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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with General Hal Moore, USA Ret.
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 Dr. Richard Verrone: General Moore, thank you for being with us today. I am Dr.
2 Richard Verrone conducting this oral history interview with Lieutenant General Harold
3 G. Moore. Today is November 10th, 2005. We're in Washington D.C., at the 40th
4 anniversary reunion of the battles of the Ia Drang and Pleiku veterans. Sir, there's a lot
5 we need to discuss. I would like to ask you something in general before we get to X-Ray
6 and the events that surround that. Could you talk to me about yourself and your training
7 and what you brought with you to Vietnam in 1965. In your principles of leadership, how
8 you saw your men. What you wanted to do with them and how trained them up for that
9 job.

10 General Hal Moore: Well, this will take about an hour. I'll cut it back to a few
11 minutes. I was a paratrooper soon after I was commissioned out of West Point. Airborne
12 Division in Japan, 82nd Airborne, Fort Bragg. Jump tested parachutes. Associated
13 Airborne equipment for the Army, the Air Force, CIA for two and a half years. Had a few
14 sporting events which were life threatening, which taught me the primary lesson of
15 always keep focused when you're in a tough situation. Don't panic, don't do things
16 spontaneously unless every instinct in your body tells you to. I served in the pentagon as
17 a one-man airborne research and development officer. Developing airborne techniques,
18 airborne equipment. Army's interest and requirements for Air Force and aircraft. I was
19 requested by then Major General Harry Kinnard, commanding general of the 11th Air

1 Assault Division to be one of his infantry battalion commanders in the 11th Air Assault
2 Division, which was a test division testing air mobility, air assault concepts. So I did that
3 at Fort Benning for fourteen months and I had great troops, many of whom had trained
4 together in basic and advanced infantry training. We trained in a lot of tough exercises in
5 the Carolinas, Georgia. We became bonded as a family team of fighting men. Also, in
6 such a situation you learn to love your fellow soldiers. Which is a phenomenon that many
7 civilians cannot understand. You love your fellow soldiers as if they were your brothers.
8 And if you're the leader, you're responsible for their total welfare. Not only the food, the
9 mail, the hot chow, a place to sleep when you're in the arson, but most importantly to
10 discipline them. I don't mean punishment. I mean to discipline them, to perform as
11 perfectly as they can when in battle, be perfectly trained in the use of their weapons.
12 Perfectly trained on their duties within the team that they are in, their squad, or platoon.
13 All that discipline and I'm going to stress, no punishment involved. It will help them to
14 stay alive on the battlefield.

15 RV: Did they understand this?

16 HM: Oh yeah. I think that's the primary duty of a commander, whether it's a staff
17 team or a combat team in the air or on the ground. Your duty is to lead them to be a
18 beautifully disciplined team, a fighting team, fighting family team of men and women! I
19 stress the ladder word of women because now in the contemporary military, where the
20 role of women have been expanded so broadly. They are a full member of the fighting
21 team, just like the men. I've always believed, since my time at West Point where I was in
22 grave danger of being kicked out because of being so dumb in all the mathematically
23 based on bizarre subjects. But I had a positive attitude, never quit. I studied in the toilet
24 outside the room door, in the hall, 40-watt lightbulb until one or two o'clock in the
25 morning. I learned how to sleep fast, I got four, five hours of sleep. Got eight hours and
26 four, five hours of sleep. I am proud to say that I graduated at the top of the bottom
27 fifteen percent of my class. I learned and I'm glad I couldn't coast easily through West
28 Point. Otherwise, I would never have had those two principles sledgehammered into my
29 head. Attitude. Positive attitude always. I never quit. And I hammered those principles
30 into my troopers. Which resulted in them being very tough fighting men in the grave test
31 at Landing Zone X-Ray and other battles in Vietnam. I have three or four principles of

1 leadership, which I think are applicable in any endeavor. On the athletic field, on the
2 boxing ring, in business, in the military, with what you do. The first principle is, with the
3 game of baseball, three strikes and you're out! Not so in the game of life. In other
4 endeavors, in the game of life. Three strikes and you're not out. Number two, there's
5 always one more thing you can do to influence any situation in your favor. After that, one
6 more thing and after that, one more thing. The more one more things you do, the more
7 opportunities open up. In that connection, whenever I was in a tight spot on the battlefield
8 or in a time critical decision environment in the Pentagon and involved with tens of
9 thousands of people, millions of dollars on occasion, personnel chief of the Army for two
10 and a half years—I would think, “What am I doing that I should not be doing?” And
11 “What am I not doing that I should be doing to influence the situation in my favor.”
12 Associated with that principle of one more thing, I've learned in life, in any endeavor,
13 family, battle, and business. After I retired, I was vice president of a major ski area in
14 Colorado for four and a half years. When there's nothing going wrong, often there's
15 nothing going wrong except there's nothing is going wrong. That's when you got to be
16 most alert. Finally, I learned early in my life to trust my instincts. Your instincts are the
17 product of your education, your training, your work, your personality. In a tight time
18 critical situation, especially in those types of situations, if my head tells me one thing and
19 my gut tells me another, I go with my gut. Often times there's no time for a reasoned
20 analysis of the situation. You can't take out a notebook that says, “Pros and cons, option
21 one and two.” In seconds, and in this work on the battlefield Landing Zone X-Ray, about
22 which that book was written, we were being assaulted by hundreds and hundreds of men
23 and I guess just a handful of us. I went with my instincts every time. I turned out to be
24 right. So those are just a few of the basic principles that I've attempted to live by and one
25 of the principal things I learned at West Point, which I've applied throughout my life and
26 tried to teach my five children. Always choose the harder right instead of the easier role.
27 Over the years also and I'm proud to say this, years ago in my youth, I concluded that
28 none of us know when we're going to go out of the game. Our life here on this earth is a
29 tryout. We're proving life and eternity. I think a lot of people get focused on day-to-day
30 earthly activities without paying attention to the fact that their time on this earth is like a
31 snap of the fingers compared to an eternity. So I've always tried to conduct myself so I as

1 to qualify. The older I get, the more vulnerable I get to going out of the game. I'm doing
2 my best to make the cut.

3 RV: What role has your spiritual life played for you in the military? How do you
4 blend those two things, a strong spiritual belief and warfare?

5 HM: Well, as strange as it may seem, when I was sent to battle by my president,
6 and swore an oath at West Point, on the plane at West Point to follow the orders of the
7 president of United States. I trusted my president and I trusted that the orders that I was
8 receiving were honest orders which had to be followed. No one ever likes taking the life
9 of another person if they're in their right mind. I know that there's many criminals who
10 take delight in killing other people. But I did my duty. At X-Ray, when we had that
11 terrible three-day shootout, at the end, when we walked across those enemy bodies, I was
12 proud of what my men did but a lot of them could be walked across. I lost seventy-nine
13 men killed, twenty-one wounded. But as I looked at all those dead North Vietnamese
14 soldiers, the thought struck me that they had mothers too. We did what we had to do.

15 RV: The diary you found that you all recovered off the North Vietnamese soldier.
16 Tell me about that. The personalizing of your enemy.

17 HM: The North Vietnamese soldier—when I fought in Vietnam, not only in the Ia
18 Drang Valley but in other very tough battles, he was a well-trained soldier. Highly
19 motivated, was not afraid to die. I think part of his motivation may have been that they
20 were determined to drive the round-eyed Russian foreigner out of their country. The
21 thought struck me often in Vietnam that we look just like the French. White, black, we
22 were brown. We were in their country! Killing them! Dropping bombs on their cities. I
23 don't think it was a very tough job for the leaders in Vietnam to imbue a very tough
24 fighting spirit into their soldiers to get this round-eye foreigner out of our country, which
25 had been enslaved by the French for a hundred years. Pillaged. I think they identified us
26 almost like we were French.

27 RV: When did this thought and this belief hit you?

28 [Editor's Note: Audio cuts and returns after a technical difficulty.]

29 HM: We're good to go?

30 RV: Yes, sir.

31 HM: Okay.

1 RV: So your enemy, you're discussing his determination. Is this a characteristic of
2 the People's Army of Vietnam and the Viet Cong fighters or did you see a difference?

3 HM: Oh, I think they're about the same. Same motivation. Probably a similar
4 motivation to some of the Iraqi terrorists. The goal that the British occupation in the
5 countries in the middle east for years, for decades. Here comes another bunch of white
6 guys, want to take over our country, get our oil. But let's not get off on Iraq.

7 RV: When did you come to this understanding about that, the American forces
8 were similar to the French forces in the eyes of the Vietnamese?

9 HM: Oh, in Vietnam. Yeah, I have studied history of Vietnam and some military
10 history for years. I visited Di An, Binh Duong for three days. I've been back to Vietnam
11 seven times since 1990. I've talked to General Giap, twice. General Dũng, the historian
12 for hours. I talked to Lieutenant General An who was my opponent on the battlefield in
13 the Ia Drang as a Lieutenant Colonel, we were trying to kill each other. Went back to the
14 battlefield with him. You've probably seen that documentary.

