping supplies and they were stationed at Cam Ranh Bay and that was the one time I
15 was there and felt essentially very safe. But these guys then flew supplies into Khe Sanh
16 and this was in March and it's funny, I guess because I was doing sounds, that's why, you
17 know my sounds records all you did was fill out a sound card and that was it, there was
18 no other information. Anyway we flew in a C-130 and they would come, they wouldn't
19 land, it was too dangerous. They would get within six hundred feet over it and then kick
20 these pallets out with parachutes on them at the end of the runway. So I saw Khe Sanh
21 from six hundred feet and we were taking fire from the hills. They were ringed in pretty
22 good.

23 RV: What was your impression of Khe Sanh looking at it?

24 BG: Scared to death, oh the base. It just looked like red clay, it was all red. I know
25 when we did the Jewish Passover services we went to China Beach, which I'm sure you
26 remember the TV series, well we were actually at the real one which was nothing like
27 that one but there was a guy, a Marine who came in from Khe Sanh, the deal was with the
28 Passover was any Jew who was in the war zone could get like a week off to do this if they
29 wanted to, even guys who hadn't been Jewish in years suddenly found their roots and
30 they all showed up there. This one guy came in from Khe Sanh and I remember he just
31 stood there, he had his weapon with him, of course being a Marine he was in the infantry

1 and he wearing a flak jacket and his helmet and he was all covered with red dust. And I
2 remember he just had this look like he could not believe that there was any place that you
3 didn't need all these things to wear them all the time. He didn't take off his flak jacket
4 and his helmet for a long time, it was really strange.

5 RV: Did you get a picture of him?

6 BG: No, I was, like I say, well first of all it didn't occur to me and secondly I
7 don't think I was even carrying a camera, I was doing sound on that job. Yes, I know,
8 wow it would have been a hell of a picture in retrospect. Here again, see my evolution as
9 photographer is only just beginning, I still didn't know that this was what I wanted to do
10 with the rest of my life yet and what I have done with the rest of my life.

11 RV: Were you getting an idea by this time?

12 BG: I was starting to think that there was something to it, yes but I still hadn't
13 gotten to the point where, and I kick myself now, dedicated enough to always carry my
14 camera and make pictures for myself.

15 RV: You do that now?

16 BG: Oh, yes and my last trip I actually did some decent photography on my own
17 with an even better camera slightly, I got a Pentax Spotmatic but at this point no, it was
18 like, I was more concerned just surviving and now I look at, I think what an opportunity
19 missed.

20 RV: So you ended your first tour, it was a ninety-day rotation.

21 BG: Ninety-day rotation, I go back to Hawaii, go back for a couple of months and
22 then I went to Korea again.

23 RV: What did you do in the couple months back in Hawaii?

24 BG: Basically not much of anything. You know we'd do I guess some training
25 but it was mostly just sitting around on your ass bored out of your skull for eight hours a
26 day waiting for five o'clock to roll around so you could leave.

27 RV: What would you guys do at five o'clock, just go back to the barracks?

28 BG: Go back to the barracks, yes, you know go drink somewhere; you know catch
29 a bus down to Waikiki.

30 RV: How about incoming DASPO new people to go into the unit, were they
31 coming in, rotating in?

1 BG: Yes, there were guys coming in but I was never, you know I was usually, I'd
2 meet them, you know the funny thing is you would work with guys but you wouldn't
3 always see them. There would be guys that were in the unit that you just barely saw and
4 there were guys in the unit I never saw. It was really, I mean because we were all
5 traveling around and we didn't always travel in the same circles although I tended to
6 work with Harry Breedlove and Paul Molten more than anybody else.

7 RV: Why was that?

8 BG: Well, I think we developed a friendship, I think Moulton liked me and he
9 was always an NCOIC and I was working for Paul and it took me years to learn to call
10 him Paul, I mean he was, he was a career sergeant and when I first met him he scared the
11 shit out of me but you know once, that was because until I proved myself to him that was
12 how he was going to treat me. Once he learned that I was a worker and I wasn't a BSer
13 than we didn't become friends, we never did that until after the war, until after we all got
14 out and then we became friends, even the officers. You know you dropped all the
15 pretenses and all the military formality and Paul insisted that I call him Paul, it took me
16 awhile, I was still calling him Sergeant Moulton when I, and this only happened, I got to
17 see these guys after I came to work here at the Philadelphia *Inquirer* because before that I
18 was too far away from them. They all were like in the Washington area and I was living
19 in Florida and working at a paper down there and then out in Missouri for awhile before I
20 came here, so get that straight. So anyway I worked with Paul and Harry a lot.

21 RV: So you were there for a few months and you go to South Korea, when did
22 you go back to South Korea?

23 BG: Okay, let me see here.

24 RV: Was it July, August?

25 BG: Yes, it was like in the summer. I've got notes here, end of July, August, and
26 let's see, yes July through September. And actually between that, I left this out, I see
27 there's a note, President Johnson came to Honolulu in May of '68 to meet with President
28 Thieu and I sent you guys a couple of snapshots from that, they haven't gotten on the site
29 yet, but we covered that and that was the first time I'd ever seen the White House Press
30 Corps.

31 RV: What did you think?

1 BG: I was not impressed. In fact I was thinking to myself, if this is what
2 photojournalism is about, I don't want any part of it. It was like a pack of wild dogs, the
3 photographers' end of it anyway, yes. But anyway, you know that was at Camp Smith,
4 the meeting and of course we didn't go inside for that, just took pictures of them coming
5 and going.

6 RV: What was your impression of Johnson?

7 BG: I was impressed. He's the president, you know big guy.

8 RV: Had your views or anything changed on the war and?

9 BG: Was I anti-war, I don't know. Sometimes I think I blew hot and cold on that.

10 RV: Well not necessarily anti-war, were you, had your views evolved any on
11 what was going on?

12 BG: Well, you know it's funny. There was on incident where we went to this
13 college hangout, University of Hawaii, some of the guys in the unit and we were talking,
14 I think I was a little drunk and talking too loud and some guys that were in the Air Force I
15 think at the table next to us took exception to my views on Vietnam and I don't
16 remember what I said, but they called me outside.

17 RV: Oh really, did you go?

18 BG: Yes, and I just said, and I was drunk enough I said, "Okay, if you think
19 hitting me will change my views, let's go outside." So we went outside, I just stood there
20 and the guy hit me in the face. And I looked at him, I said, "Okay, are you satisfied
21 now?" And he kind of like got this strange look on his face like you know what have I
22 done. Because I think at some point I asked him, I said, "Have you ever been to
23 Vietnam?" And he said, "No." I said, "Well I have" you know but he was like a patriot,
24 he was a, you know. Air Force guys lived a hell of a lot better than the Army and the
25 Marines and even the guys that were over there. I remember, my favorite story, if you go
26 to, you go somewhere and you get off the plane and you go over to the airport shack and
27 you say, or the Air Force facility which would be a prefab building with air conditioning
28 and you know cold water fountains and all this stuff and you say where's the such and
29 such Army unit and they say, "You see those tents over there and you can see the smoke
30 coming up from where they're burning the shit in the outhouses, that's where they are."

1 You know that happened over and over in Vietnam. The Air Force goes in and they build
2 a base that's permanent, so they lived a heck of a lot better.

3 RV: Tell me about your second South Korean tour.

4 BG: Well, by this time I think we were in Walker Hill briefly and then we got the
5 juice to rent a villa so that we would have a center, they decided – well the reason that
6 DASPO was now permanently in Korea was because of the Pueblo incident. We had
7 pulled the team out in September of '67, we just took a look around, shot some stuff and
8 that was it. When the Pueblo was captured they decided to put a team in there and to say
9 until the Pueblo crew was returned. And then they did a lot of stuff and it was all, you
10 know Korea was all about depot facilities. Like for instance we shot something called the
11 ASCOM depot facility, which is, they stored everything from tanks to armored personnel
12 carriers to nails. I'm writing, I'm reading from notes. They process, store and handle
13 eight different classes of supplies, not including POL and ammunition. So we spent a lot
14 of time at the ASCOM depot, you know that was like a day trip. Everything we did at
15 this point was day trips and then we'd go back to the house, the villa where we had a
16 Korean couple, Mr. and Mrs. Yi, who looked after us, did our laundry and kept the place
17 clean and kept the thieves out. It had a wall around it, it was a very, it was a very nice
18 house. And we learned to take our shoes off and walk you know in our socks around the
19 house like the Koreans did and that was our base of operations. And let's see,
20 ammunition renovation, as I told you about earlier, it was a supply depot where they
21 basically took all the stored ammunition and checked it to make sure it was serviceable
22 instead of buying new stuff. Let's see, we went to a parade, Armed Forces Day and I
23 think they were honoring a unit that had served in Vietnam.

