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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with William Lee Lund
Conducted by John R. Milam
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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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David Weisgaber: JOSN David Weisgaber. Recording Dr. Ron Milam, interviewing Bill Lund. Okay, we're rolling.

John R. Milam: My name is Dr. Ron Milam. I am with Texas Tech University and the Vietnam center. I am interviewing Bill Lund today. Bill, I'd like to start by asking you to tell me what your MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) was and your job specifically on November 14th, 1965.

Bill Lund: Okay. I was artillery, 11-93, but I was a forward observer attached to B Company, 2nd of the 7th which was attached to the 1st of the 7th. We were some of the few guys that were in both X-Ray and Albany.

JM: Your MOS was 1193, and your rank?

BL: 2nd lieutenant at that time.

JM: 2nd lieutenant. What was your source of commissioning?

BL: ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps). At the University of Minnesota.

JM: University of Minnesota. After having been commissioned, did you choose artillery as your branch?

BL: No. (Chuckles) In fact, the whole thing was pretty funny. I was married, my high school sweetheart and I got married, as sophomores and juniors in college. That's why I was in ROTC because lieutenants got more pay than privates. I thought that was a

1 good idea. When I got my orders, I always remember because it said—in Minnesota,
2 when you graduate, you put your uniform on, walk across the stage, they pin the bars on
3 you, hand you your diploma and they hand you your orders at the same time. I got my
4 orders, I opened them up and I looked, and it said “11th Air Assault. Experimental.” I
5 thought, “Wonder what that is.” So I took it back to the captain of the ROTC and said,
6 “What’s that?” He said, “I don’t know, but you’re in trouble.” (Chuckles) That’s how it
7 started.

8 JM: You graduated and got your commission, what year?

9 BL: March of ’64.

10 JM: March of ’64? You’re first duty station was Fort Benning?

11 BL: Right, after Fort Sill’s training.

12 JM: Okay so you went to Fort Sill first for FO (Forward Observer) training.

13 BL: Right. FO training.

14 JM: Was it artillery OBC (Basic Orientation Course)? Was it Officer’s Basic
15 Course for artillery men?

16 BL: Yeah, right.

17 JM: But you already knew your duty station was going to be Fort Benning—

18 BL: Fort Benning.

19 JM: With the 11th Air Assault, which was going to be part of the 1st Air Cav.

20 BL: Was going to be the 1st Air Cav. Oddly enough, I got assigned, this was way
21 off the base, I got assigned to a thing they used to call “The Little John Rocket Battalion”
22 that’s a missile about the length of that table, maybe a little longer. (Editor’s Note:
23 Interviewee points to a table)

24 JM: Nuclear? That was one of the first of the nuclear—

25 BL: Yeah, exactly. That’s the one.

26 JM: Battlefield nuclear.

27 BL: So that was kind of an odd thing to be in. For a year, that’s what I did. I
28 became an FO a week or two before we left for Vietnam. Which was kind of an
29 interesting experience.

30 JM: What was your major in Minnesota, at school?

31 BL: Business.

1 JM: You were business major?

2 BL: Right.

3 JM: Strong mathematical background?

4 BL: No. No. Not at all. But it was obviously a real good school. I found it—

5 military all interesting, I enjoyed the heck out of it.

6 JM: When you went to Fort Sill, of the—eight weeks of OBC?

7 BL: Yeah, about eight weeks.

8 JM: In that eight weeks, how much of your training was about being a forward

9 observer in Vietnam?

10 BL: Zero. In Vietnam. Most of the training was about being a forward observer. I

11 think they realized that most 2nd lieutenants were going to be forward observers. Never

12 had heard the word. Never heard of it. In fact, I don't know if anybody else has told you

13 this but when they ordered us to go to Vietnam, they actually took a lot of the officers to

14 a movie theater on base and showed us where it was and how you pronoun the name.

15 JM: Wow.

16 BL: Yeah. We had never heard of it.

17 JM: I am familiar somewhat with artillery at Fort Sill with the IOBC (Infantry

18 Officer Basic Course) and with the OCS (Officer Candidate School) program there for

19 artillery and later in the war, I know that there was this rule that said all combat arm

20 officers should have four months of troop experience before they go to Vietnam. They

21 did that pretty much across the board for a while, but then they found that with artillery

22 people, when they came out of OCS, they had had FO training, or at least they were

23 ready. By the time they had four months of troop training, they had lost a lot of it and for

24 a period of time, they sent artillery 2nd lieutenants, newly commissioned, directly to

25 Vietnam. I think that was a mistake and they realized this, and they went back to the

26 other. But that's my familiarity with RTO and OCS, I've told you everything I know. But

27 in your case, you had orders for this new cavalry air unit at Fort Benning, before you'd

28 even been to artillery OBC.

29 BL: Right, had it from—the very first orders I ever got said that's where I was

30 going but you're going here first—to Fort Sill first and then to Fort Benning.