15 RV: Yes, sir.

16 HM: Joe Galloway and I visited his widow and his family in Hanoi three four
17 years after his death. I have found the military history of Vietnam just fascinating. Of
18 course, the French were not only in Vietnam, they were in Laos and Cambodia as well.
19 Colonizing the whole place. I never have fully understood it, perhaps you can enlighten
20 me on why President Truman did not strongly object to the French recolonizing
21 Southeast Asia after World War II. When they threatened the Dutch, that they were going
22 to cut off marshal aid if they didn't get out of Indonesian and they did! Why did we
23 tolerate the French giving birth to another war in Southeast Asia? Which became the
24 siege of American involvement in our tragedy in Vietnam. General An and I, when we
25 met in Hanoi, we talked for several hours. Went to dinner together with some of his
26 officers. General Dũng, the historian, General Minh his boss, now four-star. He was a
27 very good general during the battle. Commanded the hound forces and the hounds. As
28 strange as it may seem, General An and I became friends. We were in a van together for
29 several days. In a hotel together, ate together, good interpreter. He was sick with a
30 respiratory infection and I was too, and I gave him some of my medicine, he got better,
31 and I got better. We resolved after that trip back to the battlefield in 1993 in October, to

1 attempt to get the Vietnamese government to erect an obelisk on the clearing at Landing
2 Zone X-Ray which would say only, “On this field in November 1965, the US Army
3 forces, and the People’s Army of Vietnam fought the first major battle of the American
4 War in Vietnam.” Nothing else. Not who kicked who’s ass. Just the fact of the battle. He
5 was attempting to get this authorized with a road out there. When he died, the whole
6 project collapsed. I’ve been back to the X-Ray battlefield one other time after the 1993, I
7 went back with twelve of my veterans. You can take a truck from Pleiku—you’ve been to
8 the central highlands?

9 RV: Yes, sir.

10 HM: You take a truck from Plei Me to the west until the road runs out. Then, you
11 got to start walking. First place you hit is LZ (Landing Zone) Albany. Then you walk
12 another mile and a half north and you hit LZ X-Ray. It’s still scrub jungle, high elephant
13 grass, a few Montagnards. There has been some logging out there, by the Japanese
14 primarily. But I think all that stopped. When we were there in 1993 and ’97, there was the
15 remains of a logging road which have been all grown over. So as you well know, the
16 tours of veterans of Vietnam, they’re taken to Hanoi, to the museum, Da Nang, Hue, the
17 palaces, the tunnels of Củ Chi, Saigon, the roof on Caravelle, the outdoor roof on that
18 hotel right across the street, I forget the name of it. But they don’t take them to—
19 sometimes to Plei Me, which is pretty handy to Pleiku. You’ve probably been to Plei Me.
20 You got to really be careful when you walk around there with all the unexploded
21 ordnances, but if you push them, they’ll let a group go to Plei Me. But they don’t let
22 anybody out into the Ia Drang Valley.

23 RV: Do you think there’s another reason instead of the lack of access?

24 HM: Well, I have always puzzled over this. I think there may be other reasons,
25 including the presence of Khmer Rouge. X-Ray is only six miles from the Cambodian
26 border. And the Ia Drang River runs into Cambodia. So I think Khmer Rouge, although
27 that threat may have been diminished in recent years, it’s certainly was present when we
28 went back there in 1993. Spent the night on that battlefield. That was pretty sporty. Then
29 there was also the Montagnard situation, where unfortunately the Hanoi government is
30 almost weaponed out the Montagnard tribes. Sending them away from their ancestral
31 villages into what are called new economic zones to the east or just killing them. It’s a

1 real national tragedy, which is really not too well understood in the western world. I'm
2 sure you are very familiar with all that.

3 RV: Yes, sir. There were Montagnard tribespeople there on the morning you came
4 in on the 14th?

5 HM: Oh indeed, there were, yeah.

6 RV: They quickly dispersed?

7 HM: I never personally saw any Montagnards, but there were Montagnard
8 villages to the north of us along the river. That's primarily the Montagnards were. When
9 we went back in '93, some days a few Montagnards materialized. Also, when we went
10 back in 1997, we saw a few Montagnards along the river. Got to have water, that's where
11 they settled.

12 RV: Could you describe Sergeant Major Basil Plumley?

13 HM: I believe in destiny. I believe in faith and I think it was my destiny to get
14 linked up with Sergeant Major Plumley. When I took command of my battalion at Fort
15 Benning, Georgia in June of 1964, and I met up with Sergeant Major Plumley, 6'2",
16 about my age. Master parachuter like me. He had five combat jumps. Four in World War
17 II, one in Korea. He and I believe the exactly the same principles. Tough training, fair
18 and square to all your men. Tough discipline. If somebody screwed up, take the necessary
19 action but don't overreact because what you want to do is retrain them so that won't
20 happen again. Sergeant Major Plumley and I were a team. I told Sergeant Major Plumley
21 that he had unlimited access to me at any time. That he could accompany me anywhere I
22 went if he wanted to, if he didn't have something else to do. I wanted his principal duties
23 to be to improve the professionalism of the non-commissioned officers of the battalion.
24 Promotions of soldiers in the ranks in those days was determined by quotas, which came
25 down from higher headquarters. Like I might get a quota for two soldiers to be promoted
26 to three stripe buck sergeant and two soldiers to be promoted to staff sergeant. I turn it all
27 over to Sergeant Major Plumley and he organized a committee of all the 1st sergeants.
28 The five 1st sergeants in the battalion, and whenever we would get those quotas to come
29 down, they would meet. They knew the soldiers better than I did, better than the officers.
30 They would meet and determine which soldiers would get those stripes. He would come
31 in to me with a recommendation and I would always approve anything he recommended.

1 I trust him totally. In battle, he could accompany me anywhere he wanted if he felt that's
2 where he needed to be. I had dinner with him recently and he and I sort of laughed a little
3 bit over why we weren't killed!

4 RV: Those three days? During those three days?

5 HM: The whole tour in Vietnam.

6 RV: In previous or just Vietnam?

7 HM: Just in Vietnam. Of course, you can get killed in a helicopter crash in the
8 United States, but the chances of getting killed in battle are a hell of a lot better. Sergeant
9 Major Plumley is a national treasure. We went into Vietnam together and we flew out
10 together on the freedom bird, on the same day. Ironically, we were in a battler near Nha
11 Trang special forces camp. My replacement, the colonel had arrived two weeks earlier. I
12 really didn't want to take—I didn't want to lose command of my brigade. I knew how to
13 fight that enemy, I knew the terrain, I knew the dos and don'ts. Here is a guy fresh out of
14 America, socks were still clean. Hell, he didn't know nothing about that enemy. I refused
15 to let him take command of the brigade! I got by with it for a while. Then a company got
16 surrounded down there in Nha Trang special forces camp, 101st Airborne Division. I
17 heard about this and I asked the assistant division commanded for operations, "Why don't
18 you send my brigade down there to take the pressure off those couple companies and
19 save them from being wiped out." So we went down, they were sent down and this was
20 my last battle in Vietnam. It lasted for about—took us about a week or so. Finally, the
21 division commander, General Norton, he showed up and he said, "Hal, you got to turn
22 over your brigade. Your replacements been here now for over two weeks." So I turned
23 over the brigade and flew back up to An Khe. Me and Sergeant Major, we packed up our
24 duffle bag. Flew down to Saigon, spent a night in Saigon and the next day we were put in
25 a Jeep and headed out to Tan Son Nhut Airport to get on the freedom bird, and go back to
26 America. We got to Tan Son Nhut and it ended up being mortared.

27 RV: It's a good send off.

28 HM: After all we'd been through, we thought this is really ironic to maybe get
29 wounded or killed in a mortar attack in Saigon. So they sent us back to Saigon and we
30 were delayed on the airplane for two days and we got on the airplane the next day. Came
31 home together. Plumley is a piece of work.

1 RV: What do you mean?

2 HM: Unique. Iconic. He can be an armory. He doesn't give interviews. He avoids
3 the press. But he and I are dead loyal to one another. He lives just right outside of Fort
4 Benning. My home in Alabama is in Auburn, forty miles from Fort Benning, Georgia.
5 Over the years, long gone by, my wife and I would go over to Fort Benning on occasion
6 to visit my troopers in the cemetery. Her parents were buried, daughter of a colonel. On
7 occasion, we'd visit Sergeant Major. Sit down in his kitchen with him and his wife. She'd
8 always have a pumpkin pie, hot coffee. We'd sit there and talk about old times. Tell war
9 stories. Some of them were true. We'd visit the cemetery. I lost my wife a year and a half
10 ago. That's where she is. So if you want to interview Sergeant Major Plumley, I don't
11 think you would succeed. You're going to have to learn about Plumley from guys like me
12 and Joe Galloway and others. Because he refuses all interviews.

