

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

**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Richard Robert Ackerman
Conducted by Philip F. Napoli
Date 11 November 2005
Transcribed by Mark Steven Varela**

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

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.

1 Dr. Philip Napoli: This is Professor Philip F. Napoli, today is the 11th of

2 November 2005. I'm with Mr. Ackerman at the Crystal City Hilton.

3 (Editor's Note: Interview speaks to a third party, not relevant to the interview.)

4 Could you say your name and tell me what you had for breakfast today.

5 Dick Ackerman: Dick Ackerman, I'm still waiting to go to breakfast. (Laughs)

6 PN: So Mr. Ackerman, tell me your age and where you were born and grew up.

7 DA: I am Richard R. Ackerman, but I go by "Dick." I'm sixty-four, born in
8 Brooklyn, New York. I was adopted out of there, I was raised by a career Air Force man,
9 so I'm an Air Force brat. In fact, when I came back from Vietnam, my dad went three
10 months later and spent his year over there. It was kind of tough on my mom.

11 PN: Where were you raised? In Brooklyn?

12 DA: No, mostly in Rantoul, Illinois, Chanute Air Force Base. We had three years
13 in England, and couple of other places but that's the main place, that's what I call my
14 hometown because I went to high school, graduated there. You know, friends from
15 school and all that.

16 PN: Sure. So was joining the military kind of a natural thing for you?

17 DA: No. (Chuckles)

18 PN: Tell me that story then.

1 DA: Well, back in '64, '63 when the draft—if you were 1A it was very hard to get
2 a job. Because they would have to hold your job for you until you got back, when you
3 were drafted. So I was running around partying and having a goodtime, my mother
4 thought I ought to settle down but couldn't get a good job so she just wrote to the draft
5 board and said, "Either draft him or change his status." I was twenty-two years old! I
6 could've probably made it through, but she got me drafted. It was a good thing, straighten
7 me out a lot. (Laughs)

8 PN: Alright, tell me a little bit about your training.

9 DA: Fort Knox, Kentucky for basic. Then, Fort Jackson, South Carolina for AIT
10 (Advanced Individual Training) and then Fort Benning. I was in the 29th Infantry, which
11 was a support battalion for OCS (Officer Candidate School) and ranger training. We were
12 the aggressors whenever they went out to the field and simulated, we were the aggressors
13 out there. That was when we went up to the Dahlonge, Georgia to mountain ranger
14 camp. We went down to the Air Force Base for the swamp training and of course they
15 had to hump the hills and we went on trucks, but that was okay. (Laughs) That was
16 interesting. I ended up driving the company deuce and a half, so there wasn't a lot of
17 training. I never even saw my first M16 until I was issued it on the way to Vietnam. I
18 wasn't in the 1st Cavalry Division. When they were preparing to go, they went around
19 Fort Benning—well, first they determined who wasn't going to go, the short-timers and
20 the medical profiles and things like that. Then they just went around Fort Benning, I
21 guess grabbing bodies to fill the slots. I got like two weeks' notice I was going.

22 PN: Do you know why you got picked?

23 DA: Infantry MOS (Military Occupational Specialty), I'm sure. (Laughs) There's
24 no doubt in my mind, because I was a short timer. When—I was supposed to get out New
25 Year's Day and they made the cut off somewhere in the middle of October, I think. If you
26 were supposed to get out before that, you didn't go. After that, you had to go. Then you
27 got out when you're over there, so I ended up going. I think they just went around and
28 said, "We want you; we want you. Yeah, okay you come here." Maybe I was at the
29 wrong spot at the wrong time. (Laughs) I think that happens a lot in the Army. (Laughs)

