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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Bud (Jesse) L. Alley
Conducted by Dr. John Ron Milam
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.

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Dr. John Ron Milam: My name is Dr. Ron Milam, with Texas Tech University Vietnam Center. I am talking today to Bud Alley. Bud, I'd like to start by asking you to give me your MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) and your rank on November 14th, 1965.

Bud Alley: Okay, I was communication officer for the 2nd Battalion, 7th Cav of the 1st Air Cav Division. What was the other thing again?

JM: You were a communications officer, and your responsibilities that day?

BA: Yeah, well on the 14th, as communications officer, I was responsible for the communication of the battalion internally and external communications. It was—I was a 2nd lieutenant in a captain's job, it was a staff position.

JM: Staff position.

BA: Non-combatant staff position. (Laughs)

JM: Yeah, as we'll find out as we talk. Okay, let's back up then to when you joined the cav. What date, or approximately did you go to Benning and joined the cav.

BA: In the middle of June.

JM: Of what year?

BA: '65.

JM: Of '65. So you get there a month or two before they depart for Vietnam.

1 BA: Yeah, now backing up a little further, I was with the 2nd Infantry Division.
2 That's who I joined when I went in at Fort Benning.

3 JM: I see.

4 BA: I'd just gotten back from communication officer school and our brigade got
5 sent to Fort Bragg to train the ROTC incoming troops because the 82nd was deployed
6 down to the Dominican Republic. So I was up there happily training ROTC troops when
7 the word came.

8 JM: So, now you were commissioned 2nd lieutenant ROTC?

9 BA: Yes sir, from university. Yes sir.

10 JM: What was your branch communication?

11 BA: I was infantry.

12 JM: You were infantry. You weren't single corps, you were infantry.

13 BA: Yes, I was apart another program too, that was kind of unusual, it was the U2
14 program. Do you know about the U2 program?

15 JM: U2 program. Well, is that the one where you didn't have to go to OBC (Basic
16 Orientation Course), you could go directly to troop command?

17 BA: Yup.

18 JM: How long was that program in place?

19 BA: I think we were the only ones. (Laughs)

20 JM: I've done a lot of research on schools for officers during the Vietnam war and
21 this is a new one for me. I didn't know about that program; it must've been short lived.

22 BA: It was. Enrique Pujals, who was with us in the valley. Jim Bail, who is since
23 deceased was one of them. Paul Bonacourse was another. Mike Mantegna was another.
24 So there was a number of us and those were guys I knew were in that little class with,
25 there was about fourteen or fifteen, and Joe Marm was the one of the cadry guys of our
26 little. What they did was they had a little school for about ten days in October, after we'd
27 gone in August, that they put us through.

28 JM: During that same time there was a big controversy as to whether or not
29 academy graduates had to go to OBC, because the feeling was that they had already gone
30 through the four years of hell, why go to OBC? So for a time, they didn't have to go to
31 OBC but it changes then again and they required it again, it's back and forth. But I was

1 not aware of this U2 program, so I appreciate you making me aware of it, it adds to my
2 body of knowledge.

3 BA: Yeah, that was for untrained 2nd lieutenants, as far as I can tell. (Laughs)

4 JM: Yes. So you are with the second infantry division at Benning or at Bragg?

5 BA: Well, we were stationed at Benning at PCS (Permanent Change of
6 Station). Then we were detailed up to Fort Bragg.

7 JM: Up to Bragg, while they took the place of the 82nd, which has gone down to the
8 Dominican.

9 BA: Right.

10 JM: So you are part of that, then in June you get orders for the 1st Air Cav?

11 BA: Yeah, it's verbal orders commanding general, first available transportation,
12 getting my butt from Bragg back to Benning.

13 JM: Bragg to Benning. Was your specific job "identify"?

14 BA: Yeah, I was supposed to be a communications officer for, at the time it was
15 the 2nd Battalion of the 9th Infantry, which was still part of 2nd Infantry Division.

16 JM: Mhmm. That's why.

17 BA: At building number, so and tell.

18 JM: Then they changed colors and become the 2nd of the 7th, as part of the first air.

19 BA: Yes.

20 JM: Your job was staff 2nd lieutenant, but you're filling a captain slot as the
21 communications officer of that battalion?

22 BA: Yes.

23 JM: Who was your next in command? Who was your chain of command up?

24 BA: Initially, I reported to, on the staff end, to the S-3 operations officer.

25 JM: To the S-3?

26 BA: Who was Barney Gill. Barney had been an All-American football player at
27 University of Virginia. That was before they had the five- or six-year programs to
28 graduate. Barney got out and joined the army, and he was an assistant football coach at
29 army. It had been Barney's career was football coach at army.

30 JM: He was a major?

31 BA: Yeah, he was a major.

1 JM: You're the young 2nd lieutenant filling the captain slot as the comm officer,
2 non-combatant, with the 2nd of the 7th. You get orders then in July, President Johnson
3 makes the big announcement, 1st Air Cav is moving to Vietnam.

4 BA: Yep.

5 JM: When you signed up as the commo officer, did you have a hint? Did you get
6 an idea before Johnson's speech, that the 1st Air Cav was going to be Nam very soon?

7 BA: We did, we did. As officers what they did was they took those of us on the
8 staff over to a building and we signed in and saw some classified footage that was shot by
9 the air force of Highway 19. We were told then, at this briefing, that this is a high
10 likelihood that this an area in the highway that we will be traveling. I happened to go to
11 college with Bernard Fall's daughter. So I was a little bit familiar with him and being
12 curious, I went and checked the book out of the library and—

13 JM: *Streets without Joy*?

14 BA: Yes! I'm reading about Highway 19 with no—you know we were group full.
15 Where Groupement Mobile 1000 got annihilated, eight thousand men in the Mang Yang
16 Pass. I'm reading this as were going to this briefing. (Laughs) Don't think we want to go
17 there!

18 JM: He was tragically killed in Vietnam, I believe in '67. A few years, so he was
19 still alive when you were, still there probably. So you get on the—you get orders. What
20 kind of training in Benning did you have before going to Vietnam for the job you were
21 in? Or going to be in?

