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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Harold Bowen
Conducted by Steve Maxner
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Transcribed by Cecily Darwin**

1 Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner. I'm conducting an interview with Mr.
2 Harold Bowen. We are attending the Firebirds and Rattlers helicopter reunion, Assault
3 Helicopter Company 71st and the Alpha 501st. Is that right?

4 Harold Bowen: That's correct. The unit went over to Vietnam as Alpha of the
5 501st. That was the way it was originally organized. After it was in Vietnam it was re-
6 designated to the 71st Assault Helicopter Company.

7 SM: Very good. We are in the Omni Hotel in San Antonio, Texas, conducting
8 this interview. Well, sir, why don't we go ahead and start with, if you would, provide a
9 brief description of growing up in North Carolina?

10 HB: Well, I grew up in southeastern North Carolina, the son of a small tobacco
11 farmer in that area. I was the middle child of three children. I have an older brother four
12 years older than I am and a sister a couple of years younger than I am. My parents,
13 incidentally, are both still living. They still live in the same house that I was born in and
14 they have now been married for seventy-three years still living alone independently there
15 in Whiteville, North Carolina, Columbus County. I went to school in Whiteville and
16 graduated from high school there. A month after graduating from high school I entered
17 the Army.

18 SM: Could you describe what you remember about the Second World War as you
19 mentioned in—

20 HB: About the only thing that I remember about the Second World War was the
21 fact that periodically we had air raid warnings when all the lights got turned out or the

1 shades got pulled. We had window shades rather than blinds in the house so that the
2 house could be completely darkened so far as any light showing on the outside. I
3 remember that happening periodically. Apparently when there was spotted enemy
4 activity off the coast which was only about forty something miles from my home.
5 Apparently they had occasionally German submarines and other ships, I guess, spotted
6 off the coast there. I also vaguely remember the hullabaloo on the radio when President
7 Roosevelt passed away.

8 SM: Oh, yes, sir.

9 HB: I remember us being out in the field working with the car driven out
10 alongside of the road and the radio on the car turned up so that we could follow the news
11 on the radio as the train bearing his body back up, I guess, to Washington made the
12 various stops along the route.

13 SM: Yes, sir.

14 HB: Those were about my only memories of that era.

15 SM: Do you remember anything about the drives and rationing and stuff like
16 that? Rubber drives or tin drives or anything like that?

17 HB: Not much about the drives. I remember us having the rationing books and
18 Mom and Dad saying that we couldn't get this or we couldn't get that because we didn't
19 have ration coupons available and that kind of thing. I remember that we had an older car
20 and Dad wanted to buy a new car. This was, I guess, primarily shortly after the war and
21 production was extremely limited on new cars after they had gone back to making the
22 cars. Of course, during the war they were not making new cars. The only thing you could
23 buy was a used car and they were very expensive if you could find one that was for sale.
24 But after the war he was in the market for a new car. I remember that as a general rule
25 you had a very tough time finding one. You got on the list for a car at a dealer and
26 hopefully one would become available and you took it the way the dealer offered it. As I
27 recall they like to add every extra on them that they had available at that time. We're
28 talking about things such as mud flaps on the back and maybe a squirrel tail on the radio
29 antenna and things of that nature, anything they could add on it to increase the price of it
30 a little bit. Of course, you didn't have any of the options that we have for cars today.
31 There was no such thing as the power features or air conditioning or anything of that

1 nature, but a fully equipped car so far as we were concerned had a radio and heater. That
2 was the only thing you were interested in. The rest of it were things about as valuable as a
3 squirrel tail or mud flaps or things of that nature.

4 SM: Yes, sir. Well, as you were nearing graduation from high school what made
5 you decide to join the military?

6 HB: Well, probably in, I believe 1954, which was a couple of years before I
7 graduated, we had a hurricane off the coast of North Carolina, Hurricane Hazel.

8 SM: Huh, oh yeah.

9 HB: It was quite a severe hurricane. I recall that the Whiteville battery of the
10 North Carolina National Guard was activated to go to the coast to patrol the coast to
11 protect property from looters and things of that nature. As a high school student I thought
12 that was a very cool thing to do. I regretted that I wasn't able to participate in that. So as
13 soon as I turned seventeen and was eligible to join the National Guard with parental
14 permission, of course, I did so. So that the next time the National Guard was activated I
15 would be able to go with them.

16 SM: Yes, sir.

17 HB: I had a girlfriend that I was going with in high school. We jumped off
18 between my junior and senior year in high school and eloped and got married. We lived
19 there with my parents then after we were married. I went to my senior year in school
20 married and she went to her junior year married. When I graduated I really didn't know
21 what I was going to do in southeastern North Carolina at that time. There wasn't much of
22 an opportunity. So I decided I would go on active duty. I joined the Army and went
23 through basic training at Ft. Jackson, South Carolina, and was assigned to an M-38 75-
24 millimeter Skysweeper AAA, anti-aircraft artillery course at Ft. Bliss, Texas, to become a
25 fire patrol mechanic on the old 75-millimeter Skysweeper.

26 SM: I'm sorry, sir, before we continue with your training I forgot to ask you what
27 do you remember about the Korean War and what impact did that have on your
28 community there in Whiteville, North Carolina?

29 HB: I don't know that the Korean War really had that much of an impact. I
30 remember, of course, much more detail about the Korean War because I was up twelve
31 years old when that started. It was a more limited action that really did not involve the

1 American people back home, I think, to the extent that the Second World War did. You
2 know we were not rationed in any way. We were not deprived of the luxuries or
3 necessities of life in order to conduct the war. So for those people who did not have
4 family involved personally in the war life pretty much went on as usual. I did not have
5 family involved. I think we could say that my life was really not affected by the Korean
6 War.

7 SM: Did you have family who served in the Second World War, uncles or
8 brothers or anything?

9 HB: I had an uncle that was in the Army during the, entered the Army right
10 toward the end of the Second World War. He never was deployed overseas. Now that
11 probably is the closest relative I had. I had some cousins that were involved in the Second
12 World War, but these were not family members that I really knew at that time. So, no, I
13 would say not.

14 SM: Do you recall when before President Eisenhower went into office, of course,
15 there was a big conflict between President Truman and General MacArthur. I was
16 wondering if maybe you remembered how folks in your community or perhaps in your
17 family your father and your mother, if they responded to that at all, or if they were just
18 too busy living day by day raising a family in rural North Carolina.

19 HB: Well, I think the general population in that area I think considered
20 MacArthur very much an American hero. There was an awful lot of resentment of
21 Truman for relieving MacArthur the way he did, but I think most of those people
22 probably were not truly aware of the way MacArthur had become. From everything that I
23 have learned from accounts that I have read since I became an adult and became more
24 interested in things of that nature MacArthur really had overstretched the bounds that any
25 serving military officer can go to. I think most serious military historians agree that if
26 anything Truman probably bent over backwards to avoid relieving MacArthur, probably
27 simply because he realized the furor that such a move would cause politically. It finally
28 became necessary and he did it. I think history now reflects that that probably was the
29 better move, although I think there still is some question as to whether or not MacArthur
30 was right in what he wanted to do. It frankly was not his decision by the constitution of

1 the country and all. He had his boss and he was duty-bound to follow his orders and he
2 didn't do it.

3 SM: Well, is there anything else that you remember about the Korean War and
4 did it impact your decision to join the military at all? You mentioned, of course, the
5 impact of Hurricane Hazel and your decision to join the National Guard. I didn't know if
6 perhaps—

7 HB: I don't think either the Second World War or the Korean War impacted my
8 decision to join the military. I think probably the fact that I was married so early and the
9 background that I came from and all, that probably was the most important thing. I
10 really—you know, a lot of kids, some kids anyway, have a pretty distinct idea when they
11 finish high school what they want to do with their life. I really did not. Even after I served
12 a three-year tour in the Army I still did not know what I wanted to do. I really reenlisted
13 in the Army for lack of a better plan and stumbled into a twenty-six year career. I always
14 jokingly said that I was going to get out of the Army if I ever decided what I wanted to be
15 when I grew and I guess I never did decide.

16 SM: Very good. Well, let's go ahead and get back to training then. Take a step
17 back before we get into your AAA training at you said that was here at Ft. Bliss, right, in
18 Texas.

19 HB: The AAA training was, yes.

20 SM: What do you remember most about your basic training? Does anything
21 come to mind when you think about basic training in the Army in South Carolina?

22 HB: Well, probably the thing that—well, probably the thing that failed to impress
23 me the most was the fact that with the name Bowen, B in the alphabet the second letter,
24 every new place that I went to I'm at the top of the roster for KP (kitchen police). So I go
25 into the replacement depot that everyone goes to when they go on a military post. We get
26 in about 1:30 or two o'clock in the morning after a bus ride from Raleigh to Ft. Jackson,
27 South Carolina. After the usual games with the drill sergeant throwing bed linens and that
28 kind of thing we were sent into a bunk, to a barracks and given a bunk and taught how to
29 make a bed. Finally about three o'clock or so we get to lay our head down and about 3:30
30 I'm roused for KP. So I spend the day in the consolidated mess doing KP and four or five

1 days later I leave the replacement depot and go over to my assigned basic training
2 company and guess what? The first day in the company I'm on KP again.

3 SM: Oh, no.

4 HB: That was not a fun time.

5 SM: No, sir.

6 HB: That and the fact that during zero week there was some—and I don't
7 remember the event that triggered this—but there was some alert for the military forces.
8 This would've been during the first two or three days of July of '56. We did a forced
9 march before training started. We loaded up all of our gear and marched so many miles
10 off into the training area. After we were all thoroughly exhausted they announced that
11 whatever the alert was had been resolved. We turned around and marched the same
12 distance back. So we were all dragging butt by the time we got back. I don't suppose
13 there really was any alert of any kind. I suppose that was a line that we were fed to try to
14 justify in our minds the march, but we never were told the deal there. We just, the entire
15 battalion did a forced march out into the boonies and back. Very tiring, very depressing.

16 SM: Yes, sir. I can only imagine. Let's take a break for a moment.

17 SM: Okay. So we're back from our very brief break. All right, sir, why don't
18 you, if there is nothing else about basic training you want to discuss, why don't you go
19 ahead and talk about your advanced training at Ft. Bliss for anti-aircraft artillery?

20 HB: Well, I went out to Ft. Bliss in September of '56 and attended the radar
21 repair course that I was assigned to and was retained there in the school as an instructor
22 after graduation. I wasn't very content as an instructor. I didn't care for that duty. Finally
23 in February of '58 I was able to wrangle a reassignment to a unit in Germany as a crew
24 member on the gun system that I had been trained on. I arrived in Mannheim, Germany,
25 in February of 1958 and remained there until June of 1959 when my enlistment expired.
26 My wife had joined me over there at my expense. I was not of a rank eligible for
27 dependent travel. So I had to pay her way over myself and we lived on the economy. We
28 stayed there together for about a year and then I was coming up on my ETS (estimated
29 time of separation) and would be coming back to the States. I had decided that I didn't
30 want to reenlist in that position. In fact, I really didn't have any solid plans to reenlist at
31 that time. I hadn't decided what I wanted to do. Of course, money was extremely limited.

