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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Larry Brown
Conducted by Kelly Crager, Ph.D.
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Transcribed by David Knott**

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting an oral history interview with Mr.
2 Larry Brown. Today is 15 July, 2008. I am in the Special Collections Library at Texas
3 Tech University in Lubbock, Texas, and Mr. Brown is kind enough to join us from his
4 home in McMinnville, Oregon. Good morning, Mr. Brown.

5 Larry Brown: Good morning.

6 KC: Really appreciate your taking time out of your morning and discussing your
7 experiences in Vietnam with us today, participating in the Oral History Project. First I'd
8 like to get some biographical information from you. Can you tell me when you were
9 born and where?

10 LB: Twelfth of November, 1944, Pensacola, Florida, on the Corry Field Naval Air
11 Station.

12 KC: What were your mother and father's names?

13 LB: Pardon?

14 KC: What were your parents' names?

15 LB: My dad was James D. Brown, James David Brown, went by the name usually
16 called J.D. and my mother was Mildred Lela Crawford Brown. Her maiden name
17 Crawford and, of course, it wasn't hyphenated so it was just Mildred Brown.

18 KC: What did you parents do for a living?

19 LB: My dad was career Navy and that's why I was born there on the naval air
20 station in Pensacola and he retired in '59 from the Navy and the we moved to
21 Battleground, Washington, where I had finished my last year, three years of high school,
22 started college and wound up going into the military from Washington actually Portland,
23 Oregon, was my induction center. My mom was a, a homemaker, a housewife and later
24 in life as we got, my brother and I got older, she went to work at the school district in

1 Battleground where we finished up our high school years and then she's now retired
2 living on the property we have in that area.

3 KC: Very good. How would you describe your childhood?

4 LB: I thought it was a good, a great childhood. We grew up in the service, my
5 brother and I. We basically after I was about six months old started moving. Most of our
6 travels what with my father, while my father was in the Navy was up and down the West
7 Coast of the United States and/or Hawaii, Guam, Okinawa, Japan. Then dad retired out
8 the Navy in San Diego and we moved to Washington.

9 KC: So what did you think about all of this moving around?

10 LB: Well, I just thought it was natural, although we later on found out, and in
11 those days it was a lot of fun. You know, not everybody was traveling as much as they do
12 today so my brother and I had a lot of things to share and depending on where we were
13 at, we ran into other families that we, dad had been stationed with in different places. So
14 we got a chance to see a lot of things that most people hadn't seen. Especially being in
15 Hawaii and Guam and Okinawa in the earl '50s so it wasn't that long after World War II
16 to see a lot of things that most, especially Guam and Okinawa, what had gone on there.
17 So we enjoyed, I at least I did.

18 KC: Well, it sounds like it had certainly exposed you at a young age, not to just
19 travel but to seeing different cultures and being experienced in these different things.
20 Was it difficult as a young boy to make friends with all this moving around?

21 LB: I don't think it was really difficult. Both my brother and I are fairly outgoing.
22 Maybe that was the nature we became outgoing because of that but, you know, when you
23 have a good what we thought was a good home life, you know, at least you've got mom
24 and dad there but, you know, like I say, depending on where we went for a while you're
25 always the new kid but pretty soon you fit right in, or seem to, and everyone finds a
26 group to be with and, you know, of course, there weren't as many different styles of
27 groups as there are today, you know, but so I think we fit in pretty quickly and in one
28 way I think it made our life and later life a little easier as far as when we did move or do
29 something, you fit right, you know, able to make friends or associate and do better later
30 on.

1 KC: Sure. Now you mentioned that you have a brother. Was he an older brother
2 or a younger brother?

3 LB: Younger brother. He was born in May of '47 and he spent a couple years, or
4 several years in the Navy during, during the Vietnam era. He was aboard the USS *Black*,
5 a missile cruiser and he was off the coast of Vietnam for a while while I was there on my
6 first tour.

7 KC: What kind of student were you in school?

8 LB: Oh, just an average student. Probably could've worked a lot harder but I
9 didn't. I had passing grades. I was C, B, student, B, C however you want to say that.
10 Participated in athletics and I went on to college and then left college to go into the
11 service in 1966.