22 BA: (Chuckles) Next to none!

23 JM: Tell us a little bit of what your job was supposed to be? I think that maybe
24 would help.

25 BA: Okay, backing up, at the time we had the old radio series, which was the
26 Korean War radios, which were vacuum tubes. So basically, I wasn't responsible for
27 setting up the net for the battalion, maintaining it and pretty much keeping the old man in
28 communication with up and down the line. It was primarily used in the old radio systems
29 until we got the orders and then we get the new radios.

30 JM: Prick 25?

31 BA: Yes, PRC-25.

1 JM: So those were—now those were basically new to the army in '65?

2 BA: Except for the 1st and the 7th. Who had been a part of the 11th Air Assault.

3 JM: Right, they had been training with them at Benning, but the 2nd of the 7th you
4 didn't have them yet.

5 BA: I was—I and one of my commo repairmen, two of us had seen the things. He
6 had seen it at training, and I'd seen it at commo officer's school.

7 JM: So you were excited about getting that, it was an improvement from the old
8 Korean stuff?

9 BA: Yeah. You got it and it was straight into the box. This box over to the
10 CONEX box. All the equipment personnel we were getting from all over the place. Some
11 as far away as Fort Louis, Washington.

12 JM: What about your staff? What was staff—

13 BA: Staff. (Chuckles) I had a platoon sergeant who had been there, who had been
14 in place. What happened, the 2nd Battalion of the 9th Infantry at the time was an existing
15 unit. It had about—it was staffed maybe about forty percent of personnel that worked
16 together and then the rest of us were all new. My platoon sergeant had been in that unit
17 for some time and two or three of my radiomen and wiremen were.

18 JM: But, just so I understand the way the chain works, the RTOs (Radio
19 Telephone Operator) that are responsible within their own units report to their part of the
20 line units and they report to the—whoever it is.

21 BA: Yes.

22 JM: You don't have any chain responsibility over them?

23 BA: No.

24 JM: So you're responsible for—

25 BA: Supplying the operations center radio operators and for their communication
26 and the message sent—

27 JM: Oh, okay. It's a part of S3, at the battalion level.

28 BA: Yes, the message center belonged to me. The telephones belonged to me.
29 Power generators for electricity belonged to me, and the radios belonged to me.

1 JM: But in all ways that we would look at this, this was a staff function at the
2 battalion level being fulfilled by a second lieutenant in a captain slot. Is that the picture as
3 we leave the country?

4 BA: Yeah. U2 second lieutenant (Laughs).

5 JM: Okay, so which boat did you go over on?

6 BA: The *Maurice Rose*.

7 JM: You were on the *Rose*, okay. On the trip over, thirty days or so, what did you
8 do?

9 BA: Played poker, tried to stay out of the way of Colonel John D. White, who was
10 our battalion commander at the time. Did virtually nothing. As far as working
11 professionally, working we took some language classes.

12 JM: Vietnamese language?

13 BA: Yeah, we had one of those brigade officers was teaching us a little language
14 class.

15 JM: I see. Did you have time to read up on Vietnam? You said you'd already read
16 some Bernard Fall's stuff.

17 BA: I bought his book and took it with me.

18 JM: Okay.

19 BA: The *Streets Without the Joy*, so I had it on the boat with me. We played a
20 little poker, and it was—

21 JM: Were you excited about going? Were you depressed about it? What was your
22 general state of mind?

23 BA: Both. I was engaged. We had planned to get married that following
24 December and we had gone through a pretty tormented time of, "Do we get married, or
25 not get married?" She hasn't graduated yet; she was going to graduate in December. So
26 that had been kind of torturous and it was tough leaving her.

27 JM: Sure.

28 BA: The year prior to that I'd lost my mother to cancer. Right after I went on
29 active duty, so to kind of be jerked around, okay you're going. Then you are with the
30 guys and your onboard the ship and it's that, "What are we getting into?" kind of

1 mystery. Of course, everybody got that mystique, or you wonder how you're going to
2 stand up in combat, or what happens is somebody actually shoots at me.

3 JM: But did you sort of think that, since I'm a staff officer at the battalion level
4 that my chances of being in actual combat are probably small, compared to all these other
5 guys I'm looking at? I mean, that would've been a reasonable thing to believe, I think. So
6 you come into Qui Nhon after 30 days on sea, are you chopper or truck over to An Khe?

7 BA: I got my first helicopter ride.

8 JM: You got your first helicopter ride? (Chuckles)

9 BA: Yeah, the air mobile! We had one minor—

10 JM: Chinook?

11 BA: Yeah, it was a Chinook.

12 JM: CH-47, okay. So you flew over to An Khe to a place, there's nothing there.
13 You're going to build a base camp for a division?

14 BA: Yeah, yeah. Our advance party was there. They had sent a hundred people
15 over as an advance party to kind of try to do some prep for the ground.

16 JM: On the boat going over, was there anticipation that you would have to do an
17 invasion of the coast, like a D-Day kind of thing? Is that what y'all talked about?

18 BA: Yeah, yeah. That's what we had in our mind.

19 JM: And instead—

20 BA: Instead it was—well, it passed out, several things happened that night. We
21 were up onboard, watching the rockets and the flairs go off, and at the meeting they
22 passed out the ammo and then they come in, call us in and take all our money away and
23 give us script. Then they made the announcement, "We're going in administratively. No
24 weapons are to be loaded! At all!" This is still the middle of the night; you go back
25 outside, and you were seeing—

26 JM: You're there where you can see armaments being fired at night?

27 BA: Yeah.

28 JM: And contacts 173rd into far away, I suppose marines and everything else.
29 You're being told to not lock and load, that there's going to be—now I don't remember
30 the exact incidents, but I've read where even in some cases, women in Áo dài and native

1 dress were there to greet troops. That the General Westmoreland was at one of them
2 and—

3 BA: Yeah, he wasn't near when I was—

4 JM: Yes, but it was an administratively—that's what they called it, you would be
5 coming on shore administratively, how interesting. Did it make you feel a little better at
6 that moment?