1 So a couple of months before I was going to DEROS (date eligible for return from
2 overseas) back to the States there was a charter flight that I was able to get my wife on
3 for considerably less than a scheduled flight. I sent her back early. Then two months later
4 I came back to the States and went to Ft. Jackson and while I was there I gave some
5 serious thought to what I was going to do and decided to reenlist. In the meantime—I
6 should have covered this earlier—before I went to Germany, in fact, in the end of July of
7 '57 my oldest daughter was born. So here I am with a wife and a child and no idea what I
8 wanted to do so I reenlisted. Of course, the Skysweeper system that I was assigned to was
9 really old technology. That Skysweeper system was initially developed back in the 1930s,
10 but it was because of the contingencies of the war and all it was not brought on line as a
11 weapon system until about 19—probably in the '52, '53 timeframe at the close of the
12 Korean War before it was brought on line. Of course, the Nike Ajax missile was brought
13 on line very shortly thereafter and made the gun system obsolete. So my system had a
14 very short useful life as a deployed gun system. I began to see that that was a dead-end
15 field. So I reenlisted and was assigned to West Point as a crewman on a system they had
16 up there. I reported up there in July of 1959. I moved my family up there and we lived in
17 Highland Falls, New York, in an apartment that we rented. We were there for about four
18 months. My wife and I decided that we had just gotten married too young and it was best
19 to call the whole thing off. I moved her back to Whiteville and I was stationed back up at
20 New York. In the meantime in February of 1960 the gun system that we had up there
21 which we used, incidentally, to train the cadets on the system it was an orientation system
22 for them, that was turned in. We got rid of it. So I had no position there and was declared
23 excess and in April was transferred back to Ft. Bliss, Texas, for retraining. I went out
24 there and held a variety of jobs, met my current wife out there, and had quite an
25 experience. I wound up as a trainee on the 90-millimeter radar system which was also
26 obsolete. So this was a dead end career. In a formation one day the first sergeant asked
27 for volunteers to go to language school. Well, I'm looking for anything to do. Of course,
28 I'm single at this point, dating my wife, my current wife, but we haven't married yet so I
29 raised my hand and volunteered for this language school thinking I'm going to go to a
30 year's language course in Monterey, California, which I considered a gravy assignment. I
31 didn't hear anything for quite some time. Then about three months later I'm out in the

1 field with some of the trainees that we had. A jeep comes out and picks me up and says
2 I've got to be in Washington, D.C., to go to school on Monday and this is Thursday. So
3 we do a rushed post clearing exercise. On Friday afternoon I hit the road for Washington,
4 D.C. I drive straight through to my home in Whiteville and spent—got in late Sunday
5 afternoon and spent Sunday night with my parents. About noon Monday I take off for
6 D.C. and get up there and find out that I was supposed to be there Monday morning, not
7 Monday night, but that's okay. I find out that there are twelve of us there to attend one of
8 five different languages. No one knows anything about us. Apparently the action officer
9 out in the Pentagon who had set this whole thing up had, since he put the ball in motion,
10 he had been transferred. We are split between the language of Laos, Burmese,
11 Indonesian, Malaysian, and Cambodian those five languages. There are three of us in the
12 Lao group, all from Ft. Bliss. All twelve of these people, incidentally, come from either
13 Ft. Bliss or Ft. Hood. There's seven from Ft. Bliss and five from Ft. Hood, the five from
14 Ft. Hood are with the 319th MI (Military Intelligence) Battalion which was out there at
15 the time.

16 SM: Excuse me, sir, I will go ahead and stop. (stops recording) Okay, so you're
17 in Washington, you're getting ready to get to go to this language training, but I'm curious
18 what—did anybody explain to you what the purpose of this language training is for?

19 HB: No, no one knew. What we were told after we got up there was we don't
20 know anything about this project except we know that the contract has been let with the
21 school, it's too late to get out of that. So we're going to go ahead and let you go to the
22 school. We were there for three months. It was a cram course.

23 SM: Yes.

24 HB: Then, "Five of you were from the 319th MI Battalion, Military Intelligence
25 Battalion. The seven of you that are from Ft. Bliss, we're going to transfer you to the
26 319th. We're going to put all twelve of you there in one organization. If we ever figure
27 out what it is we're supposed to do with you, we'll know where to find you." They did
28 that. Well, it turns out that—now some of the guys apparently were very—excuse me.

29 SM: Okay, go ahead.

30 HB: I've forgotten where I was now.

1 SM: So they had the contract and you were going to go through this three-month
2 cram course on Laotian, of all things. Was Vietnamese one of the options as well? You
3 didn't mention that.

4 HB: No, Vietnamese was not one of the options, but this is in 1961 now. So
5 Vietnam is not an active situation.

6 SM: You know, it's interesting, though, because of course the focus being on
7 Laotian or Cambodian and other Southeast Asian languages.

8 HB: It's in that area, it's in that area definitely. Actually, I think during that
9 timeframe there was more guerilla activity going on in Laos and Cambodia than there
10 was in Vietnam. It was all part of the old what was known as Indochina.

11 SM: What did y'all think about the election of President Kennedy?

12 HB: Well, at that time I really wasn't—I can't say that I was very informed
13 politically. I think in my own mind I was a Nixon supporter, but I think that Kennedy was
14 good for the military. He rebuilt a military that had been pretty much decimated during
15 the Eisenhower era. Primarily, I guess, because the emphasis during that time had been
16 on the big boom, there really won't be much of a war, it will be boom, boom and it'll all
17 be over. I think that's a guaranteed recipe for failure. Kennedy started the rebuild of the
18 military and—

19 SM: It's part of his Flexible Response.

20 HB: Exactly and certainly that's essential. At any rate, going back to the course,
21 we finished the course very unsuccessfully, I might add, because we had a series of
22 exchange students as instructors in Lao. During the three-month course we had three
23 different instructors, each one from a different region of Laos and Lao, the language is
24 very different in the different regions because of dialect.

25 SM: Yes, sir.

26 HB: Each one would start us all over again because what you've been learning is
27 all wet, that isn't right. This is the right way.

28 SM: Were these different Hmong tribes as well the hill tribe people or were
29 they—?

30 HB: No, no. They were just the first one was from Pakse, I recall that. One was
31 from Vientiane and the third one may have been from the hill tribe. But what we found

1 out during the course of the instruction we were the second, third, and fourth people that
2 the Army had ever tried to train in Lao simply because the language of Laos was the
3 language of the peasants. The Army had sent an Army attaché way back in the '50s. They
4 had sent an Army attaché to the Lao course and found out after he got over there that the
5 language was worthless to him because the educated people the attaché dealt with used
6 French. Lao was beneath them. The language, by the way, is Lao, not Laotian. That's one
7 thing—everybody wants to say Laotian, but the language is Lao. The Army had
8 discontinued training their attaches in Lao and sent them to French courses instead. So as
9 a result the Army had no skill digit for the Lao language. They had no test to determine
10 your proficiency in the Lao language. So I couldn't be awarded a linguist MOS (military
11 occupational specialty) when I was reassigned to the language company of the MI
12 battalion. I still I have an obsolete MOS and I can't get it changed because the Army
13 doesn't have anything to give me in that language. Well, Laos and Thailand are in the
14 same region, therefore the languages must be very similar, right? But the hierarchy in the
15 company said that the languages must be very similar. They, in fact, use different
16 alphabets so they aren't. We had a qualified Thai linguist in the unit and they decided
17 they're going to take us three Lao linguists and they're going to make us Thai linguists
18 and test us and give us an MOS and all. We start this program. Well, about six weeks into
19 the program the Thai linguist gets transferred from the 319th MI Battalion language
20 company to the 519th which is at Ft. Bragg. So any continuation of that training program
21 is impossible. That's when I decided—by now I'm an E-5 and have been an E-5 for three
22 years. I'm looking around in the Army of that era and seeing I've got six years service,
23 I'm an E-5 and there are E-5s around with fifteen years service. Promotions were slow to
24 nonexistent. I'm not seeing anyone get promoted. In the meantime, like I said earlier, in
25 May of '62 my current wife and I were married. I decided I had to do something with my
26 career besides sit here and enjoy myself doing nothing. I've gotten divorced from the first
27 wife and I'm paying child support and doing all this on an E-5 salary, I don't have a very
28 promising future. I applied for OCS (office candidate school) and reported into Ft.
29 Benning to go to infantry OCS in late July of 1962. I went through OCS graduating in
30 February of 1963. While I was in OCS they impressed upon us that every good infantry
31 officer, as they put it then, is either Airborne, Ranger, or an aviator. I knew absolutely

1 nothing about small airplanes, had never ridden in one. The only airplane I had ever
2 ridden in was a passenger plane, commercial plane. The idea of jumping out of a
3 perfectly good airplane doesn't impress me. Rangers had the reputation of eating snakes
4 and I hate snakes and I didn't want to eat one. So of the three options that leaves flying.
5 Besides flying pays extra money so I volunteer again. I'll go to flight school.

6 SM: Now what did you understand that would mean? Did you think it meant
7 small fixed-wing air craft or rotary when you volunteered?

8 HB: At the time I volunteered, now, you volunteered for one or the other and at
9 the time I volunteered, the idea of flying a small fixed-wing appealed to me more than the
10 idea of flying a helicopter. So I applied for small fixed-wing.

11 SM: That would've been like the O-1, the Bird Dog or something like that.

12 HB: I flew Bird Dogs and O-6s, U-6s, L-20s. Well, when I was back at Rucker as
13 an instructor between tours I transitioned into the T-41 and T-42 and got my twin check
14 out in the T-42. Before I went back to Vietnam for my second tour I transitioned into the,
15 what the heck was it, the Queen Air and I can't remember the designation of the thing
16 now, the twin turbo jet that the Army had at the time.

17 SM: Did you say it was a King Air?

18 HB: Queen Air, I think it was.

19 SM: Oh, Queen Air, huh.

20 HB: It was a utility aircraft that the Army had.

21 SM: Was it a large one, Caribou? Was it a large or small one?

22 HB: It was about a six-passenger plane.

23 SM: Oh, just a passenger plane.

24 HB: Yeah. They had some versions of it with some observation gear on it and was
25 used for various and sundry missions, but I never flew them. I went to the transition
26 course and that was it.

27 SM: You mentioned the L-20 or the O-1, what else? As the smaller aircraft you
28 mentioned the L-20 and the U something.

