

ATTENTION: © Copyright The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. The following materials can be used for educational and other noncommercial purposes without the written permission of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. These materials are not to be used for resale or commercial purposes without written authorization from the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. All materials cited must be attributed to the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University.

**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Robert Bayless
Conducted by Steve Maxner
May 15, 2003
Transcribed by Jessica Fontenot**

1 Steve Maxner: OK. Let's start with that. Now, how did the Second World War
2 affect your community? Of course, one of the observations that have been made about the
3 effects of the war was it wasn't necessarily the effects of government policy during the
4 Great Depression, it wasn't really President Roosevelt's New Deal legislation and all the
5 various programs that helped bring the nation out of the war, they helped, but they didn't
6 really draw the nation out of the Depression, excuse me. It was the war that really, and
7 the huge expansion of the war time economy, that kind of pulled the United States out of
8 the Depression. What do you remember about that? Did your family experience any kind
9 of significant shift? And your community? Did it experience any kind of significant shift
10 with the onset of the Second World War?

11 Robert Bayless: Yeah. Well, just prior to the war coming along, it seemed like the
12 economy got just an incredible boost in the arm when Roosevelt came out with the WPA
13 (Works Progress Administration) program and some other programs. I guess the pay was
14 really horrible. Of course, in those days any pay was great. So suddenly when Roosevelt
15 came out with some of these programs, suddenly every family had a few dollars and it
16 seemed like just the morale just seemed to soar once these WPA and some other
17 programs started. When the war broke out, then I think that really created an economic
18 boom because of shipping. There was a shipyard in Bellingham that was about twenty
19 miles away and it started hiring people. Firestone Tire opened a plant and they were
20 making parts of aircraft there. It just seemed like when the war started, suddenly
21 everyone went to work. Those people working on the WPA, for example, if I recall right
22 they were getting forty dollars a month and then they would combine that with their fifty
23 dollars or whatever they were getting from their farming efforts. Income was getting up
24 there around ninety dollars a month. Then when the war came along, I think suddenly

1 salaries pretty much doubled with all these war plants. It seemed like then suddenly jobs
2 for everybody. Oh, and another thing that might be worth mentioning is living right there
3 on the border, before we got into the war there was a steady, not a huge stream, but a
4 steady trickle of young men coming through Blaine heading north into Canada. This may
5 sound a little strange after the Vietnam War, but going into Canada, their goal was to get
6 into Canada to join the Canadian military forces because Canada was already involved in
7 the war with Germany and we weren't. So these were young men fleeing into Canada
8 to—some of them I remember coming through town said they wanted to get up there and
9 join the Canadian Air Force and things such as this.

10 SM: After the outset, or the outbreak of war and the declaration of war, especially
11 against Japan, after they attacked Pearl Harbor and we went into a full war footing, how
12 did the war affect your community being on the Pacific Coast, of course because of fears
13 of Japanese attack along the Pacific Coast of the United States?

14 RB: I think after the first few months when, a few months after Pearl Harbor, I
15 think everyone then started to realize, they're not really gonna be attacking the coast here.
16 All along the coast at that time they had blackout restrictions. For example, there could
17 be no bonfires along the coast at all. I remember—and I never did know the truth of
18 this—but I remember we heard rumors that submarines had come up, Japanese
19 submarines had come up right off the coast of Oregon. Other than that, I don't think we
20 were affected really any more so than probably someone living in Kansas as far as feeling
21 that we were really threatened.

22 SM: Did your family participate in many of the drives and other activities during
23 the war?

24 RB: Oh, yeah. One of the activities that they were active in and they got me
25 involved in also, this is mainly time I was a freshman, sophomore in high school, but they
26 had watch towers scattered around the country and this is where people would go and
27 spend a few hours. They were manned twenty-four hours a day. When you got to the
28 watch out tower, you had a phone there and a pair of binoculars and any time an airplane
29 would come, hear an airplane, you'd have to get out and get all the information you could
30 on it and immediately dial in all the information you had about this airplane. Sometimes
31 it was kind of a tough job because the phone lines there were party lines. There might be

1 ten or fifteen people from one line. So when you'd spot an airplane and get on and pick
2 up the phone to try to phone it in, there would be someone on there and sometimes you'd
3 have a little argument with them to get them off the line so you could report the plane.

4 SM: What else do you remember about the war? Was there a local movie theater?
5 Were you able to go and not just watch movies, but see some of the news footage coming
6 back from the war?

7 RB: Yeah. It seems like Movie Town News was the big thing then. Of course, we
8 got almost all of our information by radio and the newspaper, but that was often more
9 important than going to see the main film, to see the Movie Town News. That was more
10 excitement and so forth about that. As I got up toward my senior year, some of the other
11 boys in my class started talking seriously about enlisting in the services. I was somewhat
12 interested, but actually the main thing that kept me back was if I went in the service that
13 would stop me from playing basketball for a year or two and that was far more important
14 to me then. One boy actually got drafted. He was about two years old, or he'd been out of
15 school for two years. He was about two years age-wise ahead of us. He did get drafted
16 right out of school and unfortunately shortly after he got drafted his father was killed in
17 an automobile accident, so the service released him immediately. In my junior and senior
18 year, then we started knowing a lot of our close friends who were just a year or two ahead
19 of us who were all going into the service and some of them would come back for a short
20 leave and, of course, we all sort of looked at them in their uniforms as kind of big heroes.
21 Most of us, the attitude sort of was, well, when we're eighteen they'll come and get us
22 and then we'll be ready to go.

