

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

**The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Ken Weitzel  
Conducted by Dr. Richard B. Verrone  
Date 12 November 2005  
Transcribed by Mark Steven Varela**

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

**NOTE:** Any text included in brackets [ ] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 [Editor's Note: Interview cuts in.]

2 Ken Weitzel: We set a liaison officer routinely to be part of it. During the  
3 Carolina operations, for about three years, there was a cream puff job. Everybody wanted  
4 it because that meant they didn't have to fly; they were just on the ground with the  
5 infantry. I joined a unit—

6 Dr. Richard Verrone: Actually, we should get this on tape. This part. What was  
7 your—tell me you were with the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup> correct?

8 KW: 2<sup>nd</sup> of 7<sup>th</sup>.

9 RV: What unit particularly?

10 KW: I was with headquarters.

11 RV: Headquarters? Okay.

12 KW: I functioned in reality as the S3 of the battalion—S3 Air, let me clarify that.  
13 S3 Air lieutenant.

14 RV: So were you with McDade?

15 KW: Yeah.

16 RV: (Chuckles) Well, I would like to ask you about him, is that going to be okay?

17 KW: Yeah. Head-to-head.

18 RV: Well, I would like to ask you about him, is that going to be okay?

19 KW: Yeah

1           RV: Basically, what we're doing here is short video interviews on behest of  
2 General Moore and Bob Daniels, one of the sponsors of Franklin Global Forum Group.  
3 They're putting a lot of money into this to help this reunion go well. They asked us to do  
4 these interviews so we can, one preserve them forever, for history and to be deposited at  
5 the Vietnam Archive and preserved for lots of folk into the future. Also, we'll create a  
6 DVD for you all, so you can have all these interviews. They will be on the internet as  
7 well, in the virtual Vietnam Archive.

8           KW: About how long from now will that be?

9           RV: I would say by the end of the year. I am hoping by Christmas we'll have—  
10 we're going to give these raw tapes back to Bob for him. He has equipment to digitize  
11 these DVD tapes. Once we get that, we'll put someone on the task of getting these put into  
12 basically streaming files, so they are not too large for people to view online. Let me give  
13 you my card and website. Please pick up information down there, I mean if you haven't  
14 already we have a ton of literature out. But this is the website. So go there and look at  
15 that. We have over two and a half million documents online thus far. We have over  
16 twenty million in the archive itself, plus tens of thousands of photograph slides

17           KW: Why can't you beat Texas? [Editor's Note: Interviewee refers to UT  
18 Football.]

19           RV: Well, you know we're—

20           KW: I'm from Ohio State.

21           RV: Well, I'm from North Carolina, so my heart is there with the Tar Heels which  
22 is great for basketball and occasionally good for football.

23           KW: Misplaced for football. (Laughs)

24           RV: Yeah, we've been top ten in the '80's, with Lawrence Taylor.

25           KW: Didn't they win last week? North Carolina won?

26           RV: 16-14, we were BC. Yeah, and we play Maryland today. But you're right.  
27 Tech's Football program is you know, they're wannabes and they're doing better and  
28 better.

29           KW: Something I think you're going to find in the process of these—  
30 [Editor's Note: Audio cuts out.]

1           RV: This is Dr. Richard Verrone, I am conducting a video oral history interview  
2 with Lieutenant Colonel Ken Weitzel. Today is November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2005. We are in  
3 Washington, D.C., at the Crystal City Hilton and we're here for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of  
4 the Battles of the Ia Drang Valley, LZ (Landing Zone) Falcon, X-Ray, and Albany and  
5 others. Colonel, I would like for you to kind of describe in the interest of time, we're  
6 going right into these days in November. Tell me a little bit about your duties, what  
7 position you had and what your responsibilities were.

8           KW: Basically, what my responsibility was I was the interface between the  
9 aviation support and the infantry battalion. It was part of the overall concept of air  
10 mobility. We wanted to make sure we didn't have a separation, that it was seamless, that  
11 we all felt that we were part of this overall larger unit. Each aviation company had  
12 responsibility for a battalion. We had responsibility, my aviation company of Charlie  
13 229<sup>th</sup> had responsibility for the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry and as such, I was a liaison officer  
14 to them and when they were not on an operation, I would strap on a helicopter and do my  
15 normal flying things and as soon as the alert was given for an order for us to move to the  
16 field with the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup> and I ceased flying and then I was part of the S3 shop  
17 operations of the battalion. I would coordinate all helicopter air support during the course  
18 of the operation. In general terms, we'd go out for seventeen, eighteen days at a time. I'd  
19 be in the field the entire time and if there was a combat assault that was going to go on  
20 during the course of the time we are in the field, I would coordinate that, get the word  
21 back to my aviation commander and then the operation would flow from there. I was  
22 responsible of making sure that the sequence of the landing zone—the pickup and  
23 landing zones were appropriate. That type of thing.