24 RV: Were you still on still photography?

25 BG: Yes, yes I'm looking at still notes here.

26 RV: Well, let me ask you about your notes; were these notes that you made back
27 during the time you were there?

28 BG: Well these are official captions.

29 RV: So you would shoot and go back and make the captions?

30 BG: Yes, part of what, yes when you were a still photographer, there are
31 examples of the captions in the collection. They wanted like a summary caption and then

1 a master caption that explained everything and then you had to get like, if you were
2 shooting Americans you had to get their name, rank, hometown, you know what they
3 were doing, you had to name the equipment if it was like a piece of signal equipment you
4 had to say what it was, slash, you know military loves acronyms and what not. So we
5 had to get all that information and so yes, we spent a fair amount of time back at the villa
6 you know doing captions and then getting our film ready to ship back to, I don't know if
7 it went to Hawaii or went to directly to Washington because that's where it was, it was
8 processed in Washington. And then at some point early on they would do captions, I'm
9 sorry not captions, contact sheets and so a typical contact sheet at that time was a twelve
10 exposure roll on one eight by ten piece of paper. Then they would be critiqued and
11 you've got some examples of critiques in there too by an officer would say what was
12 right or what was wrong about it. And we all were invited, encouraged to make copies,
13 you know you made, cut copies, it was set up with carbons so you could have a copy and
14 then there were two copies that went to Washington so you know we got, and a lot of this
15 stuff was just, you know shooting vehicles parked in storage areas, signal equipment, you
16 know it wasn't real exciting stuff.

17 RV: Did you want to get back into something more exciting such as Vietnam?

18 BG: Oh, hell no.

19 RV: Okay, I didn't know if your pattern had changed.

20 BG: Are you kidding, this was cotton candy duty going to Korea. Yes, I mean we
21 traveled around a bit and the work wasn't exciting, I guess I wouldn't say it was dull it
22 just, you know didn't have, you know but anyway, we'd get these and what happened
23 when I got out of the Army I didn't have anything to show for my military photography
24 so fortunately one weekend before I was due to get out I was on CQ duty on the weekend
25 in the officer I went through the first sergeant's files, which I found out later a lot of guys
26 did and just pulled the contact sheets out because they kept them, these were copies, the
27 film and everything was back in Washington. So we did contact sheets at first and then
28 they started sending eight by ten or ten by ten work prints, color work prints of
29 everything that you shot and they would critique that so I kept a few of those too. Then
30 you had to go into these books; they had these spiral-ringed notebooks full of these
31 pictures so I have a sort of a combination of the two. Then over the years I would,

1 because the contact sheet for two and a quarter negatives is fairly large I'd go in with a
2 macro lens and copy them for myself. And you know I had a set of black and white prints
3 that I collected and put together over the years, after the Army. And the one of Harry
4 down on the ground never survived, they censored that and kept up the negative and only
5 preserved the one of him standing after he got wounded. That's the kind of mentality,
6 you had these fifty some odd year old women back in Washington deciding what
7 negatives survived and which ones were cut up and thrown in the trash.

8 RV: Why would they cut up that shot of Harry?

9 BG: Because it would be bad for morale to show an Army photographer
10 wounded, you know. We didn't have any say so and I've never seen the picture other
11 than my copy of it.

12 RV: How'd you feel about that kind of policy?

13 BG: I didn't know about it at the time, didn't have a clue. And it was about this
14 time, this second trip to Korea and the last trips to Vietnam and I also went, a split trip
15 actually after that Korea trip I did a split trip to Thailand for a month and a half and then
16 back to Saigon for a month and a half, I think.

17 RV: What did you do in Thailand?

18 BG: Much of nothing, except drink.

19 RV: Really?

20 BG: We didn't, they just didn't have much for us to do. We lived in a hotel in
21 Bangkok and we; we did a couple of trips. One was kind of interesting, we went to
22 Kanchanaburi, which is the location of where the original bridge over to River Kwai was
23 and saw that site, you know there's a cemetery there too where all the Allied soldiers who
24 died building the bridge are buried and Chinese laborers and Thais.

25 RV: What was your impression of all that?

26 BG: Well, I'd seen the movie you know, and I, wow and could actually see the
27 stubs of what the original, where the original bridge was and they hadn't turned it into a
28 tourist attraction yet. I understand now it's a huge tourist thing so yes, it was, that was
29 interesting. We went down to a B-52 base and shot, it was funny an Army, we were
30 shooting for the Air Force, we were an Army photo team and we were shooting B-52s at
31 U- Tapao air base, you know I got to watch them load the bombs in them and everything.

1 RV: How cooperative was the Air Force?

2 BG: Oh, well we were military, full clearance and I think it was probably
3 classified to a certain extent, I don't know.

4 RV: What were the Thai people like?

5 BG: Well, the ones I met were nice. They were, see a lot of these countries,
6 Korean and Vietnam too, you know really nice people didn't associate with Americans,
7 especially the GIs. So especially in Korea and in Vietnam all we ever were close to were
8 pimps and prostitutes and thieves which gives the average GI kind of a tainted view of
9 the people of that country. I mean we met a few you know Koreans through the officers,
10 our officers and in Thailand the people in the hotel were nice and they were average folks
11 but you know the people that tend to cluster around us were out to get their hands in our
12 pockets one way or the other.

13 RV: Anything memorable happen in Thailand?

14 BG: Well, there was a, we went to this fishing village when we were doing the U-
15 Tapao, oh we went down to Sattahip which was way down the coast to film these
16 freighters or these tankers offloading POL and jet fuel and what not. And we filmed that
17 and then we were going to do something, I don't know why in some little fishing village
18 and it was like very quaint and scenic little village but there was nobody around. It was
19 about eleven o'clock in the morning and then about noon all of a sudden, there were these
20 shacks there and they were up on stilts so I guess it was a real tidal area. All of a sudden
21 all these shacks opened up and all these GIs came out who had been sleeping in there
22 with Thai whores. It was like one minute there's nobody there but maybe a fisherman
23 mending his net and some kids playing stickball and the next minute its like the base, the
24 Air Force base nearby, half their troops are there and they're all kind of hung over and
25 you know done with their time with the prostitutes. That was a really strange moment, I
26 guess that sticks out, one of those humorous.

27 RV: Okay, how long were you there in Bangkok, or in Thailand?

28 BG: I was there about a month and a half.

29 RV: Okay, and then you went straight to Saigon.

1 BG: Then I went back to Saigon and did a month a half there and only did like
2 really one combat shoot and that was outside of, I got one picture from it I like a lot. It's
3 a picture of a radioman up against a tree and I shot that with my own camera.

4 RV: When you would shoot with your own camera did you turn any of that stuff
5 over?

6 BG: Oh, of course not.

7 RV: Okay, I didn't think so.

8 BG: In fact they put out some memos saying don't carry your own cameras
9 because what would happen is a lot of times the still photographers would shoot the
10 motion pictures guys while they were working and they would have like their cameras,
11 still cameras around their neck and the guys back in Washington saw that and said you
12 can't do that.

13 RV: Why?

14 BG: Well, because they didn't want us shooting when they should be shooting for
15 them. In fact that one picture which I consider a keeper even now, I had to you know
16 make the decision to use the Army camera or mine and I used mine.

17 RV: Why'd you do that?

18 BG: Because I wanted it. By this point I knew that I was headed towards wanting
19 to have a career in news photography.

20 RV: How did that evolution happen, what happened?

21 BG: It was very gradual. I don't know when I, it clicked. I know that second trip
22 to Korea, myself and Jim Egan, we were still staying at Walker Hill got into a sort of
23 drunken discussion/argument about photography and content and meaning and I was
24 saying -- we're friends, we were then, we still are -- and I always thought good photos
25 were accidents and he said, no, they're the result of thinking and instinct and insight and
26 he was right. And somewhere along that line I began to evolve my thinking about
27 photography being more than just the snapshots you see in the family album into
28 something more meaningful and communicating something else and that's been an
29 evolution that's ongoing even to this day in the kinds of pictures I do. But then I was still
30 making baby steps, I didn't know how to print for instance, I was nagging Jim who did to
31 teach me how to print in the darkroom and do darkroom work and I didn't get into that

1 until I came back to school at University of Florida and learned all that. But anyway I
2 knew, you know started to know something was going on, that's why I took that picture
3 for myself.

4 RV: Okay, what makes the good picture?

5 BG: Wow, that's a hell of a question. It's something that's more than the sum of
6 its parts. It's something that communicates more than just showing what something looks
7 like, it can be an emotion, it can be a feeling, its something that elicits a response from
8 the viewer when they look at it. That picture was on the cover of a piece I did in our
9 Sunday magazine at the *Inquirer* for the twentieth anniversary of Tet and you guys have
10 got a copy of that. I once read a famous photo editor say that the difference between
11 news photography and Army photography was that Army photographers were like at an
12 accidents, they are the guys that take the insurance adjuster pictures, they document the
13 scene. A news photographer goes in and tries to capture the emotion of the moment or of
14 the thing that happened.