23 SM: Well, is there anything else that you recall about growing up in Blaine,
24 Washington, during the Great Depression and the Second World War?

25 RB: Really, life was—it really seemed pretty quiet and uneventful. There was not
26 a great deal of crime. People were all very helpful to each other in those days and that got
27 instilled in me early. I remember quite a number of times I would get a call about five or
28 six o'clock in the evening, some frantic farm wife would get hold of me and say that the
29 man of the farm was sick or something happened and could I possibly come down and
30 milk his twenty cows. Quite a number of times I did just that. I remember going down to
31 their farms and sitting out there in the barn till maybe eight or nine o'clock at night to get

1 all those cows milked. Then when I was going to high school it was a little different then.
2 It was a mile, we had to walk one mile to catch the school bus. Sometimes the weather
3 was extremely grim so we had to get up very—we had about a few cows of our own. I
4 used to have to get up extremely early, milk the cows, get ready for school, walk a mile
5 to catch the bus.

6 SM: How many cows did your family have?

7 RB: Well, I think it varied between three and six.

8 SM: How long would it typically take to milk them?

9 RB: Oh, it was interesting milking cows. Some were easy to milk and some were
10 extremely tough. Some liked to kick and give you a real bad time. I would say, I'm
11 making a wild guess now, but I would just say it would take between seven to ten
12 minutes to milk a cow. One thing, your grip, your hands, got extremely tough and pretty
13 powerful after all that milking. I do remember one time, one night counting our cows and
14 another farmer's cows. I think this was the most I ever had. I did milk twenty-seven cows
15 in one night and I probably didn't do a very good job because when you milk by hand
16 there's such a thing called stripping the cow, that is you have to get most of the milk out
17 to take a great deal of effort to strip out the last bit. If you're milking twenty-seven cows
18 you'd probably get a little sloppy when you get near the end of it.

19 SM: Understandably so. Did you have many brothers and sisters growing up?

20 RB: I had two sisters. One was three years older than I was, and one was five
21 years younger. The one that's three years older, as soon as she graduated from high
22 school she seemed kind of famous because she got a job at the state capitol down in
23 Olympia. Everyone was very envious of that, that how in the world could a high school
24 get a job like that coming right out of school?

25 SM: As the Second World War was drawing to a close—wait before that, I'm
26 sorry. Excuse me. Was there any, I guess not necessarily anti-war, but were there any
27 people in your community that weren't very supportive of the war or in opposition to the
28 fighting?

29 RB: No. I know of no one who was really opposed to it. However, in our
30 immediate community there were a lot of Germans and some of these Germans weren't
31 citizens. As I recall, there was a requirement back in those days that any of these

1 Germans who weren't citizens, they could not be out away from their homes after dark. I
2 remember frequently at the little community store nearby, hearing different people say,
3 "Fritz down there, he was out at nine o'clock last night. I wonder if we should report
4 him." Then there were some Germans in the area and I certainly wouldn't say that they
5 were anti-American, but I do remember some Germans gloating at how rapidly the
6 German army defeated the French. I do remember them saying, "Well, you know you just
7 can't underestimate these Germans. They're really good tough people." I don't think
8 there was any real feeling of, strong feelings, against the Germans, but some people were
9 kind of keeping an eye on them. Then we had a lot of Italians, from Italian communities.
10 They didn't come under any suspicion at all like some of the Germans did, but I think
11 there were comments like, oh, sort of degrading the Italian army and I think some of
12 these comments kind of rubbed the Italian community wrong. Other than that, I don't
13 think there was any—it seemed like the war effort was pretty much universally,
14 completely supported by everyone, of course.

15 SM: That's funny. Did anybody point out that defeating the French army wasn't
16 anything to brag about or—was there very much derisive humor about the French, like
17 there has been more recently with their opposition to the war in Iraq?

18 RB: There was some ridicule of the French and I think that probably carried over
19 to a lot of people and I guess it even, some of that even rubbed off on me because I think
20 I was a little bit critical of the French, but all that ended years later when I had some long
21 personal conferences with Dr. Bernard Fall and I had a chance to talk to—When I talked
22 to the Vietnamese years later and found out what they thought of the French soldiers, my
23 opinion of the French and the French army completely changed.

24 SM: Wow. That's very impressive. That'll be interesting to get to.

25 RB: Yeah.

26 SM: As the war was coming to a close and the United States had, obviously was
27 going through Germany very well in '45, when we turned our sights to Japan and
28 dropped the atomic bombs, how did that—what do you remember about that? The use of
29 atomic weapons by the United States against the Japanese? How did your family and
30 your community respond to that?

1 RB: Well, it all came so fast because I do remember that this Firestone company
2 that was making fuel tanks for our aircraft, they had big advertisements in the paper for
3 more help. See, Germany was pretty much through and they had advertisements that say
4 “We still need a lot of workers. This war is gonna go on for a long, long time.” So, of
5 course, it really came as an incredible surprise. When it happened, I think it was sort of a
6 general feeling of relief. I don’t remember any people saying, “Oh, it was a terrible thing
7 that we had to kill so many people to do this.” I just remember mostly people saying,
8 “Well, we sure saved a lot of American lives by doing this. Without exception, I think—
9 of course, no one knew of all the other after effects of the weapon, but I would say at that
10 time it was a hundred percent. Everyone was a hundred percent for dropping the bomb
11 and what we did.

