

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 H. Edwards
Conducted by Richard Verrone
Date 10 November 2005
Transcribed by Mark Steven Varela**

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

The transcription of this interview was paid for by a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone, I'm conducting a video-oral history interview with Mr. Robert H. Bob Edwards.

Robert H. Edwards: I prefer Bob.

RV: Prefer Bob. Colonel Edwards and I are in Washington, D.C., at the Hilton Crystal City. We're here for the 40th Anniversary of Ia Drang-Pleiku reunion. As well as the 1st Cav Division reunion. Today is November 10th, 2005. Bob, let's start with a little bit about yourself.

RE: How far back? (Chuckles)

RV: Well, since we're time limited, tell me about the training for you personally. Becoming this officer, the company commander and working with General Moore back in Benning and training up in Vietnam.

RE: Okay. I got—I was commissioned out a ROTC program in 1960. Served a three-year tour in Europe. Got to Fort Benning in January of '64, as a promotable 1st Lieutenant. They put me in the brigade headquarters, assistant staff officer out on Kelly Hill. About that time, the 2nd battalion 23rd Infantry was tapped to be loaned from the 2nd Infantry Division to the 11th Air Assault Division for the air assault air mobility testing. To do that, they needed soldiers and officers with retainability that weren't going to be moved for a while. So the then commander of the battalion, Lieutenant Colonel—for the

1 life of me I can't remember of his first name, Conger. Came by one day and said, "How
2 would you like to command a rifle company?" I said, "Lead me to it." So on April of '64,
3 I took command of C Company 2nd Battalion, 23rd Infantry. I got promoted to captain in
4 early May. Then in June or late June, early July, then Lieutenant Colonel Moore arrived
5 to take command of the battalion.

6 RV: What do you remember about Moore these first few days and the mood he
7 set?

8 RE: (Chuckles) If you ask General Moore, he'll say, "Don't let Bob Edwards tell
9 stories about me." My first real impression of Colonel Moore, let's call him Colonel
10 Moore because that's was what he was. We were having a, what they called a miniature
11 review, a parade essentially without troops. Battalion commander, staff, color guard, guys
12 on guidon bearers. We get out on the parade field, Colonel Moore looks around and says,
13 "Who is the senior company commander?" We had an aviator at the time serving the
14 ground tour. I said, "I am." He said, "Inspect the company commanders!" And four jaws
15 went (Opens jaw to interviewer) like that (Laughs). That set the mood! He was absolutely
16 no nonsense, but absolutely as fair as you can be. You always knew where you stood. We
17 went from there; we went into the extensive air assault training program at Benning.
18 Culminated in the big air assault test in the Carolinas, in the fall of '64. Ended up in '65
19 and continued training and the rumors start floating around about being deployed and that
20 sort of thing. And then we were deployed.

21 RV: What did you think about that? Is this what you wanted to get into this
22 situation like that?

23 RE: Oh absolutely! By the spring of '65, I'd commanded the company for almost
24 a year! We had the same guys. The same officers, same sergeants, same soldiers.

25 RV: Very tight?

26 RE: Oh yeah, the company was tight and the whole battalion was tight. I came out
27 on orders to Captain Little Schooling, which was then called the Career Course, and they
28 said, "You can stay with the company, or you can go to career course. We can't tell you
29 what's going to happen, but those are your choices." So I talked to the battalion exec
30 then, Mac McCall. He said, "I can't tell you what's going on, but you're really ought to

1 think about staying with the company. So I said yeah. I can always go to the career
2 course; I want to stay with the company. The rest ends up in the book.

3 RV: Well, let's cut to November '65. You guys are over there, you're ready to go.
4 What did you understand, as one of Moore's company's commanders, what did he
5 demanded of you all in the field? What was it there that he wanted you to do?

6 RE: Well, the first thing he wanted you to do, is if he called you on the radio, he
7 didn't want your radio operator answer, he wanted you to answer. But that wasn't just in
8 Vietnam, that was from day one whenever we were in the field. But other than that, he
9 would give you a mission and he wouldn't tell you how to do it. He'd give you guidance
10 and support and all that other good stuff, but he would not be real restrictive. He was just
11 a super commander.