7 BA: I didn't quite know what to think at that a point. (Chuckles) Anyway, we go
8 down the rope ladders into these LSDs (Dock Landing Ship) and off to the shore and get
9 out in the sand, and somebody is saying, "Get on deuce and a half," so we load up on
10 deuce and a half and we go over to an airfield, get on a Chinooks and off we go!

11 JM: As soon as you get to An Khe, your job is to set up the communications for
12 the battalion.

13 BA: Yes.

14 JM: Now, there would be, I assume there would've been a—this is a brigade level
15 that is going over, so was there a brigade commo officer?

16 BA: Yes, there was.

17 JM: That would be in charge of getting—

18 BA: He was a captain.

19 JM: Now, did you report to him? You reported to the S3?

20 BA: I reported to the S3 and Dan Boone was Captain of the headquarters
21 company and he was my CO (Commanding Officer) for administrative purposes.

22 JM: So between sometime in August when you get there and November 14th,
23 what all did you do? What was your job?

24 BA: We got our equipment in, we were getting it out, we got it tested out. We
25 went out to the An Khe Pass. An Khe is on a plateau. We went out there on operation as
26 plateau security or guardians, there was kind of a shake out. From there, we went onto
27 some other—we jumped off onto a couple other shake out missions down in the Valley,
28 towards the coast.

29 JM: That was "Operation Silver Bayonet", did you participate in that?

30 BA: Yeah. Then we—during that operation while we were at the pass, I was
31 responsible for maintaining. They were trying out new techniques and they divided the

1 battalion in half and put part of it under the command of the executive officer and they
2 called it Task Force Mallet. Major Mallet had it, he was down in the valley and they had
3 a separate operation center, and so my job was to maintain the communication between,
4 we were still using the old written orders, message center runs down, we were still
5 learning how to operate the radios and stuff. So there was some breakdowns, so
6 occasionally I had to ride down to the bottom and deliver the message, and ride back up. I
7 did that because I didn't want my men to risk it and get shot down. Fortunately, we
8 didn't, we never did have any contact at night, but I wouldn't go take any chances.

9 JM: When were you issued your M16?

10 BA: I think we got them in Benning, honestly, I can't—

11 JM: You mean before? Then you carried them on ship. When did you first fire it?

12 BA: After I was in Vietnam.

13 JM: After you were in Vietnam? You'd never even—have you ever fired any
14 M16 before?

15 BA: No, not at all.

16 JM: You fired M14 in training, that was your training weapon, but you didn't go
17 to OBC, so you fired it probably in ROTC. Summer camp?

18 BA: I never fired the M14, I fired the M1.

19 JM: M1!

20 BA: In summer camp.

21 JM: At summer camp? For goodness sake!

22 BA: And it was a timing issue. When I went in August of '64, went straight to
23 unit and we went straight out into the field, we were out in the field for three months.
24 During that three-month time, we were aggressors toward the 11th Air Assault. We were
25 mechanized infantry, and we played the role of tanks. So they were testing these various
26 concepts of air mobility against tanks, among other things. During that time, we were out,
27 I came back in, we were there for about a month. You got Thanksgiving and Christmas
28 kind of piled in. Then in January I get sent out to Fort Sill for commo school. So I'm in
29 commo officer school for almost four months, come back and I'm there for two nights,
30 and go to Bragg. I missed all those times of qualifying for M14.

1 JM: So, you're not a weapons man, you're not a gun man in this job that you're
2 in. Did you ever have any background with guns before you got in the army?

3 BA: Um-hm.

4 JM: Okay, let's fast forward to November 14th. Tell me what happened that
5 morning when—what was the first time you knew there was going to be an operation?

6 BA: Let me get my bearings here. You're saying the 14th?

7 JM: November 14th. That's the day of X-Ray. The first insertion into X-Ray.

8 BA: I was—our battalion was sent to LZ (Landing Zone) Golf.

9 JM: Golf? Okay.

10 BA: We were traveling, we had a brand-new battalion commander, brand new
11 executive officer, brand new operations officer, we had two brand new company
12 commanders, five of our second lieutenants were out of country with illnesses. We'd
13 already began sending people home from the rotational standpoint. I took a convoy,
14 Lieutenant John Howard and I, our job from headquarters company, they flew the line
15 companies in—

16 JM: To X-Ray?

17 BA: No.

18 JM: No, I'm sorry, to Golf.

19 BA: No, they didn't fly them to Golf. They flew them to Catecka tea plantation
20 with the C-130s and Caribous.

21 JM: I see.

22 BA: I flew—we had two deuce and a half's. We needed to take Jeeps and I had
23 three Jeeps, they were communications Jeeps. I took the Jeeps and the two. John was in
24 the rear and I was at the front and we convoyed up through Mang Yang Pass. With all the
25 stoves and cooking utensils, generators and everything. About eight of us, either eight or
26 ten, and John and I.

27 JM: This is like the 14th or in that area?

28 BA: Yeah, and off we go! We drive up that morning up through Mang Yang Pass.

29 JM: Okay, what happened? Continue the story.

30 BA: We get there, we figure out where we are supposed to go out in the tea
31 plantation, we get out there. This is not a convoy; this is not a high traffic highway.

1 (Chuckles) We get out to the tea plantation and find out where we're supposed to go,
2 report to Captain Dan, so we go into LZ Golf. Then equipment is coming in. At the time,
3 we were operating—

4 JM: You flew into Golf then? From the tea plantation?

5 BA: Flew into Golf with the helicopters—yeah, on helicopters.

6 JM: To do what now? I want to understand your mission.

7 BA: We were air assault; I was going inside the headquarters—

8 JM: To set up the battalion headquarters?

9 BA: Battalion headquarters at LZ Golf.

10 JM: Okay, which is going to consist of a small CP (Command Post) with some
11 Prick 25s?

12 BA: At that time, no. At that time, on that operation, our battalion went with a
13 complete compliment of headquarters elements. Headquarters company consisted of
14 support platoon, communication platoon, and medical platoon. We took everything we
15 had out there with us. We took tents, CP tents, big tents. We took generators. We took my
16 single-sideband radios. The big Collins single side 106s. My 25s and my Jeep.