31 JM: So you graduated in Spring of '64 and you go to OBC until September or so?

1 BL: No. So I graduated in March, so I was at Fort Benning in May.
2 JM: You got to Benning on May of '64.
3 BL: Right.
4 JM: So you were there with the unit for virtually a year before you left?
5 BL: Right, yup.
6 JM: What was your responsibility at Benning?
7 BL: I was a platoon leader of the rocket group. We had three companies. It was
8 set up just like a regular artillery outfit, and you did the same type of things when I was
9 just—I had a platoon of people that took care of this rocket. It was so unique, nobody else
10 knew what we were doing. It was a lot of fun to side in the base, but it was fun because it
11 was you know playing with a nuke. In reality, it's drills with the screwdrivers and all this.
12 JM: But you didn't, for that year, you didn't really train with the infantry or you
13 didn't train as an FO with the 1st Air Cav or anything like that.
14 BL: Nothing. No. Not at all.
15 JM: As you are assigned to this 11th Air Assault unit as a platoon leader with an
16 experimental or with a nuclear weapon, a battlefield nuclear weapon you might say,
17 tactical nuke, at that time do you realize what the 1st Air Cav is doing in terms of their
18 training is to go to Vietnam—
19 BL: Not until they started talking about going to the Carolinas. That and you
20 know we did in September, October maybe in the Carolinas. Two months up there living
21 in the woods and flying places in helicopters. I started to get, you know, there was sort of
22 this talk of this is how this is going to work, and the infantry is doing this. But we never
23 saw the infantry. We never were near anybody. Because as you can imagine, a tactical
24 nuke is called up from the rear to get within range of sometime and that's all. Yeah. It
25 was pretty interesting.
26 JM: So you're attached to a unit that ultimately is going to go to Vietnam, but
27 you're not going to take your honest John with you.
28 BL: Right.
29 JM: When did you, personally become the guy that is going to go over with the
30 unit?

1 BL: What they did was somebody on high sent down a list of we may need this
2 many artillery guys to fill the slots. They posted our names on a bulletin board and there
3 it was. Your name. You're going. So I went home and told my wife, I said, "Wow, you
4 won't believe this. I'm now an FO with the 7th Cavalry with the 21st Artillery, I never met
5 the guys, but I'm going over to meet them and I'm going to Vietnam!" What a shock!

6 JM: What was the time between getting your orders and leaving?

7 BL: Month and a half maybe.

8 JM: Okay, so in that six weeks, were you trained to become an FO?

9 BL: No

10 JM: So you're training to be an FO. You remember a little bit of it from OBC?

11 BL: Exactly. It was the most—in fact, the things that I did do were go through the
12 infantry course, all by myself by the way, there's nobody out there. Guy, that sergeant
13 sets it up for me and I run around shooting things.

14 JM: This is to get you used to—

15 BL: To get you qualified.

16 JM: For your weapons?

17 BL: Weapons and stuff. That whole situation was really interesting. To me, the
18 FO stuff never left me. I mean I had that stuff cold, for some reason. I will tell you about
19 being assigned, if that's okay, to these infantry officers—I was told to report to B
20 Company of the 2nd and 7th and I have to tell you that they were smiling on me from
21 above when they assigned me to that outfit because that was a good outfit as it was in
22 Vietnam. We were something else. But when I walked in the door, I saluted the captain
23 and he started talking to me and I'm thinking, "Wow, who is this guy?" It was Myron
24 Diduryk, who if you read the book of course, Hal Moore says was the best company
25 commander he ever saw. This guy is—was somebody from the Ukraine. So in the movie
26 when you see Mel Gibson saying, "We've got officers in the Ukraine," well they're
27 talking about Myron Diduryk. So I'm listening to this accent, I can hardly understand him
28 you know and—but he and I became fast friend because I was like attached to the guy the
29 whole time we were there. What was funnier yet was then he brought in some of the
30 lieutenants, but the first one he brought in was Rick Rescorla. He is from Cornwall,
31 England. So I'm going, "What kind of outfit is this? Listen, I'm a FO and I don't need—

1 I'm independent, what are you guys?" (Chuckles) I had a lot of fun with them. That was
2 good.

3 JM: You went to Vietnam with the 1st Air Cav in August, on the troop carrier, on
4 the ship?

5 BL: Yes.

6 JM: Did you have any—you were going—you knew you were going to be a FO?

7 BL: Yep.

8 JM: Did you have anybody else assigned to you? Or were you a singular?

9 BL: Yeah, I was alone. When we first got there, we tried to do the traditional—I
10 think a traditional like a sergeant, a jeep driver, and a radio operator.

11 JM: Yeah, DOE (Date of Enlistment) is that.

12 BL: Yeah right, we started like that and trust me, nobody wanted to be with the
13 FO. The minute they realized they really didn't need it these guys bailed in a hurry and
14 they just rotated a guy and I always laughed, I said, "Are you being punished? Are you
15 being punished to come over to be my radio operator for a week? Two weeks?" Because
16 they keep changing these guys. It really ended up just a radio operator and me.

17 JM: You're going to Vietnam as a one-man shuttle. In a sense of you're not a
18 platoon leader. In a traditional sense, you're not going to be at a fire base, supervising the
19 firing of 105s. You're going to be the guy that calls it in. You're going to be out there
20 with the troops. Your experience so far has been this honest John, tactical nuke thing,
21 OBC and everything. You're really going to do some OJT (On the Job Training) from the
22 standpoint of not that you don't know FO stuff, but knowing it on the ground, in combat
23 is going to be new to you.

