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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Louis Ray Lefebvre
Conducted by Dr. Richard B. Verrone
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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 Dr. Richard B. Verrone: This is Richard Verrone, I am conducting a video oral
2 history interview with Ray Lefebvre, now a retired Lieutenant Colonel. Today is
3 November 11th, 2005, Veteran's Day. We are in Washington, D.C. at the Hilton Crystal
4 City for the 40th anniversary reunion of the Ia Drang-Pleiku Campaigns. It is eight
5 o'clock in the morning, or just after. Colonel Lefebvre, let me start by asking you about
6 before you went over to Vietnam and this is going to be your second tour as I understand,
7 in 1965. Could you briefly comment on what you had learned before and what you are
8 taking with you now in 1965.

9 Ray Lefebvre: Okay. I had gone to the Army Language School in Monterey,
10 California in 1961. So I was a Vietnamese linguist and when I got finished with that
11 school, I went to Okinawa and we didn't have a lot of military in Vietnam, but I spent
12 most of my time that I was in Okinawa, in Vietnam. Working on various projects with
13 other agencies of the US government and probably the biggest thing I got out of that, we
14 had to study the history. While we're studying the language, you study the history, the
15 culture of Vietnam. I really grew to admire and respect the Vietnamese people. The main
16 thing that I got out of all this was that they were very nationalistic. They're history, they
17 had fought the Chinese and defeated the Chinese. They had fought the French, defeated
18 the French. When the Japanese came in World War II to occupy Vietnam, the Japanese

1 thought they could do it with a moderate division of troops and it took six or seven
2 Japanese divisions just to handle the Vietnamese. So they're very nationalist, they didn't
3 want anybody to bother or to take over their country so to speak. That's how they viewed
4 us. That's when I used to—most of my research was, because of the language
5 capabilities, I did a lot of the—we monitored radio Hanoi. We got a lot of North
6 Vietnamese propaganda, that sort of thing. Try to found out what they were thinking,
7 what they were doing. Got involved in a lot of things like that.

8 RV: Before you go into the Ia Drang and before you're involved with that, you
9 had a history of the country?

10 RL: Yeah.

11 RV: You understood this. How did that change, or how was your perspective
12 maybe different than those others coming into X-Ray and Albany in 1965?

13 RL: I think the big difference might have been—I don't have any empirical data,
14 just a personal feeling. Those of us that had been there before, we had other people in our
15 unit, like Tony Nadal had been there before, we had other people that had been in
16 Vietnam. They knew that when we actually got into any type of combat, we were going
17 to be up against a pretty tough enemy. Mainly based on, again my opinion, based on their
18 feelings of they look upon the Americas as invaders into their country and based on their
19 past experience, they were going to do everything they could to keep us from taking over
20 their country. That's how they viewed us. They didn't view us as being there to help the
21 South Vietnamese. So I was prepared for it. I knew it was going to be tough. I didn't
22 think I would be in and out that quickly, but I was ready for that. I just knew it was going
23 to be a tough battle, a tough time.

24 RV: Do you think that then Lieutenant Colonel Moore and others and Matt Dillon
25 and Tim Brown, did they understand that? Did they grasp what they were coming into in
26 that sense? A historical sense?

27 RL: I don't know, I think Colonel Moore might have. Based on some
28 conversations I had with him later, I have the feeling, he pretty well he understood that
29 because he had studied them when they were fighting the French. He knew about the
30 battles with the French. Maybe not about the battles with the Japanese, he may not have
31 known the other history, but he knew what the French had gone up against. So I think he

1 had it pretty good. The rest of him, I don't know. I can't really speak to that, but if they
2 didn't, it wouldn't surprise me because I don't think we ever adequately prepare
3 ourselves to go to another country for war or whatever reason. I think Colonel Moore did.

