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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Ed Freeman
Conducted by Dr. Richard 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 Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone, I am doing an oral history
2 interview with Major Ed Freeman. Today is Veteran's Day, November 11th, 2005. We are
3 in Washington D.C., at the Crystal City Hilton and we are commemorating the 40th
4 anniversary of the battles of the Ia Drang Valley back in November of 1965. Major
5 Freeman, thank you for doing this. I want to ask you a little bit about your memories of
6 those days in the Ia Drang. If you could, before we get to the specific things that
7 happened, can you tell me about your training for those types of missions? I know talking
8 to other pilots, you had to throw some things out the door and improvise. Could you tell
9 me what you brought into that battle?

10 Ed Freeman: Experience. I didn't have the privilege of training with the 11th Air
11 Assault. My commander Bruce Crandall did and they trained for two years on this Air
12 Assault business that they were undertaking and it was of course, a brand new concept of
13 warfare as far as the Army was concerned. I was already an experienced pilot prior to
14 coming to that organization. I had been in Iran for a year mapping, I did topographical
15 mapping, and I'd been in South and Central America for four years doing the same basic
16 job. So I had quite a bit of experience.

17 RV: And you had some interesting experience in Korea?

1 EF: Yes. As far as battle is concerned—as war is concerned, I felt the sting of
2 battle when I was very young.

3 RV: You were at Pork Chop Hill?

4 EF: Yes. Mm-hmm.

5 RV: To be on the ground then, in Korea and as you said, feeling the sting of battle
6 in that sense, help you those days in November supporting Colonel Moore?

7 EF: Absolutely. I understood war a little better than I had when I first encountered
8 it.

9 RV: Okay. So tell me about Bruce Crandall. What was he like and him as a
10 commander?

11 EF: He was a tremendous leader. Almost to a point of a little bit dangerous. I'll
12 give you an example. We were coming back in one evening from an operation and had
13 been inserting troops and we were empty. We were coming near this one village and we
14 had normally received fire from that village and he came on the radio and says, "Yellow
15 X", to one of the other pilots. "Take over the flight," and he says, "Follow me Freeman."
16 You know, "Serpent 26, roger." And we peeled out from the formation, dropped down
17 and started out over this village and we flew around the village for a while and we landed
18 to came back and I said, "Pray tell, why did we do that." He says, "To see if we could
19 draw some fire!" And I started to punch him out, but I didn't because he was my friend
20 and also my commander. But he was trying to draw fire and at the time we would've
21 called gunships to take care of the problem, but I told him, "We can find other ways to
22 draw fire other than that." Especially if it's just me. Anyway, that's an example.

23 RV: So a good leader. How about communication? You all have to really talk to
24 each other up there when you're flying and how important was that? And how are you
25 two together?

26 EF: We worked together real well. Now, you got to remember we were in Panama
27 together and then he was in Costa Rica and I was in Managua, Nicaragua. We were on
28 many missions together. We went to advanced engineering school together. A year long
29 course. I watched his kids grow up and he of course mine. Both of our families kind of
30 grew up together. He's an outstanding individual.

31 RV: What do you know about then—what did you know about Colonel Moore?

1 EF: I didn't know Colonel Moore until I arrived in Vietnam and got acquitted
2 with him, of course having to support his organization 1st of the 7th. Most of the time as
3 far as I know, we were almost assigned to him as each unit depending on their numbers
4 was assigned to a battalion and we drew Colonel Moore's battalion, 1st of the 7th. I got to
5 know him real well. In fact, I'm an honorary member of the 1st of the 7th. After the battle
6 of Ia Drang, he called Bruce and I into his office and made us honorary members and I
7 signed a document and I have a medallion of Garryowen and my number is eleven,
8 Bruce's is number ten. So we are honorary members of the 1st of the 7th.

9 RV: Tell me about Hal Moore, the person. What was he like in the field and
10 especially in those three days?

11 EF: He was firm and he believed in training above everything else. And
12 discipline. When you have that, it makes for a better battle. Your soldiers are being very
13 disciplined. I compared it to what I'd run into in Korea. I had a hodge-podge group of
14 people, some cooks, some truck drivers and I'm not bad mouthing any of them, but they
15 were not trained and it was an entirely different situation to be with a trained and highly
16 skilled organization versus one that wasn't.