12 RV: Tell me about him at X-Ray. What do you remember about November 14th,
13 and getting in there? Because I know you came in and you were immediately deployed to
14 a blocking position and you got your men set up, and within twenty minutes, the attack
15 came and you all held off, how many? Hundreds? Of North Vietnamese attackers? He
16 tells you, "Here's what you got to do, go!"

17 RE: And that was it!

18 RV: He said this morning you jumped three feet into the air, running!

19 RE: Well, that may be true.

20 RV: What did it actually look like when you came in? And tell me about that
21 moment.

22 RE: C company was the third company in. By monitoring the battalion command,
23 you knew that this was not an ordinary, calm place to be. You knew that the first two
24 companies in were engaged. You knew or I knew that our mission was going to change
25 and that wasn't difficult to accept, because we had practiced that through all of our
26 Benning years. I remember—I distinctively remember seeing it as we came in on what
27 the aviators would call "Short final, looking down at the landing zone." And there's dust,
28 and smoke and there's a few explosions of probably RPGs (Rocket-Propelled Grenades)
29 but maybe mortars. So it tends to get your adrenaline up. From that point on, as I'm
30 quoted in the book, it was trained soldiers who were confident of their leaders.
31 Responding without question and doing what they were told to do. That's what enabled

1 me with ninety percent of my company on that first lift. Take it in, get a quick order, go
2 block and tell the platoon leaders, “You’re on the right, you’re in the center, and you’re
3 in the left. Let’s set up a blocking position.”

4 RV: And you did it.

5 RE: We did it and it really got noisy. I mean, General Moore says that at some
6 point, that he had never heard the volume of gunfire in two wars that he heard in X-Ray.
7 It was, it was just indescribable. It sounded like everybody that had a gun on both sides
8 was firing.

9 RV: Is that when you went to the blocking position, and that’s how—

10 RE: Yes.

11 RV: Tell me about that attack. What is a frontal assault? These wave attacks by
12 the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) pattern. What does that look like and feel like?

13 RE: It’s very simply a bunch of guys deployed down on the ground and here
14 comes a bunch of guys on the other side in different uniforms, running at you. We were
15 just shooting as fast as we can. The amazing thing is, you have to give those guys credit,
16 they didn’t have artillery backing them up. They didn’t have—if they were wounded,
17 they had a very slim chance of being medevac or evac to any type of medical facility. But
18 they attacked and kept attacking until finally we killed enough of them that they backed
19 off late that afternoon.

20 RV: What did you do personally? Tell me you were controlling your platoons.

21 RE: Right. Controlling the platoons. Very worried initially about my left flank
22 because at first it was nobody over there. So when I was confident that the platoons were
23 holding, I got up and around and I knew that Ray Lefebvre had been wounded. He had
24 turn control of Delta Company over to the anti-tank platoon sergeant who was
25 functioning as a rifle platoon. Found him, got Colonel Moore’s permission to put them on
26 my left flank. Although they weren’t attached to me, that gave us four platoons on the
27 southern and southeastern side of the perimeter. Doing all that, I found out that the rifle
28 company mortars, which were supposed to be upon landing consolidated with the Delta
29 Company mortars, nobody had taken charge of them so I got, again Colonel Moore’s
30 permission to put all the mortars under my mortars section sergeant’s control.

1 RV: How are you thinking? Are you thinking that this is the going to make the
2 best blocking force, I got to secure my left flank? Is this all going through your mind?

3 RE: Oh yeah.

4 RV: Are you like, “Okay, I got to get this guy, I got to go back and organize the
5 mortars.”?

6 RE: I wasn’t consciously thinking of that, it was something I discovered in
7 moving around the battlefield and trying to, well making sure my platoons were doing
8 alright. Then thinking of a little bit broader picture about, you know, I got an open left
9 flank, what can we do to help that? I didn’t sit down and say, “Hmm, what should I do
10 next to make this thing better?”

11 RV: Jack Geoghegan’s platoon was there on your left flank, is that right? For
12 Alpha Company there? Is Alpha on your left?

13 RE: Alpha Company as I faced out, was on my right. It was my 3rd Platoon with
14 Bill Franklin as platoon leader. The 1st Platoon in the center with Neil Kroger and then
15 Jack Geoghegan in the 2nd Platoon on the left. Then nothing, until the Delta Company
16 and my tank were filled into Jack’s left.