17 JM: I see. So you had everything?

18 BA: We were out there like a mac—we had everything but the air conditioning
19 and ice cream out there, in the middle of the freaking jungle.

20 JM: So you were out there setting up headquarters.

21 BA: Yeah and fire up the generators. We've got radio repairmen out there, we got
22 wiremen out there, we got cooks out there, we got truck drivers out there, we got truck
23 driver repairman out there. We got the whole component, we got the S1 clerk out there.

24 JM: So, you even had personnel? Administration, everything?

25 BA: Yeah, we got the chaplain assistant out there.

26 JM: I see. Okay. Now, tell me what happens next. Take me through these next
27 few days if you will.

28 BA: Well, obviously the 1st and the 7th hits the fan at X-Ray. Our Bravo Company
29 had been—was a brigade reserve and it got attached over real quick. They went in and
30 fought there at X-Ray. Then the morning of, it just kept getting worse. I was on the radio,
31 and I was helping of doing some relaying from the Lognet, because we were having a

1 few difficulties so I could get X-Ray on my radios, so I can monitor what was going on
2 there and could relay back to Pleiku for supplies and stuff that they needed as they were
3 calling it in. So I did that, and my men did that—

4 JM: Was that your job? Or was that just— that would've been normally what
5 would've happened, no matter where you were. If you were back in Pleiku instead of LZ
6 Golf you would've done that.

7 BA: Yeah. Somebody had—we could pick up the ball. So we were doing that.
8 The morning—that went on through the morning and after about—late in the afternoon,
9 one o'clock maybe, time is not my strong suit here. Major Henry came up, he was our
10 executive officer, and he said—in order, they were trying to get us to get reinforce
11 Colonel Moore. So they took—Major Henry took himself, John Howard and I as
12 lieutenants, John's medics, he took about five or six of his medics. I took about five of
13 my commo guys because they needed radios, they lost radios and they didn't have
14 anybody to operate them. We went with Alpha Company, Joel Sugdinis' company to try
15 to get into X-Ray. We were not able to get in that afternoon.

16 JM: I see.

17 BA: We went back to- I believe LZ Columbus it was either—

18 JM: That was because LZ X-Ray had been closed by the colonel.

19 BA: We were trying to walk in.

20 JM: Oh, you were going to walk in?

21 BA: Yeah, we were trying to get in overland, but yeah, we couldn't get in. Didn't
22 hit anything, we had some natural obstacles, we had some water problems. So long story
23 short, we overnighted at either LZ Falcon or LZ Columbus. Then we got up about four
24 o'clock the next morning, made a diversionary move about a thousand meters north and
25 came back, and get into LZ X-Ray that morning. As we were going in, the ARA (Aerial
26 Rocket Artillery) spotted movement simultaneously on the mountain side, we were
27 coming in opposite from the mountain side, we were coming in from the east. On the
28 mountain side on the west, the wave attacks were going on. We're coming in this way
29 and the ARA right at dawn spots movement and they open up on us, and we get four guys
30 killed, friendly fire as we were trying to go in before we get that resolved. We ended
31 up—

1 JM: You say you got four guys killed, what was the situation? You say it was
2 friendly fire, what did you do at that moment?

3 BA: I was far enough back in the column, there wasn't anything for me to do
4 other than the column stop and everybody hits the ground. Then word came back, and we
5 stayed there for a while until they got it sorted out up front with Major Henry and
6 Sugdinis.

7 JM: Okay, go ahead.

8 BA: So then we got on in, and when we got into the LZ, by the time we got to the
9 CP there at X-Ray, the fox hole there at the ant hill, we tried to set up communications,
10 tried to get an antenna up. So we made a jerry-rigged antenna. I climbed up the damn
11 tree. (Laughs) Stupid but got the antenna up and had it hanging up there, and in the
12 meantime, the battle, the fight actually was ending over there on the far side of the
13 perimeter from us. So we kind of took over communications and were helping out
14 wherever we can help out. John and the medics were helping the aid station, and there
15 wasn't an aid station just the ant hill, everyone is piled up.

16 JM: Were you- this is your first sighting of combat, were you shocked?

17 BA: Mm-hmm.

18 JM: The extend of it? Real war?

19 BA: I was scarred shitless. Yeah, it was—we were scared on one hand, and on
20 the other, I went in as a volunteer to X-Ray and John did.

21 JM: But it doesn't —the battle is over for many of those troops. A Company, 1st
22 of the 7th is decimated. They're down less than fifty percent I believe. So, they fly back to
23 Plei Me and they are pretty much out of the flight because they don't have anybody left.

24 BA: They extract the 1st of the 7th back to Plei Me.

25 JM: Right. But it's not over for you, tell me what happens next. Where do you
26 go?

27 BA: The next morning, morning of the 17th, radio call comes in. In the meantime,
28 later in the afternoon the 16th, we've been getting the rest of our troops had been coming
29 in because they had been taking the other guys out. So we end up with our whole bag and
30 baggage. We didn't have the equipment. They'd left the equipment back in Pleiku but
31 they sent the people. So we still had our personnel guy, we had out chaplain's assistant,

1 we had our operation staff drafts man. The whole complement of headquarters people or
2 a large complement of them. The morning of the 17th, about nine o'clock, our job at that
3 point, we were still policing the battlefield. Still getting the body count and trying to
4 physically count the bodies by dragging them out and piling them up in the middle of the
5 landing zone.