29 HB: Well, the Bird Dog, the O-1 was the primary fixed-wing aircraft of the day
30 and the L-20 or the U-6.

31 SM: U-6.

1 HB: Well, the L-20 and the U-6 are the same.

2 SM: Oh, okay. I'm sorry.

3 HB: They're the same aircraft.

4 SM: Okay, I'm sorry. I hadn't heard that definition before.

5 HB: The L-19 was re-designated the O-1. They're the same aircraft.

6 SM: Gotcha.

7 HB: The L-20—

8 SM: Was designated the U-6.

9 HB: Was designated the U-6. In the early '60s, the L was "light." The Army

10 came up with a new designation system. The O was observation, the U was utility. The

11 UH or the Huey was utility helicopter. Just the plain U was fixed-wing.

12 SM: Okay. Well, what year did you—after you finished infantry officer candidate

13 school, commissioned in '63, volunteer for flight school so did you follow on

14 immediately after IO—after infantry training into flight school at Ft. Rucker?

15 HB: Yes, yes. I went to Ft. Rucker straight from Benning in '63, snow birded

16 down there for a couple of months and started flight school in May of '63.

17 SM: How long did flight school last for you?

18 HB: We started, as I recall, we started the first of May and I graduated in

19 February of '64. I was assigned to Germany, went to Finthen, Germany, right outside of

20 Mainz and was assigned to the 1st Brigade of the 8th Infantry Division and their brigade

21 aviation section, which had a couple of Bird Dogs and an OH-13, a couple of OH-13s, I

22 guess. At one time we had three—we had varying numbers of Bird Dogs depending on

23 what was going on. There were at various times anywhere from two to about five pilots

24 assigned to the section. We were there until February of '67, but in the meantime in '65,

25 of course, Vietnam was warming up considerably.

26 SM: Yes, sir.

27 HB: The Army started a program in Germany. They collected some Huey aircraft

28 and started a course down at Stuttgart to qualify all of the rotary-wing pilots in Hueys.

29 They finished that and got all of those guys qualified, shipped most of them out to

30 Vietnam and then they collected some OH-13s and started a program to transition all of

31 the fixed-wing pilots into helicopters. I was in the third class, I think, that they did. Went

1 down, this was started up at Unterschleißheim right out of Munich there was a big airfield
2 down there that they started this program at. We had about eight or nine weeks, got as I
3 recall, got fifty hours of H-13 time and ten hours of Huey time. Then I went back to my
4 unit and graduated in July of '66. Went back to my unit and by that time people were
5 leaving for Vietnam right and left. Meantime I had in late '65, early '66 I guess it was,
6 early '66—in fact, the week before the Army and the Air Force made the deal to give the
7 Caribou to the Air Force. I had put in a request for Caribou transition and reassignment to
8 Vietnam because Caribou was the hot aircraft. I knew I'm going to Vietnam.
9 Everybody's going to Vietnam, you know. It's a matter of what can you get out of it
10 before you go. I wanted to fly the Caribou. By that time the Caribou is now the Buffalo
11 which had turbine engines. That was basically the difference in them. I wanted to fly that.
12 So I put in a request to go to Vietnam with the Caribou transition en route. Sometime
13 later, several—well, a week after I put the request in the *Stars and Stripes* has this article
14 about this deal that has been made see. So I says, "Oh, hell," but the Army had the gall to
15 come back and I remember the endorsement back on my paperwork very clearly. It said
16 that my request had been approved. I was going to go to Vietnam.

17 SM: But not through Caribou training.

18 HB: It didn't mention a Caribou transition. I was told what unit I was going to be
19 assigned to and everything.

20 SM: What month and year was this, do you recall?

21 HB: This was in early '66. It was before I went to the helicopter course, but I'm
22 not going to Vietnam for a year. I got orders a year in advance going to Vietnam. In the
23 meantime I go back and I think, "Hey, you've made a mistake. That's not what I asked
24 for. You say my request is approved, but you didn't give me what I asked for." "Well, we
25 gave you the essential agreement, the essential ingredient of what you asked for. You
26 asked to go to Vietnam. We gave you that. All the conditions you attached to it, they
27 don't count."

28 SM: No.

29 HB: Okay. Well, I mean, I can see the handwriting on the wall. Well, that's a
30 losing argument there. You don't bother to wager.

31 SM: No.

1 HB: So I check into this unit and I find out that the unit that they say I'm
2 assigned to is a Bird Dog unit that is being formed at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky, for
3 shipment to Vietnam. Okay. Then in the spring I come out on orders for the helicopter
4 course. I call DA (director of administration), I don't want to fly helicopters. The
5 assignments officer at DA says, "That's fine. You don't have to go," because I'm going
6 to incur this new military obligation if I go.

7 SM: Sure.

8 HB: I don't want that. I'm still not sure that I want to stay in the Army, see. I'm
9 thinking very seriously about getting out and trying to fly commercially or something like
10 that. He says, "Well, you don't have to go if you don't want to, but if you don't go you're
11 going to pull a tour in Vietnam and then you might as well get out of the Army because
12 you're finished. If you can't do what we want you to do, we don't have a place for you."

13 SM: Wow. That's pretty blunt.

14 HB: Well, I'm not one that likes to burn my bridges.

15 SM: Sure.

16 HB: Okay, well, what the hell. I'll go fly helicopters. I mean, I'm already on
17 orders for Vietnam for fixed-wing so I'm not going to have to fly helicopters over there,
18 right? I go down to Munich and I go through the training program. It was a lot of fun. I
19 enjoyed flying helicopters, but I didn't want to fly them in Vietnam.

20 SM: Now what were you trained on? Were you trained on the Huey? Did they
21 throw you right on?

22 HB: I got a fifty-hour transition into the OH-13 and then ten hours in the Huey
23 just enough to learn how to crank the thing.

24 SM: Orientation kind of.

25 HB: Yeah. Graduated in early July of '66, went back to my unit and very shortly
26 after I got back there of all the pilots we had in the unit I wind up as the only one left. So
27 I'm flying the brigade commander around in the H-13. So I get quite a bit of H-13 time
28 over the next several months. Keep in mind that I'm on orders to Vietnam already to go
29 over. In the meantime my assignment to the unit at Ft. Campbell was changed. I get
30 orders to go direct to a unit, a Bird Dog unit in Vietnam, but the timeframe is the same.
31 I'm going over in February of '67, March of '67. All my classmates from the transition

1 course who don't have orders to Vietnam already, they receive orders and leave because
2 of their new qualification, but I've already got orders so I don't get new orders. So I
3 wound up staying over there longer than anybody else. Everybody else leaves and I'm
4 still there. Finally I DEROS back then in February of '67. Never flying a Huey from July
5 until I left Germany in next February, never touched a Huey. Report to, go to Vietnam,
6 wind up there at Long Binh in the replacement detachment and find out that the orders
7 that you travel to Vietnam on become null and void when you arrive at Long Binh. You
8 are in the pot with everybody else. They're not looking for Bird Dog pilots. They're
9 looking for Huey pilots. I get orders to the 145th Battalion there at Long Binh, actually at
10 Bien Hoa, but it's right near Long Binh. I go down to the 145th and am assigned to the
11 71st. The 71st at that time is at Bien Hoa. I don't remember the date. We could check it. I
12 actually wind up assigned to the 71st the same day that Major Airrink assumes command
13 from Major Morris.

14 SM: This is, what, late '66 or early '66?

15 HB: No, this is March now of '67.

16 SM: '67.

17 HB: Yeah.

18 SM: Now before we talk about your first tour in Vietnam let me ask you a couple
19 of quick back-up questions regarding events that happened in the early '60s. In particular,
20 of course, in November of 1963, of course, there's quite a bit of interesting, a lot of
21 interest going on both in Vietnam and in the U.S. with the assassination of the
22 Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem and I was wondering if that made its way to you
23 guys while you were—were in Germany at that point, November '63 or were you still
24 back in the States?

25 HB: November of '63 I'm just starting, just starting, no, I started flight school in
26 May. So I'm well in the flight school.

27 SM: Middle of flight school.

28 HB: November of '63 is actually when Kennedy was assassinated not—

29 SM: Right, two weeks later.

30 HB: Yeah.

1 SM: Two weeks after Diem is killed in Vietnam, President Kennedy is killed
2 here in the U.S. So I was wondering, first, if you guys even paid attention to what was
3 going on in Vietnam in '63, if you even remember what was coming back to the U.S. in
4 terms of news from that country.

5 HB: You know, I remember his assassination and I remember his wife's
6 comments about that when Kennedy was assassinated, which was something to the effect
7 that he deserved it because, I mean, I think she pretty openly accused him of being
8 involved in her husband's assassination.

9 SM: Well, how did the Kennedy assassination impact you guys and what do you
10 remember most about that?

11 HB: I don't know that it impacted us training-wise any more than it did other
12 people in the country. I mean, you know, I of course remember being very affected by it
13 emotionally and all. It was quite a traumatic experience for everyone, but I don't recall
14 anticipating that it would have any real effect on the Army per se any more than it did all
15 the rest of the country. I didn't foresee that the direction the Army was going to go in was
16 going to change or anything like that. Certainly at that point, though, I had—I snow
17 birded for two months with a combat developments organization at Ft. Rucker before my
18 flight school class started. They were very actively involved in at least keeping up with
19 what was going on in Vietnam and what was going to be needed there and that kind of
20 thing. Though their ability to foresee at that point—this is early to mid '63. No one
21 certainly foresaw that it was going to become anything like it did. Still I think they
22 probably had better insight into it than most people did. I was aware of the Southeast
23 Asian situation, but not really concerned about it because it doesn't affect us now. I
24 mean, what the hell, you know?

25 SM: Yeah, by '63 it's still not a major possibility for you guys to be sent over.

26 HB: No.

27 SM: Did you know any advisors who had served over there and come back? Did
28 you meet any?

29 HB: Yeah. We had a couple there in the combat developments organization that
30 had—I don't recall if they had been to Vietnam. They had been to Southeast Asia. We

1 had advisors. In fact, at one time there we probably had more in Laos and in Cambodia
2 than we actually did in Vietnam.

3 SM: Do you remember anything they might've talked about with regard to their
4 service over there that early?

5 HB: Not specifically. No, I don't.

6 SM: What do you remember when the Gulf of Tonkin Incident occurred in '64,
7 August of '64? Do you remember anything about that?

8 HB: Not a great deal. I recall the—we in the military took everything at face
9 value. The line that was put out by the powers at the time portrayed it that there was
10 absolutely no provocation on our part. It was a brazen attack against us. I think for the
11 most part those of us at the line level accepted that hook, line, and sinker. In those days it
12 never occurred to any of us that anyone was being less than truthful and candid with us at
13 the level I was at the time. Hell, yeah, the son-of-guns want to start something like that
14 we'll fix their ass. We can easily handle this. This is not something that we need to get
15 concerned about.

16 SM: Prior to leaving Germany and going to Vietnam what kind of indoctrination,
17 training, just informational training, did you receive about Vietnam itself and what
18 service would be like there in that country? Did you receive any kind of orientation
19 before leaving Germany that you remember?