17 RV: Tell me about Jack Geoghegan briefly.

18 RE: A very talented, levelheaded, for a lack of a better word, cool guy. He was in
19 control, he was always looking out for the troops, his platoon. They really respected and
20 followed him. You couldn’t ask for a better officer. But that kind of description also
21 applies to Neil Kroger and Bill Franklin and—

22 RV: I was going to ask you about them as well.

23 RE: I was blessed with three great platoon leaders and all ironically from kind of
24 different backgrounds. Jack was a graduate of what is in Pennsylvania Military College.
25 He had kind of, almost from day one as a young college student had been immersed in
26 the military. You know, Kroger was an OCS (Officer Candidate School) graduate but a
27 super officer. Bill Franklin had had some enlisted time, then went to OCS, was a couple
28 of years older than them, he was married, had one or two kids. But he was a solid guy
29 too.

30 RV: Knowing this, you had three great lieutenants there. What does that do for a
31 captain? In the heat of something like that.

1 RE: Well you know you can count on these guys to do what they're supposed to
2 do. There was nobody out there that I had to worry about making a mistake. But that
3 could be said about the platoon sergeants, the squad leaders, and the soldiers. The guys in
4 that company, you can count on them to do what they were supposed to do and they
5 demonstrated it.

6 RV: Moore described you all this morning as a "Tight family" that you can rely
7 upon without question.

8 RE: Absolutely. We had—most of us had been together from the spring of '64.
9 Obviously, there was a few changes. But spending that much time together, and we spent
10 probably more time on the field from, say June of '64 through March of '65 in any other
11 unit. A lot of places, a lot of posts, periodically, units will be detailed to post support
12 action details. The 11th Air Assault Division because the mission had been given to test
13 the air mobility concept pulled none of those details. So our soldiers were always there
14 and we were always training. I don't know whether General Moore told you, but for
15 several months starting in June or July of '64, until we went on the air assault tests, we
16 would either walk or fly out into the training area every Monday morning. Come in either
17 Wednesday night or Thursday morning. Clean up that day, have an inspection and on
18 Saturday get the warning order and the order for the next week's training exercise.

19 RV: It was constant?

20 RE: It was constant.

21 RV: Talk about unit cohesion because this continues through the war.

22 RE: It makes all the difference in the world. General Moore's description of
23 family pretty well sums it up. You spend so much time with these guys, that they become
24 part of your family. As such, you know their quirks, you recognize their voices on the
25 radio, you know what their capable of doing. There are instances where frag orders would
26 be issued by either Colonel Moore or Matt Dillon something to the effect of, "You
27 remember how we did such and such operation out on the Upatoi Creek? Well this time
28 hotwire you do what fire chief did and fire chief you do what Jolly Rodger did."

29 RV: It all comes together.

30 RE: It all comes together because you remember who did what and when.

1 RV: Let me ask you about a few individuals and tell me how you remember them
2 then. How you would describe them. Sergeant Major Plumley.

3 RE: The rock of the battalion. Nobody messed with the Sergeant Major. The
4 Company commanders could go to him with an NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer)
5 problem and it wouldn't go any further. But he would say, "Well you really ought to do is
6 this and that or give him another chance or that's it." That's another—we get back to the
7 11th and he didn't post any post support details. Normally, the process of getting rid of a
8 soldier or sergeant in any unit is complicated as can be. In the 11th, it was if the company
9 commander wanted you gone, you were gone that day.

10 RV: What was Plumley like at X-Ray? When you got there, and you were able to
11 finally make some contact with him after that first action was over. What do you
12 remember about him that day?

13 RE: I frankly don't have any specific recollections about dealing with the
14 Sergeant Major and in fact, after my initial encounter on landing with Colonel Moore
15 when he said, "Go block." And a couple of brief conversations about "Can I put the NI
16 tank on my left?" and "Do you have any problem with me consolidating the mortars
17 under Sergeant Matos?" I didn't have any physical contact with Moore. We would talk
18 on the radio, "How you're doing? What do you need?" But I was doing okay, and he
19 didn't need to give me anything. If I needed it, I'm sure I would've got. He had a lot of
20 problems that he had to deal with. He had a platoon that's isolated from his company.
21 He's got for a while, an exposed portion of his perimeter. He's got a landing zone that's
22 too hot to bring in anything for a while. So he didn't need any more problems.