30 PN: Do you remember the trip to Vietnam?

1 DA: Yeah, we took the buses up to Charleston, South Carolina. I went over on the
2 *General Maurice Rose*. We went down through the Panama Canal, up to Long Beach.
3 Then, from Long Beach we were supposed to head over, but we got a guy with
4 appendicitis on the ship. We had to go through the Hawaii Islands, they sent a ship out to
5 pick him up and take him off, and then we went over. We had a typhoon outside of Japan,
6 which was kind of rough in the ship because everybody had to stay below and guys
7 getting sick all over in this troop ship with the bunks like this. You know, when you slept
8 you roll inward because you never knew what was going to be coming down. (Laughs)
9 That was quite interesting, but on calm days it was real nice. The ocean was like glass
10 sometimes, we had movies up on the top deck and of course what they showed was
11 combat guild TV series, which was what we wanted to see heading to Vietnam. (Laughs)
12 PN: Spent time playing cards?
13 DA: Oh yeah, lot of cards, lot of hearts. I spent a lot of time on deck. I didn't get
14 seasick, got queasy, but I didn't get seasick. A lot of guys did get sick, of course they got
15 the heads on the boats in the front and the back, where you get the most movement from.
16 That doesn't help either. Some guys were homestead on the toilets. You go in there and
17 use one and—
18 (Interviewee makes groaning noises)
19 "This is mine!" (Laughs) That looks good on tape, doesn't it?
20 PN: It's the truth!
21 DA: Yeah, that's exactly right.
22 PN: Tell me about arriving.
23 DA: We arrived in Qui Nhon. We went—we got off the boat onto LSTs (Landing
24 Ship Tanks), down cargo into LSTs. Then we got to the shore and they issued
25 ammunition and everything, we don't know what to expect, but we were carrying our
26 duffle bags and everything else so I don't know if they really thought of anything was
27 going to happen or not. Then we got—after we got on shore, they took us to, I guess we
28 went straight into the helicopters, went straight to An Khe. I do have some blanks from
29 over there. We got there, they had little bit of a clearing there but we basically had to
30 clear our base camp there and we put up pup tents and first couple of nights, we got guys
31 being bit by centipedes and I mean the centipedes like this.

1 (Interviewee shows length with hands)

2 Huge and maybe as big around as your thumb. They bite you and they can poison you,
3 they were poisonous. So they made us put cots in our pup tents and that didn't work too
4 well. We had some kind of plastic somewhere and we just made our own tents, to get the
5 cots in there, to get us off the ground. I think it was—our mess hall was a big tent too.
6 Even if it was raining, you went up, get your food and went outside in the rain and ate.
7 Water was a scarce commodity, only had one water trailer for a battalion. Of course,
8 when it rained or any other problems like that, cut back on our water supply. I remember
9 one time they couldn't get food to us some reason. This is still in base camp and we
10 ended up eating canned salmon, saltines with a little bit of water that we had, for about a
11 couple of weeks. It was only a year or so ago I started eating salmon again. (Laughs) I
12 just had a hard time with that.

13 PN: Tell me a little bit more about your impression of Vietnam when you arrived.
14 The heat, the terrain, you mentioned the bugs. I'm interested in anything you have to say
15 about physically what it was like to be there.

16 DA: It wasn't super hot when we got there. It was definitely different than what I
17 was used to—even though we were up in the mountains, I went down in the delta and all
18 that stuff and it was just weird. We had some of the local refugees in the village, they'd
19 hire them to come out and help clear the perimeter around the base camp, that was the
20 first introduction to the people. Of course, they were all black pajama refugees and they
21 come out there chopping down the trees with those little hook things, which were very
22 efficient like scythe type things. They'd cut a tree down to here, maybe next day down to
23 here. I don't know if that was job security or what, but it was the same tree, go down that
24 far. We had found out that some of them were the guerillas and they'd be out there, they'd
25 let you take a break, when you take a break you just start peeling bark off of it, not
26 thinking anything about it. Somebody else with that little chopper chopping and stuff like
27 that. To get the perimeter, you had to come to the base camp and go by our fox holes and
28 they could see what we had, the machine guns and whatever. They'd go out there and
29 peel that bark off and at night that just glowed. They'd lay it down, the guy who was
30 chopping, he'd make a couple of chops and maybe one chop, that would indicate what
31 was in the hole. We'd get back to work, they would just lay a stick down and it's pointing

1 right at the foxhole and told them what was in that foxhole. So at night we had to switch
2 stuff around the holes, once we found out what they were doing. You know, this was '65,
3 when we first went over there, we had to learn a lot of this stuff the hard way. I thought
4 that was kind of ingenious of them, but it definitely wasn't appreciated. (Laughs)