4 RV: Tell me a little bit more about Colonel Moore, then Colonel Moore. What
5 was he like?

6 RL: Probably one of the most—I guess the best way to explain what he showed
7 me, when we came back from our first operation, which was a place called Happy Valley
8 and we had a little bit of a gunfire, but it was really, it was a good initiation into what
9 combat might be like. I had just been named to company commander, I didn't know
10 Colonel Moore real well because I joined the unit so late. I didn't really know him, I
11 hadn't trained like the rest of the people had for all those months. But he came back and
12 did two things that really impressed me. From this operation, the first thing, one of the
13 things that he did, he came back and got all the troops in a little place back there in An
14 Khe, back at the Golf Course. He had some maps, the S3 had put some maps up and he
15 explained to his men what had happened, what was going on. He would say things like,
16 “Yeah, Ray remember when you had your machine gun was here and I came by? Let me
17 tell what was there, let me tell you why we did that.” He made them feel like they were
18 really part of the battle. An intimate close part of whatever we did because he knew what
19 every one of them had done and where they were and why they were there in that
20 position and what we were doing as far as the maneuver and that sort of thing. He didn't
21 have any of the officers there. It was just him, the sergeant major and the troops. That
22 really impressed me. You could tell by talking to the guys afterward that they really
23 appreciated that and they liked that. They felt more—I think you know what I'm trying to
24 say—

25 RV: They were all connected in a more personal intimate way.

26 RL: Yeah, then he took the officers, his company commanders. Then he said—I
27 don't know if this was same day or day later, but then he said, “Okay, I want to talk to
28 my commanders.” He didn't have any staff there, he didn't have S4 or S2 any of those.
29 He wanted to talk to his commanders, which were five company commanders. He kind of
30 did the same in a way, we kind of reviewed everything and that sort of thing, I like that.
31 As an infantry captain, just out of the advanced class, and I'm kind of digressing here a

1 little bit. When I went into the Cav, they wanted to put me up in the G5, which is Civil
2 Affairs and Psychological Operations, that sort of thing. Mainly because of the language
3 or else in G2. It made sense, I probably would've tried to get me up there too. I told them,
4 in so many words a captain can tell somebody, that I didn't want to go up there. I was a
5 captain of the infantry, I just got out of the advanced class, my job was to lead troops and
6 that's what I wanted to be, a commander. There were no jobs open, he said, "Well, we
7 don't have any jobs open for commanders, they are all filled!" I said, "Well you must
8 have something." "No, there's nothing available. We have one job down with Colonel
9 Moore down in his battalion. Is an assistant—" What they called an S3 air. "That's the
10 only job we have open and you outrank Matt Dillion, you know the S3 by one day." I
11 said, "That's fine, I'll take that. If Colonel Moore wants me, I'll take that job." "Well, get
12 out and talk to him." So I went in and reported to Colonel Moore and we talked for a few
13 minutes and he gave me the job. I told him I wanted to be a commander and he said,
14 "Well, I don't have a company, I don't have that now." I said, "Well, you will. It'll come
15 open, we're going to war. Something will happen and I just want to be there, I wanted the
16 dozen." So anyway, after they came over, he came down and told me I was going to be
17 the company commander of Delta Company. That's what I wanted. But anyway, when he
18 called in all the commanders, I thought it was like him talking to our troops, it was a good
19 feeling, you know. There's our battalion commander who wanted to get his commanders
20 together and talk about this, this little Happy Valley operation. So that was the main thing
21 I think that—there was a lot of things afterward. I'm talking about after I got wounded
22 and left, there was a lot of things that happened afterward that further enforced my
23 feelings of Colonel Moore. Lot of things.

24 RV: Do you want to talk about those?

25 RL: Yeah. He never did forget his men. As far as the enlisted guys and the
26 officers. He was always- as long as you were still in the military, he was concerned about
27 you, what you were doing. He called you, I don't know how he had time to do this, he
28 was busy man, he rose pretty rapidly through the ranks and he had some very good jobs.
29 But he always, "Okay Ray, here's what you need to do now" type of things. I keep telling
30 him and he never could understand this. I said, "General Moore, I'm only going to stay
31 twenty years in the army. My plan is that I want to do some other things." I was younger

1 then and when I got up to twenty, I said, “Man, I need to stay.” Start to make money and
2 I got kids going to college, but I ended up getting out. But he always did that, it wasn’t
3 just me, it was everybody. I’ve heard the NCOs (Non-Commissioned Officer) talk about
4 that too, how he kept tabs of them and wanted to make sure things were going. He never
5 forgot the people that served with him. I remember we were down—this was after I
6 retired and when they were thinking about the book and I didn’t know they were thinking
7 about it. I was working for private industry and Bob Edwards was down at Fort Benning,
8 he was a Colonel at Fort Benning then. I happened to be in the Columbus, Georgia area
9 so they wanted to know if I could come over and General Moore was down there then
10 and he was going to start—he was thinking about the book there. That’s the first thing he
11 said when he told us, him and Galloway were going to put a book together, you know.
12 The only reason he said he was going to write it was, he said, “I never want my guys to
13 be forgotten. They’re never going to be forgotten.” That’s why there’s so many names in
14 there. It’s almost tough to read sometimes, isn’t it?