20 HB: No, not before leaving Germany.

21 SM: How about when you got to the replacement unit there at Bien Hoa? Do you
22 recall any kind of orientation when you arrived?

23 HB: No.

24 SM: How about when you got to the 71st was there anything more than just a unit
25 orientation, cultural orientation, what's going on here in Vietnam orientation?

26 HB: No, no there was no kind of orientation, unh-unh.

27 SM: Interesting.

28 HB: I mean, "You're here. Look around you. Open your eyes."

29 SM: Open your eyes. That's your orientation.

30 HB: I mean, a flight orientation, you're here to fly. That's what you do. I
31 remember I took my orientation check ride with Rance Kirby who was one of our KIAs

1 (killed in action). I think I was his next-to-last orientation check ride. He gave one either
2 the next day or a couple of days and that was the flight that he was killed on. Of course, I
3 remember that affecting me. Rance was a very able and accomplished pilot. He took
4 me—keep in mind, now, that I've got ten hours in the Huey and then I went about nine
5 months without touching one. So I barely remembered how to start it when I took my
6 orientation ride with Rance. Rance gave me quite a ride and—

7 SM: What model Hueys were you guys flying at that point? What model was it?
8 Do you recall?

9 HB: I think those were all Delta models. I think we had Delta models at that time.
10 We had, the training that I had received at Munich was in a B model because all the Delta
11 models had been pulled out to go to Vietnam.

12 SM: Sure, they wanted the extra pilots there.

13 HB: Yeah, but we had Delta models in the 71st.

14 SM: Did you notice a big difference between the B models that you flew in
15 Germany and the Delta model you were flying in Vietnam? Could you feel the difference
16 that you remember?

17 HB: It had been too long since I had flown the B model. Everything was
18 different. Rance flew me much more than a normal check ride, at the conclusion of the
19 ride he said, "I'm going to go ahead and sign you off so you can start flying," but he said,
20 "You're extremely rusty. We have got some good aircraft commanders here, very
21 competent guys. You listen to them and they'll take care of you." That's what I tried to
22 do. Keep in mind I'm coming into the unit. I'm a captain. I've got eleven years service
23 now. Most of these guys—you know, in fact, I don't recall us having a single W-2 in the
24 unit. These guys are all W-1s.

25 SM: They're aircraft commanders.

26 HB: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. Well, our aircraft commander-peter pilot system over
27 there had absolutely nothing to do with rank. It's strictly to do with proficiency in the
28 aircraft for the length of time that you've been there. I came in and I flew as peter pilot
29 with those guys. I think I made it very clear to them from Day One that when we get in
30 the aircraft when it has to do with the operation of the aircraft you're the boss. They took
31 good care of me and I think by the time they—the system that we had the other aircraft

1 commanders in your platoon had to agree on each guy as he came along. They had to
2 agree that he was ready to become an aircraft commander before he would be signed off.
3 Even after I became with the changing and the situation and all I became the platoon
4 leader while I was still a peter pilot. I told them then nothing has changed. I'm the
5 platoon leader, but I'm still a peter pilot until you guys say that I am ready.

6 SM: On the ground administratively and all the rest you are the platoon leader,
7 but once you get in the aircraft—

8 HB: It's yours. They trained me and they kept me going.

9 SM: That's great.

10 HB: You know that's—

11 SM: In particular I was wondering if you could describe how you felt about your
12 training and before going to Vietnam. How well did that prepare you for your service in
13 Vietnam? In particular, of course, in terms of leadership, but also some of the nuts and
14 bolts of just being in the Army now and finding yourself in a war. Did you feel like you
15 were well prepared for what you encountered?

16 HB: No, I don't think that I was prepared at all. I think I had probably more
17 insight as an officer leadership-wise than a lot of the guys simply because of my age and
18 experience at the time I arrived there. I had almost seven years of service before I was
19 commissioned. So I think I understood the relationship between officers and enlisted
20 much better than many of the officers did simply because I had been on both sides of the
21 fence. I think I understood better what a good working relationship could be and
22 particularly in an aviation unit I think a working relationship between the pilots and the
23 other crew members it's a much closer relationship than in a normal, in other military
24 units. I think the warmness of that relationship, the closeness of that relationship is far
25 more important than it is in infantry units or artillery units and things of that nature, but I
26 think for the most part our officers understood that. We had a couple of commanders that
27 didn't, but guys like George Jackson and Dennis Hen and those guys certainly did
28 understand the relationship much better.

29 SM: What about what was happening in Vietnam more specifically whether or
30 not you felt that you were briefed well enough or you understood exactly what it was that
31 we were trying to accomplish in South Vietnam?

1 HB: I think we were probably briefed as well as anyone could brief us at the
2 time. I think Vietnam is a classic example of how this nation should not attempt to wage
3 a war. I'm a firm believer that the politicians do their thing, do their best to resolve issues
4 without involving the military, but that once they involve the military and commit the
5 military in the fray they should get the hell out of the way and let the military do their
6 job. That, of course, did not happen in Vietnam. The restraints that were placed on the
7 military were absolutely impossible to conduct proper actions in. When you're receiving
8 fire and you're unable to return that fire because you can't specifically pinpoint the exact
9 location that it's coming from, that to me is unacceptable restraint to place on your
10 people. We lived with that every day.

11 SM: You were prohibited from returning fire even if you were taking fire.

12 HB: In some areas and at some times during the war, not all the time. Most of the
13 time during my tenure with the 71st we did return fire when we received fire. During my
14 second tour, especially, most of the time there you were required to identify the specific
15 target on the ground that was shooting at you. You can't—from fifteen hundred feet or
16 from any altitude of flying a helicopter you can't always do that. There's value in you
17 know it's coming out of that clump of trees or it's coming out of that hooch so you
18 suppress it. If you can't do that then you're sitting up there fat, dumb, and happy. Or
19 you've gotten fire out of that hooch for that last three days in a row. So if you're smart if
20 you've got to fly by there today you suppress that sucker before you start receiving fire,
21 you can't do it if you're not receiving fire now. It was very easy at night if you're
22 receiving fire with tracers and all. It's very easy to tell where it's coming from, not nearly
23 as easy in the daytime, not nearly as easy. Maybe you would know exactly where that fire
24 was coming from if you happened to be looking there when it was fired. Maybe you
25 wouldn't, you know, it depends on what's down there. A rifle shot during the daytime,
26 shoot, you don't see very much, you don't see very much. Most of the time you're just
27 guessing where it's coming from. As far as an exact spot it depends on the terrain and
28 what's there, but if you're looking down at a little village, which house did that round
29 come from, you don't have any idea. You know it came out of that village.

1 SM: Now when that kind of stuff happened would you call in back to the
2 headquarters and would an infantry unit be dispatched to go down there and ferret that
3 sniper or that group of people out?

4 HB: Well, no, usually not because, I mean, that was an everyday occurrence.

5 SM: So this was typically—

6 HB: Not necessarily in the same location but various places this happened all the
7 time. You couldn't hit them all.

8 SM: This was en route to other missions. You had to keep on going with your
9 other missions you couldn't stop and investigate each time you are shot at.

10 HB: No, no. No, no.

11 SM: What did you think about the overall mission of the United States in Vietnam
12 and not retrospectively but at the time did you have any thoughts one way or the other of
13 what the United States was doing there in Vietnam and whether or not we should have
14 even been involved?

15 HB: Well, of course I felt that we should. I very strongly felt that what we were
16 doing there was the right thing. The people that we were exposed to in South Vietnam
17 were of course pro-American but those were the people that were interacting with the
18 American military there and, of course, if they were not in there inner hearts pro-
19 American they certainly were not going to let that be known, so that was all we were
20 exposed to. But I think most of the people in South Vietnam probably would have
21 preferred to maintain a non-communist system. They certainly did not like the ills that
22 were imposed upon them by the Viet Cong and all. But basically what they wanted was
23 just to be left alone. I mean they don't want to be either one. Leave me alone and let me
24 tend my rice paddy and do things the way my family has been doing it for the last
25 thousands of years. I don't care about politics. I don't care about any of this. Just leave
26 me alone. This is my little piece of land. I think—I don't know anything about the
27 Domino Theory at all, the thing that that's why we were involved there because you have
28 got to stop the spread of communism somewhere, you know. That is for the politicians to
29 answer. I think what we did over there was wrong in that you can bet that most of those
30 people that actively supported us over there and were with us over there suffered greatly
31 after we abandoned them.

1 SM: Oh yeah.

2 HB: That was wrong. We should be careful of involving ourselves in situations
3 that we are not willing to see through to a conclusive end. For that reason and that reason
4 only I was terribly opposed to the current involvement in Iraq. It has absolutely nothing
5 to do with whether or not Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction or whether or
6 not he deserved to be removed from power. I don't, there is any question but what he did.
7 They way I define weapons of mass destruction, he certainly had them because he had
8 already used them and that being the gas and gas is as much a weapon of mass
9 destruction as anything. Whether or not he was close to developing a nuclear weapon and
10 was able to get rid of the evidence, I don't know and don't really care but I was opposed
11 to involving it because I told my wife the military is going to wind up taking the brunt of
12 the effort there just like they did in Vietnam. The American—it is going to take a long
13 time in a no-win situation and the American people are going to tire of the effort and not
14 be willing to pay the price and demand that we get out. I asked you what's going? The
15 one thing that I did not want to see (pause) is just what I am afraid we are going to see.

16 SM: Operational stuff in Vietnam. I was wondering if you would discuss or
17 describe, I guess, some of your operations in Vietnam as a part of the 71st Assault
18 Helicopter Company and, you know, what was your area of operations, your primary area
19 and what kind of support and activities were you engaged in?

20 HB: Well, about a month after I joined the unit, actually about two weeks after I
21 joined the unit, the unit was stood down—was the term they used—we were put on hold
22 to relocate on what we were told would be a temporary reassignment to support the 196th
23 Light Infantry Brigade. In fact, the 196th Light Infantry Brigade had been selected to be
24 part of the Task Force Oregon up at Chu Lai which was well up the South China Sea
25 coast about, I guess about 40 or 50 miles south of Da Nang. We were stood down and
26 told to prepare for the relocation. The stand down actually took about two weeks during
27 which we sat around and waited, you know, the old hurry-up-and-wait game. Finally the
28 day came and we moved out with the entire company, everything that we could muster to
29 Chu Lai. We relocated up there and learned right away that we were in a very different
30 operational environment. We went from very nice comfortable living facilities at Bien
31 Hoa to tents and sand at Chu Lai. I think we had been at Chu Lai for about thirty days

1 when the last of the helicopter engines that we had left Bien Hoa with the last of engines
2 was replaced with new engines and we started replacing engines that had been replaced
3 since we arrived at Chu Lai. An engine was lasting, you know, less than 100 hours of
4 flight time and we were having engine failures and this was caused by the sand that we
5 were operating in up there. Every time that we would land the helicopter you would kick
6 up such a dust storm and that sand being ingested through the turbine engine that is was
7 wearing out the turbine blades, sand blasting the blades and causing them to wear out.
8 They sent like homing tech reps up to survey our operational area and try to determine
9 what we were doing wrong that was wearing out so many engines. They came up and
10 took one look at the environment we were operating in and there is your explanation.

