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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Malra C. Bell
Conducted by Dr. Philip F. Napoli
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Transcribed by Mark Steven Varela**

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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 (Editor's Note: Audio cuts in.)

2 Dr. Philip F. Napoli: I am Philip Napoli, today is November 11th, 2005. We are in
3 a meeting room at the Crystal City Hilton Hotel in Virginia and we are going to talk a
4 little bit about Vietnam. The first thing to do is get introduced. So tell us a little bit about
5 yourself, how old are you, where you live, that kind of stuff.

6 Malra Bell: Well, I'm 67 years old. I joined the military in February 1956. At that
7 time, I lived in a little town called Cartersville, Georgia. I now reside about twenty miles
8 away in a town called Rome, Georgia. As time went on, I changed various military jobs ,
9 you know. As a private and I worked my way up to getting involved with the 7th Cavalry
10 at Fort Benning in 1960—I came back from Germany in '63 and I stayed there with
11 Charlie Company, 1st of the 9th Infantry. I was 2nd Infantry Division and went to work one
12 morning and the company commander says—I was a Buck Sergeant 5 fire team leader,
13 when I take them, one of the guys says, "Sergeant Bell, the company commander wants
14 to see you." I said, "Oh guess, anyhow." Crossed over to the orderly room I went. He
15 said, "Bell, come on, me and you and the—" Hank Thorpe was the XO, the executive
16 officer. Captain Cloudera was the company commander I'm talking about. So we had to
17 go across the street because we are no longer Charlie Company 1st of the 9th, we are now
18 A Company 2nd of the 7th Cavalry, 1st Cav Division (Laughs) "How the hell did we get in

1 here?" It was bad. So that's how I ended up and of course we got all of the stories, you
2 know. "Hey, 7th Cav was General Custard, you know. The last end. You guys are going
3 to Vietnam and you're going to be heroes!" Can I tell a little story about my wife there at
4 the time?

5 PN: You can tell anything you want to tell, yes.

6 MB: I was 28 years old when I went to Vietnam for my first tour. Anyhow, being
7 that we were all Custard's going to be big warriors, none of us had any combat
8 experience whatsoever. We had white t-shirts and white shorts.

9 PN: Okay.

10 PN: The Army said, "You're going to have to dye those shorts and t-shirts green."
11 Well, at that time not many enlisted guys were married. So I had a fire team and my wife,
12 she was seven months pregnant with our fourth child. I said, "You're going to have to go
13 buy some dye, the government said that 'We don't have any dye to give you to dye these,
14 but you have to dye them!' " So I showed up in a couple of days with my dyed stuff.
15 Here come two or three guys, "Could you get your wife to dye these for me?" I started
16 out carrying a bag of white laundry home with me and my wife would stir on the pot, you
17 know. We lived in a tiny apartment and we had three children and she was all swelled up
18 with our fourth child. This went on for about a week. "I'm out of dye." Well, the guys
19 gave me some money to give to her to find some dye. She had to drive all over
20 Columbus, Georgia in an old rickety Ford station wagon. Finally, she had stirred it with
21 big spoons, stirring this dye pot, you know. You had to heat it on the stove and it's hot in
22 the summertime. We didn't have no air conditioning; we were too poor. She's slaving on
23 that thing and I came home, she said, "That's absolutely it." I came home, and I had a
24 Sergeant Eshbach that was my E7 platoon sergeant. Him and Johnson, Ben Johnson. By
25 the way, Ben Johnson was the first killed in action from A Company, 2nd of the 7th in
26 Vietnam. My wife, I had his laundry, Ben Johnson, and Sergeant Eshbach. Eshbach got
27 killed on the 25th of January, but I'll tell that little story in a minute. I walked in with that
28 little thing and she said "Oh no. No more!" I said, "Please, dear." She said, "Well,
29 alright." So I kind of walked out the door and the little screen door had screen front door,
30 "That's my platoon sergeant." I heard a little mumble as I left, she said, "Custard. The
31 Indians didn't kill him, his damn wife did." (Laughs) So we made our way to—the 2nd

1 Infantry Division I was assigned to, like I said C Company 1st of the 9th at Sand Hill and
2 they took the colors of our 2nd Division and sent them to Korea and brought the 1st Cav
3 Division colors back and took the 11th Air Assault and some men from 2nd Infantry
4 Division and formed up the 1st Cav Division all right there at Fort Benning and we made
5 our way by bus to Charleston, South Carolina.