12 SM: What were the celebrations like during VE Day and then VJ Day?

13 RB: Well, out there in these little towns like this, I think that mainly it was just a
14 little bit of a horn honking and maybe going to an extra movie or something like that, but
15 there was really no wild celebrations. Now, of course, we heard a lot about what was
16 going on in Seattle, which is about a hundred miles south. We heard about big
17 celebrations there and then in the Movie Town News, of course, we saw a lot of the big
18 celebrations. Actually, there was no really wild celebrating. Just a lot of joy, “Well, now
19 the boys are gonna be coming home.” But every time anyone mentioned something
20 about, well, now all our boys are gonna be coming home, they would always say, “Gee,
21 it’s great. All our boys are gonna be coming home, but I wonder if they’re gonna be able
22 to find a job when they get home. We wonder.” As soon as they started, the first few of
23 them started to trickle home, I forget what the numbers they called it. It was the 5240 or
24 something like that. Anyway, every one of them as soon as they arrived home, they said,
25 “Well, wow now we can draw for a year, for fifty-two weeks. We can draw a certain
26 amount of unemployment compensation,” because obviously there was quite an
27 adjustment period right after they started coming back.

28 SM: Was there a large influx of soldiers into your community at the end of the
29 war?

30 RB: Only those—no one came to our community other than just the boys who
31 lived there when they left. It was just the—but about that same time I do remember there

1 was a large influx of people of a Mennonite religion coming from back East. I remember
2 there was quite a bit of hostility toward them coming into the area because the thought
3 was, “Gee, we’ve got enough people around here now having a hard time and we don’t
4 want a bunch more coming in.” Then it was kind of an unknown religion, that that drew a
5 lot of suspicion. That caused a little bit of a problem, but nothing really serious.

6 SM: What was the predominant faith in the area?

7 RB: Where I lived in this area, Pleasant Valley, we had what they called the
8 Pleasant Valley Community Church and so that was the only church in the area. So
9 regardless of what anyone was, that’s what they were. I think you could say that most of
10 the people in the area were probably—there was a certain number definitely of Lutherans.
11 We had quite a few Norwegians and Swedes so forth in the area and Lutherans, Baptists,
12 Methodists. It was pretty much a Protestant-type environment.

13 SM: You were brought up in a Protestant faith?

14 RB: Yes.

15 SM: Growing up, what did you think about the suspicion of the Mennonites and
16 how they were treated?

17 RB: Really there wasn’t any adverse—there was no physical treatment, it was just
18 people talking against them. Of course my feeling sort of was, “Well, they are different,
19 but they don’t seem to be bothering anyone.” Some of the boys that were Mennonites. I
20 soon found out they were pretty descent people and also something that concerned me
21 somewhat was I found out that being in the same classroom with them was pretty tough
22 because they were all really good scholars. That raised the academic level a little. By and
23 large, we absorbed them into the community without any real big problems.

24 SM: OK. I guess just shortly after you graduated from high school that was in
25 1945, is that correct?

26 RB: Yes. Uh huh.

27 SM: You went ahead and joined the military?

28 RB: No. No. I was still seventeen. I graduated when I was seventeen. I knew I
29 was gonna have to go into the service soon, but I thought, “I’m going to try to sneak, get
30 one year of college in before I go to the service.” I had been in contact with an assistant
31 coach from Washington State University and I think this was before they gave out

1 scholarships. The school would just contact you and sort of say, “You might want to
2 come down and try to get on our team. If you come down here what we can promise you
3 is, we can promise you a job on campus in which you can earn pretty much most of the
4 money you’re gonna need.” So after hearing this I decided I was going to Washington
5 State, which was a big step for me. That was two hundred and fifty miles away. When I
6 went over there I found out it was basically the coach. He’d just heard of me. He just
7 knew I was there, but it was up to me—they had tryouts. In those days it was a lot
8 different than now. There would be signs hung throughout the campus: “Basketball
9 tryouts are gonna be conducted.” When they first started, they’d have so many tryout one
10 night and so many the next. I think all in all, probably about ninety different kids were
11 out for the tryouts. Of course, there were about five or six veterans from the previous year
12 that didn’t have to worry about being on the team. Then was the big suspense of the
13 coach gradually each night lopping off a bunch of names. So when I first got there they
14 said, “Well, you can have this job.” I forget the pay, but it amounted to somewhere
15 around forty-five dollars a month. You were actually putting in time working. Once I
16 made the team then I got a different job. It was sixty dollars a month and you still had to
17 put in a little time, but not near as much time as you had to for the forty-five dollars. It
18 was so different than what you’d see in athletic programs today.

19 SM: Just to clarify, in what year did you first join the military?

20 RB: Oh, I went in the military in September of 1946.

21 SM: September of ’46?

22 RB: Wait. Let me make sure. Let’s see. I got out of high school in ’45 and then I
23 finished my first year at Washington State in June of ’46. Then right after—see I’d
24 already been called to take the draft physical. So I went to, in the summer I got out I went
25 to the draft board and I said, “OK. How soon are you gonna draft me?” They said, “Well,
26 because of the overall world situation and so forth, we can’t really tell when we’re gonna
27 draft you, but it’s gonna be some months away.” So I had a job around, a temporary job
28 for the summer and I thought, “Well I’ll just see if they call me while I’m working on this
29 job.” Then they didn’t call me and then I wanted to, I didn’t want to start school another
30 year and get called in during the school year. So then I went down and I enlisted. At that

1 time you could enlist for just eighteen months. So it was in September '46 I enlisted for
2 eighteen months. That's when I first went in.