24           RV: Okay. Before we get into this, you were with the headquarters group. Tell me  
25 about Colonel McDade and your experience with him. What kind of person was he and  
26 what was he like to be in the field with?

27           KW: Colonel McDade was very mild mannered, somewhat soft spoken. Had been  
28 the division G1 and had taken over command of the unit, I believe shortly after we got  
29 into country. I don't think he took the battalion over there, to the best of my recollection.  
30 Wasn't very forceful. He'd had assigned—the aid to the general got assigned as the XO  
31 (Executive Officer) of the battalion, as I think more of a support for Colonel McDade. A

1 gentleman by the name of Frank Henry who has since been deceased. The battalion itself  
2 was a ragtag battalion, if you really get down to it. It was formed in the later stages,  
3 before we deployed from Fort Benning and they brought elements with different units  
4 together. So it had not had the advantage of two or three years' worth of extensive  
5 training that the 11<sup>th</sup> Air Mobile division went through. So it really wasn't a very  
6 cohesive unit to begin with. We had people that were assigned like the S3 of the  
7 battalion. A gentleman by the name of Barney Gill. Barney Gill had been a football  
8 player at West Point and then spent fifteen or sixteen years as Red Blake, the coach's  
9 assistant football coach and they decided that it was time to go back to the real army and  
10 do something. So Barney was assigned as the S3 of the battalion and knew nothing about  
11 operations or how to write an ops order or anything else. Within the first month and a half  
12 that we were in country, we replaced the S3 with Jim Spires who was outstanding. But  
13 you had this kind of turbulence going on. Even within the companies, they weren't whole  
14 companies when they joined the battalion back in Benning. They were filled in with  
15 people. So they didn't have the advantage of the continuity that the other battalions  
16 within the division had.

17 RV: That's obviously going to affect you in the field.

18 KW: That affected later on. I think if you looked at the after action reports you'll  
19 see that as one of the causal effects of what happened in the Battle of Ia Drang Valley and  
20 how the battalion performed.

21 RV: Right. When were you put down into the Valley? Was it on the 16<sup>th</sup>? Did you  
22 come then? Or was it—

23 KW: Oh—well you throw a date at me.

24 RV: I'm sorry, that was—Sunday the 14<sup>th</sup> was the beginning of X-Ray and then  
25 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> is when those guys, most of them were extracted, Colonel Moore is  
26 extracted.

27 KW: Right. Then we would've gone in on the 15<sup>th</sup>. We were in LZ, an artillery  
28 support base called LZ Columbus and I would estimate there were maybe eight to ten  
29 kilometers away from X-Ray. Our responsibility was to guard the artillery units so that  
30 they could fire in support of General Moore's operation in X-Ray. Then we get the word

1 late at night on, I believe the night of the 14<sup>th</sup>, that we were to move out by foot and at  
2 nighttime and do an early dawn link up with the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup> at X-Ray.

3 RV: So the 14<sup>th</sup> was the first day of X-Ray and the 15<sup>th</sup>, on that Monday, was the  
4 second day. Was it the second day or the first night?

5 KW: No, it was the second day.

6 RV: Second night? Okay.

7 KW: It was the night of the second day.

8 RV: Okay.

9 KW: So getting into the third day, the next morning. You know, a lot of  
10 trepidation at the thought of moving over land. A link up operation is a difficult thing at  
11 best. Being able to approach friendly lines and make sure that there's good interaction  
12 and so forth. But we also thought there was enemy between us and Colonel Moore, and  
13 there was no intelligence to tell us otherwise. So we were preparing to moving through  
14 there that we might have to battle our way into his position. Turned out that wasn't the  
15 case, there was no enemy opposition at all. Although we took casualties going there  
16 because just at first light, a couple of gunships out—scout ships saw us and fired on us.  
17 So we took our first casualties of the Ia Drang Valley operation moving in to augment  
18 the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup>.

19 RV: What did X-Ray look like when you got there?

20 KW: Chaotic at best. We moved in, collocated our CP (Command Post) with  
21 General Moore's CP. There were mounds of equipment, mounds of weapons that had  
22 been stockpiled and everyone had that look on their face that you see when you haven't  
23 slept for three or four days. They've been under intense stress and trauma and you could  
24 see it on everybody. General Moore's face was totally covered with dirt. If I could give  
25 you a quick, quick side, you can edit this out later.

26 RV: Absolutely.

27 KW: Two weeks later, I got a letter from my mother and she said, "I was  
28 watching television the other day and they had this battalion commander on. He started  
29 talking about his troops and tears started running down his face and going through the  
30 dirt, you can see the streaks of the tears going down and he talked about his love for his

1 troops.” She said, “I hope first, you’re not in that battle. Number two, if you are, you’re  
2 led by somebody like him.”