17 RV: Mm-hmm. Well, let's go to November 12th and 13th, and before the insertion
18 on the 14th. What were your preparations and what were you all expecting?

19 CJ: I don't think we expected what we got because our intel says there is
20 suspected enemy activity in the area. That suspected enemy activity turned out to be three
21 regiments. They met us on the fifth lift. Not one round was fired for the first four times
22 we went in. On the fifth one, they arrived. They announced their arrival. They really
23 worked us over.

24 EF: Tell me about that fifth lift, the first time you did come under fire from them.

25 RV: Well, it was such a surprise. I guess because you know you almost get
26 complacency doing this for the four trips. It almost brought back—I said, "Well, I guess
27 they went home or whatever." And then all of the sudden they open it up and it tightens
28 up things and you begin to reassess your position in life. But we lost quite a few
29 helicopters, it was damaged beyond repair. Some of them could make it back to the
30 pickup zone. It was a fierce battle and just instantly just like turning a switch on and it
31 happened.

1 EF: What were you getting shot with? What was coming at you on that fifth lift?

2 RV: AK-47s mostly and some machine gun fire. I'd say ninety percent was AK-
3 47s because that was their primary weapon. They travelled light, but occasionally you
4 would enter an area where they had light machine guns and occasionally also, but seldom
5 you'll run into .51 caliber machine guns and that once—wasn't in the Ia Drang Valley,
6 but one of them hit my rotor system and knocked a hole that you could put your fist
7 through the main rotor blade. I expected to fall any minute or break but it didn't, it didn't
8 hit the sparks, so it just made a deathly noise. But most of the time, it was AK-47s.

9 RV: Let me ask you something about operating in that kind of environment when
10 it just got like you said, instantaneously very dangerous, very lethal. First of all, for
11 yourself personally. How do you continue to fly? I know you have your fall and your
12 commander, you're under orders, you want to support the people on the ground, but
13 what's going through your mind personally? And what are you feeling when you're
14 coming into the LZ (Landing Zone) there at X-Ray and you're really getting hit with it?

15 EF: Training. The only different in a training mission and a combat mission is a
16 combat mission adds bullets. Remind yourself that you can't change what is going on
17 about you at the particular time. I always have the mindset that it is more honorable to let
18 the enemy kill you than to kill yourself. If you get carried away with this fear and anxiety
19 of what's happening, you can hurt somebody including those around you, you make
20 mistakes. So stick with your lesson plan and fly the ship at all costs. To the last second,
21 continue to handle your equipment as you needed to do to make a successful approach
22 into wherever you were going and sometimes that could be pretty tough because there's
23 horrible terrain and tall trees everywhere. In LZ X-Ray, the trees were about two hundred
24 fifty feet tall. Surrounded and it was just a little short of the size of a football field.

25 RV: So it was very tight?

26 EF: Very tight and very confining because you had to have some skill—you had
27 to have a lot of skill to get in and out of there successfully without damaging the aircraft
28 against obstacles.

29 RV: Was fear a part of your day?

30 EF: Absolutely, but controlled fear. If you don't it'll devour you. Again, go back
31 to, "I can't change things." Another thing that I had—I didn't expect to survive because I

1 had been in tremendous battles before and who am I to say I am the chosen one and I will
2 be spared. But I'll tell you, two things in the situation of combat. You need some skills
3 and you need some luck. It's like playing Texas hold 'em and I do that, I play Texas hold
4 'em as well. But both are those are involved and I think they play an equal part, possibly.
5 But the skill is a must if you are going to successfully perform the duties that have been
6 assigned to you and do it safely because it would be a shame to splatter a load of troops
7 all over the hill and your mission was to get them into battle. At least get them in there
8 and let the enemy take care of the rest of the problem.

9 RV: Sure. When did that hit you? That you're probably not going to survive this.
10 When did you have this realization?

11 EF: Say again?

12 RV: When did you have this realization that, "I'm not going to survive this. I'm
13 not the chosen one." Did you have that conscience thought on the 14th, on a Sunday?

14 EF: I had it when I walked down the pier in Mobile, Alabama. I walked down a
15 pier and got in a baby flat top and I had been to a war before and I explained to my wife I
16 said, "There's a good chance that I won't return. Make sure you take care of the kids and
17 hopefully I'll see you, but don't expect any miracles." And I walked away. My oldest
18 brother was with me and he says, "It must be awfully exciting knowing you're going off
19 to a war." I said, "Yes, I'm about to pee in my pants." I was so excited. He meant well
20 and it was exciting. The most exciting thing that has ever happened to me is to be in a
21 formation of a hundred helicopters going to battle. I've never smoked marijuana, but if
22 you want a high, try that one. A hundred ship formation.