3 SM: Now was that under specific MOS specialty?

4 RB: No. There were no promises, no guarantees, no bonuses, no nothing. You just
5 signed up for eighteen months and that was it. I think our pay, I think the pay had upped
6 to fifty dollars a month which at that time we thought was pretty good. Of course, we
7 were getting room and board and everything.

8 SM: What was your MOS when you got in, when you finished your basic
9 training?

10 RB: Oh, now I took basic training at Fort Lewis. Basic training was only eight
11 weeks. Then things got a little confusing. They put me on a train and sent me down to
12 Camp Stoneman, California, and I was on my way to Japan, but while we were at Camp
13 Stoneman something quickly changed and they shipped us from Camp Stoneman and put
14 us on a ship at San Francisco. Of all things, they sent us back to Seattle, which is just a
15 few miles from Fort Lewis. Then from Seattle we left and I was assigned up in Alaska. I
16 think I was assigned in about the most dismal and remote spot in the world. It was a little
17 place called Whittier. It was a port. It was a deep-water port where all of the supplies and
18 equipment for Alaska came in at that time and there was no road leading out of Whittier.
19 There was only a railroad. To get out of Whittier, there was one tunnel that was two miles
20 long and then there was another tunnel a half-mile long and the train would have to go
21 through these two tunnels to get up to Anchorage. I started it—when I first got there they
22 put us all at work unloading ships and loading the freight cars that take the stuff up to
23 Anchorage. After I'd been working out there on the docks for about a month and a half, a
24 lieutenant stuck his head in and said, "Hey, we desperately need someone who knows
25 how to type." Well, in high school that was one of the sissy courses I took was typing. So
26 when I said I typed, he grabbed me right away and they put me up in a ration breakdown,
27 the commissary ration breakdown office, which was an incredibly interesting job because
28 I not only computed how much food we had to order for the troops there at Whittier, all
29 the different types of foods and how many, but also we had about thirty different Army
30 tugs and barges that came in and they would draw food once a month. They would come
31 in and get supplied once a month. So I would have to figure how much food each one of

1 these, every kind of food each one of these barges got for a thirty-day period based on
2 number of people they had. So I ended up having an extremely interesting and
3 challenging job that I often spent ten twelve hours a day on, but in a place like Whittier
4 where there is absolutely nothing there, what else are you gonna do besides work? The
5 weather was such that a number of times during the year, we lived in these Quonset huts.
6 We had to get up on top of the Quonset huts with our shovels and shovel off the heavy
7 snow that was piling up on the Quonset hut. At Whittier for that year, there was
8 absolutely nothing to do except go to movies and work. Overall I found it an interesting
9 and reasonably enjoyable assignment.

10 SM: When you went to basic training in Fort Lewis, what was that introduction to
11 the military like for you?

12 RB: I thought it was quite a bit different than what I expected. We first got
13 there—I remember the first day when we fell out and the sergeant and, of course, he was
14 an absolute god to us, he yelled at us in a very threatening tone. He said, “OK. Tomorrow
15 morning we are going to fall out here at zero six hundred,” and then he said in a very
16 threatening voice, “and any of you who aren’t here are going to be absent.” Well, I
17 thought, well, that’s probably, he’s probably dead right there. Then I remember when
18 we’d get in formation there and he’d say, “Forward.” Everyone would lean forward and
19 he would say, “OK.” He says, “I don’t want you leaning forward like the leaning tower of
20 Persia.” I thought, well, he might mean Pisa, but in any event we just had a real
21 colorful—I just remember this very colorful first sergeant that we had. It was kind of, it
22 seemed like a hit-and-miss thing because the barracks were extremely crowded where we
23 were staying. We were all double-decked. There weren’t more than just several feet
24 between each barrack. I do remember that we were all surprised at how good the food
25 was and sometimes to get in the mess hall we used to have to wait in a line about a block
26 long. Actually at Fort Lewis once we got into our basic training and so forth, I found it
27 very—I pretty much thoroughly enjoyed basic training. About thirty-some years later I
28 had the opportunity, one of my last duty days I spent in that barracks where I took basic
29 training.

30 SM: OK. Well, what was the most challenging part of basic training for you?

1 RB: Physically, I was in extremely good condition. So the running, the exercising,
2 it was a physical camp and I don't think any part of that was at all bothersome. I
3 remember a part of the training that I disliked the most. I remember I never liked fooling
4 around, putting weapons together. It seemed like many times other people could get a
5 machine gun or BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle), they could get it put together faster
6 than I could. That kind of frustrated me. All in all, I found basic training pretty interesting
7 and a somewhat exciting eight weeks.

8 SM: You didn't really go through any kind of specialty training after that?

9 RB: No. No. From there, this was a point in time when they were bringing
10 soldiers home as fast as they could and they were just rushing bodies over to replace
11 them. So we had no advanced training at any time. From our basic training company
12 when we finished practically the whole company just had these orders that you guys are
13 going to Japan. That's when we got loaded up and sent down to Stoneman.