3 RV: That’s interesting. What do you remember of Colonel Moore then? Besides  
4 his physical look.

5 KW: Yeah, I guess the compassion and the—that probably came across more than  
6 anything else. The compassion, but the strength that he exhibited. He was a combat  
7 leader. I never served one day with Colonel Moore. Unabashedly, I’ll tell you I love him.  
8 I respect him so much, and when he became the brigade commander, I had no interaction  
9 with him then, but revered him and revered him through the entire rest of his career he  
10 had in the military.

11 RV: Was that back in 1965? Or was that because you knew what he had done in  
12 those three days and you knew what man he was?

13 KW: Yeah, I think it was less of knowing what he did than knowing the kind of  
14 man that he was. The type of leader that he was. There obviously was a contrast between  
15 Colonel McDade and the leadership of Colonel Moore. Difference in the experience  
16 level. Difference in how long they had their units and how long they trained with them.  
17 Colonel Moore was the real deal.

18 RV: Tell me about the decision to walk to Albany instead of being lifted out.

19 KW: That’s an interesting thing because we spent that night collocated with  
20 another battalion. There was another battalion, in addition to Colonel Moore’s battalion  
21 and they left the next morning. We were left in the landing zone for a couple of hours and  
22 decided to move. That day before, I’d gone up with the battalion and S3 in a helicopter  
23 and we had done a reconnaissance to find out where there was an appropriate area where  
24 we could have a landing zone. Probably for about fifteen years, I carried with me  
25 personally, the guilt that maybe we had spent too much time over the area where we were  
26 looking for the landing zone, maybe we had tipped our hand to where we had intended to  
27 go. It wasn’t until I read the book, where they had interviewed the PAVN (People’s  
28 Army of Vietnam) commanders to know that this was a chance encounter that we ended  
29 up having and it had nothing to do with it. But I’d always wondered, was I responsible?  
30 Was Spires responsible? We really weren’t—

31 RV: So you were looking for Falcon basically?

1           KW: No, no we were looking for Albany.

2           RV: I mean, not Falcon, Albany. You and Spires pinpointed this location.

3           KW: So we knew that's where we were going to go. Then we got the order to  
4 move over land and you know at the time we didn't know—we knew we had one  
5 responsibility and we knew we were going to, for the first time in the history of warfare,  
6 B-52s were going to be in direct support of a ground unit.

7           RV: Right.

8           KW: In order to do that, we had a gridline on the map that we had to get pass by a  
9 certain time in order to have the safety margin for the operation. So we knew that and  
10 understood that as a reason to move. I reflected for forty years, why did we move  
11 overland? We were tired, we had to move in a hurry, the terrain was difficult. Security  
12 was sacrificed for speed. There was no reason to do it. I mean I would love to this day to  
13 talk to the brigade commander or the assistant division commander for operations and ask  
14 him, "Why did we do that?" A more logical thing would've been hit the mountain with  
15 B-52s, take our battalion and lift them out of wherever we were and assault right into the  
16 B-52 post strike and exploit whatever the advantages we had. Why we didn't do that, I  
17 don't know. Our philosophy in air mobile at that time was pile on. We didn't shy from  
18 trying to find out where the enemy was and land several miles away and walk towards  
19 them. It was gleeful the day that we would land right in the middle of the hornet's nest  
20 because we would pile on and have the fight. That was the advantage of air mobility.

21           RV: Was there any discussion, do you remember with McDade and Moore or  
22 anyone else? I know they received orders from brigade, but you're Air Cav and all of the  
23 sudden you're going to be walking.

24           KW: There didn't seem to be a lot of discussion. In retrospect, I look at it and say,  
25 "Why wasn't there a lot of discussion?" To this day, I don't know what the mission was  
26 after we got there. What were we supposed to do?

27           RV: At X-Ray or Albany?

28           KW: Albany. We were walking there, what were we going to do when we got  
29 there? The whole logic of the B-52 strike, well obviously it was to damage the forces that  
30 would be there as greatly as we could. But what was the overall mission?

1           RV: Right, it was almost from what I understand, you all had to get two miles  
2 away from Chu Pong or some distance.

3           KW: I don't know the exact distance.

4           RV: So they said, "Okay, let's hike two miles away so we're safe."

5           KW: But we walked the other battalion too and it spun off and went—I believe  
6 they went to Columbus, I'm not positive.

7           RV: Yes.

8           KW: So, yeah, I don't know the reason for the walk, I don't know the reason for  
9 the following mission. I've talked to people; they said our mission was to be picked up  
10 and taken back to Holloway after. That's a hell of a reason to walk over land. If it was a  
11 rouse of some kind to make the enemy believe that we were still there so they should stay  
12 in position, I'd like for somebody to tell me that, if that's what we were being used for.  
13 There's no negative thoughts in my mind when I'm saying this, it's just to this day I don't  
14 know and I don't think we question it very much.