6 PN: Before you go into Charleston, can you tell me a little bit about the training
7 you guys did together?

8 MB: Myself and my Company Commander Cloudera and Hank Thorp, Lieutenant
9 Thorp, that later became Company Commander of Delta Company, 2nd of the 7th. We had
10 trained previously as we were the aggressors for the 11th Air Assault. They had to go to
11 the field and train in Fort Stewart, Georgia, which is down by Savannah and Hundred
12 Airfield and all that down there. We had trained by—we were actually Armored
13 Personnel Care, APC's Company. We had trained but we were used as the aggressors of
14 against the 11th Air Assault which was the 1st Cav. We didn't know this at the time, so all
15 my training was with APCs until we got to call to go—we got very little actual, the 2nd of
16 the 7th got very little airmobile training before we left to go over. Now, the 1st of the 7th
17 which had Hal Moore, Colonel Hal Moore, they got extensive training. We got very little.
18 So that's why when they got to Vietnam, that the 1st of the 7th was probably the most
19 highly trained unit in the 1st Cav Division and therefore they got all the hard jobs. Like I
20 said, back before, then we got on the buses and we went road to Columbus. From
21 Columbus to the Port in Charleston, South Carolina. It took us like thirty days to get over
22 there on the USS *Rose*, it was a troop transport ship backed in. Previously, I was well
23 aware of the *Rose*. I had ridden it to Germany about three or four years before. The same
24 ol' rambling *Rose* they called it. It was a USS *Maurice Rose*. So we went to the Panama
25 Canal, up to Long Beach, California and refueled. Took some food. Some of the people,
26 as their enlistments were running out, some of them got off in Long Beach. We went in—
27 we didn't go into Hawaii. We stopped outside and they sent a boat out, we had a sick guy
28 on there. I didn't know him or get to know him, but we had the entire 3rd Brigade of the
29 1st Cav on this USS *Rose*. When we got to Qui Nhon, thankful they helicoptered us by
30 Huey, helicoptered us, you know. We landed at An Khe and we started clearing the Golf
31 Course and making fighting positions.

1 PN: I want you to go a little slower for me. Can you tell me a little bit about that
2 typhoon? The big storm?

3 MB: Oh yeah. What I remember most about the typhoon was, we were—I was a
4 Buck Sergeant, I was in the hull of the ship, you know. If you were E6 and above, you
5 were up there pretty nice, but if you were a Buck Sergeant or E4 you were down there.
6 Anyhow, I think we were off in the Philippines somewhere. When they started wiring,
7 they had a big cable about twenty feet from the outside rails of the ship and there were
8 some wires out there. But these big cables, they put two of them up and only had about
9 this two feet of space out doors that we could come out of the basement, the hull of the
10 ship to get in the air to keep the people—when the typhoon started hitting us, we didn't
11 know, "What the hell are you doing up here? We don't have no place to go smoke or
12 anything!" They had put this wire in so close that we had hardly any room and I'm talking
13 about a whole brigade of soldiers on the ship!

14 PN: It's to keep you away from the rail, I take it.

15 MB: Yeah, to keep us from falling over. But you know, we're standing there,
16 shoulder to shoulder. You know trying to smoke a cigarette! (Laughs) The whole thing.
17 Basically, I don't know if a lot of the guys regurgitated and everything down there, it just
18 smelled terrible. I practically lived out standing against the bulkhead on the outside.
19 That's the thing, the smell was just too great for us.

20 PN: Sounds intense.

21 MB: But like I said, we got to—anything else.

22 PN: I'm just curious about if there was anything funny that happened on that boat
23 ride or anything other—anything else that was memorable except that big storm that you
24 guys went all through or maybe even landing, or when you did arrive at Qui Nhon.