14 SM: What was that trip like for you the first time outside the United States?

15 RB: Going to Alaska?

16 SM: Mm-hmm.

17 RB: Well, we went up on an extremely crowded ship. I remember there were
18 bunks, probably around four or five levels high and there was so little room between
19 them that if you were laying on your bunk and you put your knee up in the air you were
20 jamming the back end of the guy in the bunk ahead of you. Other than it being extremely
21 crowded, some of the little things you remember—they had a drill, a boat drill. I never,
22 once I got on the boat, almost every bunk had a life preserver on it, but I never had one
23 on my bunk. So when we fell out for the drill, here I am without a life preserver. Well,
24 along came this sergeant and was really extremely upset that I didn't have a life preserver
25 and he said something to the effect that if I didn't have one there were plenty around
26 there that I could've grabbed. Well, of course I would've been grabbing someone else's.
27 So I remember for a good part of the trip he put me on special duty. I was running around
28 the ship with a can of some kind of Brasso or something, shining all the rails. I used to
29 think what a nasty guy he was. Then what was strange is once we got to our destination
30 in Alaska, once I became in charge of ration breakdown, he is the guy who's in charge of

1 all the mess halls in the area. So he and I started working together very closely and
2 strangely enough we became good friends.

3 SM: That's interesting. OK. Describe the area in which you worked if you would
4 when you arrived in Alaska?

5 RB: Well, first getting there when I was working on the dock, it was a big
6 primitive dock where the ships would come in and there's always a race to get them
7 unloaded as fast as possible because there's always another ship out there waiting to be
8 unloaded. The railhead was right there. Most of the time, my job was not in the bowels of
9 this ship so much. I was up on the pier where we were loading stuff onto the forklifts and
10 then taking it and sticking it in the freight cars. I would always remember that once in a
11 while some kind of a big box would break. I don't know if it broke accidentally or if
12 someone broke it, but sometime a big box would break and things like some candy and
13 stuff would fall out. Of course, then it was a free for all as to who grabbed that stuff that
14 was laying around on the pier. I didn't really like that job, but I was pretty happy when
15 they called me and told me that because I typed I was going to another one.

16 SM: Where did you go from there?

17 RB: Well, that's when I went into this commissary, the ration breakdown office
18 where I spent my time figuring out the rations.

19 SM: Working in that system, how was the supply system working at that point?

20 RB: The ration breakdown?

21 SM: Yes sir.

22 RB: Well—

23 SM: Was there any shortage of anything or was there pretty much everything you
24 needed?

25 RB: Well, it was interesting. There was all these master lists. Like, we were
26 supposed to have so much lamb a month, so much beef. They had different kinds of beef,
27 roasted, fry, stew, and boil and ground beef. Where I always used to have trouble with the
28 ships was they would come in and on their inventory lists they would have that they had a
29 full stock of lamb because they didn't want to be issued any more lamb. They wanted to
30 be issued more beef, of course. So I used to have to kind of fight with some of them to
31 tell them, "Hey, no matter how much lamb you say you've got, you better start using it

1 because you're gonna get the same percentage of lamb that everyone else is getting." I
2 think the rations, I don't think were really great. I used to marvel, when I would issue the
3 stuff out the mess halls, I used to marvel at what our mess personnel could do with the
4 stuff to make it go around. I would say our food was fair, but in no way compares with
5 the food that soldiers are given nowadays. There was an awful lot of ground beef meals
6 and things like that. It definitely wasn't eating high on the hog, but it was adequate.

7 SM: You stayed there for the rest of your time?

8 RB: Yeah. I was there almost up till, right till my time was up. Then they put us
9 on another ship and sent us back to, oh, that little Fort on the edge of Seattle. I can't
10 believe I forgot the name of it. We got there. We thought we were gonna be there for
11 about two weeks processing to get out, but the day we arrived there an officer walked in
12 and said, "We hope to have you on your way out of here within the next two days." So
13 within two days we had what was called the "Ruptured Duck," the little device to show
14 that we were separated from the service. If I recall, we got a hundred dollars. We got a
15 total of three-hundred dollars when we got separated from service. We got one-hundred
16 dollars the day we got out and then for the next two months they mailed us another
17 hundred. We walked out of there. We all thought that we were extremely rich.

18 SM: Well, in Alaska, what was the morale of the unit like there, the men who
19 were serving there?

20 RB: By and large, I would say that it was not good at all. Of course, that's
21 because there was just absolutely zero, nothing to do except go to the movie. They were
22 very—liquor was very, very tightly controlled. If you were under age there was no way
23 you were gonna get any liquor. Once during your year stay there you could get a three-
24 day pass to go to Anchorage which is not exactly the world's best R&R (rest and
25 relaxation) center, either. But other than that there were some streams not too far away
26 where you could go salmon fishing. One thing that I got into a little bit during the
27 summertime was mountain climbing. I remember climbing up one hill and just sticking
28 my head over a ledge and I found myself looking just a few feet away from me, was a
29 black bear standing there staring at me as my head was coming over the ledge.
30 Fortunately, he turned around and kind of gradually just loped away. Other than getting
31 out in the hills and hiking around and going to movies, it was a year with just absolutely

1 nothing to do. Of course, there was not a single—well I guess I can't say that. There was
2 a civilian company who was about a mile away and I think they had two women
3 employees. So on that installation, I would guess there was about eight hundred, or seven
4 or eight hundred soldiers in this civilian installation and two women. So it was an unusual
5 environment.