12 KC: What kind of subjects appealed to you the most in school?

13 LB: Mainly I was into, you know, during high school I was doing the college
14 prep. Engineering, architecture was what I thought I was going to do, you know, design
15 type architectural design or something.

16 KC: Now, where did you go to college?

17 LB: I went to initially a junior college in Vancouver, Washington. Clark College
18 there and spent a couple years there and then about that time this was in, say, I graduated
19 high school in '63, got out of in '65. I was talking to the Navy recruiters coming through
20 the area there at school about the naval flight program which I was very interested in.
21 Left college in '65, December, or the for the winter term of '65 instead of going on
22 somewhere else and was supposed to go to naval flight school, had been accepted. They
23 stopped the two-year college program that they had at that time and because the draft was
24 hot and heavy, I wasn't in college, had no deferment. I became prime and wound up with
25 a draft notice. Navy department indicated they couldn't do anything for me at the time so
26 my dad suggested because I wanted to fly, why not talk to the Army recruiter as we had
27 my flight or my high school class had been in the Army for a couple years, been to
28 Vietnam, he was a pilot and another friend who was also in my high school class was also
29 just going through the program or getting ready to go down to flight school. I took the
30 test, got accepted and wound up in the Army in March of 1966.

1 KC: '66. Okay, now, as a young man who had been exposed to these different
2 parts of the world and with a father who was career Navy, how aware were you of the
3 U.S. role in the world, the Cold War as it is going on in the early 1950s and early- to mid-
4 1960s?

5 LB: I think I had a little better understanding about the involvement around the
6 world. The fact that we'd been in Okinawa during the Korean conflict, Dad was
7 stationed there. We were living on the island at that time so I knew quite a bit about our
8 involvement with that. Of course, I was very young when that was going on but old
9 enough to, you know, being going to school and having some understanding of it and had
10 a little better understanding. As time went on and I got older, of the U.S. involvement
11 around the world and seemingly that we were a defender but at the same time we were
12 providing or seemed to be wherever we were had been at trying to bring the countries
13 back or bring the areas back to some semblance of self-independence, realized that there
14 was a lot of discontent, so to speak, or a definite division between one side of the world
15 and another, communism having come in and at the end of World War II and basically
16 the Korea conflict and where we went from there. So I had, I guess maybe had a little
17 better understanding, but like many people in the area probably also at the same time a bit
18 naïve that well, everyone will just settle down and we won't have a problem.

19 KC: Sure, so it sounds like saw this as something as being very, very positive for
20 the U.S.

21 LB: I saw the, our influence overseas is fairly as positive, you know. A lot of
22 times people, you know, run around saying, "The ugly American." Well, we were also
23 very generous and spilling lots of money back into the areas where we supposedly had
24 been in conflict. We've never as a country I, we've never owned somebody else. We
25 may have policed them for a while or assisted them to come along but basically the only
26 thing we've ever gained out of any as far as land and all the conflicts we've ever been in
27 is some cemeteries around the world, just to bury our soldiers that they gave their life
28 wherever they were at for that particular country or conflict. But, you know, we've never,
29 we haven't built an empire although we've probably spent enough money to have an
30 empire everywhere.

1 KC: Well, what about American policy towards Southeast Asia or Vietnam in
2 particular? How aware were you when you left high school or when you left the
3 community college of America's role there?

4 LB: Well, like I say, when we in Okinawa there was conflict going on in that area.
5 Our neighbor while we were there in the '50s, was shot down in the South China Sea.
6 They were, their reconnaissance aircraft went down so I remember Skoch being picked
7 up and coming back home later on. But one of the end of the, one of the part of the crew
8 or one or two of the crew members were taken by at that time, the Indonesians, there
9 which was South Vietnam, Indochina rather, had taken those guys prisoner and they were
10 released at the end of the Korean War, eventually, but they were same ones that were,
11 had been picked up and stayed there. So Vietnam had been going on for quite a while. I
12 didn't understand everything. I knew that we were in Vietnam trying to help stabilize
13 South Vietnam from the North's acquisition. I do know that Ho Chi Minh had actually
14 come to this country trying to get us to support his portion or idea of a consolidated
15 Vietnam. Congress, because of our World War II events and association, because at that
16 time Vietnam was a French colony, we came in as opposed to coming in on the side of
17 Ho Chi Minh, we sided with the French because of the World War II connection. You
18 know, we were over there trying to stabilize the country and the ensuing issues and
19 results. Maybe if certain ties hadn't been there we might've come in on the other side.