25 MB: Oh, absolutely nothing was funny on the ship. We were just sardined in, too
26 many people. When we got to Qui Nhon, we did clown the cargo nets down the side into
27 the landing crafts and we went in. Fortunately, didn't get any foot wet or nothing. I was
28 just, "Thank you"—that was it. (Chuckles) Then I thought to myself, well none of us
29 knew where An Khe was. I thought we were in An Khe when we got there, but it was Qui
30 Nhon and they said, "We got to go over that mountain over there." I said, "Oh lord, we're
31 going to have to walk over that damn mountain already." But they used helicopters and

1 they got us over to An Khe without any incident I think. It was very bad when we got
2 there. Somebody—of course we put out security, immediately. Formed a perimeter and
3 started working on that, but then somebody had packed the ship wrong! We didn't have
4 anything to eat. We had arms and ammunitions but nothing to eat. No C-rations, no K—
5 well, some still had some K-rations. Nothing to eat! I don't know the mess sergeants was
6 started getting old cans, if you could see it was made in 1942 of stuff and little sausages
7 in it and all, but we didn't have anything to eat because they packed the ship wrong. At
8 least that's what the mess sergeant told us. We had absolutely nothing to eat. So we were
9 ill tempered too. But everything straighten up finally.

10 PN: What do you remember about the terrain that you saw when you arrived?
11 Was it strange? Was it beautiful? How did it strike you?

12 MB: Well, the heat was intense immediately. But we'd gotten climatized on the
13 ship coming in, but it was hot and sweaty though. We stayed on deck, like I said, most of
14 the time. So by the time we got there we were pretty well climatized, but the terrain to me
15 was nice. It was North Georgia where I was born, it was mountainy and had the trees and
16 everything, but then we'd get further in and of course we had triple canopy jungle which
17 we weren't familiar with. I would love to go back for a trip. I would like to go back and
18 visit the country again. It wasn't strikingly bad to me at all. I was swimming in rivers and
19 creeks all my life and crossing those creeks and rivers there didn't bother us—me at all. I
20 was quite content. When we got involved going into the Ia Drang Valley now, the 1st of
21 the 7th Cavalry, with Colonel Moore at that time, he went in with his Battalion 1st of the
22 7th and they called for reinforcements. So it was B Company 2nd Battalion, my company
23 in B Company. They called for more reinforcements and they sent A Company in, 2nd of
24 the 7th on the morning of the 15th. That's when I went in. When we got there—this is
25 what happened, we landed. My company commander was on the helicopter, Captain
26 Sugdinis with his little headquarters group. My platoon leader, Lieutenant Sisson and
27 myself, and SFC (Sergeant First Class) Eshbach was the Platoon Sergeant and a radio
28 operator and a couple of more, my fireteam. I had a fire team and we landed on this side.
29 The rest of A Company was landed on the opposite side of the LZ (Landing Zone). So
30 General Moore directed my Platoon Leader, Lieutenant Sisson, "You guys head south

1 and take that southern position that was held by—" I can't pronounce the guy's name.
2 Lieutenant Grogen?

3 PN: Geoghegan.

4 MB: Lieutenant Geoghegan's position. So we went down there and all of the A
5 company, the rest of them was pulled back into reserves. General Moore immediately
6 attached us to B Company, 2nd of the 7th which was my sister company. A Company, B
7 Company, sister company. So our job—immediately we got sniper fire but we started
8 taking turns with the fire teams. Guarding the perimeter and kind of started digging in,
9 but the job fell to us to move all of Geoghegan's dead back to the pickup point. Smelly,
10 swelled up, they've been there. We've got there at nine o'clock in the morning, around
11 nine, there about. Bodies all over, we were picking them up, taking them back. We
12 couldn't take too long, we had to quit and another fire team take over, you know. It was a
13 goring job, you know. Once we got them all stacked up, then we started stacking up the
14 dead Vietnamese. We put them in piles. Like six foot long and six foot high and we used
15 them for firing positions, but we were dug in real nice. My last position, I was tied in
16 with Lieutenant Rescorla's platoon of B Company 2nd of the 7th. I was on B Company's
17 left flank as they were facing south, I was on their left and Rescorla's platoon was the
18 most southern platoon. They tried to overrun us that night and everything. Some of them
19 got real close, but you know we fought them off. Then, we had our fired weapons off
20 come daylight.

21 PN: Mad minute?

22 MB: No. Mad minute was after I was shot. The next morning, we started moving
23 around and looking. There were live NVA (North Vietnamese Army) over there and he
24 fired at us and we shot him. we started moving around and I got up and a sniper shot me
25 right here.

26 (Editor's Note: Interviewee shows where he was shot to the interviewer.)