23 RV: Tell me about Sunday, November 14th, and how that day evolved and what
24 you and Bruce did.

25 EF: It was a normal, supposedly, operation. We did everything the same. We
26 prepped the area with artillery and we were to arrive thirty seconds after the last white
27 phosphorus round hit the ground and we did that exactly.

28 RV: Were you nap-of-the-earth at that point?

29 EF: Yes, right, absolutely. This was the first site—first landing in the area. We did
30 this (Interviewee visually shows flight using his hands) and come charging in and of
31 course again we were not disappointed, but surprised that nobody was firing back at us.

1 RV: You were number two behind Crandall?

2 EF: I always flew that slot.

3 RV: Moore was in the first chopper. Moore, Dillon, Plumley.

4 EF: He was in Bruce Crandall's chopper.

5 RV: Right. Who was there with you? Do you remember?

6 EF: I had company commanders and I'm not sure the names of any of them, but

7 there was a number of them. Four I think it was. But they were not all on my chopper.

8 They were maybe one company commander and the next company and that way when

9 they hit the ground, they could muster their troops and go to their assigned area of

10 position that they were going to take up.

11 RV: How many at a time? Six into the LZ at a time?

12 EF: About six. Do you mean troops?

13 RV: No, Hueys, your helicopters.

14 EF: Four started off with. Then, we blew some trees away, the engineers did, and

15 we moved it to an eight landing ship operation. Once we got the trees blowing away

16 there's small, not very large trees kind of in the middle guarding it. Then, it got very—

17 you know when you put eight in there at a time, that helps because you double the

18 number of troops in the ground. They were within a hundred yards when we first started,

19 when they first came to meet us on the fifth landing. By the time Bruce and I finished,

20 they had backed them up for about two hundred yards away. You could still look them in

21 the eye, basically they were out there trying to knock you out of the sky.

22 RV: You could visually see them every time you came in?

23 EF: Absolutely. They're all uniformed, that's the first uniformed soldiers we saw

24 in the country. Before that it was pajamas, black pajamas, they called them VC (Viet

25 Cong). They were rice farmers during the day and VC at night. They'd lay down their

26 holes and get their AK-47 and go harass the Americans.

27 RV: What do you remember—you come in the fifth time, then it gets hot. Colonel

28 Moore was at this point at the CP (Command Post). You all were beginning to extract at

29 this point or were you still landing, going back? When did you start—

30 EF: No, after the fifth landing, we all left and went back to the pickup point and

31 he called—Colonel Moore did and says, "No more helicopters can come into the landing

1 zone. You can't survive." Well, I'm a little smarter. I know that he had to have
2 ammunition because basic load, if remember right was about a hundred rounds per person
3 and it doesn't take load to empty a hundred rounds of ammunition in the M16s. So I said,
4 "It ain't going to work, somebody is going to have to go back in there if them people are
5 going to survive. Because without ammo, the enemy would have methodically killed
6 every member of the organization once they ran out of ammunition. So we licked our
7 wounds and decided what helicopters could fly and which ones couldn't and got
8 everything rearranged and reassigned. "Okay, this can work. I'll take it back in and you
9 take this one and we'll assign the others." The helicopters, if they were beyond flight or
10 unsafe to fly. About forty-five minutes, if I remember the time, time is kind of blurry—
11 we got a call from General Moore. He says, "I need one volunteer to come in landing
12 zone X-Ray and bring ammunition, water, and medicine. And haul out my wounded."
13 There was probably thirty plus pilots down in there. We are talking young, twenty-year
14 old—warrant officers never shot fire in anger. It'd just come out of that fierce fight that
15 we would come out of and not a soul moved a muscle. I don't blame any of them. I said,
16 "I got it." And I started walking towards my helicopter. It was already loaded because I
17 had planned that this had to happen. As I crawl in and hit the starter, Frank Morino,
18 Angel Cumba, and Ralph James all started crowding into my helicopter. That was my
19 crew. My crew chief, my gunner, and Frank my co-pilot. I don't call him a co-pilot, I call
20 him a shared cockpit with me. I said, "Get out of the helicopter." He said, "No sir. We're
21 crew and we're going with you." I finally look at Frank and said, "You know Frank, this
22 will probably be the longest day of your life." He said, "Yes, sir. I know that." I said,
23 "Frank, it may be the last day of your life." He says, "Yes, sir. I know that." I said,
24 "You're still going?" He said, "Yes, sir." I said, "Lock 'em up, let's roll." 14.5 hours
25 after that, I shut it down. There's a gap there. As I did this, Bruce Crandall came running
26 out and says, "I'm going too!" I said, "Bruce, what's going to happen to the company
27 when you get zapped?" He said, "Well, we'll worried about that when it happens." We
28 joined up in formation and our last flight was at 10:30 at night.