13 RV: That's why I'm asking, one of the reasons I'm asking.

14 HM: Yeah, he won't agree to an interview. Joe Galloway and I are in the process
15 of writing a sequel to our book and we wanted to have a chapter in there on Sergeant
16 Major Plumley. He told Joe flat out, "Joe you are welcome in my home at any time, but
17 I'm not going to give you an interview." If he won't interview with Joe Galloway or me,
18 he's not going to talk to nobody.

19 RV: Tell me about Joe Galloway.

20 HM: Joe Galloway is another person whom I was destined by a higher power to
21 meet. I first met Joe on the night of November 1965, when my battalion was ordered to
22 join the Pleiku campaign being fought by the 1st Cav Division and some South
23 Vietnamese units in the central highlands, after the attacks of the Plei Me special forces
24 camp. So my battalion was sent down to patrol to the east of Plei Me special forces camp,
25 to attempt to engage contact with any enemy that was in the area. I thought that was kind
26 of stupid because the enemy had been defeated in a siege of the Plei Me special forces
27 camp and obviously they had retreated to the west. I couldn't understand why we were
28 being ordered to patrol to the east. Joe joined us and he and I were marching with A
29 Company, some troops of A Company that day. During which we crossed a stream up to
30 our necks in the central highlands, three thousand feet cold stream. We'd been wet for the

1 night, all soaking wet and Joe stayed on the ground with us instead of hopping back on a
2 Huey and going back to Pleiku for a hot shower and hot chow.

3 RV: That was unusual for the press?

4 HM: For a reporter? Hell yeah. He rolled up on the ground in his poncho with the
5 rest of us and I liked that. We patrolled around for another couple three days around a
6 Plei Me camp. Made little to no contact. On the night of the—late afternoon of the 13th of
7 November, I got a telephone radio message from the brigade commander, Colonel Tim
8 Brown, to prepare to assault into the Ia Drang Valley the next morning with a mission of
9 finding and killing the enemy. So I went back to my field command post which was
10 outside the gates of Plei Me. If you've been in Plei Me, you've probably seen the old
11 French fort remains with the revetements. We had a couple of three ops tents pitched in
12 the revetements of that old French fort. I issued the ops order, warning order and the next
13 morning we assaulted into X-Ray. We had a terrible fight all that day. My operations
14 officer, Matt Dillion, whom I think you've interviewed.

15 RV: Yes, sir.

16 HM: He was overhead in my command chopper. I landed; I was the first guy on
17 the ground, I landed with the assault company. Which was my practice in training and in
18 Vietnam to join in the battle beginning. Not to be a hero, not to be hunting for a medal,
19 but if you're in the lead helicopter, if you have to divert to an alternate landing zone
20 because of a hot LZ, you're right there and you can make the decision and I had one
21 selected. Also, you can make a quick arial reconnaissance going in, get an idea on the
22 terrain. If it's a hot LZ, you're on the ground to take care of it. If it's a cold LZ, you have
23 time to walk around and make a reconnaissance of the terrain, you get an idea of the
24 battlefield where you might make contact.

25 RV: Right. Did Bruce Crandall fly you in that first flight?

26 HM: Bruce was a pilot in the first. Lieutenant John Mills was his co-pilot and me
27 and the Sergeant Major, my two radio operators and my intelligence officer Captain
28 Metsker, who was killed within two hours. Three hours, actually. And Mr. Nick, a
29 Vietnamese interpreter, we were in the lead helicopter of B Company, which was the
30 assault company. As you know from reading the book and so forth, we had a hell of a
31 fight that first day, it was a cliffhanger. Probably only had about two-hundred of my four-

1 hundred-fifty or so men on the ground. We were attacked by two battalions of enemy,
2 eight hundred to a thousand enemy. I'll go into the details of that a little later if you want
3 me to, but it was a cliffhanger all that afternoon. My men fought magnificently; we lost a
4 lot of troopers. Finally, things quieted down a little bit and we established a command
5 post behind an anthill which was about the size of a small pickup truck. Six-feet high,
6 six-seven feet high termite hill. That's where I established my field aid station, my ammo
7 point and where I gathered my dead. About seven o'clock, I had Dillion overhead in my
8 command chopper along with my forward air controller, Charlie Hastings, Lieutenant
9 Hastings—my fire support coordinator. With a back of radios, they relayed back to
10 brigade commander, helicopter liaison officer, they could control all that movement. Had
11 Dillion not been on the ground with me, I would've been penalized because who would
12 have done all that stuff. Anyhow, I told Dillion late in the day, "I want you to come on in,
13 I want you bring Charlie Hastings and bring my fire support coordinator, Jerry Whiteside,
14 captain artillery." He said, "Come on in." He said on the radio, "That reporter, Galloway
15 wants to come in." I remember Joe from Plei Me and I said, "Well, if you got room on
16 that last chopper coming in and if he's crazy enough to want to come in here, bring him
17 in." So he did. Joe, you get from him the story of him coming into X-Ray. Like I said
18 earlier, I think we were destined to meet, fate. Twenty-three year old kid reporter, half
19 my age, he landed and he stayed with us for the rest of the fight. I was—in Vietnam, in
20 Korea we didn't have many reporters. I fought the stabilize night warfare, the outpost
21 warfare in Korea for fourteen months. We didn't have many reporters joining us but in
22 Vietnam, hell they were everywhere. I was a strong believer in freedom of the press. I
23 told my public information officer when I was a brigade commander—when I was a
24 battalion commander, I didn't have a public information officer. I let it be known that I
25 welcomed news media to join me and my troopers in the field. I gave them only two
26 instructions. Do not interfere with operations and do not put out any public information
27 which would help the enemy. In other words, don't reveal my plans, where I'm going to
28 be moving. I never had any reason in Vietnam to regret that. I told my troops that if a
29 news media person or TV, photographer or journalist like Joe or photographer, if they
30 want to talk to you or take your picture, it's up to you. My only guidance is two things.
31 Number one, tell the truth as you see the truth from your level. Number two, do not speak

1 above your level. If you're a squad leader, don't talk like you're the platoon leader. If
2 you're a rifleman in the ranks, don't talk like you're the squad leader. If you're Hal
3 Moore, the brigade commander, don't talk like you're the division commander. I felt so
4 strongly that the American people deserved to know what the hell is going in Vietnam.
5 What their sons and their brothers and their husbands were doing over there. I'll tell you
6 what, every time we had an operation, we were surrounded by the news media. I like that
7 too because my men got publicity back home.

8 RV: Did you have any rules about not photographing your dead troopers?

9 HM: Not photographing dead troopers?

10 RV: Yes.

11 HM: I can't recall putting out any specific orders on that. But I also cannot recall
12 any incidents that occurred where while I was in Vietnam, I was questioned about
13 photographers taking photographs of dead troopers. I can't recall of any—we had an
14 army movie team in X-Ray, they came in early the second day. Maybe you've seen that
15 battlefield footage. I'm sure they've captured some sequences of some of my dead being
16 carried into the clearing station. But I can't think of any such photographs that were
17 publicized. That's the first time I've ever been asked that question, but I'm trying to think
18 back, and I got a lot of stuff sent to me from the US after we had battles, newspaper
19 clippings. I'm trying hard to think of it.

20 RV: There are some pictures from X-Ray by Peter Arnett.

21 HM: Peter Arnett, yeah.

22 RV: Who did photograph—

23 HM: Peter was there with us. Peter gave me the picture of Rescorla on the cover
24 of that book. He's credited with that photograph. Peter gave me a couple of other pictures
25 of me, one of me standing over a dead North Vietnamese with my rifle and my bayonet
26 on the third day when we had counterattack. He didn't give to me any pictures of just a
27 dead American trooper, that's the first I've heard of that. But to answer your question, no,
28 I didn't put out any instructions on that. I think a lot of that is common sense on the part
29 of the photographer.

30 RV: You would think so?

1 HM: I would think that if a photographer who would take—a newsman
2 photographer who would take a still photograph of a dead trooper with a nametag, I think
3 that's bad for them, considering people back home.

4 RV: Was your attitude towards the press in Vietnam, was it different from most
5 other kind of news?

6 HM: I don't know, but I'll tell you this. The army of public affairs officer years
7 ago asked me for permission to publish in his instructions when he briefed commanders
8 to be the tank commanders or brigade or division, he took an excerpt from my book and
9 I'll show it to you if you want to open it up. If I can find it.

10 [Editor's note: Audio cuts and resumes here.]

11 HM: What the hell is going on. Joe Galloway and I were really in on the birth of
12 the embedded reporters in the Iraq War.

13 RV: Yes, you were.

14 HM: When you talk to Joe, he'll tell you about that.

15 RV: Well in the book and in the movie, you instructed him to let the American
16 people to know this. To tell the truth to the American people.