15          RV: So you and the headquarters, you all started off at the head of the column?

16          KW: No.

17          RV: That's right, you were back.

18          KW: Yeah. You know, being at headquarters, elements traditionally we would be  
19 two or three companies back and we were situated mostly between Charlie company and  
20 Delta company, which was of the other battalion that was the rear unit. We had recon up  
21 front. We were moving at a fairly good pace.

22          RV: Was this—were you going down a trail of sorts or just kind of walking  
23 through the brush?

24          KW: Yeah, it was brush but it didn't have all the characteristics of a heavily  
25 travelled trail or something like that. But moving through that was simple. The problem  
26 was you had high—like savannah grass and brush and then you had the regular trees and  
27 stuff, but not so dense that you couldn't see through the trees. Anything that was down in  
28 the grass, it was virtually impossible five feet away to see anything. We had recon  
29 platoon out front and I actually can't attest to how dispersed they were but based on  
30 where I know the enemy actually was when the attack was sprung, they could not have  
31 been dispersed very widely or they would've triggered the attack.

1           RV: Right.

2           KW: We had next to no flank security. We had no rear-guard security.

3           RV: What about Alpha Company Back in the back?

4           KW: Delta Company.

5           RV: I mean all the way in the back. It was Delta. Okay.

6           KW: That was Captain Forrest, was in the back. So we didn't have that and then

7 other traditional things we routinely did was walk artillery with us.

8           RV: You did not do this.

9           KW: We didn't do it. Now I don't know if that was in recognition that you had B-

10 52 strikes going through, but the B-52s were so high there wasn't any top of ordinance of

11 anything we would fire in direct support. We also didn't have aviation assets that

12 normally would've been scouts, that would've been on top of us. It couldn't be because

13 they had to be outside the safety zone.

14           RV: Do you know why these decisions were made? Or when you found out this,

15 what was your reaction? Because you might not be in the dition to know why.

16           KW: Yeah, I really didn't have any reaction to it. It was just something that we

17 kind of accepted, that this was—I remember I had my famous words I ate for years and

18 that's when the B-52 strike hit, we couldn't even see the planes. All of the sudden, the

19 whole world erupted, and ants fell out of the trees, we had all this debris coming down on

20 us. My response was, "That'll teach them to screw with us."

21           RV: You said that there?

22           KW: Yeah. I ate those words about fifteen minutes later.

23           RV: What did the B-52 strikes feel like?

24           KW: It shook the whole ground, and we were probably several miles from where

25 they dropped. You couldn't see in it. The planes, you couldn't hear the planes. Just all of

26 the sudden the world shook. It was awesome and to think that anything on that mountain

27 side where they had hit had survived, would have been incredible. But then, you know in

28 retrospect of thinking, what a beautiful place for us to land on a combat assault, in the

29 middle of an area that had been sanitized by B-52s.

30           RV: Sure. Talk about what happened next.

1           KW: Well, let me tell you. We came across two North Vietnamese who for some  
2 odd unexplained reason were sitting there, apparently were eating. It didn't make any  
3 sense at all that they were in that posture. But what was different about them, the people  
4 that Colonel Moore was fighting when they would capture them, their storyline was all  
5 the same. They were from the north, they didn't want to be here, they were sick, they had  
6 malaria, they had no pills. You know, they were unwilling participants was a word we  
7 were getting. On contrary, what they were saying, they were fighting ferociously. So  
8 what was different about the two POWs (Prisoners of War) when they were interrogated,  
9 they said they had eight to ten friends dedicated to killing Americans, they were up in the  
10 trees and they would fight to their death. They all had new uniforms, new uniforms in  
11 their packs, fully equipped. So they had a tremendous amount of credibility. They did  
12 damage to the unit because of their credibility, when I look back on it. Because we really  
13 did believe them. They were finally telling the truth, that these were well trained troops  
14 dedicated to fighting Americans. So when we got the order to halt the movement, I think  
15 I was in a unique position. There was only two people who were called forward.  
16 Company commanders were called forward, staff was called forward. Now the head of  
17 the column had gotten to just right outside of Albany. We could visually see it. So it was  
18 a logical thing in any combat situation that a commander could lay out an objective on a  
19 map and say, "A Company is here to here and B company is here to here." But when you  
20 have the advantage of actually being on the ground and say A Company is by that tree to  
21 that mound and you can establish your boundaries for your units, you certainly would  
22 want to do that. So part of McDade's calling people forward, was to do that visual  
23 because he could. So that explains a little bit on why the company commanders were  
24 called forward. So the D Company commander had the advantage of walking in an entire  
25 line of the route of march and see all the troops and so did I from Charlie Company  
26 forward. I remember—well, first of all, there's about a fifteen minute period of time that  
27 nothing happened. We didn't know why anything had stopped, there were no  
28 communications. I, like everybody else just sat down on the ground, most people took off  
29 their helmets. Resting, drinking water.