6 JM: This is our guys?

7 BA: No, this is NVA (North Vietnamese Army).

8 JM: Our guys are out by now?

9 BA: 1st of the 7th is out. 2nd of the 7th guys are in there, we're grabbing NVA
10 bodies and piling them up and counting them. They are out in the middle of the LZ
11 because they were adamant back in brigade, they got PAVN (People's Army of Vietnam)
12 body count and all this. So we do that and finally about nine o'clock, we're working
13 there, it's hot as hell, radio message comes in that, you know, 4-6 and each got to move
14 in messages, we got to relocated. They called in an "Arc Light" and everybody is looking
15 around each other, colonel is looking at the major, the major is looking at the colonel,
16 then they finally look at me and I got the signal operating instructions. So, I open it up
17 and see what an "Arc Light" is. I look down here, "Arc Light B-52 strike." (Chuckles)
18 "Oh shit!" They'd never done that before. (Laughs) Apparently, what happen on that B-
19 52 strike, as far as I can tell, it got called in when Colonel Moore called for a "Broken
20 Arrow". I think it went through chain of command, all the way back to Guam because
21 they came from Guam. They must have called in over three hours overtime over target.
22 That's when brigade realize that "Oh shit, we got people out there still." So it was grab
23 everything you can carry, you got to be at these coordinates and you got to be there
24 before noon. We stop what we were doing, grab everything we can tote, and like a
25 column of twos, we headed off to that unknown point in the map. We had about two
26 maps of the area, because LZ Golf was not on that map. There was only a couple of maps
27 in the whole area. In recon, Pat Payne in recon had one of the maps, I'm not sure who had
28 the other one. We're administrating on this move! I'm talking to Dan, Dan Boone, as this
29 is going down, he says, "Well, hey we got all these guys. You take one side; we're going
30 in columns of twos! You and John take on side, and Doc Shucart and I will take the other

1 side.” That’s how we went out. The order of march was recon, A Company, Delta
2 Company, Charlie Company, headquarters elements, and Alpha Company 1st of the 5th.

3 JM: You’re carrying your M16, you got it loaded up, right?

4 BA: Oh yeah!

5 JM: It’s administrative but there’s still B-52 bombs dropping and people dead
6 around here, it’s a war zone.

7 BA: Yeah, and it smells pretty bad. But we were told—first of all, we asked when
8 the helicopters were coming. They said, “There’s not any, you’re going to walk.” “How
9 are you going to do that?” “Well, you can’t get that far in single-file. You got to go
10 column of twos.”

11 JM: And how many people? Give me the number.

12 BA: Almost four hundred, I guess.

13 JM: Continue, please.

14 BA: So columns of two and off we go into the wild jungle. We hadn’t had water
15 resupply that morning. It’s hot as hell, probably a hundred and five or so. We are all
16 carrying excess gear because we were told to carry everything we couldn’t destroy, if it is
17 salvageable, carry it. I was carrying, I honestly can’t remember if I was carrying a two-
18 niner-two radio antenna, which weighed about sixty pounds plus your regular harness
19 stuff. Hadn’t slept in three nights, none of us had. It was either two-niner-two or I had a
20 Prick 25 on the back, one or the other. But as battalion communication officer, I was not
21 a part of the staff group as a second lieutenant. There was the S3, who was my boss, he
22 was upfront with the old man and the XO (Executive Officer). They were re up front.
23 Basically, were just supposed to follow the guys in front of us. You know, “What
24 happens if—” “Nothing terrible, don’t worry about it.” That’s what the word was! “What
25 do we do if we hit something?” “Stay where you are, that’s what the line companies will
26 take care of you.” I’m not in the radio net! I’m a communications officer and I’m not on
27 the radio net. I wasn’t authorized a radio.

28 JM: There was no attempt to put the line units, like put the headquarters groups
29 that are not combatants in the middle and have line units on either side? Or do you know
30 if there was an actual operation plan?

1 BA: Shit, no. It was like I just said, you know, we're looking, and we got to get
2 the gear and you know, "Joel, you take—and we'll put recon up front."

3 JM: So, when do you first realize that this administrative move is the real the deal,
4 that you're in combat?

5 BA: We busted out butts. We had no water and somewhere around one o'clock
6 time frame, we stopped, the column stopped. All the company commanders, the line
7 company commanders were called forward. So that was Charlie Company, A Company,
8 Delta Company and the 1st of the 5th were called forward. Everybody had got up there but
9 Captain Forrest and apparently our recon guys—we were just sitting back here in the
10 back, smoking cigarettes and if you happened to see a ration, you ate it. Recon guys had
11 captured a couple of guys and word came back that we had captured a couple of NVA.
12 Time goes by and next thing you know, hear some sheep way off in the distance. Then
13 word comes back and well, we need Charlie Company—who was our immediate front to
14 move in line because recon had hit an ambush. It was an L-shape ambush and C
15 Company was going to move in line and roll up the end of that ambush. Sounded good
16 and John Howard Nash didn't like it but all of the sudden, the firing started to come back
17 and back further down the column and it keeps coming back and back, next thing you
18 know it, it's right in front of us. Charlie Company is hurriedly trying to deploy in line,
19 and terrain was real rough there, it's jungles, elephant grass over your head, scrub
20 pines—not pines, scrub oaks and hardwood trees. All of the sudden, guys started getting
21 hit from Charlie Company, and cries go up for "Medic, medic, medic!" Of course, the
22 medics are in front with John, they take off and John takes off to answer the medic and
23 I'm standing here like, "Shit!" The one thing they told us at Fort Benning, one class I
24 went to, Tony Nadal taught, is in an ambush, you move! You don't stop, you move! So I
25 jumped in with Charlie Company. Thinking everybody else was following me! They
26 didn't follow me. So I ended up in the middle of Charlie Company in the fight. It was a
27 bloodbath. It was just four-five hours of absolute pandemonium hell and when you found
28 the radio, I found one radio, I was able to talk to Frank Henry on the Lognet. Frank said,
29 "I got my hands full up here, do the best you can!"

30 JM: And you're firing your weapon?

31 BA: Mm-hmm.

1 JM: Are you firing your weapons at known enemies? At sounds? At directions?

2 What are you—

3 BA: Little bit of both. There was a guy that was shot to my right-front, about ten
4 yards to the right front. He was screaming. I hollered at him, “Shut up! I’ll get to you, just
5 be quiet!” Because his screaming was drawing a lot of fire. He kept screaming and I went
6 over to him, got to him and was trying to bandage him. He’d gotten shot in the arm. Had
7 a dime size hole through his wrist. I took my first aid, bandaged him up but he was
8 screaming. I’m like, “Please, maybe just hold your tongue!” And his screaming kept
9 drawing all this fire. Finally I just put my M1 on automatic and stuck it on the side of
10 trees and pull the trigger in the direction of the fire we were getting and it went up and
11 something fell out of the tree, twenty-thirty meters away. I’m assuming it was one of the
12 NVA that was there.