29 RV: The two of you?

30 EF: Two of us over the top of the two hundred fifty foot trees with a kid standing
31 with a flashlight—holding that flashlight. Let me tell you about the flashlight, back up

1 one minute. I was an instructor for two years in Hueys. One of my jobs, one of my tests
2 was to burry a six-cell flashlight in the ground and turn it on and put it near the side of the
3 runway at a training field we had. Turn the light on and take the helicopter to a thousand
4 feet above the terrain and give to the student and shut the engine down. His job was to do
5 a three hundred sixty degree turn and when he stopped, I wanted to see that light shining
6 up between his feet and if you didn't do it, you got a pink slip that day. In the Air Force
7 everybody knows about pink slips. Anybody that ever flown.

8 RV: So you were prepared to come in and hit that flashlight?

9 EF: I was prepared because I wanted to train and wanted to be in total charge of
10 that piece of equipment. I could make it almost talk and I still tell Bruce Crandall I'm the
11 world's greatest helicopter pilot and he's second. But we'll argue about that.

12 RV: (Laughs)

13 EF: But I was prepared and I could make it do what it was capable of doing and
14 that is what I required of my students because that is called insurance. If you know your
15 machine and you know it well and you know how to operate it well and you know
16 anything that happens in between, that everything is good, you can identify it and take
17 action to prevent a catastrophic failure of whatever.

18 RV: How many lifts—when you two took back off, how many lifts did you guys
19 do? You said fourteen and a half hours.

20 EF: Well, you do the math. It was thirteen minute flight each direction and we
21 flew 14.5 hours.

22 RV: Eight.

23 EF: I don't remember, but somewhere in my citation they put a number of about
24 thirty that I evacuated.

25 RV: Thirty.

26 EF: Of course, I couldn't count but I'll tell you what, I was in that hospitality
27 room today and about thirty guys walked up to me and said, "Thank you, Ed. If it hadn't
28 been for you I would've died in LZ X-Ray." And I said, "Well, I wish I could remember
29 your name, but I can't even remember your face."

30 RV: So what you did you—you come in, you wait for them to do their work in the
31 back. Offloading, onloading and you go.

1 EF: Yeah.

2 RV: Are you holding in the cockpit?

3 EF: Yeah. Never got out of it. I stood on the skid and took a leak. I hold the
4 controls while Frank ate a can of beanie-weenies and he did the same for me while I ate a
5 can of beanie-weenies. We hot refueled. Hot refueling is leaving the engine run and we
6 had a mechanism that prevented—you know, you turn all the batteries off, radios. You
7 prevent static electricity and we had this closed refueling system and that allowed us to
8 continue to—saved us quite a bit of time because that engine can't be cranked until it
9 drops below about seven hundred degrees Fahrenheit and it runs pretty warm. So that
10 saved quite a bit of time, each time we had to stop and take on fuel.

11 RV: Did you have to change helicopters periodically because of damaged?

12 EF: Yes.

13 RV: Do you remember how many times you had to change?

14 EF: Probably three.

15 RV: Wow.

16 EF: It was a precautionary thing because sometimes there was this—you never
17 know what is hit because it was going to break or come lose a little later. So if it's
18 doubtful, you just go ahead and drop it and let the maintenance people look at it and
19 figure it out. Obvious wounds, sometimes they'd shoot the tail rotor off. Not in my case
20 but we have tail rotors shot off. We've had fuel lines and always in the belly of the fuel,
21 but we had a self-sealing fuel system. It would only go down to a third of a tank and it
22 would seal itself. If you ever been in a helicopter and nothing but fumes of jet fuel is
23 hitting you in the face and you just say, "Well, it's a matter of seconds until we hit a big
24 ball of fire and it's over with." Because that's exactly what you're thinking and why it
25 doesn't blow up, I don't know because it's spewing fuel and we're running an engine up
26 here at nine hundred degree centigrade and it was quite a bit of fire up there. But
27 fortunately it didn't.