15 RV: Yes, yes.

16 RL: That’s why he did it, he wanted those names in that book because he knew it
17 would be for posterity, it’d be there forever. That shows the kind of guy he is. The other
18 thing and this they told me I could say something off the record.

19 RV: Today, this morning?

20 RL: Yeah.

21 RV: Absolutely.

22 (Editor’s note: Audio cuts and resumes)

23 RL: I was in the hospital at Fort Benning, this was in—well in ’68 maybe or ’60,
24 no, ’67. But I was in the hospital and they would not discharge me from the hospital
25 because of the injuries I had. I ended up—I told the hospital commander, “If I’m going to
26 be out here all the time, then I want to work! I want a job, I want to do something.” So we
27 had a lot of Vietnam veterans returning who were wounded and so forth. They put me in
28 charge, I became kind of a super—I was a captain, I was kind of their company
29 commander. Most of them were enlisted guys, young lieutenants. I was put in charge of
30 taking care as far as finding things to do, making sure the ward’s decoration, you know
31 this sort of thing. I really liked it. I said, “Wow, maybe if I can’t get back to the infantry,

1 I might be a medical service corps type of person.” They came down, General Heaton,
2 who was the Surgeon General of the Army came down. They asked me if I briefed
3 General Heaton on what we’d been doing, so I said “Sure.” He asked me afterwards,
4 Heaton said, “How would you like to transfer from the infantry to the medical service
5 corps? We need people like you.” (Chuckles) I said, “What does that mean?” “Well,
6 we’ll send you out to Baylor University and we’ll get you a master’s degree in hospital
7 administration. Then you’ll go and become a medical service corps guy and do hospital
8 administration type work.” So I went to talk to my wife about it. I was concerned that I
9 would never get back with the infantry because of the injuries that I had. We were about
10 ready to do it. Well, General Moore came down, he was the brigadier general then. He
11 came down to Fort Benning and he was going to visit. Next thing I know, I got the word
12 that he was going to meet an escort officer so they called up, I was at the hospital they
13 said, “Okay, General Moore is coming in and he asked that you be his escort officer for
14 his little visit here.” I said, “That’s fine.” So he came down and I told him about this
15 medical service corps thing. Well, he talked me out of it.

16 RV: What were his reasons?

17 RL: He just thought I was an infantryman. Stay in the infantry. He said, “I’ll do
18 everything I can to make sure you get infantry jobs.” I said, “I’m still getting out in
19 twenty years.” I had about almost ten years then, in fact I did have ten. But he said, “I’ll
20 make sure. I’ll try to do everything I can to get you infantry type jobs because I think you
21 can do it.” I said “Well, okay. I’ll stay infantry.” But then that same thing, we went out to
22 the cemetery at Fort Benning. Where many of the guys from the 1st of the 7th who were
23 killed in the Ia Drang were buried. We went out there, me and him. He walked around
24 there, to each grave site and paused, he mumbled to himself, talk to himself. He wasn’t
25 talking to me, I was just kind of in the background there. He turned around to me and
26 said, “This is where I want to be buried, right here with my boys. Back here with the
27 men.” I guess he is, his wife is down there. I imagine that’s where he’ll go. That’s the
28 kind of guy he is. That’s his—you know. He hasn’t changed any. (Chuckles) I mean as
29 far as personality, he hasn’t changed any.

30 RV: Let’s talk about X-Ray and your time there.

31 RL: That won’t take long (Laughs), as you know.

1 RV: A lot happened there very briefly there for you, but a lot happened that
2 changed your life. Talk about coming in with Delta Company, you came in I believe on
3 the fifth lift, about 2:30 with Crandall.