30           RV: You weren't with McDade?

1           KW: At that point, not with McDade. McDade was already forward at the head of  
2 the column. I remember—people told me later, I went to the bathroom and I walked  
3 about fifteen feet or twenty feet away where everybody was. Later on, people who were  
4 part of the assault said I actually walked past the positions from where the NVA (North  
5 Vietnamese Army) or the PAVN at that time, actually fired. So they had the discipline,  
6 fortunately for me, to not let me trigger their attack. So I was lucky.

7           RV: Wow. Yes.

8           KW: Moving up that line, no one was in the traditional infantry defensive  
9 positions, with one exception and that was a platoon from I believe it was Alpha  
10 Company, it was led by lieutenant Don Cornett. He had a traditional perimeter defense,  
11 and they were all alert and it vividly stood out in my mind that this was the one unit that  
12 was doing what our doctrine would've told you to do.

13          RV: You felt that at the time?

14          KW: Oh yeah, absolutely. Reading has reinforced my mind later that's the one  
15 unit that was in the kill zone. They were wiped out I think in its entirety. I don't think  
16 anyone in his platoon survived. Most of them died in a perimeter defense when we  
17 looked at the bodies laying there.

18          RV: When I got to the head of column, they had already finished interrogating the  
19 two North Vietnamese and they were tied up and sitting down on the ground. Hadn't  
20 given us any other information except for these eight to ten of their friends up that were  
21 up in the trees and prepared to fight. I was with a group—McDade was talking to his  
22 company commanders about where they should be located in the lines. The recon platoon  
23 had already moved through, they were the lead element. They were actually over in the  
24 area where the landing zone was. About forty people. I was with a group of eight people  
25 which included the battalion sergeant major and the S3's sergeant and several other  
26 people over there. But there were eight of us in total plus the two prisoners. When the  
27 firing started, we all laid down and there was a huge ant hill, five six feet high and they  
28 were I don't know how far out, maybe five six feet wide. You laid down in the grass and  
29 you couldn't see anything. It really gave you a false sense of security. What you can't see  
30 can't hurt you. I would listen to the yelling and screaming, it was intense.

31          RV: Of the others?

1           KW: Yes, all up and down the line. My assumption and I remember saying to  
2 myself how proud I was of our forces, our troops that they would yell and scream like  
3 this going after these eight people up in the trees. So these guys had really thrown at least  
4 our small group of people, I think they'd really thrown us off on what was going on. So  
5 we just—I laid there, I didn't think I had any responsibility, the noise was all coming  
6 from down the line. All of the sudden though, we started getting heavy fire at our  
7 position.

8           RV: What kind of fire was it?

9           KW: Small arms. I don't remember any mortar fire at where I was at all. I believe  
10 back where Charlie Company was, I think they were getting some pretty good mortar fire  
11 back there. The SFC (Sergeant First Class) Bass, I bet today he's never gotten an award  
12 for anything. He was the operation's sergeant. What he did, he said, "I'll stand up and  
13 draw fire. The rest of you find out where the fire is coming from and I'll drop them, and  
14 you guys engage them." So he did it the first time and he laid down on the ground and he  
15 said, "Did you guys see him?" I said, "No, we didn't see him." "Damn!" So he did it  
16 again. He did it eight to ten times. Each time we were saying—each time he got more  
17 frustrated that we didn't see them. Frankly, I don't think we were looking that hard. You  
18 know, you have the courage forty years later to say that you weren't the hero that you  
19 thought you were. But finally, I never saw anybody coming towards that hill at all. But  
20 somebody yelled, "There all over us. Get out of here!" And it was like a herd mentality.  
21 Everybody stood up and started to run and five of the eight didn't take two steps and  
22 were killed immediately.

23           RV: Five of the eight people that you were with?

24           KW: Yeah. Then the young PFC (Private First Class) got hit or stitched across the  
25 stomach and he was running with the sergeant major and I down this open field and I  
26 later written something I just keep personally, I call it my "Run to Nowhere", because I  
27 didn't know where I was running to.

28           RV: Let me ask you, were you running toward Albany?

29           KW: Actually, I was. But I didn't know it. It was just an open field and I knew I  
30 couldn't be where I was, and it was just running. This PFC his entire intestines were  
31 outside of his stomach. He was holding them with both arms and keeping up with us

1 stride by stride. It was remarkable, I don't know if he lived or if he—I mean, he made it  
2 out, he was lifted out. But whether or not he survived or not, I don't know and don't  
3 know his name. People that saw us, said it was incredible with the number of tracer  
4 rounds all around our heads. Every fourth or fifth round was a tracer round so it was three  
5 or four times what you were seeing. They said all of our heads were laced with tracer  
6 rounds. I could actually feel at times I'd flinch because it was so close and near it touched  
7 my ear kind of thing. I fell down on the ground, just stumbled. Sergeant major fell over  
8 me, the PFC fell over the sergeant major. We are laying there, and the recon platoon was  
9 in a wood line and they were yelling for us to come over there. It sounds really corny, but  
10 some young troop had a confederate flag and he carried it all the time, he stuck this small  
11 confederate flag on an ant hill. I figured being a brilliant captain, that they weren't very  
12 many NVA carrying confederate flags, so it must be safe over there. The battalion  
13 sergeant major got up, ran to the wood line, fell to the ground and then he got up in  
14 traditional infantry mode like this and said, "Over here!" Got hit right in the chest and in  
15 the armpit motioning for me to come over. So it ended up, I was unscratched and got into  
16 this small perimeter.