20 KC: What do you think about that, when you look back on it from today's,
21 prospective of today, or even from the prospective of a young man graduating high
22 school? Based on what you knew about it, what did you think about that American
23 approach to that?

24 LB: Well, I think the American approach is if you have an alliance with
25 somebody, you try to, you can't be changing one alliance today and tomorrow another
26 one and totally pushing somebody aside that's supposed to be your friend or an alliance
27 with you or somebody that is dependent on you saying that you have an agreement and
28 your gonna help take care of 'em. So looking at it, I guess we were pretty much in a
29 situation that we had to support the lines that were already there. Of course, looking back
30 right now, the way the French have treated us, you know, maybe it'd been better if we'd
31 left the, told the French, "Nope, we're not supporting you."

1 KC: Yeah. Well, that's certainly a topic that can go on and on and on.

2 LB: It seemed that certain European countries don't seem to have the same belief
3 that when you have an alliance or a pact to work together that ,you know, its only when
4 they need it.

5 KC: Sure. You say that with the support, especially guys in higher
6 administration, Truman, Eisenhower administration, with the support for the French,
7 what about when the French leave Vietnam, when Vietnam was up for grabs as it were?

8 LB: Yeah, after the French had left Vietnam, you know, the South who basically
9 came back in and said, you know, "Hey," you know, "the French were defeated up at
10 Dien Bien Phu and pulled out of there and came out. Only they got all their people back
11 out only because of huge amounts of money that the French paid to North Vietnam in
12 order to release their POWs (prisoners of war)." We don't pay for POWs. We expect
13 people to be returned as we return them. But when the French pulled out of South
14 Vietnam or out of Vietnam and with the North and South issues, South Vietnam then
15 came to us, of course, and saying, you know, "Hey, we're a French colony or have been
16 and we want to come in on the side, we need your assistance to, or would like your
17 assistance so we can maintain what we've got. We don't want to be overrun or taken over
18 by the North" So that's where, kinda where we came in back into the war and, of course,
19 were with the French, we'd had the advisors with them while they were in Vietnam to
20 begin with. Most people may or may not know that but we had US advisors with the
21 French trying to help them to begin with.

22 KC: Right. So with all of this background knowledge, at least awareness if
23 nothing else, as a young man, when you choose to approach the military as maybe not a
24 career at this point, but possibly so, when you were thinking about joining, did the
25 thought of the Vietnam conflict enter into your mind? This is 1966 when you leave
26 community college so the U.S. was fully vested, invested in Vietnam by that time.

27 LB: Well, yes. I, yeah, I knew that was going on. They, a few, in those days on a
28 college campus, of course, I was speaking about being on a JC (junior college) but I was
29 at the same time going up to a couple other four-year universities, checking to find out
30 what was gonna go on, whether I was going to stay in school and continue, where I might
31 go. College campuses were pro-U.S. involvement in the war. There was a small

1 contingency of people that were, you know, “Oh, we can't do this. We can't do that.” The
2 protest side was, you know, if you had a protest group you'd have two or three people
3 maybe coming to something and holding a banner and shouting and you'd have fifty or
4 100 stand around 'em and tell 'em, you know, “Why don't you wise up and go away?”
5 Where later on in life when many of these protests turned and end up going in the other
6 direction. You know, you had huge numbers protesting something and very few standing
7 there telling them, “Hey, look. Stop the protest or take it somewhere else.”

8 KC: Right.

9 LB: So at that point, yes, I was well, I knew about the war. In fact, I probably
10 guess one of the reasons I went into the service was I was expecting that I would be
11 going.