15 RV: Is that true?

16 BG: Yes, I think that's the goal of, you know it doesn't always happen but that's
17 the goal of most photojournalists is to capture the emotion, capture the essence of
18 something, not just show it for what it looks like.

19 RV: So those labels are true, you would think.

20 BG: I think so. Yes, I mean from what I understand about military photography
21 now, you know the interests on the part of the people who are running those
22 organizations is to document or, even for intelligence. The unit that we, that became, took
23 over DASPO's role is the 55th combat photo down in Fort Meade, Maryland. We visited
24 them this past October when we had a reunion, I've been there before and basically their
25 primary role is intelligence gathering in real time because the technology has changed.
26 You know they could upload a picture to a satellite with a satphone connected to their
27 laptop and show the brass back at the Pentagon what something looks like right then and
28 there. And our role was as documentarians so we weren't really considered intelligence
29 gathering because of the time lag from when our film was shot until it got back to
30 Washington.

31 RV: How did you all get along with the civilian press?

1 BG: I had very little contact with them; you know they didn't pay any attention to
2 us. A lot of times we were places they weren't even around. There was only one
3 photographer and he was actually a former military photographer, it was AL Chang who
4 worked for the Associated Press and had been in and out of Vietnam for nine years or
5 something and I used to run into him. He actually went back in the Army for a short
6 period and ended up in DASPO as a master sergeant, he had pull with Westmoreland and
7 decided he didn't want to, I don't know why he did it unless it had something to do with
8 his retirement, he'd get more money or something and then he got right out again. But no
9 I never ran into any of the you know the famous or anything. Most of the shooters for the
10 networks were Asians, you know for the most television guys and any famous
11 photojournalists if I was around one I didn't know it.

12 RV: So tell me what you did there for the one and half months in Saigon, you said
13 you went on one combat tour.

14 BG: Well, let's see we did a, we went to the MARS radio station. We did a story
15 which you've got the contact sheets on, on the combat tracker team dogs in Pleiku, then
16 we shot aerials of government buildings, then we did the combat thing and then I, we did
17 a story on a recondo school at Nha Trang that was run by Special Forces training there,
18 that was a couple of DCS, actually that was it, three and I did sound on all three of those
19 and that was it.

20 RV: What about that combat experience, what was that?

21 BG: Well, it really wasn't much. They flew us in there, it was out, I'm trying to
22 think of the, let's see what base that was, it was a big one, just outside of Saigon, my
23 brain is, maybe I'll remember as we're talking, it was basically, they hit the perimeter of
24 this place, Long something.

25 RV: Long Binh?

26 BG: Long Binh, yes in broad daylight they high Long Binh's perimeter so they
27 sent some guys in from the first division to make contact with them and take care of them
28 and by the time we got there the fighting was over, so we just made some pictures of
29 some guys that were like a blocking force and went back, they were quartered at a water
30 treatment plant of all places. And then we got out of there and that was it, it was a, you
31 know it wasn't, we weren't doing much combat by then, we were basically doing more

1 special projects. And the 221st signal company, also known as SEAPIC, Southeast Asia
2 Pictorial had taken over the bulk of those kind of duties by then.

3 RV: The combat duties?

4 BG: Yes.

5 RV: So you rotated back to Hawaii.

6 BG: Then I went back to Hawaii for a couple months and then went back to
7 Vietnam and this was my last trip.

8 RV: When was this?

9 BG: Well my first shoot was five-seven June of '69 and I went to a place called
10 Lai Khe, oh I went to Lai Khe and then to Quon Loi and I remember this trip and I met a,
11 and I'll look up his name, a guy who later on went on to, is still working for CBS and he
12 was a public information officer at the time. For some reason I wrote his name down and
13 kept it and then when I started seeing the guy on television I said wait a minute, he seems
14 familiar and, let's see here, anyway he went there to shoot signal equipment.

15 RV: He was with you?

16 BG: Yes, his name was Bill Geist and he's with CBS news. I actually called him
17 a few years ago and said "Do you remember?" blah, blah, blah but anyway Quon Loi
18 was up near the Cambodian border and it was a base camp for the first infantry division
19 and it was located in a rubber plantation and I remember getting off the chopper and it
20 was a bright, sunny day there on the airstrip and then we walked into this dark, gloomy
21 forest. It was all mud, wet, sucking mud and just depression. Everything was mildewed
22 and you know we really didn't want to hang around there and one of the reasons I have
23 such a bad opinion about the Air Force was that when we were going to leave that day the
24 Air Force guy there didn't tell us that our plane had come in and left and we ended up
25 spending the night. And this place was getting hit a lot at night and I can remember they
26 started, it was funny I was, it was close to midnight and I was standing with some guys in
27 the tent where I was going to sleep in one of the empty bunks and I noticed that they
28 bunk they had given me was surrounded by sandbags, inside the tent. These tents were
29 like you know stand up with wood floors and some guy was standing there, we were
30 talking, he said, it turned midnight, he says, "Wow, he says I'm twenty-one now" and I
31 was wishing him a happy birthday and in comes the incoming. And I can remember

1 running out of the door of that tent and hearing the shrapnel from the, they were air bursts
2 cutting through the trees above my head, and thinking geez, and this is, I knew it was my
3 last trip, and I'm going, oh god damn, so I found a bunker that they called the lifers
4 bunker and it was the best bunker I've ever been in, in my life, it was so deep and big and
5 had a huge fan. Anyway we spent the night there. I'll never forget Quon Loi. And then
6 the next thing we worked on was a, spent quite a bit of time was the disposition of
7 personal property. This had dealt with the mortuary and the personal property depot, this
8 was a big project to film these activities, you know from the moment the body is
9 collected off the battlefield which we created that, we set that up and shot that on what I
10 called the back lot of Tan Son Nhut air base and then filmed you know inside the
11 mortuary and how, you know they had professional morticians that basically you know
12 made the bodies, this is the amazing thing about Vietnam was the first war where bodies
13 come back viewable and no corpse was released to the United States until it was fully
14 identified.

15 RV: Now, you actually filmed the corpses themselves?

16 BG: Yes, we did. I didn't actually take pictures of corpses, I was in the room, a
17 couple of our guys did and Stu Barbee seems to carry around a lot of weight from that.
18 It's, he says at that, you know he's got problems.

19 RV: Psychological?

20 BG: Psychological problems and he spent more time than I did in that room but I
21 saw some and I wrote about it if you, you know some of the stuff I saw. I think the mind
22 can accept a lot and you just sort of blot it out. I remember vignettes from it, things that I
23 saw.

24 RV: Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

25 BG: Well I, yes, you know I wrote it down so I can talk about it. I can remember
26 going in the room and the overriding impression was the smell of formaldehyde and
27 interestingly enough it was not the smell of dead bodies. They would get these corpses in
28 there right off the battlefield, sometimes before rigor had even set in. Anyway, I can
29 remember one guy who was working on a corpse that rigor mortis had set in and the arms
30 were out sort of like bowed out like you're getting ready to hug somebody and the guy is
31 standing inside the bow and he's massaging the guy's hand and arm to get the rigor out

1 so they can lay the arm down and the other arm is sort of like around him, like the guys is
2 getting ready to hug him and I can remember the, you know the bodies that were really
3 messed up didn't bother me as much as some guys I saw who looked like they could get
4 off the table and walk out of the room because they were all of course young. Then there
5 was one guy, you couldn't tell what killed him.

6 RV: He just, he looked fine?

7 BG: He looked fine, you know and then there was one body, they had two signs in
8 there, I mentioned this when I wrote it, that it was out-processing and in-processing. In-
9 processing is where you went to be embalmed, out processing was a room where they put
10 bodies on display to be checked by somebody I guess and I remember when I walked into
11 the out room there was a body in it, they had these aluminum shipping caskets and they
12 were what the bodies were shipped in and there was like this big chunk of barbecued
13 meat in the casket and for all intents and purposes it could have been like a roast at the
14 LBG Ranch, LBJ Ranch but it was a man and it had this heavy duty, clear plastic wrap
15 that would be put around it which was still open and there was a set of Army greens
16 laying in the casket with this chunk of meat, I mean there was no arms or legs or
17 anything, it was just a big you know slab of beef and they had embalmed it, they knew
18 who it was. And then there was another, it was like I turned away from that and went out
19 in the hallway, there was a guy wheeling a gurney in that had a skeleton laying in it
20 which he said had been a colonel helicopter pilot and the skeleton was like something out
21 of a Stephen King horror movies, I mean it was like chunks of charred meat and uniform
22 hanging off it and the whole thing was like laid, and the gurney, the thing that the body
23 was laying in had a lip on it about an inch high and there were juices sloshing around. So
24 I looked at that and this guy that's doing the pushing, these guys became immune to it, he
25 was like sitting there, I say sitting, he was standing there and he was leaning on the end of
26 the gurney with his elbows on it with this skeletal feet inches away from his face and he's
27 talking about his R & R that's he going to have in a couple of days. These are the kinds,
28 this is the writer side of me remembering this. And that night we went back to the villa,
29 we had finished for the day, Harry Breedlove had cooked steaks out on the grill and so
30 you know I sat down at the table and they put it down in front of me and the steak was
31 sitting these with this juice in the place, I just couldn't eat it of course. But you know

1 what, those of us that had seen some combat said I'd rather be doing this than going out
2 in the field.