23 RV: How often would he check in with you on the radio? I mean was this, after
24 that first blocking action went in, is this something like every twenty minutes, fifteen
25 minutes, or every hour? Especially going into the evening.

26 RE: I don't think you can assign a time interval to it. He would check in and I
27 think his philosophy was "If I don't hear it from Bob that he needs something, he's doing
28 alright." And the same with John and Tony.

29 RV: Tell me about Henry Herrick's Platoon. What was the fallout? When you got
30 there and found out what happened, I mean I guess you knew this before you arrived.
31 You're on the fourth flight in. Did you know about it before you got there?

1 RE: I knew simply by monitoring the battalion command. I knew that—and I
2 don't think I knew that it was Herrick's Platoon. I knew that a B Company Platoon was
3 isolated. But frankly, I had some issues of my own that I was going to deal with. So it
4 was John Herren's Platoon and he has to worry about that, and Colonel Moore has to
5 worry about it. But I couldn't do anything to help them, so I better worry about my own
6 guys.

7 RV: What—a lot has been said about that maneuver, chasing that far out.
8 Obviously, it was a mistake in the circumstances, what were your thoughts that night?
9 Did you—

10 RE: Again, I was focused on what my guys were doing. Even now, years later you
11 could go back and say, "Well you know, was it a mistake or not?" You got to realize that
12 not only Herrick's decision to do what he did, but for example my decision not to dig in
13 but to maintain a very quiet place. If I had—if he had the luxury of going back and
14 redoing it, you would've done a lot of things differently. Mainly we wouldn't have gone
15 into X-Ray at the first place, if we knew we were going to run into two regiments of
16 NVA.

17 RV: Right.

18 RE: But on the battlefield, these decisions need to be made instantaneously. You
19 don't have the luxury to do a big analysis.

20 RV: Tell me about Joe Galloway. He's in a unique situation. This guy's out there
21 and he's the only reporter out there that night. He's got experience with you guys, he's
22 been out in the field with you marching, he's got Moore's respect, from what both of
23 them say. Tell me about Galloway being out there on the night of the 14th. You were
24 wounded on the 15th.

25 RE: Well again, Joe stayed with Colonel Moore wherever Colonel Moore was in
26 the CP (Command Post) or wherever. I don't recall ever talking directly with Joe that
27 night. It had to take—it had to take a lot of guts for a guy who didn't have to be there.
28 Whom had not sworn to obey the orders of the president and the officers appointed over
29 him. He could have easily caught a helicopter out.

30 RV: Because he did not do that, has that separated him in your mind?

1 RE: The only thing that sets Joe apart from all the other officers and sergeants,
2 and soldiers in the battalion to this day, is that he didn't wear uniform. He is considered a
3 member of the 1st and the 7th.

4 RV: Talk about the night of the 14th. What do you remember?

5 RE: Nobody got any sleep. Everybody was waiting for the proverbial next shoe to
6 drop. There was some nervous firing at shadows going on. I don't know whether Matt
7 Dillon has signed up for an interview,

8 RV: I talked to him this morning.

9 RE: Okay, he may have told you the story about Tony Nadal's M79 grenade
10 launcher, "If he fires once more, I'm coming there and sticking that thing in a place
11 where it doesn't belong."

12 RV: Yes. He absolutely talked about that.

13 RE: So those kinds of things characterized that whole night. They did some
14 efforts—some illumination. The majority opinion was the illumination was hurting more
15 than it was helping, so keep the illumination turned off.

16 RV: Why was that? Why did you all feel that way?

17 RE: I don't know. You're there, you're down in the ground and it's nice and dark,
18 and you're kind of accustomed to it and then oh god! All of the sudden it's light! Now
19 that you think back, it was probably, "Okay! Either you keep it on constantly all the time"
20 So we're always dealing with this illumination situation or turn it off so were dealing
21 with the dark situation. But don't pop one, light up the area for a minute or two and it
22 goes dark again.

23 RV: Keep it going or turn it off. Did you go around that night and talk to your
24 troopers? What did you say to them?

25 RE: You know, "How you doing? You guys did a hell of a job this afternoon.
26 Keep it up." You bond with them. You go out and make sure they know they ain't out
27 there alone. That somebody is considered about them and somebody is backing them up.

28 RV: Franklin, Kroger, and Geoghegan. What did you say to them?

29 RE: Same thing. At that point in time, the distinction between platoon leader,
30 platoon sergeant, and soldier kind of get blurred. They're all out there doing what they're
31 trained to do.