13 JM: How was your—as far as ammunition, were you carrying much ammo?

14 BA: No.

15 JM: Because you were carrying all that antenna and everything?

16 BA: Yeah.

17 JM: How many magazines did you have?

18 BA: Maybe three.

19 JM: Three. Commo officers aren’t supposed to be getting in long fire fights. So
20 did you become concerned at that moment that you wouldn’t be able to fight your way
21 out of this thing?

22 BA: No, no we were still fighting. The problem is nobody knew where anybody
23 was. Nobody knew each other even. I had couple of guys near us, I said, “You drag this
24 guy back to the aid station,” because I’d passed John Howard. I knew where John and the
25 medics were back behind me. They took them back, I said, “Don’t bother to come back.”
26 You know, “Set up back there if you can make it.” So I stayed in this kind of almost a
27 room like canopy of oak trees and termite hills and little grass. Went from him, came
28 back to a termite hill, large ant mound. Couple of guys there were shot. We fought there
29 for a little bit. Basically, it was over here is this thick jungle and bullets were coming out
30 of it. Here to the left, bullets were coming out of it. Behind us bullets were coming out of
31 it. It was thick all the way around us.

1 JM: There was no one-side for where there was no fire coming, you were
2 surrounded. From your perspective.

3 BA: Literally, we were surrounded and cut off.

4 JM: Time of day, by this time it's getting towards dark or was there still light?

5 BA: At this point, I'm guessing it was three o'clockish maybe? Four o'clock. I
6 have no time memory on this.

7 JM: You're not part of a unit around you? You're your own guy pretty much. So
8 you don't have—you can't go to your superior, you're on your own?

9 BA: Yeah.

10 JM: So tell me then, did nightfall come and you're still fighting?

11 BA: Well, before that, I'd left the termite hill where I was. I gave the two guys
12 that were wounded there, they had a machine gun, I took their machine and gave them
13 my M16 because they couldn't handle the machine gun. I tried to go forward because I
14 knew that somebody was in front, that's where the troops were. The CO was somewhere
15 up there. I was trying to go forward, and I went up about twenty, thirty yards. It was a
16 PFC (Private First Class) on the ground behind a little tree and I got to him and he was
17 firing. We got pinned down by a machine gun. I say machine gun, it was some kind of
18 automatic weapon. I said, "Okay, what we'll do is we roll out. You put it on automatic, I
19 got the machine gun and well just open up." So we roll out, open up and in an instant, he
20 hits my back rolling back over. Gives it one of these. (Interviewee shows a gesture to
21 interviewer) And you know, I rolled over back to him and "You okay man?" He said,
22 "I'm dead man, don't worry about me." I pull up his hands away and he had a hole right
23 straight through here. (Interviewee shows where to the interviewer) He pulls two
24 grenades off his belt, pulls the pins and rolls over and tossed those grenades and he's
25 dead. He was dead then! That's when I said, "Well, this isn't a good place to be!" So I
26 tried to go back, I went back. Those guys were dead, that had given me the machine gun.
27 I got a rifle and got a .45, and then was trying to figure out what to do, moved down to
28 another ant hill. Lieutenant Butch Aull happened to come out of the clouds almost and
29 came sliding into me. Butch had a tanker holster on and he had a .45 and had been
30 stopped by the slide on the .45 in there and he—I had my back on the little ant hill and he
31 slid down to me and he was grinning. About that time, some automatic fire was coming, I

1 grabbed Butch and pulled him down on me and said, "Where the hell are we supposed to
2 go?" He said, "Damn, this way!" Motioning to left. "Okay, how are we going to go?"
3 During the course of this battle and moving around in there, I had guys come up to me,
4 guys covered in blood, guys dying on me. It was hard to know who was killed and who
5 wasn't killed in your mind. The firing was just intense.

6 JM: And you really are alone because you had a buddy for ten minutes or
7 something, and he's dead. So you're just moving from—you said you picked up that
8 M60. Had you ever fired an M60 before? Do you know anything about it?

9 BA: No. Pull the trigger. (Chuckles)

10 JM: But you got to also have to feed it and do all that stuff. So you had a few
11 rounds belted. Okay.

12 BA: I had my .45 still at that time.

13 JM: Yeah, but they only have nine rounds in that sucker.

14 BA: Yeah. (Chuckles)

15 JM: Okay, so now its-

16 BA: Aull is down to me and were sitting here. He's laying on top of me and were
17 talking in each other's ear and "Where are we supposed to go?" Butch says, "We go
18 down this way." About that time, an A-1E Skyraider comes in strafing. Where the hell he
19 came from? I don't know, but it's like a summer thunder shower. You can hear the
20 bullets hit the leaves of the trees and you couldn't hear them. You couldn't hear the fire
21 because the bullets were coming before the sound. You could hear the airplane going into
22 a dive and you hear all the rustling of leaves coming at you and dirt going everywhere.
23 It's like, "Shit, this is us." Up there that their shooting at. Anyways, I said, "Okay, we
24 got to get out of here." Butch seemed to know where to go and he was a line lieutenant
25 and so, I said, "How are we going to go?" He said, "Well, I call out an even number, you
26 call out the odd numbers and that's how far we'll go. I'll call out the M4 and you call out
27 an odd number." We had about five or six guys around us at the time. We all counted off
28 and Butch said, "I'll go first!", because he was on top of me. He takes off in the middle of
29 all this fire and I'm like, "Butch where are you?" He just disappeared into the grass and I
30 never saw him again. He was killed instantly. So we stayed there waiting for someone to
31 holler and for him to call out the numbers. You know, of course the other half that had

1 gone with him, I never heard or saw them again. You know, it's hard because you had
2 guys—you're trying to control people in a fight standpoint. They don't know you. They
3 don't know the hell you are. You're telling my ass to do this? Nuh-uh buster (Laughs).