27 Came out of my back and if he was about this much of a better shot, I wouldn't have been
28 here. So they medevac'd me, flew me out, we came back to the aid station and they flew
29 me to Qui Nhon. Qui Nhon, they operated me. But first off, Michael Alfred, the medic
30 that was our platoon medic, he bandaged me up and he's still alive and he'll be here
31 tonight. We see each other every once and awhile we he can make it up here. So he's still

1 alive and really is a good guy. Anyhow, when they got me back to Qui Nhon, Qui Nhon
2 to Clark Air Force base in the Philippines. At Clark Air Force Base, when they flew us to
3 Hawaii from there, Joe Marm had been put in for the Medal of Honor. He was on the
4 litter next to me, on the plane flying to Travis. We got back Travis and they sent him
5 somewhere, maybe to Scott Air Force Base. All these places they're operating on us you
6 know, as we're coming back. I got to Scott Air Force Base then to Walter Reed. There is
7 something—I wanted to mention to you. Do you have a question for me?

8 PN: I would like to slow it down a little bit and take you back to that morning. I
9 know you got shot through the chest, did you stay conscious through that?

10 MB: Oh, yes! Yes. I lost a lot of blood but what had happened—it was a little
11 hole here. No bigger than a finger but when it came out, it was the biggest glass here. It
12 came out through the scapula they call it, back here.

13 PN: Yes. The backbone.

14 MB: The backbone. The doctors—the bullet had put a small crease in the right top
15 lobe of my lung. I didn't know this but your left lung has got two little lobes with your
16 heart tucked into there. Your right lung has got three little lobes in it. It deflated the top
17 lobe and they had to put a big ol' needle in here and at night suck out air. (Laughs)
18 Unbelievable. That was at Walter Reed, ward 33 at the old hospital up there. Let me go
19 back now, back to the valley. My platoon stayed in there another night. I got shot on the
20 16th. Okay, that was the 3rd platoon of A Company 2nd of the 7th. When General Moore
21 got ready to fly out, he took B Company 2nd of the 7th out because they had been fighting
22 with him. They took the rest of my platoon out but the guys that had been shot like me,
23 that was already evacuated, they all flew out with General Moore—Colonel Moore.
24 Then, A Company took the 1st, 2nd, and 4th Platoon on that walk to LZ Albany and they
25 got annihilated. Okay, but here's my platoon sitting back over here, A Company 3rd
26 Platoon. Okay, Sergeant Eshbach, all the guys that didn't get shot—Lieutenant Sisson got
27 sick with Malaria. On the 25th of January, they loaded the remainder of my platoon up on
28 an airplane going to Bon Son with the mortar platoon. The damn plane crashed and killed
29 everybody else on that plane, including all my people. I have a paper here—
30 (Editor's Note: Interviewee takes out a piece of paper.)

1 Shoot, I got it out for you. I keep so much stuff with me. So all of the guys that was in my
2 platoon, that I knew real well, you know are now dead, except for the ones that were sick
3 in the hospital with Malaria or got wounded.

4 PN: For the sake of the camera, this is forty-three victims, members of the
5 Cavalry Unit Jungle Hill Side, scene of worst disaster. Forty-seven Americans killed in a
6 crash. This is an AP story from—this article is undated, but you said it's January 1966.

7 MB: 25th of January 1966 is when the crash. I think the plane was C-119, I'm not
8 sure. Alfred, my friend Alfred, has got a picture of the plane. He was supposed to get on
9 that plane, but they put him on another one.

10 PN: Dwayne Paulson also was supposed to get on the plane?

11 MB: No.

12 PN: No? Different incident.

13 MB: Yes. I'm pretty sure. I wasn't there. I was already back in Walter Reed when
14 that crash happened, but if I hadn't gotten shot in November, I would've been on that
15 plane and died on the 25th of January. So I was fortunate not to have gotten killed twice.
16 If not the sniper, the plane crash would've got me.

17 PN: What kind of treatment did you get? Did you get good treatment?

18 MB: Oh great, the military gives the best treatment in the world. Even the VA
19 (Veterans Affairs), I go to the VA. I have no complaints about the government's military
20 treatment. My wife had a baby in Martin Army Hospital when I was in Vietnam. Captain
21 Sugdinis, my company commander called, I was on the bridge. This was prior to Ia
22 Drang Valley. I had secured a bridge one night, I had two men on one side, three men on
23 the other side on the fire team. We were securing a bridge and he called me up and said,
24 "Red Cross just notified us that your wife had a little girl named Dawn Rose Bell and she
25 was born yesterday." So that was really nice, she's here like I said earlier.