24 BL: Brand new. Never had a clue. I always remember this, we were out on patrol,
25 the company, at that time I wasn't quite—I was maybe a platoon back from the company
26 commander, kind of in the middle of that platoon. He thought that was probably a good
27 idea, and I thought it was probably a good idea. We got ambushed a little bit up on the
28 front. In fact, Rick Rescorla got wounded that day. I remember when the firing started, I
29 turned to the radio operator and I looked at him and said, "Well, we either get in or we
30 get out, but I think we better get in." I said, "Come on, let's go." I took off for the front
31 and just as I sat down right behind the dirt, he goes, "Where's the FO?" I said, "Right

1 here.” He looked at me and said, “Alright.” I had a rocket ship up there, a gun ship, and I
2 talked to him and laid out some fire and through the smoke and sitting out to the north of
3 that or whatever and I kind of got my feet wet that way.

4 JM: This is at X-Ray?

5 BL: This is before X-Ray.

6 JM: Were you involved in Operation “Silver Bayonet”?

7 BL: Yes, yeah. I got into a few fights. Our company was out all the time. Our
8 company was out, we’d go out for four days, come in for one, go out for a week, come in
9 for two. Constantly. We were hardly ever in base camp; we were always moving.

10 JM: But it was—the contact with the enemy was very light in those first
11 operations.

12 BL: Very light, very light.

13 JM: Your role as a FO in that was to bring in the world on top of whatever the
14 infantry called for it.

15 BL: Right.

16 JM: When you first get to Vietnam, you’re in Qui Nhon, you’re in An Khe. Then
17 you have this period of time when you get to go out and work with infantry. That’s your
18 own OJT?

19 BL: Right.

20 JM: Did you move to Pleiku with the infantry unit around the four or five days
21 before November 14th?

22 BL: Yeah. I lived with the infantry unit, I never left them. Other FOs, interesting
23 enough, didn’t get assigned directly to one company, I never understood that, but I was
24 always with these guys. I didn’t know anything about the artillery. I hardly—when I see
25 the artillery people, I’m not sure who they are because I only knew the FOs because we’d
26 get together for lunch or something and whenever we were all back in basecamp, we’d go
27 to one place or another and have lunch together. But that was really it. My was—battery
28 commander, if there was such a thing or Lieutenant Colonel Miranda, he knew who I was
29 but that was barely it.

30 JM: In some ways your kind of, in military terms, you’re kind of a freelancer in
31 the sense that you’re kind of on your own but you’re assigned to the infantry units.

1 You've had some combat OJT with these light contact units or operations like "Silver
2 Bayonet" and some of the others. Then you go to Pleiku a few days before November
3 14th. Where—when you get the word on November 13th I believe or early in the 14th—

4 BL: Yep, 14th.

5 JM: What was your assignment? How is it told to you, as to what your assignment
6 was going to be on the first initial landing?

7 BL: What we were told was that—by this time I'm living in Diduryk's back
8 pocket. I'm right there all the time. What we were told was the LZ was hot. This was
9 really real action and get ready, and that Diduryk was going to report to Hal Moore, to
10 find out what to do. We did not have a pre-prescribed, "You will be doing this."

11 JM: Let me understand, LZ X-Ray, twenty minutes before the landing, they use
12 artillery preparation for the battlefield?

13 BL: Right.

14 JM: They come in, first couple of lifts, no enemy contact and then about lifts three
15 and four they started experiencing this. That's the moment at which you hear that—or are
16 you planning? Or do you know that you're going?

17 BL: We don't know where we're going. We were sitting back somewhere around
18 Plei Me. I always kind of remember that we were sort of out in jungle grass somewhere
19 when we got radio call that said, "We need you guys, a helicopter is coming to pick you
20 up, you're headed to a landing zone." By time we got there, it was under heavy fire. Real
21 heavy fire. We were sort of—the reason we got attached was they were afraid they were
22 going to run out of people before then, to hold it. We landed—the helicopter came skiting
23 in. I think we were landing to the west of all things. We came skiting in and jumping out.
24 On the way in, this is what really set the tone, I'm looking out, smoke is just billowing
25 up. There's an A1E Skyraider, which is an Air Force plane, on the ground burning and
26 the helicopter is down. I'm going "Oh my god, this is something." In we went, I started
27 running this way. (Editor's Note: Interviewee signals interviewer where he ran) Just
28 because I thought I was supposed to be running somewhere, and I started running this
29 way and there the enemy was right there! So I turned around and ran like crazy the other
30 way, and the helicopter lifted off in the meantime and I'm running like this. I see Diduryk
31 going the other way, towards the big terminate hill, so I chase him around behind the hill

1 and I come sliding up and sit down, and he's sitting down and there's Lieutenant Colonel
2 Moore at the time. He was so clam and cool. I remember him saying to Diduryk, he says,
3 "See up there? I got a lost platoon up there. I'm thinking about having you guys go get
4 them." I looked at Diduryk and said to myself, "Oh my god, what's he talking about?"
5 Fortunately, he said, "But right now, I just want you to go right up there to the North end
6 and hunker down."