17 RV: He was killed?

18 KW: No, he survived it, but he died a couple weeks ago.

19 RV: Really.

20 KW: So out of the battle itself, maybe three of us made it. Probably two out of  
21 those eight. Survivors today, I'm probably the survivor. You certainly question in your  
22 mind, you know, war and casualties were so random. Still are today in Iraq.

23 RV: Did you think about it back then? Were you thinking about death or were you  
24 running from that?

25 KW: I wasn't thinking about death, until we got into the perimeter. Once we got  
26 into the perimeter, I knew we were going to die. Then it was no longer a sense of thinking  
27 about death, it was thinking about more about the pain and suffering that this was going  
28 cause for other people. I think it was a more prevalent thought than my own loss.

29 RV: You're talking about the perimeter up near the LZ?

30 KW: Yeah. The recon platoon was basically the forty people around the  
31 perimeter. Then we started getting stranglers in. That included the battalion XO was in

1 there and McDade and all the company commanders except for Forrest who got back  
2 to—ran a gauntlet and got back to his unit.

3 RV: Why did you think you were going to die? Why were you certain of that once  
4 you got to the perimeter?

5 KW: All night long, all day long we were probed. We'd break into the perimeter  
6 at times and we'd fight them back. I know things that I did later on as I did my own  
7 personally research S.L.A. Marshall wrote a book on men under fire and he talked about  
8 through interview what people did as they prepared for their final battle. As I review the  
9 book, I understood I did all those things. I had my ammunition, I rehearsed how I would  
10 reach for another clip so I'd be able to do it automatically, where everything was  
11 positioned, I could do it in the dark and that type of thing. I remember there was a  
12 lieutenant or Captain Callow I think was our S2. I know we took off our insignia,  
13 nametags, and everything else that identified. We ripped up pictures of family and things  
14 like that because we didn't want that to be in the hands of the NVA.

15 RV: How did that feel to do that?

16 KW: It felt like saying goodbye. It wasn't a good feeling. But I—you know, I kept  
17 running into the perimeter. Lieutenant Gwin who was a combat leader in the truest word,  
18 a warrior. He was standing up, fighting. The NVA rushing him ten, fifteen, twenty feet  
19 away. Get up and rush him again and he keep firing. So I came in after running and  
20 everything totally spent. Fell down on his feet, he said, "Get up and fight!" "I need  
21 water!" He said, "God dammit, get up and fight!" "I need water!" He threw a canteen of  
22 water at me and as I look back in the years and saying what was more important to me at  
23 the time, I had to have water before I could fight. Survival was less important to me than  
24 water at the time. As soon as I got a drink of water, I was up doing what I should do. But  
25 then I eventually I moved over to where McDade was. McDade was laying down on the  
26 ground totally frustrated, in command of nothing. No communications with the  
27 companies, they jammed our radios. His company commanders couldn't direct them to  
28 do anything, they were all there. Really, individual soldiers now. Totally helpless position  
29 for him. I remember we were laying there and the bark from about this high on the  
30 ground up was all gone off the trees. We were receiving so much fire from all around this  
31 perimeter. He looked at me and apologized for getting me into this. As an individual.

1           RV: Do you remember what he said to you?

2           KW: Exactly that, he said, “I’m so sorry I got you into this. I’m sorry.” The  
3 person that truly took over the battalion at that time was Frank Henry, who was the  
4 battalion XO. Frank was an aviator, but he was put on ground duty. Had been the division  
5 commander’s aid. He was sent down to give additional strength to the battalion and he  
6 was a very strong, dynamic leader. But he also was in the frustrating position of—he  
7 couldn’t communicate with anyone. We wanted to use all the resources available to us for  
8 TAC (Tactical Air Control) air and artillery and everything else. We couldn’t use it  
9 because we didn’t know where our people were. We anguished over it. We knew where  
10 some bad guys were, and we couldn’t bring in fire around them. It was such a frustrating  
11 thing.

12          RV: I guess, especially for you personally because you—

13          KW: Yeah. It was terrible. But that was during the daytime. Then, when it got  
14 dark, that’s when we realized that none of us thought we would make it to the next  
15 morning. We had wounded people and it was the dichotomy of war. We wanted an  
16 emergency insertion for a helicopter to take out our wounded before we died. It’s an  
17 amazing thing.