1 RV: Morning of the 15th. Rough morning.

2 RE: Very interesting morning.

3 RV: This is, according to Hal Moore this morning and other times he has

4 discussed, this was perhaps the worse day of the three and the worst time of all times at

5 X-Ray.

6 RE: That is probably—that is, without a doubt, when we came the closest to

7 losing it.

8 RV: What happened over there? Where you were.

9 RE: Well, dawn comes. Colonel Moore gives the order to send out patrols.

10 Forward of the perimeter, see what's going on. I relay that order down, the platoon leader

11 sends them out. Shortly thereafter, big volume of gunfire again. So it's obvious that

12 something has happened. I get on the radio and find that Jim Lane of the attached B

13 Company Platoon, he's back and he's okay. Bill Franklin's back and his guys are back,

14 and their okay. But no answer from Neil or Jack. Gun fire all over the place. We get our

15 artillery started. I look up and see within fifty-eight, a hundred yards or something, guys

16 in uniforms other than GI (Government Issue) fatigues. Sergeant Hofstetter, who is my

17 commerce sergeant, acting as an RTO (Radio Telephone Operator) because of a shortage

18 of people, stands up and takes a round right through the neck. Then there was no doubt

19 that was a family. It went through, the blood spurted out, his eyes rolled back, and he

20 went down. So he was gone like that. I stood up, saw two or three enemy soldiers within

21 then hand grenade range. Elected to throw a hand grenade at them. Stood up, threw the

22 grenade and as I let go of the grenade, I feel a tremendous slap on the back and the next

23 thing I know, I'm down in the hole. Can't move my left arm. Get on the radio, tell

24 Colonel Moore, "I'm hit." Probably, in that transmission or the next one I say, "I think

25 I'm in trouble up here, I need some help." He says or Matt Dillon, I can't remember

26 which one now, "I would like to but right now we don't have much of a reserve. We

27 don't have any reserve. I can't help you; you need to hang on." So we did.

28 RV: When were you evacuated?

29 RE: Sometime Monday morning. Say after ten or eleven o'clock. Things that

30 they—as quick as the firing started, it just then kind of died away. Then it became safer

31 folks to stand up and do things. But there for a while, the then four us, myself, Ernie

1 Polone, Castleberry, the Artillery Liaison Sergeant and Buster Brown, his RTO, we were
2 down in the bottom of the hole and we literally, it's like in a movie. We saw the bullets
3 kicking up dirt on the top of the fox hole.

4 RV: What does it feel like to be shot? You said it's a slap on the back?

5 RE: Exactly, I have been asked this. I've been places with Joe Marm and other
6 guys and everybody just—It is like being hit with a either a rifle butt or baseball bat. It's
7 just a tremendous impact. You don't feel any pain initially, you feel this impact and
8 you're just stunned.

9 RV: How much pain were you in after that wore off? This all happened and thee
10 you're down in the foxhole.

11 RE: Well I really was not in that much pain. Couldn't move my arm. Not sure if I
12 could stand up, but the circumstances did not permit standing up anyway. I was obviously
13 very worried about holding that position. I never lost conscious. So I couldn't have been
14 too much pain.

15 RV: Well, they describe you, by the time you got evacuated as "Very weak."
16 When you got the transfusion blood, you kind of popped back awake and you were able
17 to talk about what happened. Were you evacuated at LZ (Landing Zone) Falcon or back
18 to Holloway? Do you remember?

19 RE: I think I went out on one of Crandall's lift birds. Along with Bill Franklin and
20 a lot of other wounded guys. I'm pretty sure that we went to Holloway. I think the
21 medical company was there. We went in Hueys and then we went in Chinooks to the
22 hospital in Qui Nhon.

23 RV: Tell me about—while we just mentioned that Bruce Crandall, Ed Freeman,
24 tell me about the Huey pilots?

25 RE: What can you say? They were our lifeline. They got us in. They were
26 determined that they were going to get us out, and while we were there were going to
27 keep us supplied with what we need, and they were going to haul out the wounded. You
28 have to have—an infantry guy gets down on the ground and he can dig a hole, given the
29 time and he can seek cover to some degree. The poor helicopter pilot, he flies into the
30 landing zone and he's sitting in the left or right seat of that Huey with all the protection
31 that plexiglass provides and he's has to wait while either the troops get on or off or they

1 kick out cases of ammo or whatever. You really got to be a cool guy to do that. Knowing
2 that there are people out there that very much want to shoot you.