17 HM: Exactly. Well, I'll have to find it.

18 RV: What is the passage discussing?

19 HM: What I just told you. I can't find it.

20 RV: We can look and perhaps we can check the index. Do you speak of Galloway
21 in this passage?

22 HM: No, in general, yeah.

23 RV: Perhaps we can look in the index and look for media or the press. I'd be glad
24 to help you with that.

25 HM: It's probably early in the book.

26 RV: While I'm looking, what made Joe Galloway different? Or was he different
27 as a reporter?

28 HM: First, he stayed on the ground with us. He was in the battle of X-Ray until
29 we were pulled out of there. He didn't go back to Pleiku to file his reports. He spent the
30 night; he was the only reporter that spent the nights with us. Peter Arnett, Neil Sheehan—
31 Neil is a dear friend of mine for whom I have high respect, but he and a flock of other

1 journalists who came in at the end of the battle, they milled around interviewing troopers
2 and then they got on the bird and went out. Joe went out also, but the battle was over. He
3 had to get his copy to UPI (United Press International). You'll find that somewhere, I'll
4 try to look it up for you during the break.

5 RV: What is it like to be interviewed in the middle of a battle? Or a lull in the
6 battle?

7 HM: If it's an honest to god lull and I didn't have any of the immediate pressing
8 situation to consider, I would grant a brief interview. When I became a brigade
9 commander, when we went out on operations, I told the division public affairs officer to
10 notify the news media in Saigon that the elements of the 1st Cav Division will be taking
11 the field. In my brigade, I had a reputation of finding the enemy. Consequently, the news
12 media flocked because they wanted to put out the information. So every night, like when
13 I was in "Operation Masher White Wing" on the Bong Son plain in January, March of
14 '66. Every night around five o'clock I would brief the press. I'd have maybe ten, fifteen
15 journalists in the press tent and I'd brief the press on what went on that day and the
16 results and then I told them of my plans for the next day, so that they could determine if
17 they wanted to go with this unit or that unit. Then, I'd caution, "Don't put out
18 information that would help the enemy."

19 RV: Right.

20 HM: I said, "You can fly in a helicopter anywhere you want, but don't interfere if
21 there is no room on that bird, don't push a soldier off, don't crowd somebody. If you
22 want to get in the middle of the fight, that's your call. Don't interfere with operations."
23 Which meant also do not go up to a company commander during a firefight and ask for
24 an interview. I never had that happen. I think the freedom of the press is one of the great
25 freedoms of a democracy. Absolute great freedom, along with freedom of speech. We're
26 blessed in this country to have those two freedoms. Of course, they have to be exercised
27 judiciously. I am delighted that the Pentagon embedded journalists in the Iraq War that
28 has been going on for the last couple of years. I don't know if you know this or not but at
29 the Pentagon, before the Iraq War jumped off, offered American journalists the
30 opportunity to go to Fort Benning and I believe Fort Sill, Fort Knox, maybe other
31 military bases air and ground and marine, to be briefed on battlefield maneuver activities

1 and battlefield activities. When I was at Fort Benning making a talk before the Iraq War
2 jumped off, they were having one of those gathering where the journalists for a week
3 were at Fort Benning. They learned about infantry tactics and they learned about firing
4 maneuver and fire support and they were much more qualified to report to the American
5 people what they were seeing in Iraq.

6 RV: I remember seeing that on the news and reading about this training.

7 HM: Whereas in Vietnam as I understand, Joe six packed right off the streets of
8 Chicago can show up in Saigon and get a press card. He wouldn't know the difference
9 between a squad and a battalion or a M16 rifle and a mortar. If I were asked today to
10 cover a rugby football match in the Redskins' Stadium, I wouldn't know what the hell I
11 was looking at! That was the same with a lot of the journalist at Vietnam, they didn't
12 know what the hell they were looking at. So consequently, they took these pictures of
13 dead soldiers and they reported graphic stuff which they never should've reported. Some
14 of which helped the enemy.

15 RV: Sir, I'd like to talk about X-Ray in a little bit of detail. Would you like to take
16 maybe five minute break?

17 HM: Let's do that.

18 [Editor's Note: Audio cuts in.]

19 HM: That's what the Pentagon people wanted to put out to their periodic briefings
20 of battalion, brigade, and division commanders that were recently selected to command.

21 RV: From all the interview that I've done and all the reading that I've done, both
22 as a history student and then since teaching, that attitude towards that is unique.

23 HM: It's what?

24 RV: It's unique.

25 HM: Unique?

26 RV: Yes, sir. That commanders did welcome and understand the need for press
27 coverage. But after the fact, as the more negative reports were coming out from the
28 media, they then tried to turn the volume down a bit. Really did not like what was coming
29 out and your basic rules here, it seems that they followed those, there was no problem.
30 But after the fact, I think people were starting to have a problem with the way that the
31 war was being reported.

1 HM: I realize that every now and then a report would come out that would not be
2 accurate or that would maybe damage my reputation or the reputation of my troopers. But
3 I felt like it was appropriate to take that chance for the American people. The American
4 people who send their sons and daughters off to war and their husbands, they deserve
5 what the hell is going on. I think the pentagon wised up recently when they embedded
6 reporters, some of whom unfortunately have been killed and wounded.

7 RV: Let's go back to that faithful day, Sunday the 14th. Tell me about—in the
8 interest of time, let's cut to the first day. You were the first on the field, is that correct?

9 HM: That's correct.

10 RV: And this is one of your principles, to be the first on and last off?

11 HM: That's right.

12 RV: What was the situation there? You all landed, this at B Company, the assault
13 company. You get out and the other principle you mentioned here is that when there's
14 nothing wrong, then something's wrong that there's nothing wrong and there was no
15 immediate resistance when you all took the field. Describe what you were thinking and
16 feeling.

17 HM: Well, early in the morning before the assault as described in the book, I
18 gathered a group of my key officers into two helicopters and we did an air recon at a high
19 altitude of the objective area south of the Ia Drang Valley and the Chu Pong Mountain
20 Complex. We flew from south to north over the Chu Pong Mountain Complex and the Ia
21 Drang River. Up as far as the Duc Co Special Forces camp, which was probably six,
22 seven miles north of the mountains. Just to get an idea of the terrain and the clearings.

23 RV: Matt Dillion was with you?

24 HM: Oh, yeah. I had—it's described in my book who I had in the helicopter, the
25 key people who needed to give me advice and to see the terrain to perform their duties
26 better. So we came back and consulted and tentatively decided on the clearing which
27 Dillion called "X", which was X-Ray. They go by alphabet. I ordered H-13 scout section
28 two man helicopters to make a last minute quick right above the tree recon of the Ia
29 Drang Valley area. Not just X-Ray, but I didn't want to tell the enemy where we were
30 going to land. X-Ray and Tango, another clearing which was a well-type clearing. I
31 rejected that because we could only take a couple of helicopters at a time. Yankee was

1 another clearing on the side of the mountain. So they recon very quickly and they saw
2 commo wire coming across this clearing we called X-Ray. It could hold obviously maybe
3 eight helicopters, four to eight helicopters at a time. So I selected that as the assault
4 clearing. Came back to Plei Me. Had the artillery positioned to fire the artillery prep and
5 then I gathered together on the Plei Me airstrip and you've seen the remains of it on the
6 western end of the Plei Me airstrip. I gathered all the helicopter pilots and crews. All my
7 company commanders and any troops in the vicinity. Probably fifty people. And I issued
8 my ops order. Orally, nothing right. Why did I gather all these people? Because I wanted
9 them all to know my concept. My plan of maneuver, my plan of fire support, which
10 companies would land when, in succession. Why did I do that? If I went out the of the
11 game, then somebody knew what to do. There wouldn't have to be any confusion. I did
12 that every time I went into battle in Vietnam. We had the artillery prep, and I made a
13 mistake which I've always regretted. I take full responsibility for that mistake. I should
14 have put closer air on the mountain.

15 RV: Did you think about it?

16 HM: Never crossed my mind! And I had my forward air controller, Lieutenant
17 Hastings right there! Matt Dillion, experienced operations officer right there. I don't
18 criticize them, but they didn't suggest air support.

19 RV: But you didn't know that mountain was the base camp.

20 HM: I had information, my intelligence information was that three battalions of
21 North Vietnamese in the Valley when I was giving a set of coordinates which was about a
22 mile and a half north, northwest of X-Ray on the Ia Drang River. Another set of
23 coordinates of a battalion, another battalion in the southeast part of the mountainous
24 complex about two miles from the clearing we called X-Ray. The third set of coordinates
25 that I had were the six digit coordinates right in the middle of LZ X-Ray. For an enemy
26 battalion.