4 RL: Last lift. Right.

5 RV: Tell me about the flight in, what you knew and what you heard and then what
6 it looked like coming in.

7 RL: Okay, we were about—if I remember correctly, it was about an eleven
8 minute flight from where we left to go into X-Ray. I was sitting in the helicopter flying
9 that direction and Crandall was up there, I can't remember who the co-pilot was. My
10 RTO, radio telephone operator was sitting there. Raul Taboada , one of my lieutenants
11 was there. I want to digress to mention Taboada for just a minute.

12 RV: Yeah, I have him down. I want you to talk about him if you could, please.

13 RL: Okay, well when he first reported into our company, he was going to be one
14 of my platoon leaders in Delta Company. He came down and his English—I don't know
15 if he talks or not, his English is pretty bad, he'd just came out of Bay of Pigs and all this
16 kind of stuff. His English—I still have a difficult time really understanding. He's a great
17 guy, I remember interviewing him and the only thing I can remember specifically, I'm
18 talking to him when he came down, reported in. He said, "I want to kill communist."
19 (Laughs) I said, "Well, this might be the place." Or something.

20 RV: That's perfect.

21 RL: Anyway, when we went in, I had the radio up to my ear and I am listening to
22 what's going on and where the command's at. You can hear the excitement and the
23 shooting and the talk that was going on and it was just—I can't think of anything specific
24 but I remember Crandall turning around, I remember this like it happened yesterday.
25 Giving this look like, "Oh, shit." So we knew it was bad.

26 RV: He was listening to the same thing?

27 RL: Probably. I imagine he's talking to Moore. I imagine he is because he's
28 telling him. So when we got ready to land we were taking a lot of fire. The mountain was
29 off to our left, we were taking a lot of fire and it was coming in, bullets whizzing by it
30 seemed like and one of them hit a bullet. I think the same one, I remember I felt a crease

1 going across the back of my neck, we had our seatbelt hooked up and I had just kind of
2 did like this.

3 (Editor's Note: Interviewee gestures to interviewer)

4 Because he wasn't going to land, he was just going to hover. He couldn't set it down. I
5 kind of leaned over and unhook the seatbelt then I felt a crease, a bullet go across back
6 here and I remember turning as if to watch it, watch the bullet and that was the one that
7 hit my radio telephone operator and he just slumped over and he hadn't even unhooked
8 his belt yet.

9 RV: This is happening so fast, what do you do with that? One minute he's there,
10 you're counting on him and you're thinking about, and the next minute he's gone. What
11 happens in that kind of situation?

12 RL: What happened to me was, I knew that the few guys that I would have in that
13 helicopter and I didn't know how many it would be or anything, I was in the front first. I
14 knew that we had to get there and help our unit. I wasn't sure exactly how that was going
15 to be, but I knew that's what we were going to do. The few guys that I had. Fortunately,
16 we got out the right side of the helicopter, I tried to get a radio but I couldn't get it. I'm
17 not sure why I headed in the direction I did with the few guys I had. I'm not sure why. I
18 kept thinking that General Moore might've sent something to me, but I don't know. I
19 don't want to—I want to believe that he told me where to go and what to do, but I don't
20 think I would be accurate by saying that.

21 RV: Well, all accounts are that did not happen, that you went to the perfect place.

22 RL: Yeah! It ended up in the right place for the battalion. Wrong place for Ray
23 maybe, but I ended up in the right place. As soon as we got up there, it was only seventy-
24 five yards or so. I only had three or four guys with me. Taboada was there and his radio
25 telephone operator.

26 RV: This is on Nadal's left flank.

27 RL: I didn't know it at the time.

28 RV: What is it looking like as you're coming up to this position? What's
29 happening? Are the bullets coming by? Can you see the enemy or elephant grass too
30 high?

1 RL: Yeah, on the way up, I couldn't see them. I don't remember seeing them, I
2 just know there was a lot of firing going on. We came to a spot and again, why we
3 stopped there the so-called, "Dry creek bed" thing it seemed like the spot to be, there was
4 a little spot on the ground. So I hid, I hid in that area and got down there and had my M16
5 out, this sort of thing. Almost immediately—I remember this, almost immediately there
6 are some enemy. Thirty, twenty-five, thirty yards away coming into this—what was later
7 I found out an opening between the two companies and maybe got into the battalion. I
8 don't know if I commented, I don't think it's in the book. But I remember thinking at the
9 time a real hasty thought that they didn't seem, the enemy, they didn't seem to know
10 what they were doing.