28 RV: Tell me more about as that day goes through, you're coming in, you're going
29 out. Dusk is falling, can you describe the evolution of that day after you and Bruce decide
30 to continue to go back. What happened?

31 EF: Give me that question again?

1 RV: As you go through that day, when you and Bruce make the decision to go
2 back and start flying those fourteen and a half hours together. What happen on the ground
3 at X-Ray? What were the differences? What did you see as the day went on and then into
4 the night?

5 EF: Well, the night was probably the biggest fireworks you'd ever lay your eyes
6 on. Of course, we would ask to lay down protective fire when we come in on short final
7 and the infantry would start shooting at the enemy to try to keep their heads down while
8 we were on the ground offloading and loading the injured soldiers. But it was a blur. I
9 can't even recall the fifteen hours, other than the fact just a couple of times of eating C-
10 rations and taking a leak from standing on the skid and jumping back in and going.
11 Because we would not waste any time, because they needed every round of ammunition
12 and every first aid kit we could muster and all the water that we could haul and those
13 troops needed that bad. So we wasted no time in shuttling in and out.

14 RV: What do you remember about colonel as that day went on? He was on the
15 horn with Bruce. Were you talking with him as well?

16 EF: Absolutely, absolutely. I monitored all communications and we didn't really
17 exactly tell other pilots that because it gets clutter if you get too many people chatting in
18 it at the same time. So we said, "Take home fourteen hundred pounds of fuel and follow
19 us and don't talk." Because you don't describe everything to them because it's probably
20 just better.

21 RV: Right.

22 EF: We discussed—Colonel Moore would tell us if the LZ was hot or warm or
23 whatever, advise us. Sometimes he'd say, "Move to the west side a little bit because we
24 had a push coming into the east." Or whatever. So he was our air traffic controller, so to
25 speak. Then, in the last flight in at 10:30, he says, "Don't come back in, I can survive
26 until daylight." I wanted to go out and go kiss him but I knew better. You know, don't
27 tell thing, you know?

28 RV: Right. (Chuckles)

29 EF: We went back in and landed. Bruce vomited and I was about the same thing.
30 At daylight, first day, crack of day, we started it all over again. We flew all day that day
31 and the following day. We did this for three days.

1 RV: In the movie, it portrays Bruce vomiting and then he is kind of accosted by
2 this other gentleman. Did that happen?

3 EF: Yes, that was the medevac pilots that refused to go into the landing zone
4 because it was hot. But in the defense of the medevac pilots, I know some good ones and
5 it was not their policy, it was the headquarters' policy. I wanted to transfer because if you
6 couldn't land in a hot LZ, I wanted to be in that outfit.

7 RV: Sure.

8 EF: But I thought, "Why are you here if you can't land in a hot LZ?" That don't
9 make any sense at all. But I didn't blame the individual, I blamed the people that made it.
10 Bruce was going to go over and I think maybe shoot him, I took the gun away from
11 Bruce and explained that we don't shoot our own and that I was going to shoot both of
12 them if they kept screwing around, I was pissed too. So it blew over and nothing came of
13 it, but Bruce was very hot. I can understand and I was pissed, but sometimes you can't
14 change things. Change things if you can.

15 RV: Right. November 15th, this is—Colonel Moore said yesterday this is one of
16 the worst days that he has ever experienced in combat. It was the most difficult time of
17 the entire three day battle, that dawn attack was tremendous. You went out first light.
18 What did you see when you got there?

19 EF: Just a sea of people killing each other. Everywhere you looked they were
20 killing each other. The fire was just solid. The tracers, you could walk on them, it
21 appeared. It was a strange eerie feeling knowing that you were going into where they
22 were very close range to us. But again, they didn't keep their heads up too long because
23 the infantry—they knew the helicopter was their lifeline and they worked hard to keep
24 them people from trying to kill us if they could and some of them got through of course
25 and it seemed like always took some rounds. It was an eerie feeling.