12 KC: Okay, so this is something you fully expected when you joined.

13 LB: Yeah.

14 KC: Okay.

15 LB: You know, you kinda leave the school thinking, “Well, it will probably be
16 over before I get there.”

17 KC: Now, why would you think that?

18 LB: Well, you know, we'd what we spend? Three years, eight months defeating
19 both the Germans and the Japanese. We'd had a couple of years where we'd been
20 advisors with the United, you know with the South Vietnamese over there and we were
21 just started to crank up with major U.S. forces going into Vietnam. The 1st Cav Division
22 had just had its, one of its, the Ia Drang Valley operation, you know, little things like that.
23 If we were going to be allowed to fight a war, it was obvious that we had both the
24 knowledge or the equipment and ability to win a war and, you know, so you kinda think,
25 “Well, maybe it's not going to be very long.”

26 KC: Sure.

27 LB: When you, all of a sudden you start, you know, we were in-country fighting
28 something you take and hold land. Your only own land if you stand on it or control it.
29 You can't hit it today and then pull back and let the other side come back to it. You
30 know, we limited borders or ways of advancing or chasing the bad guy, so to speak, both

1 the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) and the VC (Viet Cong). So, you know, politics
2 started putting a lot of restrictions on what we could and couldn't do over there.

3 KC: Sure. Well, let ask—

4 LB: Prolong the war.

5 KC: Let me ask you this. What, you mentioned that you were interested in flying
6 with the Navy. I understand the Navy connection with your father, of course, but why
7 fly? What was it that appealed to you about this?

8 LB: My folks, parents told me from the day I was old enough to talk, I'll I'd ever
9 talk about was wanting to be a pilot.

10 KC: Is that right?

11 LB: You know, that was just something that I always was enamored about and
12 wanted to be a member of, do something flying. My dad had, was enlisted in the Navy
13 and had flown during World War II off the *Enterprise* in dive bombers and torpedo
14 planes and was a plane captain aboard ship. So it was, you know, something I thought I
15 wanted to do.

16 KC: You mentioned that you were accepted into the Navy program but the two-
17 year program was ended in, what'd you say? 1965 I believe it was?

18 LB: Yes, they stopped their two-year college program in '65 right after I had been
19 identified. I had an acceptance date and was to report to Pensacola, Florida, in January of
20 '66. About November I got a notice from the Navy that they'd stop the program. About
21 the same time I got a letter from the draft board saying, "You're no longer enrolled in
22 college. Your college deferment has been rescinded. So now we'd like you to report for a
23 draft physical."

24 KC: So what did this do to you? You had your sights set on the Navy and flying
25 with them, then they kinda yanked the rug out from under you, then the Army calls you
26 almost immediately and says, "Show up."

27 LB: Yeah, well, you know, when your being, if your gonna get drafted its any
28 branch of the service is what you could wind up in on that particular day. It was quite
29 depressing or devastating in a way, you know, like, "Now what do I do?" You know.
30 And oh golly, you know, within days I get both letters saying that we can't do something,
31 you know we don't have a program for you and the other one said, "Welcome aboard,

1 son.” So at that point, you’re, you know it’s highs and lows and, like I say, I was
2 probably kinda mopey. My dad said, “Well, why don’t you,” because of knowing some
3 people or knowing about the kids I’d been in school with that were doing this, he said,
4 “The Army. Go down and talk to them.” The recruiter indicated that, you know, there are
5 a lot of guys lined up to get in this program and it may not happen, took the test, and few
6 days later I got a call saying, “Hey, we’ve got a slot for ‘ya if you want to take a flying
7 program in the Army. Come back with your name on an allocation.” So basically the day
8 I was supposed to report for my draft physical, I knew I was gonna go to, was being
9 accepted in the Army flight program and instead of being a draftee, you raise you hand
10 and say, “I’m a volunteer” that particular day and so you can get the programs that you’ve
11 been accepted to and that’s where it went. If you were a draftee, you’d stand there in line
12 and if they needed ten guys for the Marine Corps, they came down and counted off ten
13 from one end of the line or the other and they need two guys for the Air Force, the next
14 two get that or however they do it and, you know, as far as the draftees go. Those that
15 come in as volunteers on that particular day go to the branch that they volunteered for. If
16 their, you know, none of the branches were turning you down, so if you volunteered for
17 the Air Force you probably were gonna be in the Air Force but you had to be a volunteer.
18 In other words, there’s a difference between two years in the service or four years in the
19 service at that time.