4 JM: Yeah, it's hard enough under any situation. But if you have a unit and the
5 cohesion that goes with being trained to get enough stuff, you had none of that.

6 BA: No.

7 JM: You were just commo officer, in the wrong place, at the wrong time.

8 BA: Mm-hmm. I keep trying to go down where Butch had told me. We keep
9 trying to—I called out numbers sometimes, sometimes some of the guys follow,
10 sometimes they don't. I can't keep track of who's where. I don't know who these people
11 are anyway.

12 JM: You don't know whether they are still alive after the deal was cut.

13 BA: I get down to where the other half—the other part of the column was. Get
14 down there, there was a couple of guys there alive. One guy is just shot to pieces, but he's
15 still living. Two of the guys, "Okay, you're going to carry him. We're going this way."
16 They pick him up and of course he's in tremendous pain, he screams. He's a heavy guy,
17 he's a big guy and they carry him about five or six feet. Shooting is breaking out heavy
18 again and off they go. Dropped him. Left me along with him. I grabbed him and couldn't
19 carry him. By then, well, what was I down to? I had my rifle and my .45. One in each
20 hand. My .45 in one hand, my rifle in the other and whatever was in the magazine. Had
21 dropped my web gear just from the shear exhaustion and no water. I tried to carry him,
22 couldn't pick him up. He was in too much pain. I said, "Okay, well if you can hold onto
23 me somehow on my shirt, I'll try to carry you. I'll try to crawl with you and carry you."
24 He was in and out of consciousness and finally I just had to leave him. There was no help
25 from anybody. I mean everybody was—

26 JM: Sure.

27 BA: We were still getting the shit shot out of us. I made it down to a ditch, found
28 some guys in the ditch. Bumped into—there was some other guys in the ditch who were
29 from I think A Company 1st of the 5th and an NCO (Noncommissioned Officer) I think,
30 who said, he was going one way. I said, "Well, maybe I'm going that way." Some of the
31 guys said, "We'll go with you, lieutenant."

1 JM: Where was the CP—where was the battalion commander and the company
2 commander?

3 BA: Two, three hundred yards ahead of us.

4 JM: Ahead of you.

5 BA: I was—I had gone back in the back; we were in that ditch. They only thing I
6 could hear was some artillery firing by then. I figure that was the only chance we got, to
7 get to an artillery base. It was somewhere near dusk. We're in the ditch, I got one guy
8 who got his eyeball dangling out. He had part of a bandage over it but his eye when he
9 was telling me, "I can see, I can see!" "Yup, you're going to be alright, son." One guy,
10 one sergeant, got some shrapnel in his chest. Another guy shot in the neck, the arm and
11 the leg. Another guy—there were five and they were all wounded some. The other two
12 had wounds too. I don't remember their extent. So off we trek and we're going up this
13 ditch and staying in the bush, in the brambles and briars and the fix stuff, hoping we can
14 avoid because we were down, I was the only one with any weapons. I had given one guy
15 my .45 as a security blanket because those things are—if you can't hit anybody when you
16 throw it's not good. One guy had my rifle, and I was trying to keep everybody together.
17 We were in this bramble—briar patch. Typical briar fire patch and I'm going through it
18 and all of the sudden, I look down—because I'm like, "You know, surely nobody can find
19 us in here." I look down and there's a freaking tin foil off a chewing gum wrapper. And I
20 just freeze because I'm like, "Any second, I'm dead." There's a turd there, besides the
21 chewing gum wrapper! Somebody took a shit. Somebody else had been in there, NVA
22 had been in there. Apparently, they had overrun us, and we were behind them and we
23 kept going, no shots came at that point, at least directly at us. We kept going and we
24 ended up—we were out of water. Water was the toughest thing because you had no
25 strength, no water. We got to the perimeter of the LZ Columbus where the artillery was.
26 We could hear the firing, it was dark, it was elephant grass taller than this room, they
27 were moving in. I said, "Guys, if we tried going in there, we're going to get killed."
28 Because these guys—

29 JM: Our guys?

30 BA: Yeah, they're our guys. They know that shit's hitting the fan over here and
31 they'll shot anything that's coming at them at this point. It's dark and they can't really

1 tell any. So we nestle up in that little elephant grass, I mean a little patch by the size of
2 the table. Two of them with their heads on my lap. One of them was that kid with the
3 eyeball. He kept telling me he could see, I kept telling him he was going to be okay. We
4 got through the night; first light comes. I said, "Okay guys here's what we're going to do.
5 Sergeant, you're in charge if I don't come back." We went right down the chain of
6 command and "Here's what you do. I'm going to go around the other side of this
7 perimeter. In case somebody starts shooting, the fire won't be coming this way." During
8 the night, we're hearing movement going around the grass around us. We think it's
9 people, it could be rats, shit we had eight rounds maybe between us. Nobody in any shape
10 to defend themselves. That morning, I went all the way the other side of the perimeter,
11 crawled in as close as I could to the perimeter, where I could see the guys in the foxholes.
12 They were out of the foxholes getting ready, having some chow and starting to move
13 around in the morning, and I hollered at them. I said, "Get me an officer, a company
14 commander, lieutenant, somebody down here!"

15 JM: You hollered as loud as you could?

16 BA: Yes, into this perimeter.

17 JM: What were your exact words? You remember?

18 BA: Something like, "Get me an officer!" or "Get me an NCO!"

19 JM: In your best English.

20 BA: Yeah. Because my big thing, being new to combat, was scared shooting. If
21 my voice, triggering the whole perimeter going off. So anyway, they were nonchalant
22 enough to go get an officer. They got Lieutenant Jim Brigham, who had been one of my
23 ship bunk mates, bunk mates on the ship. I said, "I'm going to stand up, I want you to
24 hold your fire." I hollered at them, "I got five wounded guys out here," I said, "They're
25 not with me, I've got to go get them and I'm going to bring them back in here. Make sure
26 everybody in the perimeter knows." So I stood there until word went all around the
27 perimeter that friendlies are coming in, no firing.