26 PN: That's a good moment. How's your health now?

27 MB: Well, real shortness of breath. But see, I stayed in the army. I was only a
28 Buck Sergeant E5 then and I retired in 1978 from the Army. I've had several operations
29 and I have a leg that fell and broke two years ago and it won't mend. It hasn't mended
30 yet. I was on a wheelchair for over a year. It slowly—they got me down on this brace

1 here, I can walk with the cane and this brace. But I'm completely retired, so it doesn't
2 make any difference.

3 PN: So what were you're assignments after? It must've taken you a long time to
4 get healed from the gunshot wound.

5 MB: Okay, after I got out of the hospital, they sent me back to Fort Benning
6 because that's where my family was. I had a real good assignment. I made E6. I went to
7 the Drill and Ceremony Committee and we talked to FM22-5, that's Drill and Ceremony,
8 to OCS (Officer Candidate School) candidates. E6 is the lowest rank, we had a master
9 sergeant and E7s, SFCs, and some E6s and I was one of them. That's what we did. In the
10 day, we would go out and have a platoon of OCS—have a whole company come in and
11 we would take a platoon each and we talked drill and ceremony to them so they know
12 how to march and salute, things like that (Chuckles). It was really a plush job. Never got
13 dirty or anything. We wore old pith helmets in the summer. You remember the jungle
14 pith helmets?

15 PN: I do.

16 MB: That's what we wore out there teaching those guys in the summer. Well
17 doing after that, I stayed there, I forgot how long and got on the E7 list and I got orders to
18 Fairbanks, Alaska. So I was back in the infantry up there. I think I was in C Company 1st
19 of the 47th Infantry up there and we had APCs (Armored Personnel Carriers), but I
20 always—I was already familiar with them because I'd been in Charlie Company, 1st of
21 the 9th. So I stayed there one year to the day exactly. I'd gotten orders—I'm an E7. About
22 a month later, I got orders back to Vietnam and to the day, February the 22nd for
23 example,—it wasn't February, I just don't know the date. February the 22nd of 1969, we
24 left Alaska for one year and I had to go back to Vietnam, so my wife—I had relatives in
25 San Diego, so we drove from Fairbanks to San Diego and we got her a house and then I
26 went to the Senior NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer) Academy out in—by Manhattan,
27 Kansas. What's that—Fort Riley. I went to Senior NCO Academy and then I went back
28 to Vietnam for part of '69 and part of '70, but at this time I was in the Mekong Delta, IV
29 Corps and I was a MET (Military Engagement Team) team, mobile advisory team. It was
30 a light infantry weapons advisor.

31 PN: That's decent duty too? Isn't it?

1 MB: No. No. No.

2 PN: That wasn't decent duty.

3 MB: Absolutely not. Okay, a MET team, a mobile advisory team. This was the
4 concept. You had a group of men, supposed to be a full army captain, a lieutenant and
5 three E7s. A light infantry weapons, a mortar—heavy weapons, and a medic. Okay, never
6 saw a captain. They had instead of all E7s, most of them were E6s. Say you were an E6
7 as heavy weapons and he was the medic and he was an E6 and I was E7 and I had a 2nd
8 lieutenant. He was the advisory team leader. He would be there about a month, six weeks
9 and they would put him in a unit up north. Then, I would get a new 2nd lieutenant, but all
10 this time, we did not live in a compound. We lived out in a village with the people. When
11 they went on operations, RFs, regular forces, I wasn't with ARVN (Army of the Republic
12 of Vietnam) now. ARVN is a step higher. I had a lindoid, they called it. A battalion about
13 the size of an infantry company. We were advisors to and we went on operations every
14 day. We got shot at every day and we walked the rice patties. We were supposed to go
15 two at a time. Well, if we went two at a time, it didn't work out because I didn't have
16 three people most of the time. So what we had to do—and we couldn't leave one guy
17 back by himself. So we all went.