11 RV: You could sense this somehow?

12 RL: Yeah! I remember telling people afterwards like somebody, like they were on
13 drugs, you know. They were uniformed and everything, but they didn't seem like they
14 were in control or maybe they were wondering, "We made it this far." I don't know what
15 went on in their mind, but we took them under fire.

16 RV: This is really close. I mean they're right there.

17 RL: Yeah. It's there. I actually, you know, all the people that been to Vietnam—
18 most people have never seen the enemy, right?

19 RV: Right.

20 RL: Well, I saw them.

21 RV: Almost immediately. Are you wearing reduced rank or are you wearing your
22 captain's insignia?

23 RL: I'm wearing—yeah.

24 RV: Okay. The ladder? Your captain insignia?

25 RL: Yeah.

26 RV: So they knew?

27 RL: Well they probably did. I had a couple of grenades, we carry a couple of
28 those and I remember throwing those and shooting an M16. I remember—I think I
29 remember hitting people, I mean it's hard to miss somebody so close.

30 RV: Do you remember if you were on full automatic or were you on single?

1 RL: I don't remember, but I don't think so, I don't know. It was—but then it
2 stopped, then they stopped. So I don't know what happened to them, I'm sure we didn't
3 kill them all. I don't know what happened. I know we did some and I say we because
4 there was another rifleman or somebody over here to my right, I don't think he was in my
5 company. Probably part of John Herren's company, I don't know. To the right and
6 Taboada was over here on this side and he got wounded.

7 RV: Taboada got wounded in the helicopter ride, he was shot in the hand, is that
8 correct?

9 RL: Pretty early, yeah. I remember hollering to him that I needed his radio, I
10 needed his RTO. Send your RTO up to me, I think his name was Dugas. I said, "Send
11 him up there to me." He didn't make it up there to me, he got shot—(Laughs) I said, "Get
12 Dugas—" I think he's was Dugas, "Get your RTO over here to me!" I don't know if this
13 was before, it might've been after we were shooting at people I don't remember now. I
14 said, "Get Dugas over here, I need the radio. I got to get a hold of the battalion, tell them
15 what's going on." So I don't even know how far they were, but I know it was off to the
16 left and Dugas says, with all the shooting going on I remember him saying, "How am I
17 going to get over there?" I said, "Remember what you did in basic training, called the
18 'low crawl'?" He finally made it over to me, I got the radio then. It was right soon,
19 everything happened so suddenly, it was right soon—right after that, that's when I
20 realized that I got shot. I didn't realize how bad the injury was until I begin to see the
21 blood, you know because it was a major artery got severed right here.

22 RV: You got shot just above the elbow?

23 RL: No, it went behind it. It went in back there.

24 RV: I see.

25 RL: I tell people I was facing the enemy until it followed me.

26 RV: (Chuckles)

27 RL: But went in back there and blew this all out. So this main artery was severed
28 right in here, both the nerves were cut, I didn't know that at the time but I knew the artery
29 was cut because you know every time your—the blood.

30 RV: Your heart. Are you right-handed? Were you right-handed?

31 RL: I was then. Can we take a break?

1 RV: Absolutely we can.

2 (Editor's Note: Audio picks back up)

3 RV: Please continue. Let me ask you something. What did it sound like? Do you

4 remember what it sounded like when you left Crandall's chopper and you come up and

5 immediately hear the enemy. Do you remember the sounds and the smells of these

6 minutes?

7 RL: I remember the sounds. I don't remember anything else except the sounds. It

8 was just noisy, I guess it's the best way to put it. There was—I think by that time artillery

9 was coming in, you could hear the artillery rounds hitting and just the weapons. The

10 machine guns, it seemed like everybody had machine guns, it seemed like. Thank god for

11 that too. That's all I remember, just how noisy it was.