11 SM: Sure.

12 HB: So we started receiving shipments of oil and tar and all that they spread on
13 the ground in our flight line area to hold the dust down to keep us from creating dust
14 storms when we landed there so that a small number of dust storm landing was
15 eliminated but still out in the operational area every landing is a dust storm. We improved
16 the situation but we did not eliminate it. They eventually—that resulted in modified
17 filters for the Huey which kept out a great deal of the sand. Eventually that problem was
18 at least greatly reduced. Engine failures were still a very common part of life over there
19 but at least we could get several hundred hours out of an engine before it failed. You
20 know, typically we would have usually a company-sized combat assault, several in the
21 course of a week. We were primarily supporting the 196th Light Infantry Brigade which
22 had three infantry battalions. There would be a company or larger size operations, three
23 or four a week, that we would conduct a combat assault and then the remainder of the
24 missions during the course of the week would be what we referred to as ash and trash
25 missions, resupply. You know, everything that the infantry received out in the field they
26 received by air and we took it to them or they didn't get it. Once they left their base camp
27 and went out on an operation they were totally dependent upon helicopter support. There
28 were not ground vehicles operating out to these outlying sites simply because road
29 transportation was not safe. Where there were roads and in most areas there were not
30 roads to the sight but even if a road existed there it wasn't safe to travel that road—not
31 that the helicopter travel was all that safe but it was safer than road travel. A typical day

1 might start 4:00 or 4:30 in the morning. Usually you were taking off on a flight after
2 getting dressed and having breakfast at home you were taking off on a flight pretty close
3 to first light; sometimes in the dark especially in the wintertime in the dark you would go
4 out to the unit that you were supporting for the day and then fly missions as directed by
5 their S-3 Air, normally. Their operations officer, whose assistant operation officer whose
6 function it was to coordinate aerial support for the day. These were normally single-ship
7 operations and might involve supporting a number of different locations during the
8 course of the day. Quite often you would be assigned to a battalion for the day and they
9 would have a number of different elements out at different locations in the field and you
10 would be taking supplies to each of those different elements. Supplies involved just about
11 everything that a person needs to exist: their food, their water, their ammunition,
12 replacement personnel. Whatever they needed we carried to them. Combat assaults,
13 during the time with the Rattlers most of the combat assaults were company-sized
14 operations which usually involved a compliment of ten aircraft, ten troop carriers—

15 SM: How many gunships?

16 HB: Depending on the situation either a light or a heavy fire team. Light fire team
17 being a two-ship team, heavy being three ships, but depending on the tactical situation it
18 could involve more than that. We really did not like to do combat assaults without some
19 escort. We did it on an occasion but that was not something that we looked forward to.
20 Combat assaults—well, during the early days up at Chu Lai almost all of our combat
21 assaults, of course, what we termed full-suppression combat assaults. You are going into
22 an LZ usually these LZs were out in an area where there were no known friendlies and
23 we like to go in what we term full suppression. A true full suppression usually involved
24 artillery prep followed by an Air Force prep and then we came in with the slicks with the
25 guns escorting us and the guns were firing full prep as we went in and were firing with
26 the door guns at the same time. Though that is a loud chattering, nerve-wracking
27 experience the first time or two you do it, it becomes very reassuring and soothing after a
28 while. You feel much more comfortable going in that way. Sometimes you know you
29 receive fire but most of the time when you go in full suppression you do not receive fire
30 because what the suppression does is if Charlie is there it forces him to put his head in the
31 hole and he doesn't do a lot of shooting while he is in the foxhole. You put his head down

1 and you are okay, you can get in and out quick in a hurry and that is not going to take a
2 very long time. Most of our troops were well trained in that they exited the aircraft very
3 fast and those that were not fast enough got a little help because our crew didn't want to
4 be on the ground there any more than the pilots did. If you are a grunt onboard the
5 aircraft it behooves you to move real fast or you are going to get some help. We have got
6 a million dollar machine that the government doesn't want us wasting and we certainly
7 don't want to waste it because if we do we are going to be stuck on the ground there and
8 that is not where we want to be. I don't think—I am sure it happened and it probably
9 happened more down at Bien Hoa on some of the operations they had down there before I
10 was really involved with the company. I don't know of a single incident in which we had
11 up at Chu Lai, we had anyone shot on a full-suppression combat assault. They were nerve
12 wracking but they were reasonably safe. What you have got to watch out for is incidents
13 like the one I told about earlier when I took the round through the chicken plate that was
14 you know a—there wasn't supposed to be any action there that day. The unit was being
15 pulled out, this was in the PZ (pick-up zone) now, we had put them in that morning and
16 they were being pulled out because they hadn't found anything in the area and yet right
17 there in the PZ where they were in a spider hole was Charlie. My gunner saw him and
18 killed him.

19 SM: Wow. Well, that brings up an important question. How effective and how
20 accurate did you guys think the intelligence briefings were before you went out on
21 operations? Did you feel like you were getting good intelligence and good information
22 prior to your operations or were you surprised more often than not by those types of
23 events where there wasn't supposed to be anybody there but all of a sudden when you get
24 outside there is? Which was the norm?

25 HB: I would say just as often as not the information was wrong.

26 SM: So about 50/50.

27 HB: Yeah, about 50/50. You know, this wasn't intelligence information we had
28 about the area, this was confirmed by the troops from ground. We had been out here all
29 day looking, there is nothing here.

30 SM: Especially on that incident on the PZ.

1 HB: How much looking they had been doing, I am not to sure of. Going back to
2 the intelligence, now, I am sure in Vegas—have you interviewed Frank Anton and the
3 POWs?

4 SM: I have interviewed Sam Fister, Jim Fister.

5 HB: Jim Fister, okay.

6 SM: But I have not interviewed Mr. Anton yet.

7 HB: Okay I was the operations officers when Frank was shot down. I had, that
8 was the 5th of January. I had two months left to go in-country. Just about that entire two
9 months was spent conducting small raids and combat assaults with small, usually five-
10 ship formations with a platoon or something like that reacting to intelligence reports of
11 where Americans presumed to be POWs had been spotted. I mean, we were all over the
12 countryside. Every day almost we got a report and would scramble and put together five
13 ships to go out and put this unit in because of a sighting here or a sighting there. On all of
14 them the intelligence reports we got back was they had been here but they were moved
15 before we got there, that is what we were told. You talk to Frank, it didn't happen, didn't
16 happen. He was in a POW camp within a couple of days of his capture and he was only in
17 four POW camps the whole time he was held in the south, three years he was in four
18 camps. He wasn't moving around.

19 SM: So what would you attribute to this rather frantic activity trying to find them
20 and getting this intelligence that said they were there and then getting the feedback on the
21 ground that they were here but were sent someplace and this happening—how many
22 times would you estimate that happening if you would have put just a round figure? Was
23 it a dozen, two dozen, more than that?

24 HB: Over that sixty-day period I would say, I would say eighteen to two dozen
25 times.

26 SM: Wow.

27 HB: Keep in mind, now, this is the intelligence that we down at the company
28 level are being fed. It is also the intelligence that the infantry unit that we are taking in is
29 being fed.

30 SM: It is kind of interesting—

1 HB: But where is it coming from? Where was it generated? Was it something
2 created within our system or was it information that our system was being fed? I don't
3 know. I know that it doesn't match with Anton's experience. Our POWs were readily
4 identifiable because you know there were two white guys and a black guy.

5 SM: That's the information you guys were getting.

6 HB: Yeah.

7 SM: These are descriptions of the guys that are supposedly on the ground here.

8 HB: Yeah.

9 SM: You know, what a remarkable bit of information.

10 HB: I distinctly remember, you know, that information and because the whole
11 company, of course, was very frantic.

12 SM: Yeah, you guys are trying to find them. I'm going to go ahead and pause of a
13 minute. I am curious—I am going to go ahead and turn this on again. The attempt of
14 operations from one area to another when you guys moved from Bien Hoa up to Chu Lai,
15 was there a significant increase in the overall tempo of your missions or was it pretty
16 much the same. Did you guys find yourselves on more operations?

17 HB: You really would need to discuss that with someone else in an interview that
18 had more time at Chu Lai. I really only flew a couple or three missions at Chu Lai. I say
19 at Chu Lai, at Bien Hoa. I don't know enough about the tempo down there. I recall only
20 going on one combat assault in the Bien Hoa area and I flew all two or three other days
21 on ash and trash missions and that is all I flew there.

22 SM: About how many months were you there in Bien Hoa?

23 HB: At Bien Hoa? Oh, before we stood down I was there less than two weeks.

24 SM: Oh, okay. Two weeks, stood down, and then moved to Chu Lai.

25 HB: We sat there for ten days or so after we stood down during which time we
26 didn't take any missions just pack it up and get ready to go.

27 SM: Sure. By April, May of '67 you are in Chu Lai.

28 HB: Oh, in April we were in Chu Lai, yeah. I had less than thirty days in-country
29 when I arrived in Chu Lai.

30 SM: Okay. You were in Chu Lai, then, for the rest of your time with your unit.

31 HB: Yes, yes.

1 SM: That means you were there in Chu Lai during Tet of '68 and, of course, this
2 is the same timeframe when Frank and Jim were captured, January of '68.

3 HB: Yeah.

4 SM: Let me go ahead and pause for a second. Thank you, sir. We are back again.
5 Again we are talking about Tet of '68 now and so I was wondering if you could tell me
6 what happened there with your unit when Tet hit and, you know, what do you remember
7 about it and I guess how was your unit prepared for that if they were prepared at all?

8 HB: Well, we were not prepared at all. We had grown very, I would have to say
9 lackadaisical as far as our perimeter security and all in our company area. We hadn't
10 done much in the way of bunkers and protective areas. The mortars that the VC had were
11 not—we were well within the perimeter of Chu Lai. We did not have a perimeter sector
12 responsibility. We were internal in Chu Lai, well inside the compound and the mortars
13 would not reach us so we had no fear of mortars impacting in the company area and we
14 hadn't built bunkers and all as we should have to prepare for that. At that point Charlie
15 was not using any of the longer-range rockets on Chu Lai. Of course, that all changed
16 with Tet. They were able to lob some longer-range rockets which did impact in the area
17 and also they were able to breach the perimeter and get sappers into the ammo dump
18 which was, oh, as the crow flies probably less than a half a mile from our company area
19 and they were able to destroy sizeable ammunition stashes in the ammo dump. When Tet
20 broke we actually had shrapnel. I don't think that we actually had any rounds impacting
21 in the company area but we had shrapnel from rounds that did come into the company
22 area. We had considerable concussion damage. The wall of my hooch was blown out.
23 What we had was a, you know, a screen wire wall to the hooch but this was during the
24 rainy season and during the rainy season we rolled plastic down to cover the screen wire
25 and keep the rain out of the hooches. That created a little bit of a barrier to the force of
26 the air from the concussion which meant that the impact of the concussion went against
27 the walls and took the walls out.