5 PN: I can understand that. Tell me about the first number of weeks of shakedown
6 operation you guys went through.

7 DA: We went—well, our first actual mission that we were supposed to go on,
8 which I found out a few years later they didn't expect us to come back from, was a down
9 helicopter on a sandbar. They loaded us up into a Chinook and on the way they were
10 telling us where—they told us a Vietnamese word for halt, "Dung Lai" in case you
11 needed to stop somebody advancing and they don't shoot them. This chopper was down,
12 it was on the sandbar and we had to supposedly provide the defense for it while they were
13 repairing it so they could get it out. Later on, the word was that it was a general with all
14 kinds of good stuff, food, stuff like that and they didn't want to lose that. Risk our lives
15 for that but I don't know how true that was. Halfway there they aborted it for some
16 reason, and we came back. We just did a lot of patrolling around there. Take us out and
17 drop us off, we'd go on patrols and come back again. It wasn't a lot of action at that time.
18 It was just long hard days out walking. I was usually point man; I was in a recon platoon.
19 When I was usually point man, I didn't mind that, but I was like I said, drafted late. I was
20 twenty-four years old over there. Would rather me be in front than some young kid that
21 took it for a lark. I figured out I was more responsible, so I didn't mind being in the point.
22 Not a good place to be. (Laughs)

23 PN: Were you good at it?

24 DA: Yeah, I think I was. I was told I was. I didn't like being back in the middle of
25 everybody else anyway. I liked being where I could see what was going on.

26 PN: Tell me about the events leading up to several days in November.

27 DA: Well, just before Ia Drang Valley, I was on R&R (Rest and Recuperation) in
28 country, out of Vung Tau. The guy who come to greet—well, as I was waiting to leave, I
29 had three days down there. As I was waiting to leave, all of the sudden things started
30 happening. You see stuff going on around you and I was sitting on the back of a deuce
31 and a half, waiting for the plane and I could see these two helicopters, I can tell they were

1 going to hit each other. One was a Chinook, and one was a Huey. I could see the guys in
2 the Huey, but I could tell they were going to hit each other. All I could do is sit there and
3 watch them. They hit, went down in flames. I go, "Woah." That was right around the
4 beginning of the Ia Drang, in the first initial part of it because we were—our plane was
5 late, we lost a day just sitting around there waiting because everything was directed
6 towards Ia Drang Valley, I don't think it was X-Ray yet. I think it might've been a Plei
7 Me camp. Finally, when the plane came in, we got on the plane and were taxiing. They
8 stopped, they came back and said "Lift your feet guys, start throwing body bags in. So we
9 had nothing to do but to put our feet down on the body bag. I mean, you can't sit for a
10 whole flight like that. Then we taxied again, they stopped, and they came back, and they
11 took all the body bags off again. I never have understood what that was about, but that
12 was beginning of Ia Drang. At the time, I didn't know it. I went on to R&R. The guy that
13 greeted us down there came out, starts giving us fatigues and spit shining jungle boots.
14 The first jungle fatigues and jungle boots I'd seen, and he's running the R&R center. He
15 took us back, went in there, said, "I'll see you guys in a little bit once we get settled." We
16 come back down, and he's got shorts and tennis shoes on. Next time I saw him in
17 uniform was when he took us back out and went to meet the next plane. The reason I
18 brought that up is after Ia Drang, when we got back, they had us take showers and that
19 and issued us new uniforms and it was the old heavy khaki uniforms, boots. They didn't
20 have any boots in my size, I got mine from a dead man. That's because my boot soles
21 were coming off of them, I got my mine from a dead man. But this guy running the R&R
22 center had jungle fatigues and jungle boots, that's why I brought that up. Anyway, I
23 didn't think that was the greatest way to handle things over there. Anyway, when I got
24 back from R&R, I walked in and they said, "Saddle up, you're going with us." So I
25 grabbed my gear and we went to a tea plantation. We were sitting there waiting to see
26 what would happen. I draw a lot of blanks in here, I'm not sure why. The counselor I
27 went to said, "Sometimes when you're drawing blanks, it's just something you don't want
28 to remember or maybe just nothing happened that was memorable." But I was point man
29 going into there too, when we were walking through to relieve them at LZ (Landing
30 Zone) X-Ray. We got attacked by our own helicopters, because they saw a force coming
31 through the woods. I guess it's good and bad they saw us. It good, but bad because they