7 JM: Who else was on the slick that came and brought you in?

8 BL: Probably my radio operator, Diduryk's radio operator, 1st Sergeant, that's
9 probably about it. Maybe another couple of guys.

10 JM: There's no infantry troops on it because they're all down. They're all there—

11 BL: They're behind us. They're coming. We had probably a flight of six or
12 whatever. We're the first one in and the other five had all the troops in them.

13 JM: The lost platoon, that's already happened when you get there. That's kind of
14 the point—

15 BL: Timeline.

16 JM: At which we would find it. You hunker down in the CP (Command Post)
17 there with the battalion commander for a time, for some short period of time, to decide
18 how you can be used most effectively.

19 BL: Right.

20 JM: Were you then detailed to a particular unit? To get to or to a particular
21 location?

22 BL: Yes. We were detailed to be in reserve and put on the North end of the
23 perimeter. There was nobody on the north end. The mountain was sort of a southwest
24 end. That's kind of where they were coming from, we were kind of in reserve up here on
25 the north end. I was also detailed—if my memory serves me right, interestingly enough
26 about all this stuff, it doesn't go away. When I read the book, I went, "Yeah, that's right."
27 I think they wanted me to put some artillery up around the lost platoon. It was my first
28 kind of practice, because as you know it, artillery, they teach you to shoot it so far away,
29 you can barely see it, you have to have a pair of binoculars and now all of the sudden it's
30 right there.

1 JM: Tell me how that works. You are the FO, you are truly forward in this case,
2 Afdc literal translation of that word, you're there. You're talking to an aerial?
3 BL: No.
4 JM: Are you talking to a battery?
5 BL: I'm talking to the battery, directly back to FDC (Fire Direction Control).
6 JM: And the battery is located where?
7 BL: I think at that time it was called LZ Falcon. There's two of them, Falcon and
8 Columbus, but I don't think they were at Columbus yet. There was one other FO in there
9 at the time, the other one had been killed already, a friend of mine, Timmy Blake.
10 JM: He was killed at X-Ray?
11 BL: Yeah, right off the bat, he was in Tony Nadal's—he was attached to him.
12 JM: Okay, now—that's good now I know where we're talking.
13 BL: Now I'm sort of the FO to try to get some stuff up around that lost platoon
14 because I think Bill Riddle had his hands full over on the other side.
15 JM: You were essentially a replacement for the FO that had gone down with
16 Alpha Company?
17 BL: Right. Now all of the sudden, we don't have enough FOs. We got three
18 companies, four companies in there now and we got two FOs.
19 JM: But you're going to be calling it in from these locations and these are 105s?
20 BL: 105s.
21 JM: Do you have anything to do with the aerial rocket artillery?
22 BL: Yeah. One of the things that—interesting enough, I worked the Air Force, I
23 worked aerial rockets, I worked them all. If we get a FAC (Forward Air Controller) in
24 there and Charlie Hastings was in there, but if he wasn't around, in later operations, I
25 would work anything. I had no problems with F4s. So yeah, aerial rockets, the whole
26 thing.
27 JM: Did it seem to you that there was a comfort level, not really a good term to
28 use in combat, but I'll use it here, that there was a comfort level by the platoon and
29 company commanders of the infantry units to let you do the talking, and to you do the
30 adjusting no matter what it is. Everything from ARA (Aerial Rocket Artillery), Air Force,
31 everything except their own M79s were essentially going to be your job?

1 BL: Yep. Diduryk and I had a bond like that, that was just fabulous, and I don't
2 know how to say this properly, I got blessed. I was really good at this, okay? I don't
3 know why; I could keep more balls in the air after this experience and maybe that's what
4 did it, X-Ray did it. But I had no fear. I don't—I mean I was scared to death of the
5 enemy, but for some reason I knew where these rounds were going to go, right exactly. I
6 could put them on top of—I could put them anywhere. I don't know how that happened,
7 but it was a strange occurrence.

8 JM: You're not—you're carrying an M16, right? As your weapon?

9 BL: Yes, right.

10 JM: But you got more weapons available to you than anybody!

11 BL: Than anybody! I feel great, exactly.

12 JM: So in that sense, there had to have been a satisfaction that you really are in
13 control of the things that are going to make the biggest difference in this battle. The
14 general knows, the colonel knows that, and every platoon leader and every company
15 commander knows that this is going to be the savior, is this technology. You're talking to
16 the technology. Maybe that's not a good word for the artillery, but certainly a good word
17 for the—ultimately, did you bring in the B52s, I think?

18 BL: That I never talked to. That would've been Charlie Hastings.

19 JM: That comes later I think later onto Chu Pong, they brought—

20 BL: Yes, they did. When they backed us out of there.

21 JM: But in the meantime, to be most effective on this battlefield, you're talking to
22 the people that could get it done. What about your own safety? Are you hunkered down
23 below? You're not in a fox hole.