28 SM: Wow.

29 HB: Since the air couldn't go through so there was damage to the walls because
30 of that. Of course, immediately after the initial night of Tet we got very busy building
31 bunkers.

1 SM: Yes, sir.

2 HB: Six weeks later when I departed we had some very—

3 SM: Good bunkers in place.

4 HB: Good bunkers. I am sure that they kept bunkers from then on.

5 SM: Yes, sir.

6 HB: But the only time that we actually had an impact with the company area that I
7 recall was the night of that Tet first, you know, the night of Tet, the first incident. After
8 that even though we—Chu Lai would receive incoming rounds we would go to the
9 bunkers anytime that happened. We never had anything impacting in the company area
10 but we did have shrapnel in the company area that night and we had damage to some of
11 the buildings. One of the more interesting aspects of this, you know, we had, of course,
12 we had all kinds of indigenous personnel working in the company area and some of the
13 other guys may have told you this story, I don't know. We had hooch maids and KP
14 personnel and girls working in the club and we had a company barber who gave us all our
15 haircuts and shave, you know, and he works on you with a straight razor and all that good
16 stuff. He was one of the bodies that was found in the wire the next morning after Tet. He
17 was moved down at the perimeter wire trying to breach into Chu Lai the night of Tet. It
18 kind of made us sit back and think, "Hey, you know last week that guy was shaving my
19 neck with a straight razor. Last night he got killed in the wire." That's the kind of thing
20 that became very commonplace, I guess. His body was identified as one of the bodies
21 killed. Of course, we were minus a company barber then.

22 SM: Did you all enforce more strict regulations regarding having Vietnamese
23 come into the base after that?

24 HB: Yeah. They did, of course. This was all handled above our level, we never—

25 SM: You were just enforcing what came down.

26 HB: Yeah. This—there was a process with the military police at division level to
27 vet these people and let them onto the installation. They all went through shakedown
28 procedures coming and going every day, see, so it required a little bit of gall to do what
29 he did. You know, he was there every day for months and—you know that he doesn't
30 have to be stealing supplies, the information he can take back, the measurements that he

1 can give about where certain facilities within the company area are located and that kind
2 of thing can greatly improve the accuracy of any incoming mortar fire and—

3 SM: It pays things off, giving them information back.

4 HB: That kind of thing apparently, apparently our experience with him was not
5 terribly unusual but that was one that, you know, I distinctly recall occurring.

6 SM: Well, what other events do you remember from Tet and especially in the
7 immediate, like for instance, just for the month of February, do you remember very much
8 in terms of what was going on? When you were fighting at that point, when you were
9 going in on these assaults was it against what you thought were Viet Cong units, that is,
10 South Vietnamese civilians that were guerilla fighters or were these the main force North
11 Vietnamese units that were in there?

12 HB: It was some of both. I think the experience of the unit down at Bien Hoa was
13 almost exclusively Viet Cong type units. Initially when we went up to Chu Lai we were
14 mostly against Viet Cong forces but well before Tet this trend had changed and we were
15 going against North Vietnamese regulars more often. That then was what it remained the
16 rest of my time over there on that tour. Although you know things stayed pretty active for
17 a week or so after Tet and then, you know, action became almost nonexistent.

18 SM: Really?

19 HB: Oh, yeah. I say action—no, we were busy.

20 SM: Sure.

21 HB: Putting troops out looking and all but we weren't getting any action.

22 SM: Wow.

23 HB: There was nothing there.

24 SM: That's interesting.

25 HB: I mean we devastated—the North Vietnamese were totally—

26 SM: Well, they were expecting a general uprising and they got that.

27 HB: And it didn't materialize, it didn't materialize. They were totally devastated
28 from Tet. You know, if we had pushed the advantage that would have been the end of the
29 whole thing right there but, you know, that was not our goal. But all during the later half
30 of February and the first part of March and I left about the 11th or 12th of March. I don't

1 remember the exact date. There were a lot of operations, a lot of busy work, there wasn't
2 much happening. We weren't finding anything.

3 SM: Well, when you left in March you came to the U.S. and were an instructor at
4 Ft. Rucker, is that right?

5 HB: Yes.

6 SM: How surprised were you by the atmosphere here in the United States when
7 you came back? Were you surprised at all?

8 HB: I was very surprised. I really had no inkling over there of the level of
9 dissatisfaction over the war until I came back. I flew into Ft. Lewis, CTAC, I guess and
10 flew out of there and there wasn't—I saw a couple of demonstrators there but really
11 nothing compared to what I saw in 1970 when I went back and '71 when I came back. I
12 did that down in, out at Travis going from San Francisco and the anti-Vietnam
13 vehemence was much higher down there. I remember at Ft. Rucker I lived at post at Ft.
14 Rucker, I had quarters on post and I think this was in early '69 and I never went out there
15 and never observed this but I remember a couple of times an alert going out over the post
16 that we had demonstrators organizing at the gates at Ft. Rucker and you know we were
17 supposed to stay away from the gates so there wouldn't be any confrontation or anything
18 of that nature.

19 SM: Sure, sure.

20 HB: I thought, you know, this is just utterly ridiculous. The whole idea that we are
21 going to demonstrate against the military for what we are doing in Vietnam, I mean if
22 you want to demonstrate, you want to protest the war, get your ass up to Washington and
23 talk to your congressman. He is the one who put the troops over there but let's don't be
24 bothering with the troops. But of course that was not where the emphasis was.

25 SM: So while you were at Rucker were you training mostly warrant officers
26 getting ready to go over to Vietnam, Americans.

27 HB: Warrant officers and officers both. We had classes of both, more warrant
28 officers than officers but we did have both. I was assigned to what was called TACX, the
29 department of tactics at Ft. Rucker. The department of tactics consisted of TAC1 and
30 TACX. TAC1 was where single-ship tactics were taught and TACX was where formation
31 tactics were taught. TACX had the last two weeks of the student experience. We had

1 them for two weeks and then they graduated. In fact, we worked a four-day week the first
2 week and a three-day week the second week. A typical day we tried to be in position to
3 start the flight day at the break of dawn and we went until the day's mission was
4 complete. During the summertime that might be fairly early afternoon on some days. On
5 Thursday of the first week was night flight day and so we flew until the night training
6 was completed which again depended upon the time of the year and how soon we could
7 start the evening. It would go until, you know, you get home two or three o'clock in the
8 morning Friday morning during the summertime when it got dark late and you would get
9 home around midnight during the wintertime when it got dark early. It was formation
10 flying and load flying and that kind of thing. We hauled internal loads in, sling loads in
11 formation. Did simulated combat assaults both at Ft. Rucker and down at Eglin Air Force
12 Base in Florida with the Ranger students during their swamp training down there to give
13 the students the opportunity to actually fly the aircraft. Because in a normal training
14 situation that is what you don't get. I mean you learn to fly the helicopter but you don't
15 get all the other things in with it. We did actual combat loads with the students on those
16 days. Then on the second Wednesday which was their last day of training it terminated.
17 These students actually lived at field site, we had a field site. We met them at the air field
18 on Monday morning of the first week and flew out to the field site and they stayed out
19 there. We could come in at night and we generally traveled back and forth by bus or by
20 aircraft because we are always exchanging some aircraft, bringing one in for maintenance
21 and taking another one out so you might have that or might ride on a bus but the students
22 stayed out in the field and lived out there for the duration. We would go out for the day's
23 missions. We have an airfield out there that we flew out of near where they were camped
24 and the whole bit. Then on that second Wednesday we had a massive fly by. There were
25 two companies of students going through simultaneously and we would have on the
26 second Wednesday we would have a massive fly by of both companies in one massive
27 formation fly by the post parade field and we had a set time that we were supposed to fly
28 by the post headquarters and do that fly by and you better be right within about five
29 seconds of the appointed time over the flag pole and then land at the air field and that was
30 the end of their training. During my last six months there I was one of the flight
31 commanders. I had one of the companies and a good friend of mine had the other

1 company and we alternated classes being responsible for leading the formation. We went
2 to great extremes with checkpoints all along the roof to keep tabs of our time and we
3 would slow down and speed up and do whatever was necessary to time ourselves to hit
4 the flag pole. We would always just before we would leave to go to, to start the flight and
5 one of the last things we did was call the general's secretary and get a time check with the
6 clock there in the headquarters and make sure that our watches were in sync with the time
7 they had there because, you know, if your watch was off by a minute you could hit right
8 there at the time you were shooting for the but the general is looking at a different clock
9 and he thinks you are a minute late and he is very unhappy about that. That all sounds
10 utterly ridiculous but it isn't because when you are doing a combat assault—

11 SM: It's about precision.

12 HB: That timing is everything.

13 SM: Yep, it is about precision.

14 HB: If you get to the LZ a minute early you are going to be flying right into the
15 suppression and if you get there a minute late Charlie has got time to get his head up and
16 get ready for you. A lot of the things that when you talk about it in this kind of
17 environment it sounds ridiculous. What difference does it make whether you fly over the
18 flag pole fifteen seconds one way or the other? It doesn't make a bit of difference but the
19 skill that it teaches you is very important and that is what we were trying to do. Of
20 course, you have been to Vietnam and you have coordinated those assaults and that was
21 my job as the operations officer. You already know the importance of that. For that
22 young student going through the training this probably seemed like so much Mickey
23 Mouse but he found out pretty shortly that it wasn't Mickey Mouse because, you know,
24 his next stop was right where I had been.

25 SM: Was it only Americans you were training at Rucker or did you have
26 Vietnamese there, as well?

27 HB: We had a few. Each class would have not just Vietnamese but allied students.

28 SM: Yeah, other nationalities.

29 HB: Yeah, we had all kinds of students. In fact, you know, most of the training
30 courses that I attended in the military there were always some allied students from

1 somewhere in the classes. I had Iranian students in my basic fixed-wing training course at
2 Rucker in '63. The Shah was still in power and we had four Iranians in my class.

3 SM: Well, what made you decide to go back to Vietnam for your second tour
4 because you had to volunteer for that, didn't you?