6 SM: Yes, sir. There were no cities or towns or anything like that?

7 RB: No. The only town anywhere around was Anchorage and I forget how far it
8 was, but it was a several-hour train ride and of course the train was pretty slow. It had to
9 go through those tunnels and so forth. Other than Anchorage, there was just absolutely
10 nothing. I did get up to Anchorage this one time, but something went wrong. I got a real
11 bad case of ptomaine poisoning about the day I arrived in Anchorage. So my whole time
12 in Anchorage I spent laying on the flat of my back really sick.

13 SM: OK. Well, what were your plans upon getting out?

14 RB: My thoughts on getting out was immediately, of course, going back to
15 college, which I did. When I went back to college this is sort of where I got tied up for
16 future military activities. When I got out of the Army, I was like everyone else who got
17 out at that time. I was in. I got my time behind me, and boy are they never, never, no one
18 is ever gonna get me to spend another day in the Army. I think that was attitude of
19 practically a hundred percent of us who got out. Well, when I went back to college I used
20 to have to walk past the office of the ROTC department. Every time I'd walk past this
21 one sergeant would yell out something at me, "Hey now that you're an old, experienced,
22 know-it-all veteran, now is the time for you to sign up for this ROTC program." He said,
23 "Let me tell you what this ROTC program means." He says, "It means that in addition to
24 that big seventy-five-dollar-a-month GI Bill check you're getting, it means that you
25 would get an extra twenty-seven bucks a month." Which he's talking big money, so daily
26 he hit on that with me. So one day I said, "Well, let me hear a little more about it." He
27 said, "Well, if you take this ROTC program it doesn't mean a dang thing because you get
28 your money. You get commissioned as a second lieutenant when you get out. If there's a
29 war, you're gonna get called in as a second lieutenant." But he says, "They're not gonna
30 call you in as a second lieutenant unless they're calling in everyone else." So he said,
31 "You've got your choice. Take ROTC, get twenty seven bucks a month and get called in

1 as a second lieutenant if we ever have another war, or don't take ROTC and then when
2 we have another war you're gonna get called back in as you're old rank." Which my rank
3 when I got out was a buck sergeant. So the more I thought about that, the main thing was,
4 gee that twenty-seven bucks, that looks pretty big. So that's how I ended up signing up
5 for the ROTC program.

6 SM: OK. When you signed up for ROTC, did you have a particular branch in
7 mind?

8 RB: Not really, but about the only thing anyone knew about in those days, no one
9 really knew much about anything except infantry. So I didn't really have any branch in
10 mind. Signing up, it took a certain amount of courage to sign up for ROTC because there
11 was an awful a lot of harassment, nothing bitter or anything, but just a lot of, awful lot of
12 good-natured harassment on the day that you wore your uniform around campus. I'm sure
13 that chased off an awful lot of people. When we first went in, it seemed like the only
14 thing any of them talked about was infantry and it just seemed to me like—in the back of
15 my mind I just knew there were other branches like engineers or signal corps, but the
16 thought always was, well, to go into engineers you have to be majoring in engineering at
17 college and things like that. So it just seemed like infantry was what everyone sort of
18 gravitated towards.

19 SM: When you went to Washington State the first time immediately after high
20 school, what was your major?

21 RB: Oh, I immediately and I don't know why, but I immediately went in majoring
22 in business administration. I guess I did that primarily because I didn't know what else to
23 major in. My high school coach had often mentioned to me, "Well, you oughta go and
24 major in physical education and be a coach." Then in the back of my mind I always
25 remembered how he told me that he was always flat broke and he didn't make any money
26 and I remember he was driving around town in a much older more dilapidated car than a
27 lot of the students were. So I thought well, maybe that coaching isn't all that big a deal
28 after all. So I really didn't know what I was aiming for, but business administration
29 sounded kind of interesting. That's how I got into that.

30 SM: OK. So that's how it changed?

31 RB: Yeah.

1 SM: With ROTC in addition to your course work were you able to do anything
2 else in school as far as playing sports or anything?

3 RB: Yeah. When I went back to Washington State, immediately started going out
4 for—I got back there for the spring semester and I started going out for basketball, well
5 they had spring basketball practice. So I immediately went up for that. I was enrolled in
6 ROTC. Then one of the first disasters of my life hit. My mother got extremely ill so I had
7 to leave school just before the semester ended. I had a difficult time getting credit for my
8 classes because of that. Anyway at that time my parents had been living out south of
9 Seattle, so I had to rush home. That was the first time I was ever on an airplane was when
10 I flew from Spokane back to where my parents lived. Then my mother passed away and
11 then I sort of lost interest in going that far away from home again. So then I sort of set my
12 sights on switching school and going to the University of Washington, which was in
13 Seattle.

14 SM: OK. When you transferred over with your mother's illness and everything,
15 were you able to pick up fairly quickly back in school?