3 RV: That was, combat was much worse.

4 BG: Well, you weren't going to get killed there. Much worse, I don't know. It
5 was the survival thing, this is my last trip, so I was thinking in terms, you know I got a
6 chance of getting out of this thing. So we did that from, I got till the first part of July,
7 from middle of June till first part, that's all I shot.

8 RV: How did you deal with death and that whole idea and then actually
9 witnessing the dead bodies?

10 BG: You know there's a line from *Full Metal Jacket*, you know and its funny, I
11 meant to bring this up to you that a lot of remembrance is now tied up in movies and
12 that's not an uncommon experience. I've read about it, that guys from World War II even
13 when they were there, they felt like they were part of a gigantic you know Metro Golden
14 Mayer movie extravaganza and then you start, you start to remember things by what
15 popular culture presents you after its over and so I think that's clouded some of it. Now I
16 can't remember your question.

17 RV: About death, how'd you deal with it?

18 BG: Well, the line, that's right the line from *Full Metal Jacket*, the guy's looking
19 down in the hole at the dead colleague of his, he says, "Better you than me" and that was
20 sort of my feeling. I didn't know these guys and it was sort of like every man for himself.
21 So I didn't have any emotional attachment, you know I was glad to be working in Saigon
22 and not going out in the field and at this point I didn't know that our combat involvement
23 had you know gone to practically nothing, nobody knew that. So we were always, there
24 was always a possibility you'd get handed that assignment to go shoot a combat operation
25 someplace.

26 RV: Who decided who would get the combat ops?

27 BG: Oh, the officer in charge. You know those guys, they stayed in Saigon and
28 they talked to Washington and they got the story requirements and as long as we had
29 projects to do then we'd normally, unless it was something major, which there wasn't
30 going on really at that time, you know we did our projects. So after that there was a
31 formal withdrawal of the ninth infantry division down at Dong Tam which I sent you

1 guys some stuff from and that was the beginning of Nixon's Vietnamization of the war
2 and they were withdrawing units from the ninth was, parts of the ninth were going first.
3 And then we shot something called Industrial College of the Armed Forces and I don't
4 know what that was, I think it might have been aerial shots of buildings, did that at Cu
5 Chi, Long Binh, Newport, which was I guess the port facility and then we went up to
6 Cam Ranh Bay and did it there and then we went to Long Binh and did it again and then
7 we went down to Can Tho and shot CS and defoliation, which was basically Agent
8 Orange and of course nobody knew it was nasty but even back then I wasn't going to bug
9 spray so I never got any of it on me.

10 RV: Never had any contact with it?

11 GB: Not that I know of, but I kept the paperwork and I got a picture from it, if I
12 ever come up with any kind of cancer that they attribute to it I'm sure as hell going to
13 stick it to them. Then we shot something called barbed tape and that's when I took my
14 Pentax out and made some pictures that I still like. Barbed tape was a type of concertina
15 wire that they had just introduced, its in use today but it was taking the place of the old-
16 fashioned stuff and so we filmed how it was being, or photographed how it was being
17 used, you know in a couple of places. I found this one bridge, detail guys from, I think it
18 was the 82nd who were guarding this bridge and you know it really wasn't much to shoot
19 for the barbed tape thing so I got out my Pentax and started shooting black and white for
20 myself and there's a whole series of pictures in the collection from that. My favorite's of
21 a guy sleeping in a hammock in broad daylight, I mean these guys were up all night on
22 night duty so they slept during the day. Let's see, then we shot, went to Vung Tao again
23 and shot Cobra Transition School, they were introducing the Huey Cobra and they were
24 teaching Huey Slick pilots how to fly these Cobras and we shot the ninth infantry
25 division part of the withdrawal on Bien Hoa Air base where they went from there to Tan
26 Son Nhut and got on the bird for home. Let's see, something called Combined Services
27 Operation, I had no idea except we were in Phu Bai and Hue. Then something called
28 lines of communication in Phan Rang and then National Guard Engineering Battalion, I
29 don't even remember that. I shot sound, that's why I don't have any record of it. There
30 wasn't that much National Guard over there so that was a pretty rare bird and then the
31 last thing I shot in Vietnam was the Secretary of what was he, State or Defense, Stanley

1 Risor held a press conference at Tan Son Nhut and that was on the 28th of August of '69
2 and that was my last job.

3 RV: Okay. Bryan, tell me about your Silver Star.

4 BG: Well, that happened when Harry got hit.

5 RV: That's what I thought.

6 BG: And quite truthfully I never, never totally believed that I deserved it but I've
7 always been very proud of it.

8 RV: I wasn't going to let you get away from telling the story. Tell me what
9 happened.

10 BG: Well, you know everybody got medals and the ceremony itself came as a bit
11 of surprise when they put me in front of everybody else because I didn't know, I just
12 thought we were all getting Bronze Stars and Harry and Lieutenant Griffith had both
13 gotten Purple Hearts.

14 RV: You were never wounded, were you?

15 BG: No, no never scratched. So basically you know the guy pins a goddamn
16 Silver Star on me and I go "What?" and then the other guys get Bronze Stars. And you
17 know I mean, there was like three or four days of following Lieutenant Griffith were
18 pretty scary and you know I did tie a tourniquet around his arm when he got hit and
19 helped get him out of there. Actually when we were putting him in the jeep we started
20 taking incoming fire and that was the only time I ever chambered a round the whole time
21 I was in country and I did then but then we got out of there. But you know Harry got hit
22 and they make it sound like we were in this terribly intense combat situation and I don't
23 remember it that way, but there is some very good commendation writers in our unit.

24 RV: So your action was actually what, getting the lieutenant out of the way?

25 BG: Well, the commendation reads for coming to Harry's, in the face of withering
26 enemy fire going to Harry's you know side and administering first aid and then returning
27 to record the battle as it raged around me and that's not how I remember it.

28 RV: It was a little more low key than that?

29 BG: Yes.

30 RV: How did Harry and the other guys think about that?

1 BG: They never said anything to me you know, I mean at the time when we got in
2 the car and went back to the office from there and the first sergeant and me and I don't
3 know who else was in the car but I said, "Jesus, I don't deserve this." And Harry said,
4 "sure you do" you know "atta boy." You're the first person of any consequence I've ever
5 told that story too so now I guess it's on the record.

6 RV: It's on the record now, yes sir.

7 BG: That's my feeling. I've always been very proud of it but there's people that
8 did a lot more to get a Silver Star than I did. And I know they handed them out for less
9 than that, so it's like most medals and you know, if I had been a career officer it would
10 have looked good on my file and I know a lot of them were given out. I know Lyndon
11 Johnson got one for riding in an airplane, so.

12 RV: Well that doesn't diminish what you did though.

13 BG: Well, I look back on it and you know I'm not, I never did anything that I've
14 ever been ashamed of and I've never had lost a night's sleep over it, I don't carry any
15 kind of baggage from it. You know the amazing this is that it pointed me to what I
16 wanted to do and I didn't know before I went in the Army. It was like this series of events
17 that were out of my control, it led me to a career in photojournalism.

18 RV: You're talking about your overall experience in DASPO?

19 BG: Yes.

20 RV: So you had no PTSD type incidents, no disabilities, nothing like that?

21 BG: No, no. And I tell you, I've covered a lot of veteran events and I get a little
22 tired of these weepy eyed guys in their jungle fatigues who show up and they seem to do
23 it over and over and over and I don't know that all of them are legit, I sometimes think
24 they just do it to get attention. And unfortunately what happens in my business is their
25 very photographicable, you don't photograph [the ones] that are off in the back there
26 wearing a coat and tie who are dry eyed, who are just there because they're veterans who
27 have moved on and moved on with their lives and made something out of themselves,
28 they focus on these guys. And so the public then gets this impression that all veterans,
29 Vietnam veterans are either psychotic psychopaths like in the movies or these wounded,
30 emotionally wounded characters who are never going to get over it and I don't think
31 that's the truth either. I mean there are a lot of guys I'm sure that are carrying some

1 baggage around but I think the majority of Vietnam veterans have gotten on with their
2 lives and been productive citizens, raised families and you know, like any other veteran
3 of any other war.

4 RV: Okay. Why don't we take a break for a minute?

5 BG: All right.

6 RV: Okay, we're back. Sir, let me ask you some general questions before we
7 leave Vietnam completely. Tell me what your opinion was, your impression of the
8 enemy, the Vietcong and the NVA.

9 BG: Well aside from being scared of them I think I had enormous respect for their
10 dedication to their cause, other than that I didn't really have much of an opinion. I only
11 viewed them in person that one time.