28 JM: Do they have Claymores set? Do you know? Do they have a minefield out at
29 all?

30 BA: They had some trip flares out because I hit one. (Laughs)

31 JM: Trip flares? Oh, at night or at that moment?

1 BA: No, coming in that—
2 JM: Oh, coming in.
3 BA: So I get back, bring my guys, go around the perimeter and we go in. As were
4 going in, I hit a trip flare. Of course, everybody hits the ground because we're like—
5 JM: It may be connected to something?
6 BA: We didn't know what the hell it was.
7 JM: But it was just a signal flair for the nighttime if somebody was at the wire.
8 BA: Yeah, so we got in. I'm like—because all night long we had heard the
9 artillery firing at, all night at this LZ. They must—they had every plane in the air force
10 dropping stuff on the jungle we had just left. Nobody is alive! They're going to put a
11 damn nuke in here. Honest to god, it was the thought I had was, they're going to pull out
12 and put a nuke in here. They've already put B-52s in and that didn't work. Remember,
13 we'd had tactical nukes at Fort Benning, down to the battalion level. I guess in a hysteria
14 thing, so I get to Jim, and I'm like, "Jim, they're all dead, they're all dead!" He said, "No
15 they're not!" I said, "Really?" He said, "They're alive." About that time, a medic came
16 up and shot me in the butt with something. I was shaking so damn bad and a helicopter
17 come in while I was standing there and about that time, John Howard came in with seven
18 or eight guys. Similar situation, totally different and unbeknownst to us. John brings guys
19 in. He had done the same thing I did. John gets in, we're standing there, I talk to my S3.
20 I've got this shot, I'm like, "I don't know what we're going to do, if you can come back
21 okay." I look at John and said, "Did you hear any noise last night?" "Yeah, there were
22 people moving all around." "What are we going to do?" They throw us on a helicopter,
23 take us to Pleiku, all the way back to Camp Holloway. We get there, we get off the plane.
24 Our S1 meets us. He gives us a big hug and John and I are crying. We are like, "You
25 don't understand captain, they're all dead! It's not what you want." "We won the fight."
26 "We didn't win the fight, everybody's dead." John and I are looking at each other like we
27 can't believe it. We got to report somewhere, we got to report, tell them we're here. So,
28 second lieutenants, we get on a helicopter and we go to the brigade headquarters to go
29 report. We walk in, blood soaked, haven't shaved in three or four days, just look like shit.
30 We walk in and here's this major who had been our executive officer and were his two
31 worst nightmares come true. He finally walks out, and he hears us in the tent because

1 we're agitated and dealing with the NCO. We're like, "Show us a map, because we got to
2 know where we were." He hears us hell up, he comes out and looks at us, he says, "What
3 in the hell are you guys doing here? You're a disgrace!" We're like, "Sir, we just came
4 out of a fight, we need a map, we can show you where they are because we heard them
5 all around us all night." "Sergeant, show them the damn map, and you guys get the hell
6 out of here!" So, we went over the map, saw the landing zone, said, "Here's where they
7 were." "Okay" And "We're out of here." John and I left. We got on another helicopter,
8 and got back to the rear, got a shower, got some clothes and went to sleep for the first
9 time in about three days. Then the next morning I went out, went back out after that. That
10 was the morning of the 19th, I went out and joined a unit. In the meantime, we had all our
11 dead back. We had a hundred and fifty-five men killed that day, on the 17th. We had
12 another hundred and twenty-five hundred—thirty five guys wounded so bad, they never
13 came back.

14 JM: Of the men that were killed and wounded, a lot of them were of the so called,
15 "Administrative types" that were not a part of a line units?

16 BA: We were the only unit in the entire war to have their S4 killed. That's the
17 supply officer. He was killed. Number of truck drivers, truck repairmen were killed. I lost
18 a platoon sergeant, wire section chief and two enlisted, one radio operator, one wireman.
19 We had the chaplain's assistant get killed. The only unit in the whole war. We had this
20 redrafts man get killed. The S3 operations sergeant get killed, the only one in the whole
21 war. So, the non-combatants kind of took it on. I don't know how many medics we lost in
22 that fight, but it was a bunch of them.

23 JM: How long did it take, after you were sort of rejected by this major that didn't
24 want to hear your story? How soon did someone else in the—finally want that story while
25 you were in Vietnam?

26 BA: Nobody ever did. Nobody ever did.

27 JM: When Colonel Moore wrote the book, he has a reference to you in there. Is
28 that the first time you'd seen that in print?

29 BA: Well, they contacted me when they were writing the book. Because we got
30 back, we were the only unit in the war that we policed up our hundred and fifty-five, our
31 wounded so a hand-full of people, then I joined them in the field, they kept us in the field.

1 They kept the remnants of the unit in the field. They didn't bring us back to the rear area
2 of Holloway right away because there's too much press there. That's all that I can figure.

3 JM: Wow.

4 BA: They didn't tell General Westmoreland about it either. The reason they ran us
5 out was because they were expecting Westmoreland any minute. They were wanting to
6 tout the 1st of the 7th. You know, they had pretty much a definitive victory. Here we are
7 out here, how the hell are you going to explain a hundred and fifty-five men killed?

8 JM: Historians since that date have dealt with Albany in varying ways, as you
9 know. Much more like what you have just told us, although not with this detail. That's an
10 incredible story that you just told. I'm so glad it's on record now.

11 BA: Well, thank you, thank you for having me.

12 JM: I'm so glad it's on record now. It will always be on record at Texas Tech
13 University and it will be out there for the rest of the world to see online. So it is preserved
14 in that sense. I appreciate so much you being here to tell us this and I would like to get
15 you out to Texas Tech sometime because we'd like to get the rest of it, because I know
16 you have a lot more to say. But this has been an incredible interview, and I appreciate
17 you telling us.

18 BA: Thank you, thank you. I appreciate your time, and matter in which everything
19 has been conducted. Appreciate you guys being here.

20 JM: Thank you very much. Wow.

21 (End of interview)