16 RB: At school?

17 SM: Mm-hmm.

18 RB: Yeah. I didn't really notice too much difference in the schools. One of the
19 first things I did, of course, was I went to the University of Washington ROTC program.
20 Then there was some kind of an administrative foul up that didn't mean anything.
21 Somehow or other they got me listed as being in the transportation corps which I never
22 was. That's what went on on my transcripts, ROTC transportation corps, but I was
23 actually in infantry all the time. University of Washington, of course, immediately
24 seemed like a much more interesting place than Washington, D.C. because—Washington
25 State. Washington State was out in the middle of the farmland, just a little tiny town
26 called Pullman nearby. There at the University of Washington right on the edge of
27 Seattle, it was just a much more interesting place to go to school and it seemed like it was
28 a much better variety of classes and so forth. I didn't have any trouble adjusting real fast.
29 To show you how different conditions were in those days, another student and I got a
30 room very near the campus, about three blocks away in a very nice house. We each paid
31 twenty dollars a month for the room. Of course, with me getting seventy-five from GI

1 Bill and that big twenty-seven dollars from ROTC, I was quite wealthy going to school at
2 that time.

3 SM: OK. When you transferred, how bout your classes? Were you able to take
4 most of your previous year and semester with you?

5 RB: Most of my credits transferred right with me. I had no trouble with that.

6 SM: That's good.

7 RB: Yeah. So I just picked up and like I just went from Accounting I at
8 Washington State to Accounting II at the University of Washington and it didn't seem to
9 be any real problem whatsoever in shifting schools.

10 SM: OK. The atmosphere, the two schools were they very much different?

11 RB: Oh. just a world of difference. Washington State, it was a very, it seemed like
12 a—you knew so many of the students on campus at Washington State. It was a much,
13 much smaller school. At the University of Washington it was just such a huge, just
14 seemed like such a huge school and there were so many more activities on campus, so
15 many more things you could do. It just seemed like a far more interesting environment.
16 Another thing, like at Washington State because there wasn't much to do, it seemed like
17 things like alcohol was more of a problem there. I'm sure at Washington, I'm sure they
18 had their share of heavy drinkers, but you were with your own crowd and you just didn't
19 see what was going on campus wide. You were just more in your small part of the
20 campus.

21 SM: What about your major? Did that ever change while you were, when you
22 transferred over?

23 RB: No. No I stayed majoring in business and then between my junior and senior
24 year that's when we were required to go to the ROTC summer camp at Fort Lewis.

25 SM: What were some of the challenging aspects of ROTC and, for instance,
26 summer camp?

27 RB: Well, I really liked ROTC at the University of Washington. I felt like I had
28 the opportunity to get to know the instructors better than I did at Washington State. We
29 had a couple pretty old, hardened World War II veterans there at the University of
30 Washington. They seemed to be really genuinely interested in teaching us and getting the
31 material across to us. I don't think I found any of the classes extremely difficult. I

1 definitely was not one of the—in the college ROTC there's some people who are super
2 eager beavers in ROTC. That's there main goal in life is the military. When I was taking
3 ROTC at the University of Washington I don't think the thought of going into the regular
4 Army really had entered my mind at all yet. So I would say I was just sort of an average
5 ROTC student. The highest cadet rank I had at the University of Washington was I was
6 first lieutenant platoon leader. Of course, there were so many students in the advanced
7 ROTC program who didn't have any line job at all so just being a lieutenant platoon
8 leader was kind of a little, showed a little advancement. By and large, I just thought that,
9 I just looked at ROTC as kind of an interesting—I think another thing in college ROTC at
10 the University of Washington, I think I got to know my classmates in that class better
11 than I got to know the classmates in any of my other classes.

12 SM: What was the student population at the University of Washington?

13 RB: At that time, I would say it was total of between twenty and twenty-two
14 thousand.

15 SM: Wow. That's a big campus. What about the ROTC program, about how
16 many cadets?

17 RB: Well, this is kind of a wild guess. I would say that in our junior class, the
18 class that went to the ROTC summer camp at Fort Lewis, I would guess there would be,
19 would've been between a hundred ten and a hundred thirty.

20 SM: How did that compare with Washington State?

21 RB: We had more advanced students. Probably about almost double the number
22 of students in the advanced program, junior and senior year, than they had at Washington
23 State.

24 SM: You're talking about ROTC?

25 RB: Yeah. Uh huh.

26 SM: What about the student body population?

27 RB: Washington State I believe at that time the overall campus enrollment was
28 around nine or ten thousand. About half of what it was at the University of Washington.
29 However, at Washington State sometimes I was in bigger classes, a lot more students in
30 some of the classes than I had at the University of Washington.

1 SM: As you were going through ROTC classes, especially as you progressed into
2 the third and fourth year of ROTC, did the ROTC instructors, again I guess the World
3 War II veterans, did they start invoking some of the lessons that they had learned in the
4 war and combat, instilling some of that, passing some of that knowledge onto you as
5 cadets?

6 RB: Yeah. There was a certain number of war stories, but not a great deal. By and
7 large, they pretty much stuck to the basics. Sometimes it was usually more in informal
8 conversations you would get something from them about some of their war stories, but by
9 and large, they just pretty much, they didn't seem to be trying to really impress us with
10 what they'd done.

11 SM: Well, not necessarily try to impress you, but provide real world examples of
12 leadership in combat, the challenges of leading men in such a difficult situation, so many
13 challenges. Looking at it and reading about it in a book is, of course, not necessarily the
14 same as being out there and doing it for real, so providing that real world juxtaposition to
15 what you might have been reading in some of the training manuals.

16 RB: You know, in looking back I think that ROTC probably stressed more of the
17 things like weapons training, small unit tactics, map reading, more of that than they
18 actually dwelled on leadership. You know, we didn't have a lot of leadership cases and
19 examples and what you should do in different situations. That's one thing that kind of
20 surprised me a little bit about ROTC.