12 RV: And you were able to function in this noise? Did you—

13 RL: Yeah. I didn't have much functioning to do. I mean, as far as commanding, I

14 was almost an individual type thing. I mean, I could do that. I had to react, I had to do

15 something. I didn't have any troops hardly. I got a hold of Gonzalez finally, Sergeant

16 Gonzalez, I got him on the radio. This was after I was wounded.

17 RV: And you still don't know how bad it is? Are you getting an idea of—

18 RL: Oh yes, yes.

19 RV: Because you're losing a lot of blood at this point.

20 RL: Yes. What happened was I was starting to give myself a tourniquet. John

21 Herren, Captain Herren happened to come. He noticed that—he must've been pretty

22 close, but he came over. I was trying to get myself with a belt a tourniquet. He ended up

23 getting it on there for me, but it still didn't stop the flow of blood. I remember kind of

24 propping myself up against a tree. When I first realized that things were pretty bad was

25 all of the sudden—because there's still fighting going on, then I can't hear anything.

26 There's times when I don't hear any firing. I tell people the best way I can equate it to,

27 and I see one of our guys who was over there, I'd see him raise up and be like those slow

28 motion things in the movie, that's what it looked like he was doing.

29 (Interviewee makes slow shooting noises)

30 RV: But you couldn't hear quite—

1 RL: No, everything came to be slow. The couple of times I saw him and even then
2 I saw a couple of the enemy. Everything seemed to be in slow motion. I guess, I don't
3 know why that happened. I don't know, but I remember that very distinctly.

4 RV: You're losing blood, you're dying is what's happening. Blood's flowing out
5 of your body.

6 RL: One time what I did was—I felt good because that was Sunday, right?

7 RV: Yes, that's Sunday.

8 RL: We went to mass. General Moore is Catholic, so am I. We'd gone to mass, I
9 had gone to communion. I remember sitting there thinking, "Well, the last thing I did
10 before I came to this battle was to go to communion."

11 RV: That crossed your mind while leaning against the tree?

12 RL: Oh, yeah. I remember Dugas was up there and he asked me, "What are we
13 going to do now?" I said, "I don't about you, but I'm praying." I might've not said it that,
14 you know but—

15 RV: Right. But let me ask you, do you remember getting hit? Or was it just—

16 RL: Yeah, I remember getting hit.

17 RV: What did it feel like?

18 RL: It didn't hurt. That was the surprising thing, I looked down there—I
19 remember looking down there and it was so terrible looking. It was all open and it looked
20 bad. It just looked terrible. It never did hurt really, it wasn't pain that I can remember, no.

21 RV: So you're against this tree and how long were you there before you were
22 taken back to the battalion medical station?

23 RL: I don't know, I don't know. But I did a couple of other things. I remember
24 sitting there and I had just received some mail from my wife. One thing they teach you is
25 never bring anything into combat that the enemy might capture and use against you.
26 Well, I broke that rule because I had some pictures. I remember taking out the pictures of
27 my kids because she had sent out some pictures and they were pretty small. I remember
28 holding them, I guess in this hand. I remember taking them out of my pack, my pack was
29 sitting right there and looking at them and just then almost some wind blew—I don't
30 know what happened, but it blew the pictures away. I remember thinking, "Oh god."
31 Then I remember (Chuckles), this is so corny but I remember doing this, or saying this, or

1 thinking this. I said, "I'm going to leave some of my blood in Vietnam on this damn
2 battlefield." Like you do in the movies.

3 RV: Did you—

4 RL: Then I kept passing out. I go in and out.

5 RV: When you thought that about the blood, were you bitter? Were you proud or
6 what?

7 RL: No. I felt good about the way I reacted. I remember thinking that well, in so
8 many words I thought about—I did what I think should've been done. There's a lot of
9 other things that I might've done or might not have done, that sort of thing and I tried to
10 get my troops up there, I tried to do what a commander is supposed to do, and when the
11 time comes, when I had to fight, I did it. I felt good about that because I believed in what
12 we were doing in Vietnam. I believe that. So that made it easier to go there and do this
13 thing. For all the guys that were killed in the battle and stuff, and afterwards I feel like so
14 many of them, I feel like they died for a good cause. Even though we might of—another
15 talk type thing, we might've done it differently type thing. But I believed in what we did.