24 BL: Not at first, I'm not in the foxhole. I'm just out on a tree. I've kind of lost
25 what I must have been doing. I would go from our little northern spot up here, over to the
26 command post, over to General Moore's place. I don't know what I was doing there. I
27 assume I was sitting there talking to the FACs. The Air Force guys, trying to figure out
28 what they were doing, so I knew where I could be. Because when the napalm we've
29 heard about is dropped on us, I'm standing right there. I run and decide I can't outrun
30 this, and the guy didn't drop the second one. But I was always going back and forth. It
31 must have been to ask them where the jets were and all that, because one fear was to

1 knock the jet out of the air with the artillery. If they come in on a low run and I'm
2 firing—

3 JM: It made sense to—from Moore's standpoint and from the company command
4 to centralize all of that with you and all they had to do was to deal with their own
5 soldiers, in terms of firing maneuvers and all that.

6 BL: And they had their mortar guys, and they had the jets.

7 JM: Were they saying to you, "Bill, put it on this location." They're not giving
8 you coordinates, they're just saying, "Over there. Over there"?

9 BL: Yeah, with a lost platoon, they're telling me where they think they are. If I
10 remember right, I was very nervous about putting anything up there, so I was kind of far
11 away.

12 JM: You were putting artillery into an area where we weren't sure we even knew
13 where they were.

14 BL: Right.

15 JM: Where Moore and others knew where they were or thought they did. Were
16 they signaling to try to have those guys mark or anything at all? They couldn't talk to
17 them, right?

18 BL: I don't—they could talk to them a little bit and I think those guys tried to call
19 artillery themselves. I think my job was to try to throw it way out behind them and just
20 try to keep the enemy moving around, so that they could mask maybe and run over them.
21 It was sort of my first—I felt really lucky. If there was one great thing that saved us and
22 our company was that I got to practice, so to speak, doing that. I could work it around,
23 then they'd say, "Bring it a little closer, and put it over there," So then I'd say, "Okay, I'll
24 try that." I had all afternoon and the evening to do it. I could sit there popping things
25 around, and I kind of got a feel for, "Okay, if I know that's supposed to be five-hundred
26 yards out, let's see what two-fifty is like. Woah, that's getting close." Then, sneaking a
27 little, but I'd be off by the side a little bit so I wouldn't hit anybody. I got a real feel for it,
28 I felt blessed because as you know at the artillery school, they were teaching a thousand
29 yards. All of the sudden, we're down two-hundred-and-fifty and stuff like that. It was
30 very scary.

1 JM: Did you have any experiences with dud rounds or with short rounds of stuff
2 that you called in and it should've been there, but it wasn't because of a malfunction of
3 the round itself?

4 BL: Not that I knew about, I really tried to keep the rounds at a different angle so
5 that if they were short, they weren't coming on us. I think I may have done that in
6 Albany. I may have had short rounds. That was so close, that it was hard to tell if that was
7 short or if it was just on top of us anyway. But it was—I felt comfortable. I don't know
8 why.

9 JM: And the more you did it, the better you got at it like you say, because you
10 were a laboratory and you were just throwing it out there, and making notes and knowing
11 like you say, "It's five-hundred here, and two-fifty, now somewhere between there, I'm
12 very confident with that." How close did you bring it in?

13 BL: Well, after—that night I would say two-fifty-three, hundred, somewhere in
14 there. It wasn't real close. I could just kind of hear it or see it out there quite a way. But
15 that's the night that the enemy, the North Vietnamese, pretty much over ran the south end
16 of the perimeter. Then, the next night, we got put down there and we all know that this is
17 going to be—Myron Diduryk, the captain, said to me, "You take everything a hundred
18 yards out. That's yours. We'll get everything inside it." I said, "Okay." And a hundred
19 yards was about the tree line, so when that night came, prior to that, I sat there and
20 registered all over the place so that I had him on call. Then I put them up by the
21 mountain, on the trails and everywhere I could think of, so I had them all over the place.

22 JM: All HE (High Explosive)?

23 BL: All HE. I fired all HE.

24 JM: How about illumination? Were you involved in that?

25 BL: I was the illumination guy. That was the biggest difference first night, second
26 night, in my opinion. Well, there's a lot of other differences. We learned from those guys
27 because they got—we moved our foxholes back and did all that stuff. Now, I wasn't
28 doing all that (Chuckles) I didn't think of that, I wasn't smart enough to do that. But
29 Myron Diduryk was, and Rescorla, and Jim Lane, and those guys, those lieutenants, they
30 all knew we can't re-position this. We were actually cutting our grass out in front of our
31 foxholes, so that they couldn't get into our foxholes. But Myron said to me, "You take

1 everything a hundred yards out.” So I registered out there. Then the illumination, they
2 had an outfit called “Smokey the Bear” and that was an Air Force—I don’t know if it was
3 a C130 or 123—

4 JM: I think it’s a 123.

5 BL: Yeah, I think so too. So I got on their frequency. Now, I don’t know if the
6 forward air controller from the Air Force, sitting back behind me with Hal Moore, if he
7 got—he must’ve called them up and said, “Get up here.” Then I don’t know when he
8 handed him to me, or how he handed but I had the Air Force guys—I was talking to them
9 right in the airplane. They were droning around up there at night and—I never, this is
10 embedded forever, and it’s dark and you can hear them. After a little while, one of the
11 lieutenants called down and said that, “Diduryk, they’re right in front of me.” And he
12 said, “How close?” and he says, “I can almost touch them.” And he says, “Kill them.”
13 And he turned to me and said “Illumination.” I said to the guy on the Air Force, “Kick it
14 out, illumination out now!” With that, pretty soon there was this little pop, and it was like
15 this (Editor’s note: Interviewee visually shows to interviewer) bright as day, I couldn’t
16 believe it.