3 RV: How would you describe your enemy? The Cav soldiers and the Vietcong
4 were there.

5 RE: Well, I talked about this earlier. They are out there on the end of the—how
6 long their supply line and it's coming by backpack or bicycle or something like that.
7 They don't have any fire support. If they get wounded, the best they can hope for is
8 somebody is going to drag them back to some non-air conditioned, definitely unsanitary,
9 maybe hole in the ground or hut. Whether they get any anesthesia or not for what the
10 doctor or medic is going to do to them, who knows. So they were obviously well
11 disciplined. They were well trained. They're good shots. They were fighting for what
12 they thought was right and we were fighting for what we thought was right. We had the
13 advantage of knowing that if you get shot, there's this whole medical chain there to take
14 care of you. I went from a hole in the ground at ten-thirty, eleven o'clock in the morning
15 to an air-conditioned tent- maybe a Quonset hut. With white sheets and tubes, and all this
16 other stuff and late that night I was in an operating room.

17 RV: That's incredible support.

18 RE: Absolutely!

19 RV: When did you find out about your lieutenants and their status, and what had
20 happened to them. Because Franklin goes out with you, right?

21 RE: Right. Probably while I was still in Qui Nhon, somebody from the company
22 came down and kind of broke the news of what had happened.

23 RV: How did you react to that?

24 RE: I don't think you can describe the reaction. You lose all these guys that had
25 been part of your life for so long and you wonder how they didn't make it, and I did.
26 There is no way to describe it, it is a huge loss. Some folks deal with it better than others.

27 RV: How did you deal with it? You're out of the fight here.

28 RE: Well, I can distinctly remember leaving X-Ray. Being thrown on a helicopter
29 and telling Colonel Moore, I was absolutely convinced that I was going to go back, they
30 were going to slap a bandage on me and I was maybe going to spend a little time at the
31 hospital, and I was coming back to the battalion. I said, "I won't to save me a job!" Well,

1 that obviously didn't come to pass but you know you deal with it. You tell yourself, "This
2 is what war is about." And some guys make it, some don't. You hope you did your best
3 to ensure that as many as possible of your guys come back. The thing, as you reflect back
4 on it over the years, while obviously I would've like to have done much better. I do know
5 that the sacrifices of the guys from Jack's platoon and Neil's platoon, they kept the
6 battalion from getting split in half.

7 RV: It's your guys.

8 RE: Exactly.

9 RV: What did you think about the book coming out and the popularity of it? And
10 now it's almost required reading across the country in military history courses and at the
11 academies. Then the movie! How did this change your life? What did you think about the
12 fact that—

13 RE: Well, it has not changed my life. But the first thing about the book is, for the
14 longest period of time, Joe and Colonel Moore, by then General Moore, would say, "You
15 know, we're going to write this." But it got to be a joke. Yeah, come on guys? When's
16 the book coming out? They interviewed Ray Lefebvre and I in '81, maybe '82 and when
17 I was a Colonel at Fort Benning and Ray was still kind of recuperating—no, Ray had
18 retired by then, Ray had a civilian job but he was close enough by. Had Ray and his wife
19 up to our quarters and Julie and Hal came over from Auburn. We had dinner and he sat
20 Ray and I down. Plopped a tape recorder on the table and did what we're doing now.
21 Then we kind of knew this book thing this was serious. The book itself—people will
22 come up to me and say, "Hey, I saw the movie!" And my first response is, "That's great,
23 but did you read the book?" Because I said, "The movie only tells the story of a few guys.
24 There were four-hundred and fifty in there. Each of whom deserves special mention
25 somewhere." And Joe and General Moore now, they made a superhuman effort to talk, to
26 find and talk to as many soldiers as they could and to tell their story, even if it was only
27 one line about John Smith from Texarkana who was in the 2nd Platoon of Bravo
28 company. The movie is a movie. It does a pretty job at telling the story. I guess Randall
29 Wallace will see this and I'll be on his crap list. But there are somethings that are
30 "Hollywooded" up. I understand that, my son makes films. You have to appeal to the
31 audience. So the movie is pretty good, if you haven't, you got to read the book.