12 RV: How about strengths and weaknesses?

13 BG: Well, you mean what I thought then or now?

14 RV: Well both, then and now.

15 BG: You know I think I've probably formed more opinions since then. You know
16 I mean Ho Chi Minh wasn't the greatest guy in the world and certainly their form of
17 government is not as fair to the Vietnamese people as any more fair than say the South
18 Vietnamese government was to its people, it was like, it was sort of a lose-lose situation.
19 I think you know their leadership was incredibly talented and they were able to find ways
20 to get around our superior firepower and technology you know and they had the will to
21 win and they kept with it and they've done that through the entire history of that country
22 against a lot of other people that have come to their country and tried to take over and run
23 things. I think communism doesn't, you know their planning was sometimes spoiled by
24 their form of thinking, for instance everybody knew that they were coming in May of '68
25 and they came anyway and they basically got butchered in the process. So you know their
26 strength to their sticking to what they believed in and there's weakness in their form of
27 government and from what I've heard about Vietnam now, it's still full of corruption and
28 graft, that you can't get anything done without paying under the table so they haven't
29 changed any of that.

30 RV: Okay. How much did you work with troops from other countries, you
31 mentioned the Australians at one time?

1 BG: Well, I saw some Kiwis once, I didn't actually work with them, I drank with
2 them. I think we shot some stuff with the South Koreans once, demonstrating tae kwon
3 do and certainly I followed the South Vietnamese around some in combat during the May
4 Offensive.

5 RV: What was your impression of the South Vietnamese forces?

6 BG: The ones that I saw, we were with seemed very professional although there
7 were moments that I witnessed that showed that this was a conscripted peasant army. I
8 know one time I went into a store of some kind, a dry goods store to reload my camera
9 and came up on a group of South Vietnamese soldiers looting the place and you know
10 these were kids from out in the boonies who didn't have anything and certainly I've read
11 and heard that their own officers didn't pay them or stole their pay and you know they
12 certainly had reason to look at all this stuff and think well I should have some of it too.
13 So I saw both ends, I think they had some very professional soldiers and I think they had
14 some that weren't quite so professional.

15 RV: Did you ever experience any racial issues or witness any racial issues while
16 you were there in country?

17 BG: Not in Vietnam. I once went into a bar in Tokyo on the way to Korea and it
18 was an all black bar and they told us to leave, they said we weren't welcome there.

19 RV: Really, there were Americans?

20 BG: Yes, they were, yes, they were GI, they were probably Air Force, in no
21 uncertain terms.

22 RV: What did they say to you?

23 BG: Said get out of here.

24 RV: Okay, pretty straightforward.

25 BG: Yes, I mean we were just looking to get a drink you know, we thought we
26 could stand at the end of the bar and they came over and said "We don't let your type in
27 here."

28 RV: How did you feel about that?

29 BG: You know I saw it for what it was, reverse racism.

30 RV: Okay. How about the relationships you formed with the other men in your
31 unit, the DASPO guys, how would you describe that?

1 BG: Well some of them have been very long term over the years, you know some
2 of the NCOs and the officers that I served under I had enormous respect for then and I
3 still do and some of the guys, we've kept in touch over the years and I think those
4 attachments are important to all of us.

5 RV: Were you all especially close when you were in country there at the villa?

6 BG: Oh, yes I mean we spent a lot of our spare time together and yes, I mean the
7 guys, we pretty much got along pretty well as a group.

8 RV: Tell me about what you all would do for entertainment and recreation at the
9 villa.

10 BG: Well, on any given night there was the money that we might have gotten
11 from the Tan Son Nhut movie exchange which we had a sixteen millimeter sound
12 projector and we would show them on a large screen we had set up on the second floor
13 room and then after that, you know of course we would be drinking and then there was
14 the nightly poker game which I never got involved in because I'm terrible at it. And then
15 we'd sit up on the roof and drink beer or sit up on the very high roof and at the last trip
16 smoke a little grass and you know sometimes you'd go down the street and get laid, that
17 kind of thing. That was very available.

18 RV: So that was available?

19 BG: Oh, absolutely. You know the, you know you could stand out by the wall and
20 be propositioned any time of day.

21 RV: Was there a particular place that you guys would go?

22 BG: I don't recall offhand. There was a barbershop down the street that used to
23 go down there and get a haircut and get laid, take care of both things at once.

24 RV: Really, any time during the day you could have done this?

25 BG: Oh yes, oh yes.

26 RV: Was drug and alcohol use any kind of a problem in the DASPO villa?

27 BG: No. I know there was one guy who was legendary that was gone from the
28 unit by the time I got there who was a legendary drunk, he'd been a sergeant and he'd
29 gotten busted down to private. He'd also been, he was a very talented cinematographer
30 and had been involved in the making of well-known movie, the name of which I don't

1 remember, I think Ted might remember that. But no as far as we just, we drank to excess
2 but you know, why not.

3 RV: And did it ever affect you guys in the field at all when you would go out?

4 BG: No, you didn't take it out in the field with you.

5 RV: What about the role of music, did you guys listen to a lot of music there?

6 BG: Well, I think especially the last trip we were all buying stereo gear and
7 speakers, I know I've still got a pair of Sansui speakers I bought in '69 and yes we
8 listened to reel to reel tapes, I don't think anybody had discs or anything, you know
9 turntable but we did listen to reel to reel tape and there was also Armed Forces radio
10 which had an FM, I don't know if it was stereo then or not, it might have been and of
11 course television but yes, we listened to music to a certain extent.

12 RV: What would you watch on television?

13 BG: Well, re-runs of old American TV shows.

14 RV: Do you remember which ones?

15 BG: I sort of remember *Perry Mason* but I may have seen that also in Korea on
16 Korean television with the Korean dubbed in. I know they had a news show, their own
17 local news and weather for Saigon and the area. You know I don't remember, it could
18 have been like *Green Acres*, you know whatever was popular over here then. It didn't
19 really make that much of an impression on me.

20 RV: Speaking of news, were you able to keep up with what was happening in the
21 big picture of the war and maybe what was happening back home?

22 BG: Well you know we certainly saw the news that was given to us by Armed
23 Forces television and we got *Stars and Stripes* and that's a pretty good newspaper, was
24 then and still is now so yes I would think we probably did.

25 RV: What about contact with home, did you write letters, record?

26 BG: Constantly, wrote letters constantly. That's where the cartoon drawing came
27 in, when I got done writing everybody that I knew then I'd draw cartoons to amuse
28 myself.

29 RV: Had you always been talented like that, to be able to draw art cartoons like
30 that?

1 BG: Well, I don't know, you can look at the cartoons on the site and judge for
2 yourself but no, I didn't, I drew a few cartoons in high school and then I just sort of took
3 it up on the first trip to Korea and did some. They started sending them over, they made,
4 it wasn't Xerox, there was some other kind of thermal way of copying stuff, they would
5 send them back to the office and the first sergeant became a fan and started collecting
6 them.

7 RV: What would you draw?

8 BG: Just stuff about you know either gags about guys in the unit or stuff that spun
9 off of actual events. I know one time in Korea we were going to cross what looked like a
10 little shallow stream and the captain said "Yes, cross here Grigsby" and I said, "Okay"
11 and the front end of the jeep went totally underwater and I just gunned it and we went on
12 through and we didn't stall out or anything and so I drew this cartoon that showed this
13 half submerged jeep with fish coming out of the water looking at us and the character
14 that's me is looking over at the captain saying, "Which way now sir" and I think there's a
15 little sign off to one side that shortcut. And you know other stuff, like we had people that
16 were in the movie, *Tora, Tora, Tora*, they were made that when we were all in Hawaii
17 and then by then Captain Griffith had got a speaking part of it and I drew a whole set of
18 cartoons sort of making fun of that because he was sort of a W.D. Griffith fan and he was
19 into directing and what not, so I made it like he was trying to take over the direction of
20 the movie away from the director even though he only had like a one, thirty second
21 speaking part and you know stuff like that.

22 RV: How did your parents feel during your time when you were doing the
23 temporary duties in Southeast Asia?

24 BG: You know I'm sure my mom worried about me, my dad died during that
25 time. He had open-heart surgery and didn't survive. That happened after my first trip to
26 Vietnam and I went home on leave and saw him briefly. I'm sure my mom worried but
27 you know I don't recall her every saying anything to me about it afterward.

28 RV: Did you ever get to make any MARS phone calls?

29 BG: I did, I did and I haven't really discussed with you but I was married by the
30 time I went to Vietnam the first time. That marriage ended in divorce so I just really

1 didn't want to get into it. We had a child, a daughter, but I did call her once on that
2 MARS setup when we did the story.

3 RV: Did you all have any pets there at the villa?

4 BG: We had dogs. They kept them, as allegedly for security reasons, hoping
5 they'd make noise if anybody broke in but they didn't. I think they called, one was called
6 Crybaby and the other one was called Little Shit, Dipshit or something.