5 HB: Where did you get your information?

6 SM: You didn't go back to Vietnam?

7 HB: Oh, yes, but I didn't volunteer.

8 SM: You didn't volunteer.

9 HB: Oh, no.

10 SM: I thought you guys had to volunteer to go back for second tours.

11 HB: Oh no, no, no.

12 SM: They could send you back if they wanted?

13 HB: You got selected, friend.

14 SM: Oh, you got selected. Okay.

15 HB: No, no. You didn't volunteer. I mean, you could but not many people did.

16 SM: All right, well then, how did you get selected? When did you go back for
17 your second tour?

18 HB: I went back in September of 1970. I went to Rucker, arrived there in April of
19 '68 after taking thirty-days leave out of Vietnam. I stayed at Rucker then until late
20 August of '69 terminating that assignment as the flight commander there in TACX. I was
21 selected for the Infantry Officers Advanced Course and went to Ft. Benning to go to that
22 course. That was about a nine-month course. Of course, coming out of Benning I know
23 where I am going I don't have to be told so there is a lot of jockeying for whatever I can
24 get en route. I still want to fly my old engine fixed-wing.

25 SM: Oh, okay.

26 HB: I have gotten a, what we refer to as a bootleg checkout, in the T-42 which
27 was the dual-engine trainer. I want to fly U-21s, which was the Queen Air I was trying to
28 think of. I couldn't remember the designation but it was a U-21, that is what I want to fly
29 in Vietnam on my second tour. I am bargaining with infantry branch for a U-21 check out
30 and they tell me that, you know, the infantry has no requirement for U-21 pilots, they
31 don't need it. They offer me a maintenance officers' course at Ft. Eustis. Well, you know,

1 maintenance doesn't appeal to me. I don't want that. We finally compromised. They are
2 going to send me to the infantry, not the infantry, to the instrument examiners course at
3 Ft. Rucker en route back to Vietnam. I am going to be an instrument examiner. Army
4 regulations say that in order to be an instrument examiner, in order to go to the course
5 you have got to have a current instrument ticket; mine is expired. I told the guy this, "Oh,
6 don't worry about it. They will renew it for you down there." I said, "Well, the reg
7 doesn't say that. It says it has got to be current when you start." "Don't worry about it.
8 They will take care of it for you." All right. So I go to Ft. Rucker after I finish the
9 advanced course. It is TDY (temporary duty) down there, you know, and I have got my
10 wife with me and everything. First thing they do is, "Your ticket is expired." "Yeah,
11 branch told me not to worry about it that y'all would take care of it." "Unh-unh. You
12 can't get in the course." "You have got a U-21 class starting anytime?" "Yeah, I have got
13 a class starting next Monday." "Got any openings in it?" "Well, we have got one but you
14 have got to get your branch to get you the quota." I call that branch assignments officer
15 back and I said, "They won't let me in the class and you have got me down here wasting
16 the government's money for nothing." "I have got a solution for you, though. If you will
17 go over and talk to so and so they have got a quota for one U-21 slot." "You can get it for
18 me and I can fly U-21s." Well, of course, he had some choice things to say to me about
19 going behind his back and setting things up but he did it and I got the U-21 checkout,
20 which was what I wanted. My stick mate in the U-21 class had a good friend who was the
21 company executive officer in the CAC company at Long Thanh which was the command
22 airplane company, that's what CAC stood for, which was the VIP fixed-wing unit in
23 Vietnam, that is all they did was ash and trash hauling generals around the country in U-
24 21s.

25 SM: Where was that based again?

26 HB: Long Thanh.

27 SM: Long Thanh.

28 HB: That is down by Long Binh, not far from Long Binh.

29 SM: Okay, so that's where you need to be assigned.

30 HB: That's where I wanted to go. He contacted his buddy over there in the
31 company and they had it all set up. The skids were greased for us to go and fly U-21s. I

1 am going to enjoy this tour. They had oxygen. You fly that thing at 20,000 feet, see. It is
2 cool up there and you are not landing. Any time you are landing you are going into an
3 improved air field.

4 SM: Like you said, VIPs.

5 HB: That's white shirt flying. Helicopters, that's blue collar, see. That's dirty
6 work. So I am really excited. I get to Long Binh and, sure enough, the guy had the skids
7 greased. The CAC company was assigned to the 164th Group at Long Binh, the group
8 headquarters was at Long Binh and the 164th they were not a typical group in Vietnam.
9 They had the CAC company, they had the 120th Assault Helicopter Company, which was
10 the VIP helicopter company.

11 SM: Okay.

12 HB: They had the, a Bird Dog radio relay company the 173rd, I think it was. They
13 had all of the airfield detachments which operated the control towers and everything on
14 all the Army air fields in Vietnam. They had just a mish mash of stuff there. I made it
15 down as far as 164th Group. The 120th had had a series of safety incidents involving, for
16 lack of a better term, lack of command discretion within the company. The CG
17 (commanding general) had gone on a rampage and the commander had been relieved and
18 they had decreed a whole list of things that would apply to this 120th AHC and the
19 assignment of personnel to it. Chief among them being that the commander of the 120th
20 would be a lieutenant colonel and the XO (executive officer) and all the key officers in
21 the company would be majors. We would all be second tour aviators, no first tour
22 personnel in the command structure of the unit. We had to have standard instrument
23 tickets, we had to have a certain number of—you know, certain positions within the
24 company had to have these qualifications, just a whole list of things. The change of
25 command for the lieutenant colonel to take over had occurred the day before and they
26 were looking for an XO and I am now a major, second tour aviator and I flew into the
27 group that commands this company. Well, my buddy went and flew U-21s. I went to the
28 120th.

29 SM: Where were they stationed again?

30 HB: The 120th was actually stationed at Long Binh.

31 SM: It was in Long Binh.

1 HB: Yeah, we were at Long Binh.

2 SM: And you were the XO.

3 HB: And I am the XO. The commander was one of the greatest commanders I
4 ever worked for. I loved the guy. It was a really fun six months. He, of course,
5 understood that was not what I wanted when I went there but he promised me if I would
6 come and be his XO for six months he would get me a command one way or another for
7 the second half of my tour.

8 SM: This September 1970.

9 HB: This is September of 1970.

10 SM: Of course, now we are in the height of what Nixon was referring to as
11 Vietnamization.

12 HB: Oh, absolutely.

13 SM: What was the mission of the 120th at that point? Who were you guys
14 supporting and what were you guys trying to accomplish there in the Long Binh area?

15 HB: Well, the mission of the 120th was support of USARV (United States Army,
16 Vietnam) and MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) headquarters. We were,
17 as I say, the VIP company. We flew all the headquarters staff around.

18 SM: To include General Abrams?

19 HB: To include General Abrams. We had General Abrams's aircraft. Actually, we
20 had a detachment of the 120th with General Abrams aircraft, the USARV and MACV
21 deputies' aircraft stationed at Hotel 3 in Saigon. That detachment was down there, three
22 aircraft with the crews and all the support necessary for that aircraft. They were detached
23 from the company but they belonged to us. I used to go down and coordinate with them
24 quite often. We also had—now, those three aircraft were assigned, nobody got those but
25 those generals and those crews didn't fly anybody but those generals.

26 SM: Right.

27 HB: Everybody else was old and as needed basis with the exception of we had
28 one, and I can't remember now the guy's name, but one two-star that just gave us a fit.
29 You know, he thought he was a prima donna and every mission that we had he was
30 raising hell about this or that. You know, my job, my primary job, was to answer all the
31 complaints and the inquiries and all of that stuff. The commander told me when I went

1 there he had been an S-1, battalion S-1, in the Cav on his first tour over there. As the
2 battalion S-1 he had primarily flown a desk, he had gotten out and flown very little and
3 he saw my flight records when I checked in there and said, “You got your time the last
4 time. I am getting mine this time. You run the company and I am going flying.” So he
5 spent most of his days out flying and I spent my days handling the paperwork in the
6 orderly room, which was not unusual for an XO. Usually the XO is the admin type and
7 the commander was out with the company and that’s what we did. It was a rare day in the
8 six months that I was there, it was a rare day that I flew. Now, I did—my instrument
9 ticket was expired, as I said before, and he did get me out enough to get that renewed and
10 that kind of thing. I flew just enough, really, to make the minimum. At that time, you
11 know, the Army was still operating on the minimum number of hour system you had to
12 fly every month and get so much a year and all this so I was flying enough to do that but
13 that was about it. I operated the admin side of the company. Sure enough, after six
14 months he got me a company.

15 SM: Okay, which company was that?

16 HB: I commanded the 335th, the Cowboys down at Dong Tam which was the old
17 9th Division base camp down in the Delta. Of course, the 9th Division was long gone by
18 then.

19 SM: So this is into ’71.

20 HB: This is March of ’71 I took that command. Actually, yeah March of ’71.

21 SM: How close to the Cambodian border were you?

22 HB: Oh, we were well away from the Cambodian border. We were south of
23 Saigon but not over on the border that’s right in the heart of the Mekong Delta.

24 SM: That’s right there in the middle, yeah, okay.

25 HB: The biggest thing we had to worry about down there was the water. You
26 know, the entire base camp there was built out of dredging from the Mekong River. One
27 of the first things I faced when I went down there we were just entering the rainy season
28 and I get up one morning and it is raining, the company area is just a quagmire of mud. I
29 go over to the mess hall and the mess hall is closed. The mess hall was closed because the
30 mess hall has a foot of water in it. By now, you know, this ’71 and we have got Stateside
31 type cooking equipment not field stoves and with all the electrical power and everything

1 in there it is not safe to use the facility. We have cut the power to it. I have got an
2 aviation company and all of its detachments that is going to be eating cold C-rations for
3 breakfast and this in 1971 and this is not the way to do things. I go on a campaign to try
4 to get better drainage in the area and I arrange with post engineers for several days about
5 what was needed to drain that area and they just, they don't know what to do. I mean my
6 mess hall was built too low. You know, it is not just the mess hall area but the whole
7 drainage system of the entire installation is operating above capacity and it won't take the
8 water away. I can't figure out what the hell I am going to do. I can't be having
9 interruptions like this every time it rains because it is going to rain every day
10 continuously, situation's only going to get worse. "Okay, get me some cement." "What
11 are going to do?" "Well, this whole country operates on dykes. I am going to build a dyke
12 around the mess hall." So we framed up a mold there about eighteen inches high. You
13 know, the mess hall was sitting on a concrete slab, it was built on a slab and it was just
14 one of these screen wired wall buildings but on a slab with a tin roof over it and all that
15 so it boards up about waist high and then screen wire on up. We went right around the
16 slab outside the building right on the outside of the wall with about an eighteen-inch-
17 high, four- or five-inch-wide cement dyke. We didn't keep it dry inside but we kept the
18 water from accumulating in there. It got in at such a speed that we could keep it mopped
19 out and continue to operate.

20 SM: Now what was the overall mission of the 335th in that area? Who were you
21 guys supporting, what were you guys doing?

22 HB: We were supporting, and I have forgotten now the number of the division,
23 but a South Vietnamese division

24 SM: ARVN division.

25 HB: Yeah, strictly ARVN. We had no U.S. troops down there other than their
26 advisors. The nature of our combat assaults had changed somewhat. We never in the
27 entire—and I only commanded the company about four months because I had a son born
28 the day I left Long Binh to go to Dong Tam to take the company the day before I actually
29 took the company a son was born that had some medical problems that wound up in late
30 July he was going to have surgery to repair some things and I came back for the surgery

1 and because I would have less than thirty days to do when I got back in country they
2 didn't send me back. I only got about four months command time.