21 SM: Yes, sir. OK. Of course while you're in school during this time the Korean
22 War broke out.

23 RB: Yes.

24 SM: How was that, how did that affect you? How did affect your student
25 population, your fellow ROTC cadets?

26 RB: The war broke out. I'm trying to exactly put it together, but the war broke out
27 probably when I was a junior, yeah, I guess I would say—I think it broke out in the
28 summer, June of 1950. I just finished my junior year in May of 1950. In my class, it
29 didn't really have an impact on because with all of us being juniors. Of course we said,
30 "Hey. We're gonna finish and get our fourth year in and get our commission." I definitely
31 do not remember any loss of any of our students. Now as I recall, we just heard of some

1 students who graduated a year or two ahead of us starting to go into the service. At the
2 end of my junior year I did something unusual. Oh, yeah, now it all comes back to me.
3 Because I was a vet, my enlisted time, I had to take just two years of advanced ROTC.
4 Then I was able to get my commission before I got out of college. At the end of my
5 junior year, another student and I found out about that we could go to the Infantry
6 Officers Basic Course at Fort Benning during the summer between our junior and senior
7 year. So the two of us during the summer, we went down to Fort Benning and went
8 through this, I forget whether it was, I guess it was about an eight-week Infantry Officer
9 Basic Course. The Korean War as I recall broke out during that time. So then when we
10 got back to campus the Korean War was in its infancy and, of course, our goal was to
11 finish college and get our degree. We already had a commission and so the Korean War
12 actually impacted on us very little. Except shortly after the Korean War started I
13 remember while we were going to school hearing about a boat, a ship that was coming
14 back to dock in Seattle that had Vietnam veterans on it and these Vietnam veterans, the
15 bulk of them were young people who had sneaked into the Army underage, like they
16 joined up when they were sixteen or something. When the war broke out over there, they
17 said, “Hey, we’re not keeping these sixteen year old kids over there. We’re sending them
18 back.” So they had quite a boatload of these underage guys coming back. I remember a
19 couple of us slipped out of school and went down to the pier and watched the unloading
20 of these guys and celebration of these guys coming back. By and large when the Korean
21 War broke out like that, it seemed to have very little impact on us at that time.

22 SM: Was there any kind of an impetus for you to finish up and get out as quickly
23 as possible so that perhaps you can get over there?

24 RB: Well, the only thing was we just all knew we’re gonna stay here and get our
25 degree and then we all pretty much thought for sure that once we got our degree and got
26 out we were all, it was in the back of our minds a hundred percent for sure, that we’re
27 probably with out a doubt gonna get called up. Then, I think, we followed the Korean
28 War probably much more closely than most kids on the campus did. Then it was kind of
29 confusing because right after Inchon, you know, the fist few disastrous months—then
30 right after Inchon when they started moving north rapidly. Then there was kind of a big
31 let up, “Well, it’s all gonna be over before we get out of college.” So it was a lot of

1 uncertainty. While we were going to school right after the Korean War started, I don't
2 remember it really having much of an impact on us at all.

3 SM: Were you still in school? Were you still in ROTC when Truman fired
4 MacArthur?

5 RB: You know, I'm not sure, but I think so. I'm pretty sure. I forget what year
6 and what month he fired him, but I'm pretty sure we were. I believe, Ridgway, I believe.
7 It seems like I remember Ridgway.

8 SM: It would have been in '52 sometime.

9 RB: Uh-huh.

10 SM: I'm pretty sure. Obviously it was before Ike won the '52 election.

11 RB: Uh-huh.

12 SM: I didn't know. Were you still in school in 1952?

13 RB: It seems like I—I wish I had my dates lined up here.

14 SM: No that's OK. I'm just curious.

15 RB: It seems like I went into the service in 1951.

16 SM: Oh.

17 RB: I hope I got my years right there.

18 SM: I went in and the Korean War was still, it was going on pretty hot and heavy
19 when I went in in '51. It was kind of strange. When I was getting ready to graduate, I
20 contacted the military and I said, "OK. Are you gonna be calling me up? I want to know
21 as soon as possible and know as much as possible." They said, "Well, based on the
22 people available coming and going, right now it's hard to say. We might be calling you in
23 and we might not. There's a good chance," they said, "it's a good chance that you will
24 not be called up." I was a little bit on edge. I thought, "Well, I really, I'm reluctant."
25 Incidentally, when I got out of school, I interviewed for a job and one of the first things
26 they asked me was "What's your situation with the military?" And, of course, I had to tell
27 them. So everything was kind of uneasy. So finally after not knowing I went out and I
28 talked to the sergeant and I said, "Well, if it looks like I might be called up, let me just go
29 ahead and volunteer to be called up and that way I'll know what I'm doing." He said,
30 "Yeah. We can arrange that." So I volunteered to be called up at that time and he said,
31 "Anything special you'd want to do?" I said, "Well, yeah. I'd like to go into Army

1 aviation.” So I put in to go in the service and get in Army aviation and surprisingly that’s
2 the last I ever heard. I still have a copy of that letter I sent in volunteering for Army
3 aviation, but I never, never heard of it again from the Army. Once I told them I wanted to
4 go in then very shortly after that I got orders and was sent down to Fort Ord.

5 SM: OK. Well, why don’t we take a break for a moment? This’ll conclude the
6 interview with Mr. Bayless on the 15th of May 2003.