27 RV: You're going to land on top of them.

28 HM: And I should've realized that the enemy would have an observation post on
29 the mountain!

30 RV: On the higher ground, looking field.

1 HM: But my head was up my ass and I never thought of it. I should've put in air
2 support, smoke, white phosphorus, firebomb, they were available! So I must confess that
3 I made that mistake. Probably, had I not made that mistake, some of the enemy that came
4 balling down off that mountain might have been taken out of the game. But we landed
5 without incident and I ran into the—I fired my rifle during landing as was my practice,
6 bushes and trees where there might be enemy. I ran, me and the sergeant major, my two
7 radio operators, and my interpreter ran across the clearing, ran across the dry creek bed.
8 Me and Captain Metsker were firing our rifles into possible enemy locations. We ran into
9 the trees maybe a hundred yards. Made no contact. Not very happy about that because I
10 looked up that mountain and I got on that ground and thought, "Oh boy. We are under
11 observation." Later in Hanoi, talking to General An, he did indeed have a command post
12 on that mountain where he could observe the valley below. I could've taken him out! But
13 anyhow, we made no contact. I came back and being the first on the ground, I was able to
14 make a ground reconnaissance of the clearing and the fringes of it. It quickly became
15 apparent to me that the dry creek beds to the west of the clearing, the edge of it into the
16 trees maybe fifteen, twenty-five yards, that the creek bed and a ridge line coming down
17 from the mountain and a draw beside that ridge line, those were the key terrain features. I
18 realized I had to hold the creek bed because whoever owned that creek bed, owned the
19 landing zone. I realized that the ridge line and the draw beside of it were key avenues of
20 approach down the mountain and up the mountain. My mission was to find and kill the
21 enemy. I had given my three-rifle company specific orders. There was not practicing in
22 the two wars I fought as a part of my ops order, always instructed all of my maneuver
23 commanders to be prepared to take over the mission of another company or another
24 platoon if the situation requires that. So all three of my company commanders although
25 they had specific areas that they were going to patrol, they knew that they could get other
26 orders of other commanders. Which was why when I gave orders, initial orders, the
27 company could readily respond because they had made the map recon and they briefed
28 our platoon leaders.

29 RV: Could you tell me about the Herrick platoon and what happened there?

30 HM: Who? Herrick?

1 RV: Yeah, Herrick's platoon. We know what happened from the movie and from
2 the book. The decisions that went into that and how that played out.

3 HM: Well, once we captured that prisoner who told us that there were three North
4 Vietnamese battalions on the mountain that wanted to kill Americans and haven't found
5 any, I immediately ordered my B Company commander, Captain Herrick to reconnoiter
6 that ridge line and that draw. He was prepared to do that, he took it on and within a short
7 while, he got hit on with a large group of enemy blowing off that mountain down that
8 ridge line. Probably a couple hundred enemy. My companies were all under strength due
9 to Lydon Johnson's order that no man with sixty days or less to serve on departure from
10 Fort Benning would not go. So I lost about a hundred seventy-five men I'd trained. Then,
11 once in Vietnam, Malaria, tropical diseases and after sixty days, again I'd be losing men
12 going back home before the battle. So I went into that fight not with seven-hundred-fifty
13 men which was authorized for my battalion, but about four-hundred and fifty. So that
14 meant that officers would have to do their jobs and sometimes NCO (Non-Commissioned
15 Officer) jobs. NCOs and platoon sergeants would often have to be a squad leader. So I
16 incurred a lot of casualties because of that. When the fire fight broke out, I had my rifle
17 company, B Company up that ridge line to protect that creek bed. In the process of the
18 initial fire fight, Lieutenant Herrick spotted a group of enemy, I don't know how many,
19 maybe three, maybe six who were running to the north down to another creek bed which
20 was to the west of the creek bed bordering the LZ. He radioed back to Herren, his
21 company commander that he was pursuing these enemy. It was an impulsive act on his
22 part and by so doing, he deprived his company commander of three maneuver, a
23 maneuver element. Got three rifle platoons and support platoon with machine guns and
24 mortar. There're three maneuver elements in a company, there're three maneuver
25 elements in a platoon, there're three maneuver elements in a battalion, had three rifle
26 companies. When Herrick took off, he deprived his company commander of protecting
27 the right flank of one of his platoons and it deprived Herren of a maneuver element.
28 Herren said, "Okay, but don't get surrounded." In retrospect, Herren should've stopped
29 him from pursing those three or four enemy, but I don't know what went through John
30 Herren's mind. He was superb company commander. Superb. We all make mistakes.
31 Like I did on a close air support on the assault. Possibly, he had gone too far to be

1 recalled. But anyhow, he was quickly surrounded and gathered his men on a little knoll.
2 Formed a circle and within minutes, he was shot and killed. Within minutes, his platoon
3 sergeant was killed. Machine gunner was killed, and Sergeant Savage took command.

4 RV: Tell me about Ernie Savage.

5 HM: Three stripe buck sergeant. Superb soldier, superb leader. He took him in.

6 RV: Did you know that going into this?

7 HM: Savage? Well, I knew my NCOs, most of them very well, yeah. Expect the
8 recently assigned ones. I knew Savage was a good man. I commanded that battalion
9 fourteen months back in Fort Benning. They were my troopers, and they knew me. They
10 knew my principles. He quickly got to the radio and was able to call in fire support and
11 deploy his troops. He did a great job. In retrospect and I've talked to Ernie Savage and to
12 others and we agreed that although it was bad for the platoon to be surrounded out there
13 away from the rest of the company and the battalion, and it formed a problem for me
14 because I promised all my troopers that I would bring them all home, that none of them
15 would be left on the field. So I was in a hell of a problem when that platoon got
16 surrounded and I was in a hell of a firefight with a couple of battalions coming down the
17 mountain for that landing zone. It was very sporty. In retrospect however, Sergeant
18 Savage and I have talked about this. We agreed that although it was bad for the platoon to
19 be surrounded and cut off from the rest of the battalion, it may have been well good for
20 the battalion because it probably confused the enemy that we were stretched out! It may
21 have prevented that enemy from circling around to the northeast and coming at me from
22 two directions. So in retrospect it was probably good for the battalion, bad for the
23 platoon. Do you follow me?

24 RV: Absolutely follow you.

25 HM: Had you thought of that?

26 RV: It crossed my mind on the plane reading it again that—and it's depicted in
27 the movie somewhat. They occupy the attention of quite a few of the enemy. Those were
28 enemy that weren't even in your limits.

29 HM: Exactly.

30 RV: Again, in the interest of time, I want to ask a couple other of questions and
31 I'd like to ask you again about an individual, Jack Geoghegan. He's portrayed in the

1 movie as playing a large role. We are going to be interviewing Barbara today at two
2 o'clock and Camile as well on Saturday. I know that you value so much the lives and
3 humanity of your troopers. Tell me about Jack Geoghegan a little bit.

4 HM: Well, as Barbara will tell you and maybe you already know, Jack
5 Geoghegan was the late in life only child of elderly parents. He was a remarkable young
6 man. He was the brigade commander 1st captain of the cadets at the Pennsylvania
7 Military College. In his senior year and the year before that I think he was the brigade
8 sergeant major. He was a natural leader and I've talked to some of the men who were in
9 school with him at Pennsylvania Military College, which is no longer a military college
10 as you know. He was commissioned 2nd lieutenant; I believe into the regular army. But he
11 and his wife Barbara chose to spend a year in Africa as missionaries, which was very
12 unusual. I believe that they were Catholic, but I'm not sure. Never really thought of what
13 religion my troopers had. But I had quickly marked Geoghegan as a really fine young 2nd
14 lieutenant. Eager to learn, loved his troopers. At An Khe before we went into the Ia
15 Drang Valley, we were at An Khe from mid-September to mid-November. We went out
16 on a couple of operations which amounted to nothing, but I specifically remember one
17 event where Lieutenant Geoghegan's platoon was fording a stream and he lost one of his
18 men drowned. He was terribly upset about that. It was his fault and all that.

19 RV: Did he come talk to you about that?

20 HM: Oh, I went to him. I tried to calm him down and tell him that he got to face
21 up to the fact that this happened. I don't know whose fault it was, you might look into it,
22 maybe do better the next time you cross the stream, but pray he's going to heaven and
23 don't let your attitude contaminate the rest of your platoon. You got to have a positive
24 attitude. Although you can be grieving, you still have to have a positive attitude. Can't let
25 that contaminate your leadership.

26 RV: What was his reaction?

27 HM: Quiet. Then later on when we were defending the base camp in a perimeter,
28 I would go out and visit my troops on the defensive perimeter which were spotted at the
29 mountains around An Khe base camp. I distinctly remember a couple of days before we
30 went out to Plei Me I was sitting down with Geoghegan at his foxhole CP (Command
31 Post) where his platoon was online outpost around An Khe, having a cup of coffee.

1 Canteen cup, just talking to him. I knew that he was suffering mentally from losing his
2 soldier, so I tried to pay a little special attention to bring him back online so to speak. The
3 morning that he was killed, my Charlie company had a hundred and twelve men instead
4 of his authorized company over two hundred. That company and it was reinforced by a
5 platoon from the 2nd of 7th Cav that came in the night before, that company and my Delta
6 Company mortar position was heavily attacked at daybreak early the next morning. Early
7 the next morning, I'd stay awake most of the night and maybe I'd grab a little sleep, not
8 much. During that night, I was thinking of how are we going to get that cut off platoon
9 back? I decided to make an attack with all three of my companies out from the landing
10 zone. I had instructed my company commanders to meet me at the Charlie Company
11 command post which had a good view of the area to receive my ops order. But then I
12 noticed that everything was deathly quiet. The birds weren't singing. Quiet like this room
13 and boy my antennas were up. What the hell is going on? I immediately ordered all of my
14 companies to send out patrols to the front, all around the perimeter and Charlie Company
15 patrols ran smack into this large attacking force. They were able to give the alert back to
16 Charlie Company, Delta Company positions and to me, the rest of battalion. I didn't
17 know if this was going to be attacking there only or all around my perimeter. But that's
18 why it was so damn quiet, and my instincts told me something was going wrong here. If
19 there's nothing wrong, somethings going wrong.