1 shot at us. The good part is I don't think they hit anybody. That's the bad part. (Laughs)
2 So if it was the enemy force coming in, well you know, they didn't get anybody.
3 Anyway, we got to X-Ray and walked in. The first thing I remember seeing was the pile
4 of dead bodies, stacked like cord wood, just off to the side, NVA (North Vietnamese
5 Army). I mean, piles as high as I was tall and I'm six foot. It was just stacks of bodies
6 there. Woah, what did we get ourselves into? We had little scrimmages before, but
7 nothing like this. I mean, it was just- snipers and that kind of thing, but nothing really
8 major. This was the bodies, the smells. It was really—it was different. We got in there
9 and they set us up for the night there at X-Ray. I have no idea what happened at night, I
10 draw a blank. The next morning, I remember—I don't remember morning happening, I
11 just remember we were getting ready to walk out. I have no idea what happened that
12 night, to this day. Then we were going to hypnotize me, if I wanted to try and remember.
13 I said, "You know, maybe I just don't want to remember that. I'll just leave that, let it
14 be." The next day we provided security while General Moore's men got airlifted out.
15 They were supposed to bring in B52s because they were so entrenched there. We had to
16 walk out because they didn't have enough choppers to get everybody out at one time—
17 time frame with the B-52s and that. So we started going out, our battalion followed the
18 2nd of the 5th part way out, we branched off to the left, they keep going straight. I think
19 they went to LZ Columbus, if I remember right and we started heading for LZ Albany.
20 We were talking along, I heard a noise at one time and I turned and this big cat—I don't
21 know whether it was a lion or mountain lion, all I saw was a big cat bounding away from
22 me. I don't mean a kitten cat; I mean a lion of some kind. It's bounding away from me
23 and it jumped up from here to the camera, away from me and I'm going, "Woah, where
24 the heck are we?" (Laughs) This is weird now. I just kept going. I think we were pushed
25 too hard—well, making accusations here, I don't want to but I think we were told our
26 battalion commanders wanted us to get there so we could get out that night and not have
27 to spend the night there. So we were pushed too hard and too fast and as recon, I was
28 point man for the battalion on the right flank, we really didn't get to do our job properly.
29 We were moving too fast. We shouldn't have been moving that fast.

30 PN: So you weren't able to look, you weren't able to pay attention—

1 DA: Yeah. I just wasn't able to do the job right. You want to be able to see what's
2 going on and when you're in a fast walk, you're just going. You're not paying attention
3 like you should. We'd find some stuff, we'd find canteens, ammo. You know, just little
4 things we'd find here and there and reporting it back, but I guess they didn't think
5 anything about it. We were still walking; the ground was shacking from the B-52 hitting.
6 I mean, we were close enough that the ground was shaking, and you could hear the B-52s
7 hitting over there and everything. We were walking along; at one point I heard a
8 commotion behind me and that's when they had captured two prisoners. I was out on a
9 flank walking a point out that way and the people that were inside of me are the ones that
10 came across because they were sleeping there. I'd walked by them out here, it was the
11 jungle, the elephant grass this high, places where it was even higher. You really didn't
12 really have a lot of visibility. So they stopped there and they got these two guys. We went
13 on a little further and they stopped and kind of—everybody was taking a break; I mean
14 we were dog-tired from the last couple of days. It was hot that day and we stopped. I can
15 look back, I can see all the company commanders and all that with the battalion
16 commanders, they're looking at the map and they're doing all this pointing and all this
17 stuff. They come up to us, the recon platoon was in the front, and they come up to us and
18 said, "There's Albany over there, we want you guys to go check it out and secure it and
19 the we'll move into it." So we went—the battalion was this way and we went to take a
20 left this way. We got no more than thirty seconds out and heard some shots, so we turned
21 back to see what it was. Figured it's just going to be a few shots exchanged and be done.
22 So we got down on our knees and kind of one foot up, kneeling on the ground. All of the
23 sudden, all hell broke loose. I mean, it was just shit fire everywhere—sorry. I mean, the
24 whole world exploded. We got down, figured still going to be a short firefight. So I got
25 down on my belly and kind of waiting for it to get over with and I can hear a guy yelling,
26 and I think, "This isn't going to get over with." I kind of got up and I could see other
27 recon guys against this line of trees here and my pack had worked its way loose, it was
28 banging against me. I said, "I can't run across the field with this pack." I reached down
29 there, undid it, while I'm doing it, there's grass breaking in front of my face from the
30 bullets, kicking dirt into my eyes. I have no idea how it missed me, because I was parallel
31 to the kill zone there. I was a six-foot target laying there. I got the pack off and I ran over