3 SM: Well, for those four months how would you evaluate the performance of the
4 ARVN forces that were working in that area that you supported? Do you think they were
5 ready to take on that responsibility or did they need more time to train?

6 HB: They needed, they needed more time. They were not—you know, they were
7 like any other group. Some of them were very dedicated and very competent, others were
8 not. In large, I would have to say that the command structure was not dedicated and in
9 fact a good number of them were not loyal. I think most of the guys would tell you that
10 even when we were over there for the most part, you know, in a combat assault you
11 would not turn your back on a Vietnamese with a loaded weapon. I think all of our
12 crew members would tell you that they were on combat assaults involving the
13 Vietnamese they watched them very closely. There was a lot of caution about how we
14 dealt with them. In most cases that was not necessary but in a few cases it was and you
15 couldn't tell the difference in them.

16 SM: Well, when you came back after your second tour back to the U.S. could you
17 tell a difference in the atmosphere in the country?

18 HB: Very definitely. Both leaving, going over, and coming back both times was
19 out of Travis. I didn't come back into CTAC the second time. I flew into San Francisco
20 and out of San Francisco for the Stateside portion of the trip. You know, the
21 demonstrators at the gate at Travis and at the San Francisco airport were very evident,
22 signs, insults, you know the whole bit. A lot of our briefings, you know, in returning were
23 aimed at preparing us for that, you know, telling us what to expect and, you know, totally
24 ignore it, do your thing, don't get involved we don't want any confrontations between the
25 military and the demonstrators. You know, people spitting at you and things like that
26 were very common, you saw that all the time. Like I say, my feelings on Iraq were simply
27 to avoid a repeat of that.

28 SM: What did you think when President Nixon announced the success of
29 Vietnamization after the Christmas bombing campaign in December '72 and then Peace
30 Accords, of course, of early '73 and the fact that now we are going to completely
31 withdraw and leave South Vietnamese to its own devices. Of course, with aid. We are

1 going to provide them with whatever support we need, they need, in terms of material
2 and economic aid but we are going to completely withdraw our military forces.

3 HB: I have always felt that, you know, we abandoned our allies. I have very
4 strong feelings about that. I am a strong believer that, you know, you should think very
5 carefully before you get involved in something of that nature and be sure that it is
6 something you are willing to see through to the end. We made commitments to those
7 people and we did not honor those commitments. I am sure we got a lot of people hurt
8 because of that and we got a lot of those people and our people killed. The bottom line is
9 what did we accomplish? In my mind we accomplished nothing and that hurts.

10 SM: Well, what did you think when you heard that Saigon fell in April of '75?

11 HB: Well, certainly not surprised, disappointed and hurt but not surprised. Of
12 course, Saigon falling did not occur overnight. There was a buildup to it and it was very
13 predictable but it took several years to accomplish because of the damage we inflicted
14 during Tet of '68. Tet of '68 was the catalyst that ended our involvement in the war but it
15 was also a major mistake on the part of the North Vietnamese, major mistake. I guess it
16 all depends on outlook and what you are willing to sacrifice but the bottom line is they
17 were willing to sacrifice more than we were willing to sacrifice.

18 SM: It is a very perceptive point, sir.

19 HB: Well, we have had a lot of time to think about it so it is not hard to come up
20 with those.

21 SM: Would there be anything in particular you would want future generations to
22 remember about the Vietnam War?

23 HB: Well, yeah, I think so and that is to learn the appropriate lessons from the
24 Vietnam War. You know war, any war, is a dirty, nasty, rotten business and if you don't
25 have the fortitude to see it through then don't start it. That goes without saying regardless
26 of how you feel about the Vietnamese War. Whether we should have been in there or
27 whether we should have not been in there is totally immaterial. If we were not going to
28 execute it properly then we shouldn't have got into it. All we did was set the military
29 back many, many years and did a lot of damage to a lot of people. We lost a lot of good
30 people and I think as far as most of us are concerned we wasted them for no
31 accomplishment at all. That really is the part of the Vietnam War that hurts.

1 SM: Yes sir.

2 HB: You know, I am proud of my record there and I think I did my job and I think
3 the guys that were there, including the ones that died, did their job and they don't deserve
4 what happened. I blame Johnson and Mr. McNamara and their regime for that. I blame
5 some of the generals who—you know, I said earlier that I think MacArthur had gotten out
6 of line and was a prima donna but if he truly felt, truly believed what he was espousing
7 then I admire him for taking the stand that he did.

8 SM: Sure.

9 HB: I agree that the president has to be the final word so I admire Truman for
10 firing him but at least MacArthur had the fortitude to stand up and take his firing. There
11 is no question but what some of the Army hierarchy, some of the military hierarchy, were
12 yes-men during the Vietnam war and they gave Johnson the—they gave him what they
13 thought he wanted to hear. I don't think that can be disputed. I don't know of a single one
14 that lost his job for standing up for what he thought was right. Did they all truly believe
15 that we should be in Vietnam? I don't know. If they didn't somebody should have gotten
16 fired because somebody should have stood up and said "No." Somebody should have told
17 the man that we can't wage a war the way you are requiring us to wage it. Somebody
18 should have made that point. Apparently no one did because no one got fired over it. But
19 I think anyone who has ever been involved in a war knows that you can't wage one that
20 way. You can't place those kinds of restrictions on the man on the ground, you can't
21 expect him to succeed.

22 SM: Yes, sir.

23 HB: You can't give an enemy safe sanctuary and expect to defeat him and that is
24 what we did.

25 SM: Is there anything else you would like to add to your interview?

26 HB: I don't know of anything. I would be glad to—I am enjoying it and I will talk
27 to you as long as you want to talk but, you know, I have had a very happy and successful
28 life since then and hopefully I am going to go on for a good number of more years.

29 SM: I do want to ask you about the VA (Veterans Administration). How well do
30 you think the VA has been taking care of you and other Vietnam veterans?

1 HB: I think probably as is the case with any medical care as good or as bad as the
2 primary physician you get assigned. I did not use the VA for many years. After I retired
3 from—well, in fact, about six or seven years ago. As long as I have worked with
4 Northern I had excellent medical insurance with them and I didn't do anything with the
5 military. I was completely out of it. Then about six or seven years ago I was diagnosed as
6 diabetic on top of the heart condition and all that. My insurance was not quite as good in
7 retirement as it had been with Northern. Not only was my insurance not quite as good but
8 I was forced into—I was in an HMO (health maintenance organization) while I was
9 working and there was no paperwork involved and that was easy enough to handle. Out
10 of the—into retirement I could not take the HMO with me. I had to go to an 80-20 plan
11 that they offered and that became a nightmare as far as the paperwork and all the hassle
12 and this wasn't filed correctly and that wasn't, you know, it just drove me up a tree. Plus,
13 my insurance with Northern was not free. I had to pay for it and what was a nominal fee
14 when I retired over the years kept increasing. The last year I carried it I was paying over
15 400 dollars a month for the insurance for my wife and I. I decided to cancel that and go
16 with Strickland military coverage and I bought a supplement to supplement that. When I
17 was diagnosed diabetic I had heard that the VA had an excellent diabetes management
18 program and because of Agent Orange there were service-connected possibilities there
19 and all of that. I went to the VA and I finally got into the system and was assigned a
20 primary care provider and was very impressed with the service I received. That went
21 along for about three years and my primary provider left and took a full-time job over at
22 Duke there in Durham and I got assigned a new one. Since then I haven't felt that the
23 care was quite as good. Now, the diabetes management program is still quite good. They
24 offered a comprehensive diabetes education program that my wife and I both attended
25 and they monitor me quite closely for diabetes. I go about every three months in to see
26 what is termed a foot nurse who examines my feet and makes sure that circulation is still
27 good in the feet and all of that. Out of that I get a pedicure about every three months,
28 which if you have ever had one is a very pleasant experience, you know, so I enjoy that. I
29 am getting good eye care with the VA now.

30 SM: Oh, good.

1 HB: These are VA glasses and they cost me the price of having them tinted, that
2 cost me \$70.00 but the examination and the basic glasses are free and if I wanted non-
3 tinted glasses the glasses would be free. It is a much more attractive frame then what the
4 Army will give you and the Army won't give me an eye examination. I work up at Ft.
5 Lee one day a week now as a Red Cross volunteer at the pharmacy. I pass out refill
6 prescriptions. You know, I find that a lot of fun, getting back with the military and plus
7 they are in touch with things and I pick up medication from the Army while I am up
8 there. See, the drugs that they carry that we are on I can get them there and they are
9 available at no cost but I can't see a doctor up there or anything like that. I could get a
10 pair of glasses up there if I took a doctor's prescription up there but they are the old horn-
11 rimmed oddball-looking glasses. All of the—

12 SM: The military issue glasses.

13 HB: Military issue, yeah. All of the female troops up there refer to them as the
14 "birth control glasses."

15 SM: Yeah.

16 HB: Because you are guaranteed not to reproduce as long as you are wearing
17 them.

18 SM: Not to get any dates, with those you don't get any dates.

19 HB: Not that that is significant but I don't like the looks of the damn things.
20 These are more, to my way of thinking, mainstream glasses and they are just as good. I
21 have been through, like I say, the diabetes management program. I have been through the
22 (pause) what do you call it? Traumatic stress syndrome, or post-traumatic stress
23 syndrome, I guess it is. I was having trouble with my thought processes there. I have
24 been through their evaluation for that, they have concluded that I have moderate to severe
25 symptoms but for the most part I don't think that I really have a problem. My wife says I
26 have a much shorter fuse then I used to have.

27 SM: You seem to have incorporated your experiences in Vietnam and made it
28 something productive in your life, something positive for the most part.

29 HB: I would like to think so.

30 SM: Yes, sir.

1 HB: Everything that we do in life, every experience that we have, affects what we
2 are and who we are and that certainly has had an effect on me but I can't say that it was
3 all negative. I certainly feel like all of my association with these guys, including over
4 there as positive, even some of them that, you know, I may not always agree with, they
5 are still brothers and we are a team.

6 SM: Yes, sir.

7 HB: I sometimes get very sentimental.

8 SM: Yes, sir, and that is understandable.

9 HB: But—

10 SM: All right.

11 HB: I have thoroughly enjoyed this.

12 SM: Well, thank you, sir. I have as well.

13 HB: I hope I haven't bored you too much.

14 SM: Not at all, not at all.

15 HB: And that you will find something useful in all of that.

16 SM: This has been a very good interview. Why don't I go ahead and I guess I will
17 put an official ending on it. This will conclude the interview and I should have given the
18 date at the beginning on the 20th of April 2006 with Mr. Harold Bowen. Thank you very
19 much, sir. I appreciate it.

20 HB: Thank you.