20 KC: Sure. So when the Army welcomed you into the flight program, what were
21 your thoughts on that?

22 LB: Well, I was very happy, I was gonna go fly. I wasn’t going to be flying jets
23 off of aircraft carriers but I was going to fly a helicopter. Do something I didn’t know
24 what, much about helicopters at the time. I didn’t know what they really did. I knew that
25 they were being used, starting to be used in Vietnam to move troops around and there
26 were gunships and, you know, aircraft that were flying rockets and stuff like that so
27 you’re gonna join the program and see what happens.

28 KC: So they let you know pretty early, excuse me, they let you know pretty early
29 that it was going to be helicopters rather than fixed-wing?

30 LB: Well, there are two routes you can go, two tracks that you could go but for
31 the most part we knew it was, you know, you could, they said that when you got to pre-

1 flight it, in flight school there would be some guys that would get fixed-wing, majority
2 would get rotary-wing so, you know, your in the back of your mind you're, "Well, I'm
3 not sure what the Army's flying for fixed-wing, but yeah, I'm gonna be a fixed-wing
4 pilot." But its obvious right away when you get there, the only ones that are gonna get
5 that are the very small number and most of those guys were prior service guys that had
6 been approved for that. You know, we had guys that were going through flight school
7 with me in pre-flight they were E-7s, E-8s in the Army, older guys that when I got there,
8 we got there that had been approved for fixed-wing or something like that and that's
9 where it stood.

10 KC: Sure. Well where did you go for basic training?

11 LB: Basic training was Fort Polk, Louisiana.

12 KC: It's a nice place for basic training. Describe your time at Fort Polk to me.

13 LB: Well, it was hot. We got there, let's see, I left home on March, it started
14 getting warm. It became very hot and in Louisiana down in the swampy areas at North
15 Fort where we were at, and went through basic training, you know. The basic training
16 unit was just that. Guys came in there that were in my company when we went through
17 that some were going off to be infantrymen, some were getting the opportunity to be
18 because of their scores were high enough in their ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational
19 Aptitude Battery) test when they came in, their entrance scores and everything, or the test
20 we took there were being identified, they could go to OCS (Officer Candidate School).
21 My scores I was told, I could go to OCS but I told 'em at that point, "I'm sorry. I've
22 already been accepted to Army flight school. Could I do both?" And the answer was,
23 "We'll take you to OCS but we will not guarantee the flight school." So okay, I'll stay in
24 the flight program and be a warrant officer as opposed to an officer, a commissioned
25 officer. Guys, you know, we had young men that were going to be Army cooks, Army
26 Rangers eventually, or you know, mechanics. A basic training company is made up of all
27 MOSs (Military Occupational Specialties), you don't know, you know, and there's guys
28 qualify for it, later on they go off to their AIT, advanced individual training, to specialize
29 in what they were going to do. For the most part, most were going to be infantrymen
30 down the road.