1 to the tree line there, there was about three or four recon guys there and we could see the
2 NVA coming in to help their guys up here at the ambush and we just started shooting at
3 them. The one I remember, one of guys down from me, this guy was kind of close to us.
4 He opened up with his magazine, he emptied his magazine at them. The guy still walking.
5 Did he hit him? Who knows. Come down, the guy next to me got about seven eight
6 rounds out of his magazine, and his rifle jams. If he hits him, who knows. So I said, "I'll
7 get the guy." I put mine into single shot, and I shot him in the head. I know I got him
8 because I could see his head jerk, and he's still walking. I shot him again in the head,
9 jerked, and he still walking. He went a few feet, stopped. Fell down to his knees, sat back
10 on his heels, and he started getting up again. So I shot him in the head again and he
11 finally stayed down. I was thinking, "What are these guys?" (Laughs) I mean, I know I
12 hit him with three shots in the head, the guy still wanted to go. Whatever they were on,
13 they might've been dead after the first or second shot, but he was still—I've heard these
14 stories before. He just—well, if it's going to take this much to put every one of them
15 down, we're in trouble. Basically, we were snipping at the guys coming in. I'm not sure
16 they even realized we were there because everything else going on. So we were just
17 picking them off as they were headed to relieve their guys. Meanwhile back of us, they
18 were regrouping in the trees and they started calling us, wanted us to start going back into
19 the trees. I guess we were proving good security for them while they were setting up
20 there on this side. So I covered for the two, three guys that were with us, they ran across
21 the field and I took off. I went down and one of them started coming back, I said "That's
22 okay, I would've tripped over my pack that I left out on the field." I always carried extra
23 ammunition and everything with me, it was there. But by the time it fell, I must've been
24 ten foot away before I got my bearings and got back on my feet, went back out to get the
25 pack. I got in there and got behind a little tree about this big around. I was leaned up
26 against it and go, "What the hell is going here?" Talking to whoever was next to me. I
27 looked up and there's Sergeant Major Scott. He was in his t-shirt and he's giving
28 directions like this, you could see where when had his arm down, he took a bullet right
29 through here. His t-shirt was all torn open, his flesh hanging here and he's still up there
30 giving directions. "Woah, what a guy." So I'm talking to this other guy, and I ask him,
31 "What the heck is going on here?" I felt a big thunk and I looked around that little tree,

1 there was a big ol' bullet hole, splinters and everything. It stopped a bullet from going
2 into me, and I got down low, I'm not going to use this tree no more. I got down to the
3 ground. I think they started getting organized and they put us on the perimeter facing
4 where the kill zone was. Now, this afternoon there's a lot of blanks there too. We got—
5 we were there firing; we didn't have any foxholes or anything. We were trying to dig
6 whenever it goes in kind of low, we were digging with the bayonet and scooping out, my
7 trenching tool is with my pack out in middle of the field. We were just doing the best we
8 could to protect ourselves. We could see all kinds of stuff going on and sometimes they'd
9 come out and attacks us. My opinion of the turning of the battle is when they dropped the
10 napalm. Because all the other support they gave us was nice, but napalm is when I saw
11 the battle turn. But the napalm was dropped on our own guys too. They dropped right
12 where the kill zone was. As they'd come running out of the woods, we'd just shoot them
13 like ducks in a shooting gallery. But after that, you could see that their aggression had
14 stopped, and they were backing off a little bit. Even though there was still fighting going
15 on, it was not as intense. It seemed like, "Woah, back off here." That's my viewpoint of
16 it. I'm trying to think, there's something else I was going to say there, I can't remember
17 what it was.