18          RV: It’s a dedication to your men.

19          KW: Yeah, dedication to the people even though you thought you probably  
20 weren’t going to be there the next day. So that’s where Colonel Bennett, who was the C  
21 Company commander, he was up in the air. He said he couldn’t get in; he couldn’t see us  
22 on the ground. It was just a holocaust blow with tracers all over the place, fires all over  
23 the place. Just a chaotic mess for many square miles around there.

24          RV: He could see the whole—

25          KW: Yeah. He could see it, but he couldn’t see anything individually. Finally,  
26 what to know how bad it was, I told him to switch over to our aviation company  
27 frequency, so in the clear I told him everything that was going on. I told him that chances  
28 are—he said, “I’ll come in the morning.” I said, “Don’t come in because it won’t be us  
29 that’ll be here.” He said, “That bad?” “That bad.” So he said he will come in. He got a  
30 silver star for what he did. They came in, we didn’t control the landing zone for them to  
31 come in. It was in no man’s land. We were on one side, the NVA on the other side. We

1 put down suppressive fire. The S3 of the battalion, Spires, went out with a flashlight with  
2 a little red dot on it to try to identify. He and I took turns doing that a couple of times. It  
3 was almost comically, I'm talking on the radio to the pilots trying to orient them in to  
4 where we are and McDade is saying, "Dammit, hurry up!" He was abstained out there in  
5 the middle of nowhere.

6 RV: What was McDade—was he up in control or was he down?

7 KW: Down. He was non-participant at that point.

8 RV: Why is that going on?

9 KW: I don't know. I think he was so discouraged and felt like he had no influence  
10 anymore of the action.

11 RV: What was it like for you to run out in the middle of the LZ with a flashlight?

12 KW: It was crazy. The worst thing was when the helicopters came in, they came  
13 in through the sheet. I mean, actually a sheet of fires, incredible. They landed and they  
14 were being constantly fired at, taking all kinds of hits. We ran out and put wounded  
15 people on, other people are being wounded as they were carrying wounded out and they  
16 were being put on. I ran out and stood on the skid of the helicopter and looked at my  
17 company commander, Will Bennet and he looked at me and we both knew the same  
18 thing. That we would never see each other again.

19 RV: Because he was staying?

20 KW: Well, he was going to leave, I was going stay. I thought for a moment, why  
21 don't I just jump on this helicopter?

22 RV: Why didn't you?

23 KW: You couldn't do that. I mean if nothing else, what you were. The training  
24 you'd received there was just no way. But I thought about it later on, not then but years  
25 later, that I chose the risk of death over the risk of embarrassment of leaving the  
26 battlefield.

27 RV: Do you know why?

28 KW: Nature? Sense of responsibility, loyalty. All those crazy things. But it was  
29 tempting. On their way out, I didn't think they were going to make it. I thought we were  
30 going to lose those two helicopters and we'd be responsible for that also. Then, just try to  
31 shorten up all night long, we received probes. The worst part was that we listened

1 systematically as the NVA walked through the battlefield and we'd hear our people yell,  
2 "No, no!" and then you'd hear, "Bam, Bam!". It just about drove everybody crazy  
3 listening to that and having no effect on it. Then we finally had a really massing of NVA  
4 on the one side of where the landing zone had been. We had reached a decision, take the  
5 risk that we might have people there or call in an airstrike and it would save us but kill  
6 our own people. We didn't know what to do. We reached the joint, and it was actually  
7 Henry and Spires and I had reached the decision that if we had friendly troops that were  
8 there, they were dead. Because there were probably hundreds of NVA. So we called in  
9 A1E and dropped napalm. Actually, close enough that napalm came into our position.  
10 Nobody was really injured, but napalm came into our position. That stopped probably  
11 what would've been the assault that would've finished us off, I think. The next morning,  
12 well, there's one real quick thing. You'll hear about Rescorla all the time. I have no  
13 personal attachment to Rescorla, I didn't know him or anything else. There's a lot of  
14 people that truly admired him. This guy was really something. He came in, he organized  
15 back at the base camp. Ragtag group of people, most of his platoon. Went over and  
16 insisted the aviation—not with anybody's approval, the aviation take him in to there.  
17 That was his unit. Came in on the combat assault under fire. I think it was dark or maybe  
18 just starting to get a little bit of light and he jumped off and ran over. They just started  
19 falling on the ground and occupying position. I don't know if you've ever seen Cal  
20 Ripken retired. He ran around the stands, all the way around the stadium and he hit  
21 everybody's hand. Rescorla did that under fire to everybody that was in that perimeter,  
22 who was hunkered down, ready to die and thought all of us lost. He went around yelling  
23 and screaming, "Let's go! Let's go! Come on! Let's go!" When he was finished, he had  
24 fired up that unit to the level that everybody stood up and started screaming for the NVA  
25 to come on.