1 KC: So you had to option of going to OCS but you would much rather have
2 flown, apparently?

3 LB: Yes.

4 KC: Okay, so that certainly played a big part in directing you though your career.

5 LB: Yes, sir.

6 KC: In the U.S. Army. We'll where did you go for AIT?

7 LB: We reported at Fort Wolters, Texas. Are you familiar where that was
8 located?

9 KC: Yes, sir.

10 LB: Near Mineral Wells. So reported down there for pre-flight and let's see. We
11 got in there about May and reported there and started the first month you were at school,
12 you get in there and there is no flying or anything. You're basically doing ground school
13 type and what they're doing at that point is there's a lot of military classes your doing,
14 different classes, not so much about flying but about learning about being a warrant
15 officer in the United States Army as a helicopter pilot. The wash out rate at that point was
16 fairly high. I had a roommate that his idea was, his dad was in the service. He thought he
17 was just gonna skate right on through there and within two to three weeks he was gone.
18 When we sat down, we got into our first flight. Started flight school itself after the first
19 month. Our flight instructor sat down and says, "You know, the wash out rate in the first
20 phase is one quarter. So there are four of you here at the table. One of you will probably
21 be gone before this phase is over." It was fairly stringent. You'd hear all kinds of stories
22 of guys getting thinking they're graduating, going on to the next class while moving to
23 Fort Rucker and being told on the bus you didn't make it, get off the bus, you know, or
24 just it was, it was not a give-away program.

25 KC: What generally washed people out there?

26 LB: More times than not, I think it was lack of, they can teach, I think the military
27 always said, "We can teach anybody to fly." It was some aptitude. Some maybe just
28 didn't have the physical skills, coordination or whatever but a lot of time I think it was
29 more academics or, you know, it's like how many, everyone gets their driver's license to
30 drive. There are some you'd just as soon not to be on the highway with.

31 KC: Sure.

1 LB: So, you know, or leave the same parking lot together. You know, so for the
2 most part, you know, as many guys had went to flight school, the rate was fairly high as
3 washing out. Later on it it diminished as the need increased seemingly. When I got to
4 Vietnam I thought I was one hell of a pilot. Within a few days of flying in Vietnam I
5 realized I had a lot to learn.

6 KC: Sure.

7 LB: And that I was, I was just another guy in the batch and if I didn't start paying
8 attention and seeing and applying and seeing what the guys that were, even though they'd
9 only maybe been there a month or two ahead of you, what they were doing. I might,
10 might not finish that tour. So you had a lot of catching up and a lot of learning, very steep
11 learning curve.

12 KC: Right. Well, when you leave Fort Wolters, where were you headed next, to
13 Fort Rucker? Did you know that?

14 LB: After Fort Wolters, Fort Wolters consists of pre-flight, which was that first
15 month, and then you had pre-solo and that was hilarious to watch looking back on it.

16 KC: Explain that to me.

17 LB: Pre-solo is basically you're going out starting to fly with your instructor the
18 first time and he takes you just, I don't know if you've ever gone to an airport and taken
19 one of those, "Hey, come on, little fifteen-dollar airplane rides. We'll let you fly the
20 airplane?"

21 KC: No. Thank goodness, no.

22 LB: Okay, and you get up in the air and, "Oh, here. Hold the stick. All right, see
23 that it keeps you straight and level. Make some nice turns. Okay, real good. Here, hold
24 the collective," that, you know, one at a time letting you do these things and, "Oh, now,
25 and it gets you going and keeps you up in the air," and, "Oh, this is pretty easy." So now
26 we get down and we're instead of taxing on the ground like an airplane, you're hovering.
27 "All right. Hold the cyclic. Just keep us right here at one spot." And, "Okay, now just let
28 go. I got the cyclic. Now you take the collective and just keep us from going up and down
29 too much. Kinda hold us in one spot. Now hold the pedals and keep us, the nose pointed
30 in one direction and then," you know, "Oh, this all looks pretty easy, not bad." So he
31 gives it all to you at one time. "Now do 'em all." And you see a guy, an aircraft there at a