18 PN: You must have been running low on ammunition at some point.

19 DA: Yeah, we were getting to that point and I had—I'm kind of one of the guys
20 that always wanted to be ready for something. I carried extra ammunition, but it was in
21 my pack. I mean I had my normal load, I carried extra with me in my pack, but it was out
22 there in the field. Where we were, we were doing mostly single shots because we were
23 facing the kill zone and our guys were out there too, so we weren't randomly spraying.
24 We, the recon group, we were able to conserve ammunition by just using the single shots.
25 Targets of opportunity and not just randomly spraying. I know one time during the battle,
26 I had to pee real bad. I just rolled up on my side, I pulled my legs up to balance myself
27 and I'm laying there taking a leak. One of our sergeants saw me and I guess he thought I
28 was hurt because he saw me like this.

29 (Interviewee shows interview how his body was positioned.)

30 And he come running over there to see if I'm alright. "Yeah, I'm just taking a leak." "Oh
31 you son of a bitch!" And he ran back. (Laughs) I guess kind of humorous in the middle of

1 all this stuff going on. I thought it was pretty brave of him to just to come over there to
2 see if I was alright. I guess from the back it looked like I was shot and holding myself.
3 (Laughs)

4 PN: How would you characterize your own behavior? How did you behave? Were
5 you calm?

6 DA: Yeah, I was surprisingly calm. What I'd found out talking to others too is
7 you don't have time to get scare. You just react and do what your training had taught you
8 to do. You get scared later, when you think about it and things have calmed down, but
9 during all the intense going on, you're just reacting and doing, you're not scared. As far
10 as what I did, I'm not sure a hundred percent everything I did. Like I said, there's a lot of
11 blanks there. I was told that I did alright by a company commander and it just—you do
12 what you got to do to survive, that's all it is. There was some hand-to-hand combat and
13 the things you remember; I remember one guy I shot; I was telling you about because of
14 what it took to get him down. Other people you shot, it just happened. But hand-to-hand
15 if you—when you kill somebody, you're right there. It's personal, I guess the way to put
16 it. You're right there and those faces stick with you. They're still here. I'll never get rid
17 of them, the faces in there. The guys that you shoot at with the napalm and running out.
18 They're just people with bodies that we had to shoot, but there's no faces with them.
19 Hand-to-hand, there's faces. That's the tough part, to deal with that. As things went on,
20 things slowed down a lot. We got some holes dug, I don't know how or when. I
21 remember being the holes. I didn't sleep for two or three nights we were there. I didn't
22 eat. The smells were horrendous. You had all the gunpowder, the napalm, the burned
23 bodies and everything burnt. The smells were overwhelming, you didn't want to eat, it
24 was just awful. Then, through the night they kept flares, I guess from—helicopters were
25 dropping flares or planes were dropping flares and artillery was firing flares. We had
26 light almost all night long, there were only a couple of spells where it was dark. The
27 flares coming down a little parachute like this, all these shadows. (Laughs) I'm sure all
28 these trees got killed that night too because, trees would move on you, bushes move on
29 you. (Chuckles) When you're sitting there just watching, they'll move. Through the
30 night—we had small scrimmages through the night, no major assaults that I remember.

31 PN: You're still separated, sort of hanging out there on one side as a unit.

1 DA: Yeah, we're still on the copse of trees that we got pulled back into, the
2 survivors that were able to make it. But that kill zone out here—during the night, in the
3 beginning we could hear shots out there, of course everybody fired back. But they had
4 come around to make an inventory of what kind of ammunition we had left, and it was
5 very low, they'd started splitting it up. If you got three magazines and this guy got one
6 you give him one and that type of thing. Sometime during the night, two helicopters were
7 able to get in and they brought ammunition with them. They brought M60 machine gun
8 as I remember. We didn't have any M60 with us. They brought some men into two
9 helicopters' worth. It was wonderful, just to know a helicopter made it in there was a
10 good feeling.