20 RV: Right and trust your instincts.

21 HM: Trust your instincts. So the patrols that were out made it back under fire to
22 the Charlie Company's position. They were heavily attacked. All five of my officers in
23 that company were wounded. Two of the lieutenants were killed. Lieutenant Geoghegan
24 and Lieutenant Kroger. Lieutenant Kroger's brother is going to be at this reunion, Jeffrey
25 who've I've met. That's when Charlie Hastings, my Air Force forward air controller on
26 the ground, I didn't know that there was such an order, but he called into the radio,
27 "Broken Arrow", not like in the movie. I didn't know he had done this. When he put that
28 "Broken Arrow" call out, that was an alert to every available fighter bomber in South
29 Vietnam had to come to the assistance of an American unit about to be overrun. Within
30 ten minutes or so, we had fighter bombers stacked up over the Ia Drang Valley.
31 Thousand-foot intervals up to thirty-seven thousand feet waiting to deliver their

1 ordinance. The smoke and the dust and the noise! Screams on the men hollering for
2 “Mom” or “Medic.” It was just unbelievable. It was the damndest situation I’d ever been
3 in. During that battle, which was a climactic battle really of X-Ray, we could well have
4 been overrun.

5 RV: Did you have any doubt?

6 HM: Never once did it cross my mind that we would go down. I was too damn
7 busy thinking about negative thoughts. Obviously, what can I do to influence this
8 situation that I haven’t done. Well, the first thing I did after—Charlie thank god called
9 “Broken Arrow”, then I ordered my A Company on the other side of the perimeter, send a
10 platoon to Charlie Company’s assistance. A couple of those guys were killed getting
11 across the clearing, but they helped a lot. My D Company people at the mortar positions
12 had machine guns and they had cut down a lot of them. Only one enemy that I know of
13 staggered through the perimeter defenses and that was a black pajama Viet Cong. We
14 were attacked by a regular North Vietnamese battalion and a battalion of black pajama
15 Viet Cong. Probably eight-hundred men. This enemy in black pajamas, wounded badly
16 staggered through the perimeter and we brought him in to the CP and aid station and he
17 couldn’t even talk. My interpreter had gone to ground. We treated his wounds, but he
18 died rather quickly. We buried him right there. His remains are still right there I suppose,
19 shallow grave. But anyhow, Charlie Company held their ground. They lost so many men,
20 killed and wounded. Destroyed the combat effectiveness of the company. After things
21 quieted down around 9:30 in the morning, me and the Sergeant Major—before it had
22 entirely quieted down, I had committed my recon platoon, my reserve which helped hold
23 off that enemy and caused alarm and when they retreated boy, we brought down fire
24 power on them and there were enemy bodies all over that place. Weapons littering the
25 ground. Mortars, they came to stay. Maps, officers with packs with maps, those guys
26 came to stay. So me and the sergeant major ended up helping to clear the situation and we
27 walked, we walked up part of the line and I say Lieutenant Geoghegan’s body on the
28 ground beside PFC (Private First Class) Willie Godboldt’s body. I later learn from
29 Sergeant Jemison, the platoon sergeant who was shot three times, stomach neck and arm,
30 that Godboldt had been wounded and he was hollering, “Somebody help me.” Then
31 Sergeant Jemison in the foxhole with Geoghegan said, “I’ll go get him.” And Geoghegan

1 said, "No, I will." Geoghegan got up and got to Godboldt and about that time he was shot
2 in the head. Being a sergeant major and walking the line, we carried Lieutenant's
3 Geoghegan's body back to the evacuation point. We then went back to check on the
4 troopers and I found Sergeant Gilreath, Platoon Sergeant Gilreath, who's platoon
5 sergeant of 2nd Lieutenant Kroger's platoon and Kroger was dead. Platoon Sergeant
6 Gilreath was dead. I knew Gilreath probably a little better than some of my NCOs. I
7 knew most of them very well. Because Gilreath was a paratrooper like me and we had
8 made some jumps at Fort Benning together. So we carried Sergeant Gilreath back. We
9 adjusted the situation best we could, we had a reinforcing company come in and took
10 over the land, that was Diduryk's company with Rescorla. Diduryk was a superb
11 commander, he was killed in action on his second tour in Vietnam. Superb commander.
12 Russian parents were immigrants and he spoke with a heavy Slavic accent. Rescorla with
13 the British accent, almost like a foreign accent.

14 RV: They made quite a pair.

15 HM: Oh yeah, but in the ensuing battle whenever being attack and all that air
16 support came in, I can't describe to you really that hell we were in. The smoke, the dust,
17 the explosions, the white phosphorus, machine guns, field artillery. We had four batteries
18 of field artillery firing around us. That enemy, he was walking through hell. During this
19 maelstrom of thunderous activity, four batteries six tubes each, firing artillery. Fighter
20 bombers laying down five-hundred pound bombs. Rockets, helicopter gunships. It was
21 hell on earth. During that furious activity, I recall kneeling on one knee in my command
22 post area surrounded by wounded and my radio operator was right beside of me.

23 RV: Ouellette?

24 HM: Ouellette suddenly slumped over. I thought well, he had been shot. Still had
25 my radio stretched to his radio on his back.

26 RV: The bullets are flying around you here?

27 HM: Oh yeah. The small arms fire, the enemy machine gun fire coming through
28 my command post was clipping the leaves off the trees. Shot Ouellette, shot and killed
29 Tom Burlile, a medic. The round that hit Ouellette in the head, he was right here. I've
30 been under fire in Korea and I knew the snapping sounds of a small arms fire, but you
31 can't let that bother you. If you're going to get shot, you're going to get shot. It's a

1 crapshoot! Any soldier on the battlefield that worries about whether or not he's going to
2 get shot, he's a nuisance! Soldiers got to do their job. But I looked up and there were two
3 fighter bombers coming straight at the command post from the west. As I looked up, the
4 one on the right was ahead of the guy on the left and it was about four times as high as
5 this ceiling and he had cut loose two eight foot long cylindrical napalm containers.
6 Frozen in my mind. And they were going to hit my command post area. My ammo dump,
7 my engineer demo team, some of my medics, but if that second fighter had dropped his
8 too, he was aimed straight at Hal Moore, Joe Galloway, Sergeant Major Plumley, Captain
9 Dillon, my medical officer, my medical team. It would have taken out the whole
10 command post in the middle of the battle for survival. Probably, had that happened, I
11 don't know what would've happened to my companies in this furious battle without a
12 commander and without—we had taken out Charlie Hastings, my captain calling in
13 artillery. It might have turned out to be another Little Bighorn with the 7th Cav. But
14 fortunately, and I hollered at Charlie Hastings, above the dead loud, "Call that son of a
15 bitch off!" I think it's in the movie. I don't know what Hasting did but, he did not drop.
16 Faithful moment. I went on to command the battle. Ten minutes later, my medic platoon
17 sergeant looked over at Ouellette on the ground and he was kind of moving. He took his
18 foot, "Get up Ouellette!" Ouellette sat up kind of shaking his head. He took off his head,
19 there is a hole in the helmet. An AK-47 round had penetrated his helmet but did not
20 penetrate the helmet liner, but it knocked him unconscious. And he's got that bullet in his
21 pocket today.

22 RV: Yeah, he does.

23 HM: At that point, two napalm bombs were dropped and engulfed my
24 ammunition supply point, the engineer team. The movie is very accurate on Joe
25 Galloway's actions in trying to save Jimmy Nakayama, who got on the helicopter still
26 alive, but he was burned so badly that he died of his burns. That battle went on for
27 probably—probably for three hours. Finally, we defeated the enemy and captured several.
28 Treated them for their wounds, evacuated them. We evacuated our dead and wounded.
29 Reconstituted and carried on. Diduryk, he had arrived the night before and I put him in
30 command of the Charlie Company position, and he was a superb company commander.
31 He had his men dig deep foxholes, fresh batteries in the radios, replacement batteries.

1 Cleaned all the weapons. He had all of his men go forward of the position, reconnoiter
2 and look at the position as if the enemy were going to look at it. That night we were
3 attacked again very heavily. Two or three times during the night but Diduryk held his
4 position and I think he only had six men lightly wounded. That's when Rescorla, to settle
5 down his men, he would sign to them during the night. British battles songs, choir songs.
6 But a full script to that story, after the book came out, I had a phone call from a retired air
7 force colonel in California who called me up to tell me he was the leader of that section
8 and he was flying the second aircraft.

