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**The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Tracy Black Enders  
Conducted by Dr. Richard Verrone  
Date 11 November 2005  
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 video  
2 interview with Tracy Black Enders. Today is November 11<sup>th</sup>, Veterans Day 2005, and  
3 we're in Washington, D.C., at the Hilton Crystal City. We are all part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav  
4 division reunion and also the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pleiku-Ia Drang Valley campaign of  
5 November 1965. Tracy, tell me a little bit about your father and who he was.

6 Tracy Black Enders: Dad was a military reporter for the *Columbus Ledger-*  
7 *Inquirer*, which was basically the hometown paper for the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav. He started covering  
8 them when they were the 11<sup>th</sup> Air Assault Division. Basically, followed them through.  
9 Somehow got himself on the troop buses and took the troop ships over to Vietnam with  
10 them. So he actually traveled on the ships with him. A lot of the guys got to know him  
11 then, got to trust him, which was important for a reporter, and landed in Vietnam with  
12 them.

13 RV: How did he get himself embedded?

14 TB: Early embedding.

15 RV: Yes! How did that happen?

16 TB: He was just so persistent! But even more than that, I think the public  
17 information officers saw a great deal of—they just felt as though they could trust him and

1 they felt as though he could take the story back to the hometown where the wives were  
2 waiting and that kind of thing. He was just a very persuasive man. (Laughs)

3 RV: He was a career journalist. This is what he wanted to do. This was his—

4 TB: He kind of fell into journalism. He was a marine, knocked around with a lot  
5 of jobs. He was an iron worker. Basically, had hurt himself, broken his back doing iron  
6 working, had fallen on a job. Some gentleman offered him some tiny sum of money to  
7 read the news on the local radio station while he was recovering. Basically found a  
8 passion for it at that point but was really self-made.

9 RV: What kind of man was he? I mean, you described that what he kind of did,  
10 but tell me about his personality.

11 TB: He told a great story. Was incredibly smart, with a photographic memory. He  
12 had a great deal of respect for the military and was a real patriot. In house, you stood up  
13 even if the national anthem was on TV. (Laughs) And to this day I've never seen a Jane  
14 Fonda movie because we were forbidden to see anything with Jane Fonda.

15 RV: He was a really big supporter of the troops and what was—

16 TB: Big supporter of the troops.

17 RV: Have you heard about what his thoughts were about the Vietnam War in  
18 general, before he went over?

19 TB: I think that he—in the beginning his interest wasn't following the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav. I  
20 know that he believed that we needed to stop communism. He really did believe in the  
21 mission, in Vietnam. What he became angry about and very upset about was the fact that  
22 men went over, women went over and served and they did so honorably, and when  
23 everything went bad politically, the American public couldn't separate the two. They  
24 couldn't separate the honorable service from the politics of the war. He became very  
25 bitter about the treatment of the soldiers when they returned home. Not so much in  
26 Columbus but he just saw it in general. I think he believed in America being there in the  
27 beginning. I think he believed that we didn't fight the war to win it by the end.

28 RV: He went over in 1965 with the Cav?

29 TB: Yep, he went over with the Cav. He went seven separate times. I think he was  
30 there, I think as late as I think 1969.

31 RV: Wow. So he saw a lot of things, and he saw an evolution of the war as well.

1 TB: Absolutely.

2 RV: How old were you when this was all happening?

3 TB: I was born November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1964. Not even a year old when he was over  
4 there. In fact, I remember one of my earliest memories is of crying, trying to pull my  
5 mom away from dad because I didn't know who he was. Because then, he would get  
6 himself over there, but they never really gave him a lot of money, so he would stay for a  
7 long period of time because that was more cost effective than making these multiple trips.  
8 It wasn't until *Newsweek* maybe did a profile on him and printed his weekly salary that I  
9 think they probably almost quadruple his salary. At that point he was making nothing. I  
10 mean, next to nothing to be over there.

11 RV: Well, tell me about the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav and what he saw in '65. Part of the reunion  
12 here is about the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ia Drang battles. Did he witness any of this? Was  
13 he there to see this? Tell me about that.

14 TB: Oh yeah, absolutely. He was with them that entire campaign, essentially. He  
15 was a reporter, but they would actually bring him into planning meetings when they  
16 would be planning going into landing zone and what have you, to ask his opinion because  
17 he was really self-taught on military strategy and they had a lot of respect for him with  
18 that. But he would probably be in places that today they would shudder to think a  
19 journalist could get into, but they trusted him.