11 PN: Who were you with? Who's right next to you? Do you know?

12 DA: No, there's a couple other recon guys. I've tried just like the other CO
13 (Commanding Officer) to come over there. I don't remember which one it was, and I've
14 talked about this with a couple of the others, they don't remember who's exactly next to
15 them either. I know it was some of other guys in the recon, but I don't remember
16 particularly which ones it was, and I don't know why. Then that night that night, like I
17 said was small scimmages. The next morning, they came around before daylight and told
18 everybody to just stay in their hole, and we were going to have a mad minute where
19 everybody opened up with everything. So everybody stayed in their holes and then we
20 were told to fire. M79s would rake the trees and M60s would rake the grass, they were
21 out there waiting on us. For us to get up in the morning and do our farting and burping,
22 and comfortable daylight comes, everything safe again to us, you know. They're waiting
23 there for us to do that. Whoever said we ought to have a mad minute, it was a good idea
24 because we could see them falling out of the trees. They'd been waiting on us, getting up
25 on the grass and running because we were strafing the grass and everything else. From
26 that viewpoint it was good, the other viewpoint it was bad because we were having to
27 shoot towards the kill zone, and we had some of our guys still in there. During the night,
28 that's what I was going to say earlier, we could hear guys out there crying and we
29 couldn't do nothing about it. "Help me" and crying, just physically crying. We couldn't
30 do anything to help them. The shots were at the beginning, but we were firing back and
31 what we found out the next day was these NVA coming and getting their guys, hauling

1 them out, and if they found our guys they would either machete them or beat them with
2 their rifle butt or bayonet them. They didn't want them alive in there. But we couldn't
3 hear that, so we did react to it and shot back, that's why they quit shooting our guys when
4 they found them. The next morning, after that mad minute, they kind of split us up in
5 half, and half would provide security as we expand our perimeter and the other half
6 would go in, trying to find our guys and our job was not to stop then help anybody, it was
7 just to get out and form that perimeter. Got out of the hole, the first thing I saw was a GI
8 (Government Issue) boot standing up right. It had a bone sticking out of it just about this
9 far, flesh hanging out of it, smoke rising off of it. Jesus Christ, what else are we going to
10 see as we go out here? I don't know if I ought to have this on film, but I'll do it anyway.
11 The first NVA that we had seen as we expanded, he was wounded, and he was laying
12 there. There's another guy here and he was there. We went up, saw him there, had our
13 rifles pointed at him. I said, "Sergeant, come here." He came over there, I said, "What do
14 you want us to do with them?" He said, "Kill him." So we did. That's what we did to all
15 of them that we found that were wounded. Because—I'll put it in context here because I
16 know everybody gets upset about this sort of thing. We are expanding perimeter; we
17 don't want live enemy behind us, and we didn't have the manpower to deal with these
18 people. To say, "Okay, now we'll set up a little guard post and drag them." We had to
19 take care of our own guys first. So that's what we had to do. It's war. It's not—I know
20 there's people that will get up tight about that and next thing you know I'll be at court or
21 something for doing it. It's what you had to do to survive. What it was. So we kept
22 expanding the perimeter and as we're going through the kill zone from the ambush. The
23 things that we saw were the results of everything that went on and them coming in at
24 night, what they did to our guys at night. We had guys that survived the night out there to
25 saw what they did. Some of it, you know was not done in the actual combat, it's when
26 they came and dragged their guys out, saw our guys and brutalized them. You see a guy
27 you know sitting up against a tree and his heads on the ground next to him and it makes
28 it—it was easier to shoot the guy you didn't want behind you. Just the way it was, I don't
29 know. I'm not sure what I should be saying here.