26 RV: Tell me about exhaustion and sleep deprivation and how you worked through
27 that stress.

28 EF: You know, I wasn't exhausted because my mind wasn't working well. I
29 couldn't remember that I had just finished. I went out and laid down and immediately I
30 was in some la la land, drifting. It seemed like I was there ten minutes or less and
31 somebody says, "Ed, daylight. Got to go." And we started all over again and I felt a little

1 better, but not a hell of a lot. Combat is a strange animal. It is a strange thing, and it does
2 strange things to different people. It treats people differently. Not all the same.

3 RV: How did it treat you?

4 EF: Again, I called on my experience from Korea and I accepted the fact that this
5 was probably the end. I think I got through it a lot better than I would have if it would've
6 been the first time. My co-pilot, I flew with every member with my organization and I
7 selected Frank Marino, Angel Cumba, and Ralph James as my mechanic and crew chief.
8 They were so loyal and so talented and that kept us from hurting ourselves. The pure
9 talent and Ralph James kept it running and I kept it in the air once he'd fired it up. We
10 had a good crew and we all flew together for the entire tour of duty.

11 RV: What do you remember about "Broken Arrow"? Were you around when that
12 call went in?

13 EF: I sure was there.

14 RV: What did it look like? Can you describe it?

15 EF: Well, there's airplanes coming from all sides and some were ridiculous
16 because a jet come by and a bomb would scoot completely across the area into la la land,
17 some place else. The jets is not a close air support machine. There's man that's nodding
18 his head and he agrees. It is entirely too fast to support troops on the ground because they
19 missed the target and I think the F104s or whatever you had at that period of time.

20 RV: F105s.

21 EF: But they screamed through there, and I'm there sitting there watching them do
22 this (jet noises) and the bomb goes skipping, you could see it! Skip down through the
23 bushes. Ineffective.

24 RV: Okay. What else?

25 EF: A1E was the most effective aircraft for a close air support that has ever been
26 built. Maybe the war-hog is good, I understand. I play poker with a bore-hog pilots and
27 they try to get me into their simulators and I say, "I don't want no simulator, I want the
28 real thing. I'll go with you but no simulators!" But the A1E was a wonderful piece of
29 equipment for close air support.

30 RV: What was the den of "Broken Arrow" like?

1 EF: You know, I thought it was almost the end of the world because they were
2 stacked up, airplanes were stacked. Every aircraft available in the country of Vietnam
3 come to our aid when that happened. There were formations of aircrafts circling, waiting
4 their turn to come in and drop their ordinance. But still, the A1E was the most effective
5 one of the whole group that I could see. I don't know who put the napalm out, but I know
6 who hauled the kids out. I did. I hauled Jimmy, the Japanese dissident. By the way, his
7 mother called me probably a year ago. We chatted. I didn't know what to say, but he died
8 the next morning.

9 RV: For the first time she called you?

10 EF: Yeah. It was chaos, it was almost like a movie scene with amount of aviation
11 that was trying to get in there to support that operation. And there were a lot of them
12 dead. There was a lot of damage done to the enemy.

13 RV: Tell me about Joe Galloway. What kind of contact did you have with him?

14 EF: I didn't have much contact with Joe until was all over with. Of course, we'd
15 drink a beer or two together and I've known him for all them years. Got to know him real
16 well. He's a straight arrow, straight shooter and very bright man. He's very clever, very
17 intelligent. Good person, good human being.

18 RV: Okay. Hal Moore after this battle, you said he took you into the tent. What do
19 you remember about those troopers and him on the 16th? When they came out of there.
20 You lifted them out, right?

21 EF: Oh, absolutely. We lifted everyone, the same as we lifted the men. We got
22 men empty and extracted them, which we did a lot of times. There was a different look
23 about the young GIs (Government Issued) in their eyes. General Moore, I don't think he
24 ever changed the expression. Tight jaw, big square jaw. He's a good actor maybe. He
25 don't show very much emotion, and certainly not among his troops. I think he's just a
26 steely eyed and squared away when it comes to that because he don't want to let any of
27 this emotion shed off and get to his troops. I believe that I may be right on that. But Joe
28 was a happy go-lucky guy as a general rule, and still is. The night at Phoenix when we
29 had our medal of honor society meeting, seventy seven of us showed up by the way. We
30 presented Joe with a journalism award from the medal of honor society. He got up and
31 made his speech and he says, "By the way—" The army gave him a bronze star for that

1 battle. He says, “By the way, I should’ve gotten another medal for riding around with that
2 Freeman all over Vietnam.” I forgot to tell him I was going to make him walk the next
3 trip.