20 RV: Right. That says a lot about him.

21 TB: That came across loud, and it still comes across to this day how much the  
22 guys trusted him. He went into—they did a night landing. He went in with Colonel  
23 Stockton, with the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 9<sup>th</sup>. Who was shortly after there, relieved of his command.  
24 He was the third person off the helicopter behind Colonel Stockton and his radio  
25 operator. The story as I get it because my mom retold it and others have retold is that  
26 Stockton turned around and asked him what his wife's name was and he says, "Mary"  
27 And he says, "You son of a bitch, crazy enough to get off the helicopter if he doesn't  
28 have to, this is now Landing Zone Mary!" (Laughs)

29 RV: Oh wow, that's neat!

30 TB: And I read about the account first in a book by JD Coleman, about the Pleiku  
31 campaign because he was really the historian that documented the entire campaign at that

1 time. I called my mother and asked her about it because you know I hadn't—I said, "Did  
2 you know this?" She goes, "Yeah, I just kind of forgotten about it. Time, age whatever."  
3 She says, "Yeah, remember that old tobacco tin that I keep up on the shelf?" I said,  
4 "Yeah, the red one that kind of has the hole in it." She says "Yeah, that was in his left  
5 breast pocket during that Landing Zone" And she said, "That's what stopped the bullet."

6 RV: Wow.

7 TB: She said, "He was almost killed two or three times because they got  
8 themselves in an ambush." I guess it got pretty hot and heavy. He was there, he was at  
9 Landing Zone Falcon. He came in towards the end I believe of Albany, but everything  
10 was over at that point. But really he was there for the entirety of the campaign.

11 RV: Do you remember, based on what your mother said and based on what you  
12 read, how he remembered that whole campaign and the significance of that campaign?  
13 With this being the real huge encounter—

14 TB: He understood the significance of it. He really understood the significance of  
15 this knew airmobile concept. I think he also understood that what they did during that  
16 battle was really going to change the face of warfare to a great degree. He always talked  
17 to me even before I could really understand it and relate it to the rest of it about how  
18 difficult it is to fight an embedded troops on hostile terrain, where basically they are  
19 using guerilla warfare. Dad got that early on that you couldn't fight a conventional war  
20 and he thought that's what this campaign proved. That you had to take it to them where  
21 they were and you know your conventional war was just not going to work in Vietnam.

22 RV: Right. Did he ever talk to then Lieutenant Colonel Moore?

23 TB: Oh, yeah.

24 RV: Tell me about those conversations and what he gleaned from Moore and  
25 what his opinion of Moore was.

26 TB: He had a lot of respect for Colonel Moore and Colonel Moore has a lot of  
27 respect for him still. Dad never talked a lot about that part of his life with me, so I can't  
28 say I know of any conversations in specific.

29 RV: Do you remember what your mother has told you about him?

30 TB: What my mom has told me was that they talked a lot about tactics and  
31 repelling out of helicopters. Dad was actually certified to repel out of a helicopter with

1 these guys and a lot of—he talked a lot with Colonel Moore about the actual, “How do  
2 you get these guys out of the helicopters and onto the ground.” You know, the real nuts  
3 and bolts of the 11<sup>th</sup> Air Assault Division and what became the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav. How do you  
4 make it happen without getting your guy shot before they even put a boot on the ground.  
5 So there was a lot of that I think before they left to Vietnam where they talked about it.

6 RV: I am remembering it now, having read the book again for the fifth or sixth  
7 time that Colonel Moore mentions your father and the respect he has. He only saw just a  
8 few journalist who were worth their salt and he was one of them.

9 TB: Yep. Him, Bob Poos and Joe Galloway.

10 RV: Yeah and Joe. Did you father know Bob and Joe?

11 TB: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

12 RV: I imagine they had to know each other.

13 TB: Joe—actually when I found this group, Joe was the first guy that I really  
14 talked to. I took this book and there were some articles with some names during the tenth  
15 anniversary of the Vietnam wall and they started helping me plug names in and they all  
16 kept coming up at the Arlington Hyatt, at some reunion. I called and left a message at the  
17 hospitality suite and the guy kind of says, “If anybody knows your dad we’ll give you a  
18 call back. I’ll let General Moore and Joe Galloway know. If anybody is going to know  
19 them, it’ll be them.” So I figured I’d hear something the next day because it was pretty  
20 late already. About midnight I got a phone call and it was Joe Galloway and he said, “I  
21 couldn’t wait until tomorrow to find out—” I’m sorry. “If you’re the daughter, of my  
22 good friend Charlie Black.” It was nice because after all of those years, somebody  
23 remembered.

24 RV: Yeah. It was a direct connection right there. What did Joe tell you about your  
25 father? Were you able to go over the next day and see?