7 RV: Okay. Any encounters with wild animals, snakes, anything like that while
8 you were out in the field?

9 BG: No.

10 RV: Okay. Did you ever attend any USO shows?

11 BG: You know I had made a notation in one of my logbooks saying I'd seen a
12 great USO show but I don't remember it.

13 RV: Really?

14 BG: I don't remember a thing about it.

15 RV: Okay. Is there a particular humorous event that you remember from your
16 time in Vietnam?

17 BG: Yes, I don't know if its, I can, it's a little bit X rated so I probably should skip
18 it. It was a situation.

19 RV: Well, you can censor it a little bit.

20 BG: Well, that's hard to do. If you turn your tape recorder off a second I'll tell it
21 to you real quick and you can judge.

22 RV: Okay.

23 RV: Okay, we decided to keep that one off the record. Is there anything else that
24 comes to mind?

25 BG: No, like I said that's the one funny moment that I've hung onto all these
26 years and it still makes me smile when I think about it.

27 RV: And this involved Rick.

28 BG: Yes.

29 RV: Okay, okay. How would you describe the leadership that you had in
30 Vietnam? We talked a little bit about that officer who would tell you guys go here no
31 matter what.

1 BG: Well all, in, generally speaking the leadership was good. There were some
2 exceptions, you know Lieutenant Griffith wasn't the only one and there were others that I
3 wasn't witness to it directly but who I heard about who I think abused their rank when
4 they were over there. I don't think I'm going to name them, it happened. For the most
5 part though I think DASPO was exceedingly well run and most of the NCOs and officers
6 were really professional and like I say I had enormous respect for people like our first
7 sergeant, Ken Bridgham and Paul Moulton was another one. There was Dick Richard,
8 Captain Richards that I had a lot of respect for in particular, I mean some of the others I
9 did too but those are the names that stand out in thinking back on it and Dick's gone now
10 too, he died a couple of years ago.

11 RV: Let me ask you about your spiritual beliefs, did they change at all or where
12 they affected by your time in the war zone?

13 BG: No, I was, I would say I was an agnostic when I went in and when I got out.
14 I'm actually more of a spiritual person now and that's thanks to my present wife who has
15 shown me some things that make sense to me more than organized religion does.

16 RV: So the war really didn't have much of an effect upon you?

17 BG: No, you know I was a bit of a cynic so you know when you see the worst in
18 human nature as a cynic it sort of just furthers your belief in your cynicism,
19 acknowledges your cynicism as being correct in your own eyes anyway.

20 RV: What was the bravest action that you saw while you were in Vietnam?

21 BG: The bravest?

22 RV: Yes, sir.

23 BG: You know I can't say that I ever saw anything that I would call truly brave,
24 you know I mean in the sense of getting a medal for it or anything, I don't think I ever
25 witnessed anything. I saw guys doing their jobs, but no, not in the movie sense. Well I
26 would say none of us had any choice, we had to be there so. I saw no selfless acts of
27 heroism.

28 RV: So in August '69 you go back to Hawaii and you knew your time was up in
29 the Army correct?

30 BG: Yes, well I knew that I had, that there wasn't time to send me out on any
31 more TDYs so basically it was all downhill from there and I could enjoy Hawaii. It was

1 always such a bummer to be in Hawaii which was such a wonderful place knowing that
2 you were going to get sent back to Vietnam. Now it was like I could enjoy the last few
3 months and also look forward to getting out and resuming my life, going back to school,
4 finishing that.

5 RV: Did they try to get you to re-enlist at all?

6 BG: No, not really they knew better.

7 RV: And what were your plans when you left the Army, what did you want to do?

8 BG: Well, my plan was to get my degree and then hopefully get a job on a
9 newspaper staff.

10 RV: Now tell me about this, by this time you had decided that you wanted to be in
11 photography.

12 BG: Yes, I was definitely fully hooked, hook, line and sinker and I was beginning
13 to develop a passion for it but I knew I had a lot to learn so I started learning in college
14 by taking all the photography courses I could find. At that time they did not have a
15 photojournalism sequence at the University of Florida and since I was in broadcasting,
16 had already made some headway in that line I decided to continue that and just get my
17 degree in broadcasting. I minored in education and there were actually photo courses in
18 that plus any photo courses in the journalism print side that I could take so I learned how
19 to print black and white and you know learned more, began to learn more about the
20 history of it and that sort of thing.

21 RV: When were you actually discharged, was it January of '70?

22 BG: It was January 15th I believe, 1970, yes.

23 RV: And you flew back to the mainland.

24 BG: Flew back to Oakland where we were processed out and, which was a
25 pleasant experience, they had a mess hall there for guys that were coming back and
26 getting out, the mess hall was open twenty-four hours a day and they served nothing but
27 steak and French fries. So you know we walked around and, it was me and another guy
28 that got out, what, can't think of it, Carl Sandri was his name, he was a Californian, he
29 and I got out the same day and basically.

30 RV: Was he in DASPO?

1 BG: Yes, he was DASPO and we basically were there in our greens with our
2 ribbons and everything, you had all these kids that were headed in the other direction and
3 it was kind of sad, I looked at them and I knew, they had two or three years stretching in
4 front of them and I was getting out.

5 RV: Were they looking at you?

6 BG: I don't know, I don't know. They must have looked at something, I mean
7 you know I was a Spec-5 by then and they were all privates, PFC and you know I had the
8 Vietnam ribbons and stuff so they might have. But they didn't mess with us, you know
9 we just filled out the paperwork to get out and then the next day I caught a plane to
10 Tampa.

11 RV: Did you ever have any problems at airports, anything, being in uniform?

12 BG: No, no nobody, I never got spat on or anything like that but I do, its funny
13 when I first got to Hawaii and I got off the plane and I was headed into the terminal
14 building, as I recall in those days you got out of the plane down a ramp instead of you
15 know going directly into the terminal through a tunnel and there were these girls wearing
16 grass skirts and you know Hawaiian with leis and they were holding them up like they
17 were going to give them to you and I thought, oh this is neat and they walked right past
18 me and laid them on some middle aged and elderly tourists and that was sort of my first
19 inkling that the military was sort of tolerated in Hawaii.

20 RV: Did you have any other experiences like that?

21 BG: No, no that was it. No, I never had anybody take anything out on me. When
22 I went back to school I didn't talk too much about having been, except to people who
23 knew me.

24 RV: Well that was my next question, how much did you discuss your experience
25 in Southeast Asia, were people interested at all, did they ask you?

26 BG: Not really, they didn't want to hear a whole lot about it. You know at the
27 time I almost wasn't sure I was a Vietnam veteran because I'd been over there TDY and I
28 almost felt like I wasn't a full fledged vet, I believe I am, I think I am and it was a strange
29 feeling. I just stepped back into my old world, in fact I was placed, its funny I'd been
30 playing in the University of Florida jazz band when I left and so they asked me if I'd
31 come back in and the kind who was just a young kid when I left was now like the first

1 chair tenor saxophone guy, you know Mr. Cool and I sat on second chair next to him and
2 it was kind of like I just left for a week and come back. And a lot of the same guys that
3 were like professional students were still playing in the jazz band.

4 RV: Did you have any problems transitioning back into civilian life?

5 BG: No, not really.

6 RV: Okay. What were your opinions then and now of the anti-war movement,
7 how much did you see when you came back in '70?

8 BG: Well it was funny, the anti-war movement started to come alive in
9 Gainesville, it was like the '60s didn't hit the University of Florida until the early '70s
10 and yes, there were some anti-war, I remember when Kent State happened you know they
11 had big demonstrations and everything. You know I couldn't disagree with what they
12 were talking about but at the same time my feeling was still the same, that a lot of these
13 guys especially just didn't want to go to Vietnam because they didn't want to get drafted,
14 not because they didn't believe in the cause. Certainly Kent State was an awful thing and
15 it was worthy to be demonstrated against. You know it's a sad thing, I think the anti-war
16 movement did prolong the war in the sense that it gave North Vietnam the inspiration to
17 keep going and that's a sad thing because they really, their hearts were in the right place,
18 war is an awful thing but when you're up against a dictatorship, they don't view things,
19 their people certainly weren't allowed to demonstrate that so many of their sons had
20 never come back from that war, my god, hundreds of thousands of North Vietnamese
21 boys and girls how just disappeared and their families, and certainly they might have
22 wanted to demonstrate against, who just not leave South Vietnam alone, why are we
23 giving up our children like this, but of course they weren't allowed to do it. And I saw
24 the same thing with this war, this last war I mean, I can't disagree with what their belief
25 is but at the same time if its giving Saddam the strength to carry on then ultimately its
26 hurting our soldiers in the field especially. But that's, that's what our country's about is
27 the freedom to do that. You can argue both ways. My feelings about the anti-war, I
28 never say that in front of my wife because I tell her and I do believe that they're right but
29 it doesn't help. You know once you're at war you've got to, I don't want to say stifle
30 your feelings but at the same time if doing that gives the enemy the strength to go on then
31 there's, it's costing lives.