1 RV: So the film and the notoriety of the film, working with Wallace and Gibson
2 and Barry Pepper and all of these people. Was that a good thing for this unit? Or let's
3 leave it in the book and move forward. How do you see that?

4 RE: Oh, I think it was good.

5 RV: Given the history of Vietnam war movies, that don't really get things quite
6 right according to a lot of veterans, they're false things! Were you, "Wait a minute, this—
7 you're going to mess up what's been done in this volume."

8 RE: No, Randall Wallace was upfront before he even started the movie. He wrote
9 everybody in the battalion that he had an address for. He said, "This is not going to be a
10 documentary. I cannot tell everybody's story. There will be some events that I have to—"
11 I can't remember the word he used, "But in order to portray them, I have to have them
12 happen to somebody that maybe it didn't happen to." We all—and then there was a
13 wavier release at the bottom, "Yeah, that's fine, go ahead and do it." That sort of thing.
14 So it was no secret of what the movie was going to do.

15 RV: And you were all okay with that?

16 RE: Yeah.

17 RV: Were you on set?

18 RE: No. They didn't need any more advisors down there. (Chuckles)

19 RV: I know they had quite a few. Well, this is the 40th anniversary of the battles.
20 Forty years, almost exactly. What is it like looking back forty years, onto those days there
21 on X-Ray?

22 RE: I'm not sure I have an answer. This is the 40th anniversary, but every
23 Veterans' Day weekend for how long has this group gotten together and honored those
24 guys that didn't make it back.

25 RV: Is that what you all are about? Is that what your prime focus is?

26 RE: That's what I think this is all about. The 1st and the 7th, this affair this
27 weekend encompasses everybody that was involved in the Pleiku campaign. Not just
28 guys that were in Ia Drang and or Albany. The 1st and 7th has a members only reunion
29 each year in April. While we do some memorializing and honoring there, that is more of
30 a, "Let's get together with some old friends and tell war stories and have a good time
31 event" than this one. I see this one because of the location in Washington and the

1 Vietnam Memorial, more as a way to honor not only those guys that were killed in the
2 battle, but obviously over forty years you lose a lot of other guys through quote “natural
3 causes”. So even the older—my 1st Sergeant is gone now. Surviving Platoon Sergeant
4 Jameson has passed away. Some of the younger soldiers, Ernie Polone, my radio
5 operator, died maybe five or six years ago now of a heart attack in Chicago. So we’re
6 honoring all those guys. Getting back to the focus of this and the 1st and 7th. You’ll find
7 that this weekend, you’ll have a lot of the survivor families show up. Barbara Geoghegan
8 will be here, Claudia Polone, Ernie’s wife is coming in. Neil Kroger’s brother, Jeff with
9 some other family members come into this one. While they are welcomed to our 1st and
10 7th only event, more of them tend to come to this one.

11 RV: What’s it like seeing the family members of Kroger and these guys?

12 RE: You’re glad to see them because they know we haven’t forgotten them. But
13 what do you say to them?

14 RV: What do you say to Barbara Geoghegan?

15 RE: What do you say? Barbara is a little easier because I have probably seen her
16 on more occasions than some of the others. Widener College, which Pennsylvania
17 Military became Widener some years ago, they had an affair honoring Jack a few years
18 ago. What I’ve told them is, “The efforts and sacrifice of mainly those the platoon, Jack,
19 Neil Kroger, their platoon sergeants, their squad leaders and soldiers that died. Their
20 sacrifice prevented a much greater loss of life.” What else can you say?

21 RV: Okay, well, we are out of time here. Is there anything else you would like to
22 say? Looking into the future, the people who are going to see you a hundred of years
23 from now, talking about those days in November ’65. What do you want them to know
24 about you?

25 RE: Should’ve asked me that so I could think about that one ahead of time. What
26 I want them to know is that these were very brave, young men. Who were given a job to
27 do and they did it superbly. Unfortunately, a number of them did not survive to sit here
28 forty years from now and tell the story. They weren’t sitting around the campfire
29 debating about whether the United States should be in Vietnam or anything else. The
30 officers took a commission, and the soldiers took an oath. They fulfilled the promises
31 they made in that oath.

- 1 RV: Thank you very much Bob.
- 2 RE: Thank you!
- 3 (End of interview)