16 RV: So what were your memories as you're fading in and out? And you're getting
17 ready to be evacuated at some point.

18 RL: Well I don't remember being evacuated. I don't remember coming, I think I
19 remember being thrown in the poncho thing, I think I remember that. And being carried
20 over, I do remember being carried over and I don't remember really being thrown on the
21 helicopter, but I remember Metsker. I didn't know it was Metsker at the time, I found out
22 later it was him. I didn't know it at the time, he'd already been wounded I guess, but I'm
23 pretty sure I hear him say, this person say, "I'm hit." I found out later he had got shot
24 about that time and ended up killing him, I guess. I guess I know, but I don't remember
25 being thrown in a helicopter. I don't remember anything else.

26 RV: This was your silver star action?

27 RL: Yeah.

28 RV: When did you realize that you had played such a vital role? I mean you had
29 saved—you practically saved the battalion there with that maneuver.

1 RL: Well, that's what they said. I don't know if I ever found that out. I found it
2 out, but I never—I don't know. I just never thought about it. I'm just glad I was there and
3 I'm glad it all happened that way. Colonel Moore he seems to think that.

4 RV: You were in the hospital for quite a while, recovering from this.

5 RL: Yes. Mainly because they had all these operations to do. They wouldn't let
6 me out like I said. If I'd been a civilian I'd been ambulatory. You know, come in for the
7 operation, go back to work. But they wouldn't let me out, it was a long time.

8 RV: Did you want to find out what had happened to your troopers? When did you
9 realize thinking, "I want to know how the battle went. I need to know what happened"?

10 RL: Well, I found out a lot because you see, some of them came back—were
11 already there wounded, I learned a lot about the battle from that. Every time Colonel
12 Moore, I went over to him he would tell me more. So I was pretty familiar with what
13 happened and I had a copy of the after action report. The classified confidential copy that
14 everybody got. I got a copy of that and got that pretty early. So I don't even know how he
15 gave it to me, but I got that real early. I'm talking about when I was still in the hospital. I
16 was very familiar you know with what was going on, I knew what had happened. The
17 only thing that was tough for me was that I didn't know my troops very well because I
18 joined them so late. The way Delta Company was organized, the mortars were off with
19 other companies. So there was actually Delta Company guys and those couple of guys
20 that were killed, but they were mortarmen but they probably felt more like Bravo or
21 Charlie Company guys because they supported them, they were with them all the time.
22 My RTO, Nicholas—that was his first time he had been my RTO. We were training him
23 and that was his first operation he went on.

24 RV: How well did you know him?

25 RL: Pretty well. Not real well, but I knew the other two better. A guy named
26 Robles and Stevenson, I knew them better because they were with me on other
27 operations. We have an RTO for operations and an RTO for administration. I knew them
28 better.

29 RV: So this is Nicholas's first action?

1 RL: Yeah. We had taken him to training because Stevenson was due out, he was
2 supposed to been out 1st November, middle of November. So we were training Nicholas
3 to take Stevenson's place.

4 RV: In the interest of time, tell me what it's been like since the Ia Drang. It's forty
5 years almost to the day. What's it been like for you? Especially with the book and the
6 movie?

7 RL: Oh, dear. It's opened up things and I keep thinking some of those guys spent
8 that whole day there, the whole three days there. Some of them fought and some of them
9 died. I was there for fifteen minutes or whatever the hell it was. It's so humbling. I get
10 letters from people that read book and they want to talk to you. The first time I didn't
11 know what to say. I was in Athens, Georgia, I was working, I was an area sales manager.
12 I went to the bookstore when the book came out. I was standing down there looking at the
13 book. They had two copies. There was a young lady standing right next to me about
14 thirty-two, thirty-three years old. I was looking at it and she was looking at it too. She
15 said, "Do you know anything about this book?" I didn't know what to say. I thought, do I
16 say, "Yeah, I'm in it." Or do I say—what do you say? I said, "Who are you buying the
17 book for?" Well her brother was a captain out of Foot Hood, with the Cav I guess, and
18 she thought that would be a good book for him. I said, "I think he'll really enjoy it." I
19 said, "He'll really enjoy that book if he's a Cav guy." "How do you know?" She kept
20 probing me. I'm thinking "What am I going to say?" I still didn't know what to say, how
21 to handle it. I said, "Let me show you." I opened the book and I opened it to the picture. I
22 said, "That's me and that's my family." She says, "Can I have your autography?" I didn't
23 even know what to write. But anyway, I got thinking later on that people would read
24 about it in my little town and you know, paper's want interviews. I thought "God. I was
25 only there—" I think I might've felt that I wish I could've stayed longer.