26 TB: Yeah, I did. I was able to talk to him. His first words to me were, “Thank god  
27 you didn’t look anything like your father.” (Laughs)

28 RV: (Laughs) Thanks Joe.

29 TB: I think he was expecting maybe a female version of my dad, that would not  
30 have been pretty. I was able to talk to him and he just talked a lot about how much dad  
31 taught him as a reporter and keeping confidences and really about how to get the story

1 from the guys. The thing that everybody always talks about in dad's articles are all the  
2 names and the hometowns. When you think about this, a lot of the time he was going in  
3 when a landing zone was already hot. He's hitting the ground and he's getting these  
4 names. It was his photographic memory that allowed him to remember a lot of it because  
5 there's no time to write it down or anything like that. There was another reporter, John  
6 Laurence wrote the book, *The cat from Hué*. I've since met him and he talked to me  
7 about—he just followed him into a landing zone one day and was just amazed that two  
8 minutes he had twenty names and hometowns and everybody's story. You know so I  
9 think Joe felt as though dad was a real mentor to him.

10 RV: That book is written a lot like that because a constant mention of names and  
11 where they're from throughout the book, even if it was said before.

12 TB: I think that's something that Joe really learned from Dad, that it was  
13 important to give their name and hometown because people were so desperate for news. I  
14 mean, we didn't have the instant news of today where my god there was—where was it,  
15 we even saw the first marine hit the beach somewhere. I mean it's instant, on. Then, you  
16 could wait because these guys would type their stories over there and if you were like my  
17 dad, you waited until you could get some solider to frank it back for you. They would  
18 really wait. That's how wives found out their husband were still okay or they found out  
19 where their husbands were and what they were doing. Mothers and fathers, you know  
20 found out, "Okay, he mentioned my son." It was particularly important for that  
21 community in Columbus.

22 RV: Right, absolutely.

23 TB: So many people there waiting for news. So I think Joe really learned that  
24 from dad, how important that aspect of it was. He and Bob Poos knew each other through  
25 their time there. Dad had a lot of respect for them. At dad's memorial service, Peter  
26 Arnett was a speaker. He knew Peter really well. Dad and Peter were the only two  
27 reporters to cover the story that Peter won the Pulitzer prize for. He's saying nice things  
28 at memorial service, but he said he always thought that the only reason he won it was  
29 because he was with a big organization because he knew he didn't write it better than  
30 dad.

31 RV: That's nice. Have you and Joe stayed in touch all these years?

1 TB: Joe, yeah. We stay in touch by email. Bob Poos occasionally. Jack Laurence,  
2 who's over in Iraq right now doing a documentary I believe on the 101<sup>st</sup> airborne, stay in  
3 touch with him. I stay in touch with a lot of the guys too. You know, email is a great  
4 thing. Then, I come here every year.

5 RV: Tell me about that. What is it like for you to be here and be around all these  
6 troopers?

7 TB: The first time that I went over to the Arlington Hyatt it was weird for me  
8 because as soon as people started finding out who I was, I was just surrounded by a group  
9 of guys. But the thing that my husband noticed and it strikes me til this day, they always  
10 touch me.

11 RV: Really?

12 TB: One way or another, they need that physical connection because they had  
13 such respect for dad. I think they see me as a way of you know—

14 RV: There's that personal connection.

15 TB: That personal connection. To this day, it still exists. Even if they didn't know  
16 dad, they knew about his articles and they wanted to connect in some way. It's amazing  
17 to me because I always like to say, I think it was because of dad's age and where he was  
18 in his life, he wasn't a father that was always there. You know, he was gone a lot and  
19 then there was a divorce between him and my mother. Wasn't until I was fifteen, sixteen,  
20 maybe the three years before I lost him that we started getting a really close relationship.  
21 But what I always saw that even though maybe he wasn't the greatest father, he was a  
22 really good man. Just a very—there were people who depended on him who shared fox  
23 holes with him and whose lives he saved and they tell me about it. He had qualities that  
24 he was just a very good man.

25 RV: When did he pass away?

26 TB: In—it's hard for me to remember, 1982. I was seventeen. I was born in '64.  
27 Let's do the math. I kind of blank out a little bit, it was very hard.

28 RV: I can imagine. Tell me about your experience has been with this book  
29 coming out in '91, '92. I mean, here's Galloway and your dad's mentioned. Did General  
30 Moore or Joe contact you about your dad, or was it a surprise?

1 TB: They had tried to find me. That's why he was so anxious to speak to me  
2 because he said they'd been trying to find me for a while, but my parents had divorced  
3 and we moved to North Carolina, then I went to college, moved to D.C. I was actually  
4 living in D.C. when I finally connected with them. I was working two doors down from  
5 where the reunion was that year.