17 JM: What did you could see?

18 BL: Well, lots. They were all around in the woods and everything. Then that’s
19 when I cut loose with everything. One, I’d walk up and down and around, all over.

20 JM: And the troops in the meantime, all around you are firing 60s, and 79s, and
21 16s and everything else. But you’re not, because you’re talking on the phone? Or was
22 there a point at which you had to fire—

23 BL: Never pulled the trigger.

24 JM: Never pulled the trigger?

25 BL: Nope, I just keep firing those concentrations. Trying to bust up any kind of
26 charge as best as I could. It did dawn on me, I might have to though because I always
27 remember, I wish Rick Rescorla was alive because he would be a wonderful interview,
28 because the guy was something else. I always remember him, walking up to me, in my
29 little fight, “I’m so scared, I’m done, my (??) peering out and he comes walking up- he
30 walked around while everyone was on their (??), he be walking around. He came up and
31 he said, “Where’s your bayonet?” I said, “Bayonet? Me?” He says, “Give me your

1 bayonet! Now, you don't put that on the end of your rifle, you stick it right here." He
2 stuck it right on the ground. He says, "When you need it, you know right where it is. Now
3 if you ever put it on, you can use it!" I'm thinking, artillery guys don't do this, what are
4 you talking about? I'm not trained to do this. I'd die this way! That was something. But
5 we kept it up. I'd just finished the illumination, it was so funny, I kept them going, all
6 night long. I think it started like at four in the morning, maybe the sun came up at six or
7 whatever. The sun was up a little bit, so you can see pretty good, but I said, "Okay, we
8 need another one." The guy on the airplane says, "You need another one? What are you
9 talking about? The sun is up!" I said, "I know, but it really makes us feel good, throw one
10 more, out will you?" He goes, "Sure!" Then pop! There was hardly anything.

11 JM: The illumination fired from a 105, right? It's parachute?

12 BL: 105s are parachutes. Yeah.

13 JM: I have some experience with that, in terms of how bright it can get. The
14 enemy also uses that illumination.

15 BL: Right.

16 JM: It's better for us to know where they are, so we can do something about it.
17 But does it help you with that illumination? Does it help you as far as adjusting is
18 concern?

19 BL: No.

20 JM: It doesn't?

21 BL: The difference between the Air Force illumination and the 105 illumination is
22 like the power of ten. It covers so much more area because they are so much more higher.
23 Therefore, it also lasts a lot longer, its got a lot longer to come down, it's a bigger
24 canister I assume. But no, I didn't rely on that, I did all that in the daylight. I put all those
25 concentrations in the daylight. I wouldn't move them because I knew I was at my limit. I
26 was so close that I didn't want to do that.

27 JM: When you called fire for effect or whatever your language is.

28 BL: Yep, that's it.

29 JM: From the time that the solider drops—the solider loads it through the breach
30 to impact, how long?

31 BL: Oh boy.

1 JM: From that distance.
2 BL: From that distance? A minute. Half-minute.
3 JM: Half a minute?
4 BL: Yeah.
5 JM: The firebase is what? Seven miles away?
6 BL: Five.
7 JM: Five miles. Five miles away. You have several rounds. Did you tell them how
8 many rounds to fire? Or did—
9 BL: That night I might've had twenty-four guns.
10 JM: Twenty-four.
11 BL: I think LZ Columbus was up at the same time. I had twelve there and twelve
12 at Falcon, I think. I had them all.
13 JM: All 105s?
14 BL: All 105s. They were firing and I had them going all the time. I didn't have
15 to—they didn't have to compute anything or do anything, I'd just say, "Fire, Kilo, Bravo,
16 203." Whatever number they'd assigned to whatever that concentration was. That's all
17 we did. We just—
18 JM: You were using a code for a six-digit coordinate, that you had pre-registered?
19 BL: Yes, pre-registered.
20 JM: When you were putting in your six-digit pre-registries, were you, on the
21 radio, using code for those numbers or were you talking direct?
22 BL: Talking direct. I'd give them the coordinates.
23 JM: You didn't have to—
24 BL: We had what we called the "Pony Code," but that—no.
25 JM: But at that point—
26 BL: No.
27 JM: Yeah, the time they're listening and trying to translate, it's too late.
28 BL: Right, and they weren't going to do—I had them all over the place. If they
29 were going to get us—
30 JM: Yeah.