26 RV: Wow.

27 KW: You know what I'm saying, let's get it on. When you think that he was a  
28 lieutenant, he had one major battalion commander, three or four company commanders,  
29 other ranking people to him and he was able to convince lieutenant, overcome all that  
30 rank structure and rally those people. It was an amazing event to see. Like I said, I have

1 no personal—some people love and admire him and everything else and I don't know  
2 him beyond that.

3 RV: But that's what you saw, you witnessed. It inspired you.

4 KW: Yeah, and it gave you the hope. We only added probably twenty more  
5 people, but it gave you the hope that you were going. The rest of the thing that was—the  
6 next day was doing nothing but policing the battlefield. I personally went out just to look  
7 for my operations sergeant. Found him and we carried him back in again. Everybody  
8 spent the day going out and Chinooks came in and that was before the days of body bags,  
9 so we had ponchos. Never wore a poncho again in my life after that. Thought it was bad  
10 luck. Carried the bodies. By that time in the day, two days into it with the heat, they were  
11 bloated and everything. You'd be seeing around all the ponchos waiting for some more  
12 Chinooks to come in and all of the sudden you'd hear a, "Psst" and you'd see the poncho  
13 go down as the bodies were exploding in the heat. We captured one person. That  
14 individual had Lieutenant Cornett's wallet, with a picture of Lieutenant Cornett's wife  
15 was in his possession. That was the one lieutenant who would organize his platoon in a  
16 good defensive position. This, just by chance, this particular NVA had searched his body  
17 and taken his wallet. The guy was uncooperative, spit in the face of the sergeant who was  
18 trying to get him to sit down. Almost caused a riot amongst our people. There was the  
19 first time McDade took charge.

20 RV: What did he do?

21 KW: He just stopped everybody. Very forceful, yelling and screaming, "Leave  
22 him alone. Back up." It was almost a mob mentality; people were very angry at that  
23 point. But one did he did do, McDade said, "Strip him and search him." They tried doing  
24 it, he started struggling. Sergeant McDade said, "Subdue him." A guy picked him up and  
25 threw on the ground. Searched him and tied him up. To the NVA's credit he was  
26 belligerent to the end. Good solider, our enemy but a good solider.

27 RV: We need to finish up, in interest of time. Tell me about leaving and your  
28 feelings about looking back now on those days.

29 KW: Yeah. Leaving there, the lift back to Pleiku was horrendous too because we  
30 knew we were beaten. We were declared non-combat ready at the end of it. The only unit  
31 that had that happen to in the entire war. They'd set up a resupply area and you'd walk

1 through and pick up things that you had lost on the battlefield. You'd go to triage at  
2 Pleiku and they had people all over. Some of them ours, some of the other units. A  
3 tremendous thing. Then we went to the officer's club that night. We closed the officers  
4 club to any other officers except for our unit. Very forcefully decided that this was our  
5 time.

6 RV: Yeah. Forty years after the fact, what's it been like being here? And what do  
7 you want people to know about those guys and about you, about those days?

8 KW: Gosh. I guess I want the general public to know that we were what they  
9 think the Iraqi and Afghanistan vets are today, and that's that people that went to war  
10 without an ideology. People went to war for the love of their country, to do what they  
11 were asked to do and not tainted by the political aspects of it. We are the same kind of  
12 people. It was really great that the book was ever written because there's not enough  
13 personally accounts. If people would delve down into individual tales, there are so many  
14 other books that could be written.

15 RV: Did you feel like the movie sided you all? Or do you regret that—

16 KW: Yeah, it did, but it wasn't negative for me. You know, if you ask the people  
17 from the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup> who had the greatest battle, it wasn't the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup>. They won't  
18 agree to that. Maybe in retrospect it wasn't, if you wanted to judge the fierceness of the  
19 battle only by casualties, there is no question it was the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 7<sup>th</sup>. But maybe we took  
20 more casualties because we shouldn't have and maybe Colonel Moore's group maybe  
21 did a better job and that's why they didn't take the casualties. We were missing one of  
22 our companies, Myron Diduryk in B Company. He was a rock.

23 RV: That's what Moore said.

24 KW: He was a rock, he was a "soldier" soldier, he was a warrior. My last political  
25 statement is that when we went into Vietnam, we had not been in combat for a longtime.  
26 Those people that were effective managers and administrators became the leaders of the  
27 army. Throughout the structure, more NVAs and etc. It took us a few years and finally  
28 had warriors come to the forefront. The latter years in Vietnam, we had warriors that  
29 were leading. Then we reversed that process again. We probably now have gone the other  
30 way again. We're proud to say that a person that may be leading units is a strong combat

1 leader. Maybe not as strong as an administrative or managerially. So I think we went  
2 through that creative time.

3 RV: Well, sir we need to end the interview now. Appreciate your time very, very  
4 much.

5 KW: It was great, and I thank you for what you've done.

6 RV: It's our honor.

7 (End of interview)