26 RV: Is there a degree, a degree of guilt?

27 RL: No, no guilt. Hell, I didn't shoot me. (Chuckles) No, I don't have any guilt. I
28 just felt bad, I wanted to be there while we fought that battle.

29 RV: But you played your part.

30 RL: Well, I know that, I know and I feel good about that. I remember people—
31 now I get invited to schools and talk and stuff like that, but I got a lot more experience in

1 this battle. I briefed Westmoreland, I briefed McNamara. I told them things that they
2 didn't pay any attention to. That's the part that pisses me off more than anything else.
3 McNamara, he goes back to Washington, I thought he'd been to a different country. But
4 anyway, they would—a couple of guys, I remember in the schools, a couple of guys who
5 say, "Gosh, you sure weren't there for long." These were high school guys. I said,
6 "Would you like it better if I got killed?" I said, "Would that make you more happy?"
7 (Chuckles) I don't dwell on it too much. You can ask Larry, he comes out with me and he
8 says, "God, I find out different things every time I listen to you talk." But I felt good
9 about what we had done in Vietnam. I was in favor of it. I loved the Vietnamese people. I
10 like what I did, I like what our troops did and from that time past, from '65 on, I don't
11 pay any attention to that part. I mean, I pay attention but it's not—it's a different
12 situation, different things going on. When I come back, I don't go to many reunions, this
13 is only the second one I've been to at Washington. I'm not a reunion type guy and I think
14 maybe one reason is, I never come up to this one, I was here in '92 when they had the
15 book and I came to this because of its importance, forty years and some of these people
16 I'll never see again. We're all getting older now. I go to the 1st battalion, 7th Cav, I go to
17 some of theirs you know because I'm closer to our battalion than I am to our whole outfit.
18 I don't know, maybe one of it is—and nobody has made me feel this way, none of the
19 guys, none of the troops, nobody has made me feel this, but in the back of my mind I felt
20 like well, I never did know them because I joined so late. I never got to know them real
21 well and the few operations we went on, I left so early in the battle, it was gone. Maybe
22 subconsciously thinking, "Well I really don't belong with them or something." All these
23 guys they walk around and you see all these people that fought there and did these things
24 and you know they were young PFCs (Private First Class) and stuff. I don't know—
25 sometimes I wonder if think that or not, I don't know. I shouldn't, but I'm glad that
26 you're doing this. I believe in this oral history stuff. One of these people, years from will
27 have a chance to look at it.

28 RV: What do you want those people to know about this time period, 1965 in the
29 valley?

30 RL: That we had a bunch of people there, some of us were career guys, some of
31 us were drafted, but every one of us did what we were supposed to do and we did it well.

1 If you ask some of these people, they'll say, "I don't think I was fighting for the US, but I
2 was fighting for the guy that was next to me." And that sort of thing and that's true. But I
3 feel proud of what we did. I don't have any regrets whatsoever. Even when I think go
4 back and study it, most of the guys who are in it I'm sure probably feel the same way.
5 They got a lot of different stories, you've listened to a lot of people talk about it I'm sure
6 and you hear a lot of other things too maybe. But I think most of them at least in '65
7 comes at a different time. When you go from '65 to '70, that's a different group.

8 RV: Yes, it is.

9 RL: Different things going on in our country. It's just so many—it's just different.
10 I feel proud of what I did, I feel proud of my guys and the people I served with. When it
11 comes to things like and I see them, even though I didn't get to know them real well, I
12 just look at them in awe. What they did when they were twenty-two years old or twenty-
13 one. You know? Even though some are about half nuts. (Chuckles) I don't mean in a
14 sense from the battlefield.

15 RV: Yes, sir. Well, we need to stop the interview now. Thank you, Colonel
16 Lefebvre.
17 (End of interview.)