9 RV: Wow.

10 HM: He apologized, he said, "I'm sorry, General." He was a retired colonel and
11 he kind of got a little cheerful on the phone. I said, "Colonel, I don't even need to forgive
12 you, but I will. I don't know how you fighter bomber pilots saw any of the targets you
13 were dropping on with the smoke and the dust. You did a great job; you saved our ass! If
14 we hadn't had that fighter bomber support during that fight to augment the artillery we
15 may well have gone down. So I forgot his name but he's retired and living in California.
16 Still pored heavily on his mind.

17 RV: Let me ask you about another incident. When that one North Vietnamese
18 solider penetrated into headquarters—

19 HM: He penetrated the perimeter where he was captured immediately. He was
20 wounded badly.

21 RV: Was there a PAVN (People's Army of Vietnam) soldier who came at you
22 personally, as depicted in the movie?

23 HM: No.

24 RV: I didn't think so.

25 HM: No, the enemy never penetrated as far as my command post. That was
26 Hollywood.

27 RV: Okay. Just wanted to strengthen that out.

28 HM: In that movie, at the end of the movie when they showed that attack, we
29 did—early the next morning, after we had defeated this enemy attack that night before
30 with Diduryk's company, like I was taught at West Point, when you defeat the enemy,
31 you pursue them to the death. Like we should've been allowed to pursue the North

1 Vietnamese into Cambodian but were not by Washington. But I ordered Diduryk to have
2 his men fix bayonets after this successful night attack and I would join them. We would
3 have a massive fire support, artillery and air and then we would jump off in the attack and
4 the signal to jump off would be one final five-hundred pound bomb being dropped right
5 in front of your command post where I'll be with you. That happened and we killed
6 twenty-eight more men. But it was not at all like the movie depicted, with one helicopter
7 gunship providing fire support and all that dramatic crap that Hollywood introduced and
8 that really pissed me off. I told Randy Wallace, I said, "It didn't happen that way,
9 Randy."

10 RV: What did he say?

11 HM: He said, "Hal, this is not the history channel. It's a movie."

12 RV: (Laughs)

13 HM: So that really angered me. That and the command post scene where it
14 showed this one enemy guy going across the clearing you know hidden from me, that
15 never happened! The enemy never penetrated my position! The enemy did before we
16 could defeat all of them—some of them were looting and killing my wounded and did.
17 Had they not stopped to do that; they may have caused me some more problems. As for
18 Julie, when Joe Galloway wrote his story and it came out on press all across the country,
19 it stunned the people back in Columbus, Georgia. That's where the 11th Air Assault
20 Division was stationed, which became the 1st Cav and when we were ordered to Vietnam,
21 all of the army families including my wife and my five children, they were all ordered out
22 of the government family housing out of Fort Benning. Thirty days. Get off the post. I've
23 never understood why such a heartless order was given. Later on, in that Vietnam War as
24 it drug out, I understand that several air bases were opened which would have been
25 closed used or to accommodate families whose fathers were fighting a war in Vietnam.
26 But Julie and others were given thirty days to get off the post. Get out of the Army
27 quarters. I was off fighting a war, I'm deployed. We deployed on the 16th of August and
28 she had the until middle of September to get out of there. Kids that go to school you
29 know, her situation was repeated by the hundreds! So a lot of those families went all
30 across the country. But numerous others resettled in Columbus, Georgia. Julie rented a
31 small house in Columbus, Georgia. Three bedrooms, five kids, every night she had to put

1 up a couple of cots. Her father and mother retired military were living in Auburn thirty
2 miles away, retired colonel of artillery. Fought in World War I and World War II. So she
3 had her parents nearby and she also was in the company of numerous of the wives and
4 families of my troopers. They would meet regularly and compare letters and information
5 from overseas. But when word came out that we were in that terrible battle and she saw
6 me being interviewed on TV on the battlefield, after the battle by ABC Television, the
7 whole place was stunned.

8 RV: By the severity of the battle?

9 HM: About the battle and the news that was coming out about it. Of course, they
10 were all apprehensive now, "Did my husband make it?" Sergeant's wives. Then within
11 five to eight days, the dead started coming back and the first dead soldier was returned
12 for burial at Fort Benning was Sergeant Gell, Captain Nadal's radio operator. I was with
13 Sergeant Gell, he was caught in the machine gun fire in the attack in his first afternoon.
14 Gell was shot. Captain Nadal's artillery forward observer was shot and killed. His radio
15 operator was shot and killed by this machine gun fire and Captain Nadal was untouched.
16 Gell was carried back into my command post and I was right there when he died right
17 there. I think he had five daughters. Three stripe buck sergeant. By the way, some of his
18 daughters are going to be here, Carole Crowley is one of them. So he was sent back for
19 burial and the way the families were notified were by cab drivers. Julie found out about
20 Sergeant Gell and the cab drivers, and the cab driver knocked at her door. That's correct
21 in the movie. In the midst of all this, she thought, "Well if I don't open the door, he will
22 go away." But then she told me that she told herself, "No, face up to it Julie." And she
23 opened the door and there was this cab driver with this telegram wanting directions to
24 another address and she collapsed in tears. She raised hell with the Army. The
25 commanding general at Fort Benning, she raised a fuss all the way up to stop that
26 inhuman practice and it took a while to get the Army and the other services to send a
27 chaplain and another officer in uniform to the bereaved, to deliver this shattering news.
28 And she attended the funerals. Twelve, fourteen of my men and the 2nd of the 7th Cav at
29 Albany. She visited the homes of the bereaved, the widows and most of them were black.
30 There was one Hispanic girl from Puerto Rico whose husband was killed, living in a one
31 room motel room. Eight months pregnant. Julie could speak Spanish. She visited,

1 knocked on the door and, “Oh *señora*.” And she was so calmed down when Julie could
2 speak to her in Spanish and she and the other wives arranged a layout and then shipped
3 back to Puerto Rico. But Julie visited one room walk ups, trailer courts, shacks with dogs
4 underneath the front porch and dirt all around. Not like it was displayed in movie where
5 sergeants and lieutenants were living in Army quarters it took me twenty-one years to
6 qualify to get into. She watched this scene being filmed on this beautiful, shaded street at
7 Fort Benning and she broke into tears. She told Randy that it didn’t happen like this.
8 “Why don’t you tell the truth! It would be much more profound! Just didn’t happen like
9 this. I didn’t personally delivered telegrams but every day I got information from the
10 Army post on who was going to get those telegrams and I followed those tabs, and I was
11 the first person after the cab driver delivered the telegram. I had my five kids, a couple of
12 them in school, I had babysitters and I did this all the time my husband was in Vietnam.
13 Not just after the Ia Drang Battle, but all the battles that he was in ’66.”

14 RV: What did Randy Wallace say to this?

15 HM: He shook his head and said, “Well, we just can’t arrange that. It would cost a
16 lot of money. We just can’t arrange that” I was really angered, and Julie was grieved. It
17 wasn’t the truth! It was Hollywood, just like that last attack where he had Crandall in the
18 Huey and he had Geoghegan in that attack, I think.

19 RV: He was killed, but not before. Had Plumley with you?

20 HM: Had Plumley with me and I’m out there with bayonet. That was bullshit. I
21 was in that attack and my bayonet wasn’t fixed. I was firing my rifle. There were good
22 targets out there, but I didn’t personally stab anybody with a bayonet or do a but stroke. I
23 think one of Peter Arnett’s pictures has me standing over a dead North Vietnamese. But
24 you do what you have to do and it’s—soldiers have to do these horrible things and the
25 enemy had mothers too. But you do what you have to do.

26 RV: General, when you see—when you think about LZ X-Ray in those three
27 days, what do you see in your mind’s eye? What are the memories for you that are more
28 pertinent and more acute in your memory?

29 HM: One of memories that is very vivid is the first afternoon when there were
30 only probably a hundred fifty, almost two hundred of my soldiers in the ground and we
31 were hit by two battalions. But the night before, this had been my practice. Me and the

1 Sergeant Major sat up against the log at midnight and thinking through the, “What ifs?”
2 And my biggest what-if concern was, what if it takes me four, five hours to get my
3 battalion shuttled in.

4 RV: Right, it was thirty minutes in, right?

5 HM: Yeah. I was concerned that we were going to get into a hell of a fight before
6 I got my troops on the ground and deployed. I decided if that happened, I would call in
7 max fire support and counterattack. Stiff arm the enemy away from that landing zone.
8 That’s exactly what happened the next day, when we were attacked. But what really
9 helped was the actions of one man, Spec 4 Bill Beck. He was out on the left flank;
10 nobody was on his left. At that time, it was A and B company on the ground. When Beck
11 was out there, he was an assistant gunner and his gunner Russell Adams was shot in the
12 head, flopped on the group and Beck picked his helmet and he said it look like half his
13 brain fell out. Beck too over that machine gun. He was alone on that gun probably for an
14 hour and a half. He said, “Somebody brought me up some ammo and that made me very
15 happy.” But he said that he said, “I was firing at the enemy and they were thirty forty
16 yards out! I could feel the bullets cracking all around my head!” This is a twenty-two
17 year old draftee out of Pennsylvania—Steelton, Pennsylvania. At a critical time and a
18 critical place, he was the critical person on the battlefield for my battalion! And what he
19 had done was nothing less than save it! Had he not been there with his courage and his
20 professionalism and will to win, never quit, the enemy could well have delt me on my
21 left, come up behind me and I would be speaking to you from the grave. I hope Bill Beck
22 is at this reunion.