1 RV: How much did you keep war effort once you got back in the United States?

2 BG: Oh you know I watched television and read the newspaper. Certainly yes, I
3 watched it.

4 RV: How did you feel about the United States slowly pulling out, specifically the
5 Vietnamization policy?

6 BG: Oh, I fully agreed with it, I thought they should fight their own war. In fact
7 you know the last time I ever voted was Nixon, 1968 and a big part of his platform was
8 getting us out of Vietnam and I believed that SOB and of course you know we lost more
9 guys after he became president than we did under Johnson. So, and I haven't voted since
10 and I voted in '64 for Johnson and I voted in '68 for Nixon and I haven't voted since.

11 RV: Why?

12 BG: I just don't care to.

13 RV: Is it because of your experiences in the '60s?

14 BG: I guess my cynicism you know, I don't complain generally about whose
15 running things, I tell people that I don't vote for them so I can't complain, or I don't vote
16 against them so I don't. It's just a thing, I don't know, I just haven't wanted to vote since
17 then.

18 RV: What did you think when the United States withdrew in 1973, you said you
19 were pretty happy with the fact that the Vietnamese were going to be taking over the
20 war?

21 BG: Yes, well I mean I didn't want to see our guys getting killed any more, I'd by
22 then figured out that the South Vietnamese government wasn't any better or any worse
23 than the North Vietnamese government, that they were abusing their own people and it
24 was a lose-lose situation, so yes it was their war, they should be fighting it and I didn't
25 want to see any more American boys get killed.

26 RV: How did you feel in April 1975 when Saigon fell and South Vietnam fell?

27 BG: It was sad. I felt like all those lives were spent for nothing, although the first
28 Gulf War some things happened that, and I once wrote this to a Vietnam discussion
29 group, the things, the lessons we learned in Vietnam on how not to do it, the guys who
30 ran the Gulf War in '91 were Vietnam veterans and they knew how to do it right and not
31 repeat those mistakes and that saved a lot of American kids lives in 1991.

1 RV: So the lessons for the United States were what do you think?

2 BG: Have clear cut goals, you know go in there with overwhelming force, don't
3 go in piecemeal and they had come up with some new doctrines in fighting which had
4 been learned in the Israeli-Arab War in what was it '73. There's a thing called Air Land
5 doctrine, where you just, you kick the crap out of them from all different directions all at
6 once and that's what they did and we didn't do that in Vietnam. We got in at, Johnson
7 would never allow to activate the National Guard or the Army Reserve, we didn't commit
8 to it you know in any overwhelming force and they said that's not how you do it.

9 RV: Okay, Bryan let me pause for a second and change out this disk.

10 RV: What did you think of the media coverage of the war in general, was it fair
11 or, I mean you worked with the civilian press very little but overall as someone who was
12 documenting the war, how did you think the war was documented?

13 BG: Well, you know the military up until this day blames the media for losing
14 Vietnam yet I also have a copy of a study that the government, the Pentagon
15 commissioned back in, what was it the early '80s, to study that came up, came to the
16 conclusion that it wasn't the press, press didn't cause us to lose the war, we caused
17 ourselves to lose the war, the military and the government and their own people said this
18 wasn't what happened. For the most part the press was on the government's side for
19 most of the war but they had spent so much time lying to themselves about what was
20 going on in the field and the success, the alleged successes that were going on because
21 they wouldn't, they were almost as bad with Johnson and his leaders as the kind of info,
22 Intel that Saddam was getting, apparently he didn't want to hear him bad news so they
23 didn't tell him any and I feel like that's what happened in Vietnam, so no I don't think
24 the press lost the war.

25 RV: Okay, looking at your personal service in Vietnam and your part in the war,
26 how do you feel about your service today?

27 BG: I mean you know I'm not ashamed that I did it, it was part of a process that
28 led me to my career and you know I found what I wanted to do in a very roundabout way,
29 just backed into it. I would not be doing what I'm doing now if I hadn't have gone in the
30 Army.

31 RV: Do you think that's the way that the war has most affected your life?

1 BG: Yes, I'm one of the few people that can say that that experience was
2 ultimately a positive experience for me because I found my career and my calling. I have
3 a passion for photography.

4 RV: Now you mentioned that when you came back you weren't sure if you were a
5 Vietnam vet, how do you feel about that now?

6 BG: Oh, I'm a Vietnam vet.

7 RV: Was there a point when that changed in your life and you said yes?

8 BG: Just gradually, you know I did a lot of reading about the war, you know I
9 read lots of books about it and came to understand it better in hindsight than in you know
10 present sight. And also as far as my profession too I'm pretty much self-taught I think, I
11 mean formal courses can't teach you what you really need to know, the doing end of it,
12 seeing, visualization. My feelings about my participation haven't changed; I'm not
13 ashamed of anything I did.

14 RV: What kind of books stood out most to you?

15 BG: The Karnow's book, Stanley, is it Karnow, I can't remember now.

16 RV: Karnow, yes.

17 BG: That was, that wonderful book about it and then some just articles and, I'm
18 terrible about remembering the names of books but I've just read a lot over the years and
19 then I've read, you know I've collected photography books and books by war
20 photographers that I have a huge, huge collection of books, photo books and history
21 books and I got into studying my own family's involvement in past wars too. Like I said
22 I know my great-great grandfather Grigsby civil war record and his sons, my great-
23 grandfather Grigsby Spanish-American War record and I've got books about the Spanish-
24 American War were written back during that time. I've become some of a student of war
25 and its reasons; I guess that comes about from having been in Vietnam.

26 RV: Yes, I was going to ask, did your experience help you better understand war,
27 I guess that might be an obvious question.

28 GB: Well, I don't know that anybody understands war. I do think that I have a
29 more practical outlook on the reasons for waging it and unfortunately you know
30 somebody like Saddam Hussein you can't reason with him, and you know that part of
31 that world it's like I once read it referred to as a neighborhood full of bullies and he was

1 just another one of them and those people respect power and determination and I'm afraid
2 that American policy in the past thirty years after Vietnam we've given those guys the
3 impression that we don't have the balls to do it. And you know I don't trust George W.
4 Bush but at the same time I have to kind of admire you know his balls that he went ahead
5 and did it. I hope he's right. I mean all during that war when everybody was saying it's
6 going to hell in a handbag and nobody trusts him and nobody trusts Rumsfeld and
7 nobody likes him and I certainly don't like him either, I had to keep saying, god, I
8 hope they're right, that they know what they're doing because if they're not a lot of kids
9 are going to get killed.

10 RV: Do you think that he's proven his critics wrong now?

11 BG: So far, so far. I mean I was sort of going along with that geez, maybe we
12 don't have enough guys to do this job right, that we're trying to rely on air power too
13 much you know and the fourth division getting held up and not in country in time to take
14 part in the initial invasion. All that had me worried but it seems like they knew what they
15 were doing.

16 RV: Going back to your personal experience in Vietnam, is there anything that
17 you want to change about it if you could go back and change?

18 BG: Yes, I wish I had taken more pictures for myself.

19 RV: Okay.

20 BG: Absolutely. I think if you look at, if you go in and look in the site under my
21 name and just go look at the pictures and you look at the ones that I shot back during
22 DASPO days and then there's pictures in there from, that Ron said I could include from
23 the dedication of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC and some other things, post-
24 war type of pictures, you'll see how my work has evolved stylistically.

25 RV: I've looked at them and I can vouch for that.

26 BG: So you know I'm very serious about photography and I wish I'd been more
27 serious about it then but you know what the hell, at least I am now but I wish I'd been, I
28 wish I'd been at the level I am now back then.

29 RV: Right. What do you think was the most significant thing you learned about
30 yourself while you were there in Vietnam?

31 BG: I could do it.

1 RV: Do photography or just do things?

2 BG: Just get it done, you know survive it. I could make pictures when my hands
3 were shaking so hard I could barely load the film in the camera, that I could make it
4 through basic training, which was the toughest thing I've ever done in my life.

5 RV: Tougher than the combat in Vietnam?

6 BG: Yes, yes because it was continuous, you know seven days a week, twenty-
7 four hours a day.

8 RV: Do you ever want to go back to Vietnam?

9 BG: I've thought about it but there's nothing there for me personally. I mean the
10 guys have gone back, they've seen the villa, I've seen pictures of what the villa looks like
11 now. There's nothing, I mean if I went back it would be professionally and I just, there's
12 nothing I could think of that I'd want to do there professionally.

13 RV: Okay. Tell me what kind of movies you've seen on Vietnam, you said
14 you've read books, have you watched the movies that have come out?

15 BG: Oh yes, *Apocalypse Now* was my favorite for a long time.

16 RV: It was your favorite?

17 BG: Yes, for a long time and I guess it still is in a sense, its not, its definitely not a
18 real depiction but I read Michael Herr's book *Dispatches* which they used a lot of his
19 material and I love that book, but it's a work of art, its not a documentary about Vietnam,
20 either the book or the movie. They're just sort of impressionistic or metaphors or
21 whatever, its certainly not, I didn't think of Vietnam as being crazy like that when I was
22 there, I figured, it was hot and scary.