18 PN: Every day?

19 MB: Every day, seven days a week and we walked around rice patties and you
20 can depend on it, we got shot at every day for almost the entire year I was there. Yeah
21 and we were eating their food too. We—you know, we ate whatever they ate. We cooked
22 our own though, but it wasn't good duty. Absolutely not. A lot of the unit, lot of the MET
23 teams have got a way to keep a guy up every night. Then, he walked the rice patties the
24 next day too! Because you couldn't get killed, you couldn't dare to go to bed. Sleep all of
25 you. We never had any incidents. We did get attacked at night, but not just us and we had
26 heard in some of the villages they turn on the Americans, you know. Said, "Oh, VC (Viet
27 Cong) came in here and killed them all." So we kept somebody awake. You know, it
28 wasn't very nice.

29 PN: From 1970, you rotated back to the States, I guess.

30 MB: Yes, back—I came back to Fort Ord, California. I put in for that because my
31 wife was in San Diego. I was assigned to the committee group, they had basic trainees

1 there at Fort Ord at that time. At first, I was the NCOIC (Non-Commissioned Officer in
2 Charge), I was an E7 of a hand grenade range, when we were teaching hand grenade. I
3 had an MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) with a M on the end of it for an instructor
4 then because I had an OCS type deal. We taught them how to throw the hand grenades.
5 But then I got assigned to the night fire range. We—like I was E7 and you're E7, I
6 worked Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. From five in the morning, to eleven at night or
7 twelve o'clock when we got through with the firing, and then I didn't come to work the
8 next day. So you worked Tuesday and Thursday but then the next week—

9 PN: We flip.

10 MB: Flipped Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. So that's how we worked at and
11 that was a pretty good job, but you know, five to twelve at night. (Laughs)

12 PN: That's a long day.

13 MB: Pretty long days, yes. Then, I went to Fort Dix. Then, I went to Korea. I took
14 my family with me to Fort Dix with me, so when I had to go to Korea, I left my family at
15 Fort Dix. So I came back to Fort Dix, when I got back, I was on the E8 list, I made it to
16 E8 and I took over the 1st Sergeant of Delta, Delta 3rd Battalion, 3rd Brigade. I retired
17 from D33 on 1 October, 1978.

18 MB: You saw a lot of change in the army in those years?

19 PN: Oh, absolutely, yeah. One thing that the—I feel very sorry for the guys that's
20 over there now in Iran—Iraq rather and Afghanistan. When we went back for our second,
21 some people went back for their third tours in Vietnam, we had openings. A billet was
22 opened. So the rank was open, you could make rank. If they sent home a buck sergeant,
23 somebody got to be a buck sergeant! But these guys that are going—we were individually
24 rotated. These guys that are going to war now, they're going as a unit! So nobody is
25 getting promoted. (Laughs) They're stuck! Nobody is getting promoted because they're
26 taking their own unit with them. There's no openings unless the normal thing comes in. It
27 helped a lot of us guys, you know. I would've never retired as an E8 if Vietnam hadn't
28 had come along. So some of the guys going over there—you'd go to Vietnam in the later
29 years, say '69 or '70 and if you went over there as an E3, two months you were an E4.
30 Then, before you left you were an E5. Poor guys sitting over there, the other war is not
31 getting that.

1 PN: Let me ask another question about change. I know you had very different
2 duties and I know the war was in a different place between '65 and '69. But can you help
3 me—

4 MB: '64.

5 PN: '65 to '69, when you—you were over there in '65?

6 MB: Yes, I was II Corps.

7 PN: That's right. You came back in—

8 MB: To '69 to '70 in IV Corps.

9 PN: Right. I'm interested in the changes that you saw in the war itself between the
10 two periods of time.

11 MB: Well, I was in completely two different areas. I was in real central highlands.
12 Down here I was in the lowlands and rice patties. I was not with the America unit. I had
13 my higher headquarters, but we got there maybe once a month. So I really didn't see any
14 US Army fighting except the helicopters that I'd call in to pick up the wounded
15 Vietnamese. So I really was not involved with any unit fighting, except the Vietnamese
16 fighting and they avoided if it could, but they were always getting snipers. So I really
17 couldn't answer that at all. I don't think there was—for me it was a complete different
18 war. I was a Vietnamese fighter then.

19 PN: That's a good answer actually. That's a good answer.

20 MB: It was just completely changed. I wasn't in the American Army anymore. I
21 was in the Vietnamese Army. The South Vietnamese Army though (Laughs).