30 PN: You can say anything you want.

1 DA: Okay, we spent—once we got past that kill zone, we provided the security
2 and these guys would be dragging weapons back, finding our wounded and bringing them
3 back, dragging dead bodies back. That night we pulled back into the perimeter again and
4 I do not know what happened that night at all. I do not remember it. Next morning, I was
5 on the thing where we had to bring the guys in and somebody else provided—the other
6 half provided security. I remember this one point I was walking out, and they said,
7 “Come here, give us a hand.” They had a body there, four guys had to bring in. They had
8 to roll him on a poncho and when we got over there, this was swollen, he was green. It
9 takes a day or two in that jungle, in the heat and everything. He was just swollen; it was
10 digging into his arms and stuff like that. I said, “Roll him on the poncho, get ready to roll
11 him.” My hand hit his hand and the flesh just broke off in my hand, it just stunk. I help
12 carry him up there with the poncho and I said, “I can’t drag anymore bodies back.” I went
13 out and I grabbed weapons. I loaded weapons so much you probably couldn’t see me
14 because I had weapons all around me carrying them back. While I’m doing that, they will
15 leave me alone. Nobody is going to say, “Hey come here, come help us with this guy.”
16 That was a sight that’s always there, and I can’t get rid of it and I will always remember it
17 but I sure didn’t want to do it again that day. I ended up having to do it a couple of times
18 but not—I didn’t end up with a guy’s flesh just breaking off. It was just rotten already.
19 Just a couple of days. We finally got out of there and got back to Pleiku. They give us a
20 shower and of course those raggedy-ass uniforms. The boots, they didn’t have in my size
21 like I said, and we spent the night there. I don’t remember why, but we just slept on the
22 ground there. I’m not a hundred percent sure. We got showers and stuff, then they got us
23 on trucks the next day to go to base camp. We were over at base camp and there was a
24 bunch of replacements there already. I walked up—by that time, the pup tent and going to
25 the other tent and then they had squad tents up. Even had lightbulb in ours, if you had a
26 flashlight, you could find it. We were in that last tent, one bulb in that whole tent.
27 Anyway, the squad team went in there and some guy laying on the bunk. It was obvious
28 it was somebody’s bunk; the new guy didn’t know any better. “Get the ‘uck out of my
29 bunk!” He jumped up and move out. If I ever knew who it was, I’d apologize to him but
30 that’s—it ticked me off, those guys in my bunk. We spent the next couple of days going
31 through the guys’—the dead people’s belongings. Separate the military from personal.

1 The personal could go home and the military stayed there. That's where I got my boots. I
2 finally came across a pair that fit me and that's where I got my boots from. Meanwhile, a
3 guy in R&R, he had a spit-shined jungle boots. I was a smoker back then. All they had
4 for us in our little CONEX container PX was Salem lights and kits. I smoked Lucky
5 Stripes. Well, in R&R, I picked up two or three cartons of Lucky's down there. I couldn't
6 get them in our PX, but I sure got them in the black market down there. (Laughs) I don't
7 know if that says something about stuff that was going on there, behind the scenes. I
8 think under circumstances they did what they could to support us, but I think they
9 could've done more. Just like right now what's going on, I think they could do more.
10 They're directing their energies away from the troops and not doing everything they can
11 to protect them, with us I don't think. We should've been the ones who got the new stuff
12 coming in not some guy running R&R center. We should've been able to get all the good
13 stuff or had the smokes we wanted or whatever and not have to fight for all the stuff we
14 wanted. These guys just had it. I just think that's wrong, that's my opinion. All in all, it
15 was an experience that I never want to relive again, but it's a memory that I have that I
16 can look back on it and say I did it. I live through it obviously; I didn't get wounded. I
17 don't know how or why. When I got back to Pleiku, there were rips in my uniform and
18 scratches and all that stuff, but no actual wounds. Luck of the draw, I guess. I don't know
19 how else to describe it. Some made it through, some didn't. The wounds that are here, are
20 still there, especially survivor guilt. As point man, how come I'm still alive? Just luck of
21 the draw. They said, "You guys go check that out." Thirty seconds out of the kill zone.
22 That's where we were running in, which was right there. Just thirty seconds made the
23 difference of me being alive or dead, I guess. I don't know what else I can tell you. What
24 do you what to know?

25 PN: I think this is a place where we need to stop. I think we've done a really,
26 really hard hour.

27 DA: Well, it was.

28 PN: I know it was. Just speaking for myself, it was an absolute privilege to listen
29 to it.

30 DA: Thank you.

31 (End of interview)