1 BL: The idea was that I had them at different depths and stuff. The theory was
2 that they would mass and come pouring at you. If they massed enough people, no matter
3 how good you were, they would overrun you. My job was to keep them from massing, so
4 I moved the darn—I mean I had the stuff. I suppose at times I would move, I would say,
5 “Kilo, Bravo, 203, add two-hundred” Or add one-hundred or add fifty or something like
6 that. Just to move it over back or something.

7 JM: Bill did you—were you able to see the effect of your efforts? That is, you’re
8 hearing shrapnel through the air, you got trees around you so you’re hearing it, were you
9 able to see them go down as a result of that?

10 BL: I really couldn’t see them go down. But the next morning it was real obvious
11 because it was pretty bad. We didn’t—we had six guys wounded or something, that was
12 it.

13 JM: How about—at X-Ray you had no friendly-fire, at X-Ray at all.

14 BL: No. You mean—

15 JM: In terms of anything—

16 BL: Coming in on us?

17 JM: Yeah.

18 BL: I never heard of any there.

19 JM: Now, X-Ray is over. There’s a lot of troops, I think Tony Nadal’s B
20 Company is extracted, what’s left of it. What about you? What happens to you after X-
21 Ray?

22 BL: We are extracted back to Pleiku with Hal Moore’s troops. We’re still attached
23 to them. I always remember this, the rest of our battalion, the 2nd of the 7th plus the 5th,
24 came in to take our foxholes, but it was really over there and they were just going to take
25 our foxholes for the night. I always remember going down to my FO, another FO came in
26 and I went down and said to him, “You really got to pay attention and you really got to
27 put the stuff out there,” and stuff like that I tried to cheer him up and all that and he got
28 killed in Albany before I could see him again. I would’ve lost several.

29 JM: Now, were you his replacement? You went into Albany, right?

30 BL: Right. That’s what happened. Very odd thing. We stayed the night in Pleiku.
31 I always remember—our uniforms were so, the smell of death and all of that, we burned

1 our uniforms, they had all brand new and nice uniforms for us, jungle fatigues this time
2 not the old ones from the States.

3 JM: So you were still wearing States uniform?

4 BL: States uniform. We burned our boots because they were so bad. They gave us
5 all new jungle boots; we were all excited to have new uniforms. I remember going to the
6 theater, they have a theater there and I fell asleep. In the theater, I couldn't—they took
7 me bad, I was so tired.

8 JM: What movie?

9 BL: Some western, I think.

10 JM: Something with guns?

11 BL: Guns, yeah! Then the next day progressed, you kind of felt better, you
12 were—we were pretty stunned you know. It was getting sort of towards dusk. They were
13 having a little church service and we had a cross on a little bubble helicopter, one of those
14 OH13s. We had a little cross, I was sitting on the ground there looking at the cross,
15 listening to the chaplain. All of the sudden, somebody started yelling, “B Company,
16 mount up!” It was sort of surreal. You know, B Company? What B Company? Who’s
17 yelling? What’s happening? They said, “The helicopters are coming right there to get
18 you, get out there, run right now! Grab your rifle, your ammo and go! No C-rations, no
19 nothing, just go!” So we ran out, I’m not sure how many helicopters. I would guess
20 maybe six. Now we’re—Myron Diduryk is jabbering on the on phone like, “Where are
21 we going? What are we doing?” They’re telling him that this terrible thing has happened
22 in Albany and you guys have to get in there and try to save them type of thing. Now
23 we’re really, “Oh my goodness.” It’s getting dark, light enough to see the ground sort of
24 and we come into this LZ, and Albany was not a nice LZ, it was short, skinny. We came
25 in there and the pilots started getting shot up. We jumped from, I don’t know how high
26 up, fifteen feet, ten feet, whatever and just hit the ground. Our guys, what was left of
27 them, had sort of this side of the LZ and the North Vietnamese had the other side. So
28 when we got in there, they kind of said “Diduryk, look just take over. See what you can
29 do.” We sort of established as best we could, where people were. If you’re familiar with
30 Albany, the problem is that they’re strung out all over the place. There’s pockets of
31 people. It’s just a horrid situation because there are guys out there with radios that are

1 wounded, calling to try and get in, and they can't get in because the enemy is wandering
2 around out there. It's very difficult to put the artillery out there but eventually, I decided,
3 probably because Diduryk told me to, to put it out there. First of all, I ran a Skyraider
4 down to the other side of the LZ and had him just fire cannon after cannon through there.
5 They carried .50 calibers or .30 caliber, to try to shred those trees and get them out of
6 there. They must've left or he did do that, get our backside kind of thing. Then, I started
7 moving the artillery around but I really sort of had said, "Okay, this is so bad, that no
8 matter what you just have to bring it in and put it right on top of us." I pretty much was at
9 the fifty to hundred-yard range. You can hear the shrapnel fly around. I don't know if
10 anybody got hit by it particularly.