23 RV: What about other films?

24 BG: Well I saw *Platoon* and *Full Metal Jacket*, of course I saw that movie *The*
25 *Green Berets*, in fact I think I saw it in Vietnam and everybody was laughing at it then.
26 And it's sort of; I like the movie just because its so blatantly one sided, poor John Wayne,
27 he just didn't get it.

28 RV: At least he got to hug the kid on the beach at the end in the sunset right.

29 [Both laugh]

30 BG: I've actually got that on tape but I don't have the very end of it. It was
31 mostly filmed at Fort Benning so I was always looking to see if I could see if anything

1 that was familiar and I was thinking Jesus they were filming that probably if it came out
2 in '68 not long after I left there because obviously I was there during the winter, it was
3 cold as snot there, so it had to have been that summer if '67 they made that movie. So I
4 was thinking, wow, I wonder if I'd recognize anything. Of course I didn't, it just all
5 Georgia woods. I can't offhand think of specific names, I've seen some other stuff but I
6 think those three were the best ones and of course the *Deer Hunter* which I couldn't
7 watch until the end, I had to get up and leave.

8 RV: Why?

9 BG: I don't know, that scene, what really set me off was the scene in the hut
10 where they're playing Russian roulette and they're.

11 RV: At the very beginning of the movie?

12 BG: Was that at the very beginning?

13 RV: Well, there's a scene where, yes the very beginning.

14 BG: Not, where in the present, no, it's in the past where they're captive, you
15 know they're POWs are making them play Russian roulette until they die and just the
16 sense of hopelessness and futility of it. I remember there was the one American GI that
17 goes up the steps and he's got this most haunted look in his face and you hear the gun go
18 off and you know he's dead and they throw his body in the water. And there was
19 something about that, just like my god, to die that way so stupidly and then the movie just
20 kept going on, it was just so depressing so I never made it I don't think even to the
21 wedding scene and I had to get up and leave. I have since seen it all the way through but
22 when I first saw it when it first came out I got up and left the theater.

23 RV: Have you seen the movie, *84 Charlie MoPic*, have you heard of that movie?

24 BG: Yes, yes I've got a tape of it. It was on Cinemax I think and I know it begins
25 with this is a DASPO project. Yes that was kind of a, it was an interesting movie
26 although the logistics of it were, all that footage he shot meant they had to carry an awful
27 lot of film out there. So it's like the guys in the war movies that just keep shooting up all
28 those bullets and you never see anybody carrying the bandoliers of all those bullets. Yes,
29 but, yes it was an interesting movie, I gave it to somebody, I think I gave my print to
30 Chuck Abbot years ago.

31 RV: Have you seen the movie *Salvador*?

1 BG: Yes, I have, yes with James Woods, he plays that sleazy.
2 RV: Photojournalist.
3 BG: Photojournalist, yes.
4 RV: How accurate is that as far as wartime or pseudo-wartime photojournalism?
5 BG: Well, yes that was Central America and the scene where he and the other guy
6 were discussing the Cartier-Bresson while making pictures in the dump where the
7 Salvadorian Army or whoever dumped political opponents was a little bit outlandish but
8 yes, there was some truth there. I think most photojournalists are more ethical than he
9 was. He was lacking in that department.
10 RV: If you had to talk into a classroom today of say high school students or
11 college students who view Vietnam as almost ancient history, what would tell them about
12 the Vietnam War?
13 BG: That I can't believe it's ancient history.
14 RV: That's a good answer Bryan.
15 BG: It's like I can't believe that this much time has past. You know its funny,
16 when I was at Fort Monmouth the fiftieth anniversary of Fort Monmouth came up, like
17 1917 to 1967 and they had a big whoop-la there one weekend which I didn't go to any of
18 it, but a lot of World War I vets were there and it was funny because, and now my
19 father's generation, they're getting you know sixty years anniversary are going by and
20 that's becoming terribly a long time ago. You know the last World War I vets are all
21 over a hundred years old, there's probably only a couple of dozen left alive and it's kind
22 of sad and it's kind of scary and then we're right in line behind them, it's like all right
23 thirty-five years have gone by for a lot of them. It's like the war itself they say ended in
24 '75, I always say it ended in '73 when we left but I don't want to argue with the
25 historians on that. And we're becoming the old vets like I always viewed the World War
26 I guys, I used to take pictures of them back in the '70s for the *Gainesville Sun* and we're
27 right in line, going to be next and so yes, that's, I can't believe its ancient history. As far
28 as any lessons learned, no, we keep doing it. You know George W.'s had us in a war, his
29 father had us in the war and I'm not saying that those wars were totally wrong, I really, I
30 can't judge that, only I guess history can judge that.
31 RV: How do you think the government has treated its Vietnam veterans?

1 BG: Well, you know I went back to school on the GI Bill and got my degree and
2 everything so I can't bitch about that. I don't know, I read that they're talking about you
3 know dropping benefits and what not, paying for certain things, especially guys that are
4 disabled. I haven't been involved in it personally, you know I didn't have any, I didn't
5 file any claims against the government for anything so I can't, I know they're
6 immediately during the war the guys that were going into VA hospitals were
7 overcrowded and understaffed and it was horrible but I don't know if that's changed for
8 the better or not. I don't think there's a lot of interest in the press about that right now,
9 like there was back then when you tell stories of you know quadriplegics sitting in rooms
10 with rats running around their feet.

11 RV: Like the movie *Born on the Fourth of July*?

12 BG: Yes, yes and there was a lot of, I read his book too and I think there's a lot of
13 truth too. I think I got a picture of him, I think he was at the Gainesville Eight Trial, I'm
14 not sure but there was only wheelchair vet there and they say he was there.

15 RV: Ron Kovic.

16 BG: Yes, and I got a picture of him, its in the collection but I don't know if that's
17 him or not.

18 RV: Tell me about going to the Vietnam War Memorial and you were there at the
19 dedication, you photographed it, tell me about that experience.

20 BG: Well, you know I went there of course for the paper and I managed to get
21 together with Paul Moulton and Ken Bridgham and Harry Breedlove, we sort of had a
22 mini-reunion, shooting the events themselves and I marched in the parade and
23 photographed it at the same time, and I marched with the Florida contingency because
24 that was the state I served from, you know that was okay. I think the hardest thing for me
25 when I actually became emotionally involved was photographing these women who I
26 could tell were mothers of guys whose names were up on the Wall and when I looked at
27 their faces through my telephoto lens and made pictures I started to tear up.

28 RV: Did you find Rick's name on the Wall?

29 BG: Oh, yes, oh yes. I've got a copy of the book that they put out that's got all the
30 names, I bought that years ago and one of my hobbies because I have the ability to do it is
31 every time I see a picture on the wire from the Vietnam War and there's all kinds of

1 stories that come out from time to time about finding their bodies or their families, stories
2 about their wives or sweethearts or whatever, I print them out and I put them in the book.
3 I figure one day this book's going to be worth some money but yes, I found Rick's name
4 of course and also the other guy, I didn't know him, god what's his name. This is terrible
5 I can't remember this guy's name. It will come to me. Yes, I looked him up to. [Kermit
6 Yoho].

7 RV: What else did you do, have you been back since '82 or was that the only
8 time?

9 BG: Oh, yes, oh, yes.

10 RV: What have your experiences been like?

11 BG: Well I've been back with our reunions and then when I'd go down there on
12 assignment from time to time when I was still a shooter for the paper I would go by the
13 memorial. I think I took my kids there one time, at least once.

14 RV: What did they think of it?

15 BG: Oh, they were pretty indifferent.

16 RV: Do they, do they understand about what it was and that you were there and?

17 BG: No, no, I, no, they don't, the least bit of curiosity about it. They're grown
18 people now so. I went back for the dedication of the unknown soldier dedication which
19 was at Arlington Cemetery, what was that '84 and then of course they know who he was
20 and now he's not buried there any more. And I went down for some other anniversaries
21 and stuff. I would go down there and make pictures and some of those are in the
22 collection too.

23 RV: Well Bryan is there anything else that you want to talk about that we haven't
24 covered today?

25 BG: Not I can think of offhand, it's a beautiful day, finally. No, I mean its,
26 Vietnam's a big part of my life. I don't think a day goes by I don't think about it once and
27 it certainly had a profound effect on how my life has gone since then and I think that
28 experience gave me a certain amount of self-respect that I didn't have before then and I
29 think I grew up an awful lot and I'm willing to endure things that maybe I wouldn't have
30 before that experience, just life experiences that are annoying or difficult and you just,
31 my attitude is you put your head down, you grunt your way through it.

1 RV: Okay, anything else?

2 BG: No, I think that's it.

3 RV: Okay, well we'll go ahead and end the interview with Mr. Bryan Grigsby,
4 thank you very much for your time sir.

5 BG: You're welcome.