1 hover 'cause the instructor's got it and it's sitting pretty nice pretty soon the student's got
2 it and it starts a little bit of a yaw and a little sway to one side and another and then it just
3 keeps exaggerating because you way behind the aircraft, you start correcting, you
4 overcorrect and then it goes the other direction, you know, just keeps, the pendulum
5 keeps getting wilder and all of sudden then its stops moving 'cause the instructor's taken
6 over again and then he starts you back over. That pre-solo time your probably flying a
7 total of about or out there working in the aircraft anywhere from thirty to forty minutes.
8 When it's done, you're dead tired. You just know that your never gonna learn this, you
9 know, but you look around see other guys are doing it so maybe you will. So that's the
10 pre-solo. Eventually your solo. You get to go around and, boy, all of a sudden you're,
11 you know, you're really hot stuff. Then you're into phase one, P-1, and that's when you
12 start doing stage field work flying around and simulating flying around an airport or
13 what's called stage fields. they can't have all the aircraft in one spot. So they had these
14 little stage fields all over the country. You'd fly out to those and you work traffic
15 patterns, approaches, autorotations and all that and you go through that phase. When you
16 pass that phase, you go onto phase P-2, which now you fly out to those stage fields and
17 instead of landing on the stage field all the time, this strip of concrete out there with these
18 pads, now we're gonna go out to areas what they call confined areas. They had three
19 styles of confined areas. Let's see, was it three or two? Well, we had white tire and red
20 tire. The red tires were ones you had to be cleared into, white tire initially, those were
21 supposed to be the easiest ones to get into and you think, "I'm landing in this confined
22 area." Well, I it might be half the size of a football field but at the time it seemed like it
23 was it was pretty small, 'cause there were some trees around you somewhere. You get
24 into pinnacles, landing on the side of a hill, slope landings and things like that. So you
25 worked out a stage field, you went out there. As your instructor cleared you to different
26 areas, eventually he'd say, "Okay, you're cleared to all of the," and I think red tire areas
27 were dual, in other words you had to be with an instructor all the time, there were white
28 and orange tires and then you could go into the different ones as you were cleared for 'em
29 or he'd say, "Okay, all white tires and these particular other ones, you can use as your
30 proficiency went up." When that was all done, you graduated from there, you went to
31 Fort Rucker, Alabama, where you were gonna get into the more sophisticated aircraft and

1 the, when you got to Rucker, you were doing the first class, you got into, or phase you
2 got into was basic instruments and you were flying a Bell 47-T model, under the hood
3 and you just knew that, you know, there's no way people could do this but you learned to
4 do that. Then you went into advanced instruments where you moved from the Bell 47
5 into the UH-1 and again continued instead of just learning the instrument basics, this
6 became your navigation or actual IFR (instrument flight rules) instrument flight cross
7 countries filing in, and doing more advanced instrument work. Once that was done, you
8 went into UH-1 transition, which was the work horse of the Army at that time in
9 Vietnam, the Huey. Got into that, that took, you got about thirty hours there. When that
10 was done, you passed that phase, you went into tactics. Tactics was your last phase of
11 flight school. At this point now we're going down to areas like in the swamps in, on the
12 Alabama-Florida border where the Rangers work. We're flying out of an area called
13 TAC-X, it was a simulated Vietnam area. You go down there and stay at times for a
14 couple nights at a time and then come back up. All through flight school, until you got to
15 tactics, and in tactics you did the same thing but maybe a little reduced, but you fly either
16 in the morning or the afternoon and the other half of the day, you went to class and it
17 rotated every week. So one week I'd work, fly in the mornings and classes in the
18 afternoon and vice versa the next week.

19 KC: What kind of classes were you taking here at Rucker?

20 LB: All classes pertained to basically, well, there were some others sprinkled in
21 but most pertained to equipment, maintenance, aerodynamics. The equipment in the
22 aircraft as far as how to operate different styles of radios, learning map reading,
23 navigation, just the whole gamut, for nine months, basically what your flight school is,
24 the one month of preflight and eight months of flying and other, basically your
25 involved—well, you may get on the flight line at seven o'clock in the morning or seven
26 thirty but you may be home by the end of the day at five o'clock but you'd still be
27 studying until maybe nine, ten o'clock that night when they call lights out and go to bed.

28 KC: What about weapons training? Did you receive any weapons training with
29 the helicopters here?

30 LB: Yes, that was part of the tactics phase, the last part in basically, the weapons
31 training you received at that point was very limited. We went to, I think, one week of

1 weapons training. I got a chance to basic to fly, you know, you worked around the
2 aircraft, learned all the weapons systems in the classroom. Got out to, probably flew the
3 gun birds a couple days on the range, did some live firing. So the time you went to
4 Vietnam, you really all you had was, some classroom, you'd say "Yup, I shot rockets. I
5 shot the mini-gun. I shot the flex guns or the chunker," but no real, the only way you get
6 good at those things is repetitive use and lots of experience. So you know, you just didn't
7 you just, we knew what they, that they were armed aircraft, let's put it that way.