23 RV: He is here, we will talk to him.

24 HM: When we went back to the battlefield, he went unerringly to his position and
25 found the helmet with the hole in it, he’s got that helmet now. And when we were in—
26 Bill Beck when back to the battlefield with us in October ’93. When we had a big dinner
27 at Hanoi on a houseboat on one of those lakes, Beck was sitting next to a Vietnamese
28 Colonel and an interpreter. They got to talking about where they were in the battle and
29 Beck drew the symbol of a machine gun and a creek bed and the North Vietnamese
30 Colonel turned white and he said, “You killed my battalion! You killed my best friend!”
31 That really happened. That same afternoon, instincts. When we were in this terrible

1 action and this was a critical point. Had they overrun that creek bed or flanked us; we'd
2 have been in a hell of a fix. Hundred fifty, hundred seventy-five were taking casualties
3 and we were up against seven to eight hundred, nine hundred enemy! Of course, I had all
4 kinds of fire support, which helped but Bill Beck on that ground, on that flank, he was a
5 savior. But then I got word that my Charlie Company was coming in, my third rifle
6 company. My whole rear was open, the north was open. Open to the south, we were
7 fighting out to the southwest. And when Charlie Company came in, I thought, "Where
8 am I going to send them?" And every instinct in my body told me, "To the left. Towards
9 the mountain where Bill Beck was." And when my head tells me one thing, and my gut
10 tells me, I go with my gut. I ran out to the middle of the landing zone, under fire.
11 Machine gun fire around over our head like a swarm of bees and I ran up to Captain Bob
12 Edwards and I hollered at him above the noise. I said, "Grab your men and run them right
13 over there and tie in with A Company and be prepared to be attacked." He jumped three
14 feet in the air and started running, hollering for his men. He got them into position twenty
15 minutes before a whole fresh battalion attacked. I've interviewed those men, Bob
16 Edwards, he said it was just like shooting ducks out there. They didn't expect us to be
17 there. Instincts. Of course, that morning they paid a heavy price. The next morning. But
18 we beat off that attack, we made a couple of counter attacks that afternoon trying to get
19 out to that cut off platoon, neither one of which succeeded. But it did succeed in stopping
20 the enemy from attacking us. Things went quiet. I was able to visit my troopers on the
21 perimeter, talk to them. We formed a good perimeter that night. It was a hell of a fight
22 and reflecting back on it—

23 RV: Forty years later, right now.

24 HM: You asked me what I think about, primarily I think about that first afternoon.
25 Where we had very few men on the ground and we were hit by two battalions of enemy
26 wanting to kill us. I keep thinking how fortunate I was to have such great soldiers. Great
27 non-commissioned officers. Great fire supports. The Bill Becks. The Bob Edwards. I had
28 ordered my medical platoon in and they were under fire, treating the wounded. But you
29 know, never once during that fight that first afternoon or the next morning or after, never
30 once did it cross my mind that we would go down. Not once. And I have concluded that
31 in any endeavor, in an athletic contest, in a business situation, in a military, the business

1 battlefield, if you think you might lose, you've already lost. Can't let it get to your head. I
2 don't know who else you're going to interview, but you might interview Bill Beck on
3 going back to the battlefield and that afternoon.

4 RV: We will. Bob Edwards this afternoon, we'll talk to him.

5 HM: Oh, talk to Bob. He was gravely wounded but he still commanded his
6 company!

7 RV: Yes.

8 HM: And one of his platoon sergeants, Platoon Sergeant Glenn Kennedy shot and
9 killed a sniper that had shot Bob Edwards and shot his XO (Executive Officer),
10 Lieutenant Harrington. Sergeant Kennedy was killed later on in the Bong Son Plain in
11 May of 1966, and it just broke my heart. When I came back from Vietnam, Julie and I
12 visited the widows and their families. For several days, we were remaining in Columbus,
13 Georgia. A number of them moved elsewhere. Like Barbara Geoghegan went to Redding,
14 Connecticut with her in-laws. I often think of those days. It was the critical time of my
15 life. That was a battle which changed the war in Vietnam. The American War in
16 Vietnam. And I knew at the offset when we were hit heavily by those two enemy
17 battalions, I knew that however the outcome of this battle, major decisions were going to
18 be made in Saigon and Hanoi and Washington. And I knew that we had to win, and I
19 knew we would. General Kinnard wrote me a letter in recent years saying that we had a
20 lot of good battalions in the 1st Cav Division but I'm glad that it was your battalion that
21 ran into that Hornet's nest. It was a pretty good compliment from the commanding
22 general.

23 RV: Yes sir, it was.

24 HM: But I've gone back to the battlefield twice. Once with Joe and I wanted to
25 spend a night on the battlefield, catch the vibes. The helicopter that took us in there, a
26 Russian helicopter flown by two Vietnamese pilots, they took the first lift out but then the
27 second lift we were stranded by monsoon rain which pounded us for two hours and we
28 spent the night there. I was able to walk over to my command post and I visualized in
29 memory some of the dead that we were unable to get out that night and it's depicted
30 accurately in the movie. I could see them in my mind, boots sticking out in crazy angles
31 from the ponchos, laces tied last time by their fingers. I visited part of my perimeter,

1 Charlie Company perimeter. Specifically, I found myself at Geoghegan's foxhole, what
2 was left of it and I remember again him and others as I walked the line said, "Count on
3 me, Colonel. We'll get through this. Carry on, sir." And I knew then that night in October
4 '93, I grieved because I knew who was going to get killed the next morning. And when I
5 looked at all those dead bodies under the ponchos, I knew within thirty hours, thirty-six
6 hours that a lot of lives would be shattered through telegram. But to end up that night,
7 after we were pounded in this rain, we built a campfire that is shown in the documentary
8 to dry out and on the ground was me and Larry Gwin and George Forrest, Forrest Sawyer
9 and the ABC crew, Joe Galloway. I can't think of who else, just a few of us. We were
10 drying out and the night birds, roar of a tiger, clicking of the gecko frogs, shouting of the
11 monkeys and we were just sitting there in the dead quiet. If you're ever in an area like
12 down in a canyon where there's no ambient light, there's millions of stars up there.
13 Millions of galaxies. Makes you think, it has to be a supreme being who created all this.
14 It just didn't happen. Suddenly, we were showered by hundreds of meteorites. What do
15 you call it?

16 RV: Shooting stars?

17 HM: Shooting stars! Showers of them. I had seen and we had seen every now and
18 then one or two shooting stars, but they were hundreds of them! It went on for thirty,
19 thirty-five, forty minutes. It had to be a supernatural event. We were dead silent looking
20 at this magnificent display in this thunder of silence. It sort of quieted down, stopped and
21 we were stunned. I don't know who said it, it may have been Joe Galloway, but it had
22 occurred to us all that those may well have been the spirits of the men on both sides that
23 died in that place. In X-Ray, in Albany and the other battles of the Ia Drang. Spirits of
24 those enemy and friendly who died by the hundreds. Saying to us, "Farewell, you've told
25 our story. We can rest in peace; we can go now." Who knows, it may have been. But that
26 is an event which has never occurred before or after in any of our lives. I have been in
27 dark canyons, I've been back to the battlefield, I've been in other battles in Vietnam
28 where it was quiet at night on occasion, but never have I read about or seen such an
29 event. So I don't know who you're going to interview but I hope they follow my guidance
30 of telling the truth as they saw the truth.

31 RV: I'm sure they will.

1 HM: Good or bad. Good or bad.
2 RV: Well, this will be a good place to stop. Yes, sir.
3 HM: Made mistakes, like I told you about mistakes I made. This is history!
4 RV: Yes sir, that's why we're doing this.
5 HM: Yeah. I don't know who is going to watch or listen to all these oral histories,
6 but I do hope—
7 RV: You're speaking to the future right now. People will be listening and
8 watching for generations.
9 HM: That's good, I wish I could listen to what happened at Little Bighorn, Valley
10 Forge, Petersburg.
11 RV: What do you want to say to these people that will be listening a hundred
12 years from now?
13 HM: My message to any viewers or listeners or both to these oral history tapes
14 which the Vietnam Center is accruing, I hope that the major lesson that you remember in
15 whatever walk of life you're in, military, civilian world, political world—hate war, but
16 love the American warrior. That's my message down range. I got to go.
17 RV: Thank you, sir.
18 [End of Interview]