6 RV: That's amazing. Tell me about the book and seeing your father's name in  
7 there three times.

8 TB: Yeah, that was pretty amazing. You know, here's tangible proof that he was  
9 good. Because I think that because of the newspaper that he worked for, it was such a  
10 small home—not small, but a hometown newspaper. He never gained the fame that  
11 perhaps some of the other journalists did and my mother says that dad always had a very  
12 healthy ego. I think that always bothered him a little bit you know, that he felt like,  
13 “Okay, you know, people should know my name a little bit more.” Because he knew  
14 what he did, he understood what he did. I think that he would have loved it and had he  
15 been alive, he would've been able to have contributed a lot to it. But he would've loved  
16 the notoriety of the division. He would've wanted people to know what he knew about  
17 these guys, that they really were heroes and that they went over there and they did their  
18 jobs and they did it well. So he would've been very proud of that.

19 RV: Yeah. You brought some pictures with you and some other information.  
20 What do you have here of your father's if you could kind of describe it.

21 TB: Well, we started a website called CharlieBlack.net [Editor's Note: Domain no  
22 longer exists, however cache versions accessible through [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)] and that has  
23 a lot of his works on there. He would sometimes—he would just write a ton of articles. I  
24 mean the big joke was that somebody would make him come out of the field and sit him  
25 down until he produced enough that he could go back out on the field. But he wrote so  
26 many articles that sometimes they would publish two or three in a day. So we put a lot of  
27 those works on the website.

28 RV: Who was doing this?

29 TB: My husband and I. My husband Michael and I. Michael really is the one—he  
30 did it for me as a surprise and gave it to me as a gift.

1           RV: How nice. What do the troopers who see these articles and these things, how  
2 do they react to that?

3           TB: It's so funny because even in the room waiting, there were three guys that  
4 came in and one of them overheard me talking to another gentleman and he had to come  
5 over and shake my hand, "I knew your dad and he told me stories." They don't really  
6 have to wait for me because so many of them still have these yellow scraps of paper that  
7 they saved. That's how we collected a lot of his works, guys send us things that maybe  
8 we didn't have previously and we send them back because through some unfortunate  
9 circumstances, there's no good archive at the Columbus paper of his works. So we collect  
10 a lot from the men that attend this reunion. They'll send us scrapbooks and they trust us  
11 to take it and copy it and mail it back to them. We had a gentleman from the last reunion  
12 from Maine. He sent us a whole box of scrapbooks and we copied and cleaned it up and  
13 sent it back to them. They trust us with it. Which I think is an important thing.

14          RV: It's a legacy to your father. It speaks a lot about him and you too obviously.

15          TB: They all like to look through the scrap book. They're going to like the  
16 website, I think. They're going to be able to do searches, many come up with their name  
17 if he wrote about them or come up with battles that they may have been in that they  
18 couldn't read again and remember. But they like to see things that belonged to him. They  
19 like to tell me stories about their interactions with him, if they knew him.

20          RV: I imagine you learn a lot about your father every time you have these  
21 conversations.

22          TB: Absolutely, because so many different people find the reunion every year, we  
23 hear new stories every year. It's amazing really. At the dinner, I stand up and introduce  
24 myself on Saturday night and I guarantee you that I'll meet fifteen new people that want  
25 to tell me stories about him and their contact with them.

26          RV: That's great. We're going to take this interview and we're going to preserve  
27 for multiple generations into the future, so people could hear what you're saying about  
28 your father and what you're doing now in 2005 for him. What would you like to tell  
29 people a hundred years from now that listen to this about Charlie Black and about  
30 Vietnam and his experience there?

1           TB: Charlie Black believed in the soldiers that he covered. One hundred percent.  
2   He trusted them with his life and they in turn trusted him with their lives. I think that says  
3   something about the quality of a man. And never once, even though he may have hated  
4   the politics of the war, never once would my father have ever said anything derogatory  
5   about a man or woman serving in the armed services.

6           RV: He got it way ahead of the time, versus now.

7           TB: He felt that that was sacred. I remember watching the POWs (Prisoners Of  
8   War) come home. My dad had us stay home from school, so that we could watch it on  
9   TV because they would do it live then. He wanted people to understand the sacrifices that  
10   were made in Vietnam and to get over the politics of it and to understand how special  
11   these guys were. I think that's what I would want people to know about him, just how  
12   much he loved the soldiers and his country

13          RV: Okay. Tracy, thank you very much for sharing this with us and honoring your  
14   father in doing this. We'll take this forward and make sure he's never forgotten, at least  
15   in our archive. Thank you, so very much.

16          TB: Alright.  
17   (End of interview)