22 PN: Yes, yes. I asked this to a bunch of guys and I don't know if this question is
23 going to work for you. Are there lessons or things that you learned out of the Ia Drang?
24 That you took with you later in the service?

25 MB: Oh leadership, oh goodness, yes. Like some of our officers and senior NCOs
26 told us to do things and it really showed us what to do. Then, later on as I got higher rank,
27 I could reflect back on that and I used some of the same quotes and mannerisms and
28 everything. Got them to do a better job by having learnt from these older and more
29 experienced men.

30 PN: Who in particular? Was there anyone in particular?

1 MB: Larry Gwen, my XO (Executive Officer). Sergeant Eshbach and I had one
2 guy that got killed over there. His name was Willie Quillen, he was Puerto Rican, he was
3 a Buck Sergeant like me but he got promoted to E6 right after I got shot and he was—I
4 was one fireteam, he had the other fireteam. But he got to be the Platoon Sergeant after
5 he made E6. He showed me really—he had been in the army for a longtime, but only a
6 E5, his English was kind of limited but if I listened good I can get it. I could remember
7 some of the things back then when I was in the military he would say,

8 (Editor's note: Interviewee imitates voice)

9 "Now that's what we got to do, sergeant. We got to get them to do this." Things like that.

10 PN: So leadership is a major—

11 MB: Oh, yes. Sergeant Major James Scott, he just died two weeks ago down in
12 Fort Benning. He would always cheer up the troops coming around and kept the moral up
13 and everything. Oh, yeah. Just like if you read that book, Sergeant Major Plumley I saw
14 him two weeks ago at Scott's funeral, down in Columbus when Scott just died. Jim Scott,
15 he just died, like I said two weeks ago and Plumley was down there and every time I see
16 him, I think of the book when he says, "Alright," told Joe Galloway "you can't take no
17 pictures sunny down there in the ground, you got to get up here and look around."

18 PN: Long term, what has service in the Ia Drang meant to you?

19 MB: Well, at first, really it was just a job. We didn't actually realize what we had
20 done in the Ia Drang Valley until later, years later. I mean, not like six months—now, the
21 officers and you know, the people that compiled all of it, they knew right away what we
22 had done. But the little guys, you know, the buck sergeants and the E6s and the E4s and
23 3s, we didn't realize until it started coming out three, four, five years later. "Oh goodness,
24 I did that?" (Laughs). With this, it was all part of the job and it was, you know. Yeah.

25 PN: And over time, it has taken on more significance?

26 MB: Oh, yes. Yes, just like what we're doing up here right now for the 40th
27 anniversary of the Ia Drang Valley. The movie came out and it's drawing attention to it
28 and you say, "Oh gee, I just—you know it amazing we're still alive, you know."

29 PN: Talk to me about these events when you come?

30 MB: Sad. Sad in some respects, but then when you see some of the others guys
31 that you knew—before we went to Vietnam, at Fort Benning and after we went to

1 Vietnam, you see some of them, you're kind of cheered "Man, I'm kind of glad he didn't
2 get it." But then I remember Roger Stone, a very good friend of mine. He got killed, go
3 down to the wall and see his name on it, and see Eshbach's name on it. I see Willey's
4 Quillen's name on it. So it's sad, but it's good to see the other guys that did make it. I
5 think it's a good thing too, the healing process you know, if you want to call it that.

6 PN: Because of the connection you guys feel to one another?

7 MB: Oh, yes. Absolutely. Camaraderie and all. Oh, yes.

8 PN: Does the public attention make a difference?

9 MB: I don't think so. Absolutely not. I can't think of an incident other than just
10 being us guys. You see somebody that you hadn't seen and a lot of us did not know that
11 they were having the 1st Cav Ia Drang Valley thing until it was going on for ten years.
12 We just didn't know. Just like we didn't know what we had accomplished in Ia Drang
13 Valley. Both X-Ray and Albany and Landing Zone Columbus.

14 PN: Interesting. Is there anything else that we need to talk about?

15 MB: Not that I know of. I'm getting kind of tired in here. (Chuckles)

16 PN: I understand, we'll stop. Thank you, Mr. Bell.

17 MB: Thank you very much.

18 MB: (Editor's Note: Speaks to third parties not relevant to the interview.)

19 (End of Interview)