4 RV: Tell me about the medal of honor and how this came about and that process.

5 EF: There was a statute of limitations of two years. At the end of two years you
6 could not recommend anybody for an award. In the early nineties, congress changed that
7 law. When it happened, Bruce Crandall called me and says, “Ed, I’m recommending you
8 for the Medal of Honor.” I said, “Well, good luck. I think you’re wasting your effort, but
9 I appreciate it.” I had no idea, I didn’t even believe it was going to happen because this is
10 many, many years. Went on about my business, I was flying for the government at the
11 time. I retired from the government in 91’, before this. One day a friend of mine, I fished
12 with her husband and she called me and said, “Ed, you’re on television.” I said, “Is that
13 right? What am I doing?” She said, “Congress just awarded you the Medal of Honor.”
14 This was on C-SPAN. You see, the army never called me. I said, “Is that right?” So I
15 called my son and they all got computers and all of this and within a few minutes, “Whoa
16 dad! It’s really true!” So here was the order, we went to—John McCain introduced it by
17 the way

18 RV: Yes.

19 EJ: And it went through congress and settled down and nothing happened. I went
20 out to the national guard and called the Pentagon. They said, “Well, it could be as early as
21 June and as late as another year before it’s ever presented.” “Okay, not a problem.”
22 About—it was in the White House fourteen months before I got it. About—well, Clinton
23 was still in office. I got a call from the White House. Said, “The president would like to
24 present you with the congressional Medal of Honor.” I said, “No.” She said, “What?” I
25 said, “No, I’ll wait.” “Okay!” And I waited and when Bush became president, I still
26 waited. Fourteen months had passed since congress had awarded me the Medal of Honor.
27 When he called, I said, “Got ya!” And I loaded up and we went to Washington with my
28 family and grand-children and few friends and Bruce Crandall and all his sons coming all
29 the way from Brazil. Of course, had a big ceremony and President Bush made a speech
30 and hung it around my neck. Went from there to the Pentagon and General Shinseki made
31 a speech and went to induct me in the Hall of Heroes in the Army. Next day I went to the

1 tomb of the unknown and laid a wreath. Big party and the next morning, airplane back
2 home and the airport was full of people when I arrived. But let me tell you a little story
3 about the arrival. I had a sergeant major escort, a black boy, Sergeant Gunboat.
4 Tremendous individual. I had a lady lieutenant colonel as my escort. I had two escorts.
5 This sergeant major was on the plane with us. He come back and we were going into
6 Denver to land. He says "Sir, I think you better put your dress uniform on." I said, "Pray
7 tell why?" He says, "There's a lot of folks at Boise, Idaho waiting to see you when you
8 get off the airplane." I said, "Is that right?" "Yes, sir." I said, "How do you propose we
9 put this uniform on?" He said, "We'll figure something." So he and I—he had my
10 uniform in a suit bag and he and I went and took the first handicap stall, right? He took
11 my shoes off, polished my shoes. I sit down on this thing and started taking my shoes off
12 and I stood up and of course it would flush! Every time we're doing this, it would do the
13 same thing. All of the sudden, of course I'm standing like so overlooking these people out
14 here and I see about five people standing with briefcases like this. And I said, "Get the
15 hell out of here, it's not what you think!" And they started moving around with their
16 briefcases and took off. Well, we got the job done and of course he laughed and we left
17 and went on and of course my grand-kids is all eating hamburgers laying around the floor
18 of the airport and when we got to Boise, and there were a hundred people and a lot of
19 friends of mine that belonged to the purple heart thing and all of this. A lot of the VFW
20 (Veterans of Foreign Wars) guys and a lot of neighbors there. Had a couple of interviews
21 with the local tv and all this, but it was a very nice reception. They eventually quit
22 writing about me and somebody said, "I don't see you on TV a bunch anymore!" I said,
23 "I quit paying them and they quit interviewing me."

24 RV: Tell me about the movie, how has that changed things for you? You're a
25 prominent part of this movie. Of course, Bruce is really the focus there.