11 JM: But you were in it too. You ordered it in on top of yourself.

12 BL: Right. I tried to keep the backside because I knew those were open and I
13 knew that side was open. We were okay over there but this way I knew where our guys
14 were. So I tried to keep it over the edges. I just did that all night long; it was a terribly sad
15 thing. I do remember, it was the middle of the night and we hear this voice and it's
16 (Interviewee makes animal noises) like this. We're going "What?" It's one of the troops
17 is crawling in and he's got an incredible story. He's the guy that the North Vietnamese
18 walked up to and gave him the coup de grâce, he shot him with a pistol and the guy
19 opened his mouth, and it went into his mouth and out over here or something like that and
20 missed the vitals. The guy crawled in, but he couldn't talk so he's giving us this horrid
21 sound, trying to tell us he's an American and let him in, all that. He came in, there was
22 several other heroic guys out there that did stuff, that we gathered in the morning, here it
23 is, amazed how they lived through it.

24 JM: For you personally and maybe even militarily, Albany was so much worse
25 than X-Ray.

26 BL: Worse in the sense of, there was no battle plan. There was no—this is
27 freewheeling. The guys, Captain Forrest who was this amazing guy that was in the
28 front—they called the officers all the way to the front. They're strung out like a mile. His
29 is way in the back, when all this starts, he takes off running all the way at the back. The
30 radio operator gets killed running with him and all that kind of stuff, heroic things. He

1 had a much better handle on what pockets of people did, because we got there like I say
2 in that dark.

3 JM: After Albany and X-Ray, you've only been in country for four months or so.
4 What about the rest of your tour?

5 BL: I stayed with Diduryk until January or February. Then, they tried to make me
6 an executive officer, I guess I was an executive officer for a battalion, but I was so
7 screwed up by then, that I really wanted to be a FO. I knew it so well, I even told the
8 major—the exec of the battalion, Major Henry that “Gee, maybe I ought to stay here.” He
9 looked at me and said, “What are you nuts? You’re going home, I’m not letting you stay
10 here, you got a wife!” I said, “I know, I know, I’m just really good at this.” Because now
11 I’m really feeling a responsibility for the troops. I really—by that stage, I literally was
12 getting out of a helicopter and calling around just like that right out in front of us. So the
13 guys knew that I would be walking them down the path in front of us, right off the bat.

14 JM: Did you ever have anything on the scale of—I know there was never another
15 battle like X-Ray and Albany and the rest of the war, we can make that argument, at least
16 not for such a short period of time. Maybe per—certain people may have experienced that,
17 but in terms of a large battalion-sized operation there really wasn’t anything like it. But
18 for you personally, did you have anything that was even close to that, terms of your own
19 safety?

20 BL: No. I became an aerial FO for a while. We’d fly around in the little bubble
21 helicopters, do this. I got to go home by the end of March. That was the end of my
22 contract. They were very kind to us and put us short-time FOs up in the sky. But no, I
23 never again got into it like that. We got into it, but we were more contained, more
24 prepared.

25 JM: Then how much more time did you spend in the army?

26 BL: That was it. Then I did reserve duty for four years after that.

27 JM: But you had a three-year commitment?

28 BL: Two year.

29 JM: A two-year commitment, after commissioning?

30 BL: After commissioning. End of March ’66, I was out.

31 JM: And you spent almost a year of it in Vietnam?

1 BL: Yeah. Yeah, what a surprise. (Chuckles) Vietnam, what's that?

2 JM: Bill, this is a fantastic story, I've enjoyed every minute of it. I know there is a
3 lot more to be said, that we don't have time for. I just want to stress that we have this
4 archive, this Vietnam Archive, which is the finest archive in the world on this war, of
5 anywhere, including Vietnam. We have these oral histories that we're doing. Somehow
6 or another there is more story to be told by you and I would like to either get you out
7 there or get you one on a phone, a telephonic interview because you got a lot to say, you
8 had some experiences that most people would never even imagine. We'd like to get it all
9 down, not that this isn't going to be something, too. But we have other kinds of interests
10 there. I've enjoyed every minute of this, and we appreciate everything, and appreciate
11 you being here today.

12 BL: Thank you. I thought one of the interesting things to me, in retrospect being
13 an old guy now, is how much leadership is all about. Hal Moore and Myron, they're just
14 incredible. The—it's what happens.

15 JM: As I hear you folks talk about that and my experiences of Vietnam came
16 much later, in the 1970s, five years later. When we saw a deteriorated army and lack of
17 leadership skills and lack of preparations, no unit cohesion, and all those kinds of things,
18 y'all had it so well there in the beginning and it saved a lot of people.

19 BL: Thank you for doing this, it's a very nice thing to put a way for posterity. I
20 feel like I am one of the lucky ones to be able to have Hal and Joe write this book. It was
21 very difficult to talk about this because as you can tell, you were there and you and I can
22 vision—you're envisioning what I'm saying and when you ask me the question, I know
23 where you're coming from. Most people haven't got a clue, so you can't talk about it.

24 JM: Right. I think that book was so good for those of us who served, because we
25 did understand it, there's a lot of people that read it like just another war book. But for
26 anybody that served, you can read and understand exactly what they're talking about and
27 now being able to put names with faces, that's important too. This is very—I'm glad you
28 came in for this.

29 BL: Thank you.

30 JM: Thank you very much

31 BL: It's a pleasure.

1 (End of interview)

2