26 EF: Yeah, Bruce was down there and Bruce was more of an aviation advisor.
27 They called on me and wanted me to come down too, but I ain't lost nothing in Fort
28 Benning, Georgia, except a lot of sweat, blood, and tears when I was stationed there. So I
29 decided that Bruce could handle it and I didn't need to go. I thought it was very well
30 done, I enjoyed it. It was about eighty-five percent accurate in my book and I think most
31 people that I talk to will give it at least eighty or eighty-five percent accuracy. They sent

1 me a copy of the script and asked for comments and a big comment I had was, “Get rid of
2 some of the profanity.” In my case, I have had two young grand-daughters and they
3 probably heard it before, but I didn’t want them to hear it out of the movie. I don’t think
4 they paid any attention to me because you’ve probably seen the movie and you noticed—
5 waste of effort when I made my comments. I think they did a pretty good job of making
6 it. I didn’t approve of some of the things, but most of it was accurate.

7 RV: How about the ending when Bruce came in, Greg Kinnear character or
8 Bruce, comes in and takes out on that third morning on the 16th?

9 EF: Yeah, he and I on the gunships. Not true. First place, you can’t use a gunship
10 when you got your own troops on the ground. You see, the only time we could fire our
11 machine guns, the M60s that was on the side each of our helicopters, would be on the
12 initial trip in. Through the first trip in, we’d hose everything down, hoping we’d get any
13 straggler that was around. But other than that, you cannot come in there. You got to have
14 some pretty open area to hose them down with, otherwise your own troops will get it. So
15 it looked good on the movie, but it didn’t happen. And we did not stack bodies up. We
16 didn’t touch them. And you could walk on them, because it was very thick with bodies.
17 We didn’t urinate on mortar tubes either. Big Chinook didn’t come in with all the women
18 reporters. Just Joe.

19 RV: Well, this 40th anniversary reunion, what’s it been like for you?

20 EF: I’ve raced it through my mind a few times and replayed it maybe. Reruns. But
21 I haven’t seen the movie, I don’t think since the premiere. Maybe I caught it a little on
22 TV one night, maybe the end of it. They were showing it on Memorial Day last year or
23 whatever. But I think it was excellent that they did that and I think it showed that if we
24 had a good side, I think it at least helped the troops because the troops took it in shorts.
25 Our troops did not smoke marijuana. First place, we were in a barbwire entanglement
26 with twenty-three thousand men and you didn’t get out of there except in our helicopters.
27 We couldn’t go to the town, there was no village. There was a village ten miles away, but
28 there was nothing there. And I’m not saying people didn’t do this in Saigon or whatever.
29 Not picking on Saigon, but we didn’t have an opportunity for that. But we had good
30 troops and they were good American soldiers. They were vicious fighting men and I

1 admire them very much. But I think they took a bum-wrap and I hope this helped show
2 the public a little bit that we had some tremendous young men on our side.

3 RV: Okay. A hundred years from now someone is going to be watching this,
4 listening to this. What do you want to tell them about the battles of the Ia Drang Valley.
5 What do you want to tell them about the men there and about yourself?

6 EF: I would hope that somebody finds a solution other than war. But I don't
7 believe they will. I'll tell you a quick story about my grandson. He's my fishing buddy
8 and he's now a schoolteacher. He went to college with a scholarship and played in
9 baseball and all that, but he teaches now. When he was about nine years old, he and I are
10 going up the river with my truck. Out of the blue skies, he says, "Grandpa do they fight
11 wars on weekends?" I said, "Yes." We drove on around a couple more curves and rocky
12 road. He said, "Grandpa, do they fight wars on holidays?" I said, "Yes." Another few
13 minutes, he says, "Grandpa, do they fight wars at night?" I said, "Yes." He didn't say
14 nothing for quite some time. He turned around and look at me dead in the eyes and said
15 "Grandpa, why do they fight wars?" He knew just enough about war that he knew I had
16 been there, but nothing else because I kept my military life trying to keep it away from
17 my children. It was just a job. I'll tell you, I wished I would've known what to say to
18 him, but I've stumbled through something other than that fact that difference of opinion,
19 beliefs of two different governments and they don't agree on certain items, and I said,
20 "But that doesn't make it right, does it?"

21 RV: Well, Major Freeman, we're about out of time. I want to thank you for
22 participating in this oral history experience.

23 EF: You're more than welcome.

24 RV: It's our honor.

25 EF: I hope I didn't bore you.

26 RV: (Chuckles) Not at all, sir. Thank you, very much.

27 (End of interview)