8 KC: Sure, sure.

9 LB: So, that was it.

10 KC: Yeah, I think they would probably recognize the fact you can't simulate the
11 need to fire weapons in peacetime when you're not actually in combat. That's something
12 that's gonna have to come to experience.

13 LB: Can I, stop this for just a second and let me see what this other line is and tell
14 'em I'm on the phone.

15 KC: Sure.

16 LB: Hang on just a minute, sir. It didn't work so heck with 'em. They'll call
17 back if they need us.

18 KC: Okay, well we'll pick it back up again.

19 LB: No, no we're fine.

20 KC: Where were, or I should say where, how did you perceive your training here
21 through all stages, through basic, through preflight, through your final training here at
22 Fort Rucker, how well did these instructors prepare you do you think?

23 LB: Well, I think you know basic training was, I think took you from being a
24 civilian and to get, and the main think I think basic training does for you is cut the apron
25 strings from mom and dad, get you to quit being an individual and starts you into the
26 concept of this is military life, the way we get things done, you know, as a collective
27 group, not one individual doing it for everybody so no one's going to be waited on hand
28 and foot. So at that point it was just, there was a mindset change is what basic training
29 was about. When I went off to my AIT which was flight school, every instructor I had
30 except my first instrument instructor were military and he'd been around, that guy had
31 been around forever but they had all been in combat. They knew what the score was,

1 what we're getting ready to go do, maybe not the intensity that we had at different times
2 but they were, you know, some of the early pioneers of gunships or lift operations and
3 stuff like that so I think the training was, well prepared us. You just had to take what
4 you'd been trained and then go on from there. Considering the number of pilots and
5 everything and the missions we did overseas I think it proved that their training program
6 was very good.

7 KC: You say that they were experienced in combat. Were they all Vietnam
8 veterans?

9 LB: Yes.

10 KC: Okay, combat experience in Vietnam.

11 LB: Yes, sir.

12 KC: Other than the training that they put you through, which obviously was vital,
13 were they giving you any idea of what they had seen in Vietnam or what you might be
14 getting yourself into?

15 LB: Occasionally they, you know, depending, it's like on day one, you sit down
16 with somebody that's had an experience and that you're getting, you've probably had
17 professors that somewhere along the line at first it's just a matter of fact, information
18 back and forth, here's what you need to know, here's what the syllabus is that we're
19 working on today. Eventually, you know, as that rapport goes on for a little bit and they
20 see how you're doing they make sure some information went more and more with you. It
21 was the openness, a lot of time it was, you know, you'd ask 'em a question and they may
22 depending on how they felt and I don't think any of them were trying to hide anything
23 from us but depending on the type of unit they'd been in or where they were, they had
24 different experiences to share and, you know, most of 'em didn't stand around saying
25 "Hey, I did this." They kinda, they knew they were there to teach us and if you ask
26 questions they'd generally answer 'em pretty straightforward.

27 KC: Okay. When did you finish training at Rucker?

28 LB: March of 1967.

29 KC: March of '67.

30 LB: Yes, sir.

1 KC: Now, when you finished up there, did you know you were going to Vietnam,
2 did you volunteer to go to Vietnam?

3 LB: Yes, I had orders prior to graduating from Vietnam that we were going, in
4 fact knew we were going to the 1st Cav Division.

5 KC: Okay.

6 LB: You know, and basically most of the guys in my section were in front of the
7 alphabet just like getting a call for this, came down needing X number of people for the
8 1st Cav. I think there were fifty, let's see, fifty three of us that were going over together.
9 There were twenty-seven of us, no I'm sorry, fifty three of us wound up in the cav
10 together and there were twenty of us or twenty seven of us that wound up in the 1st of 9th
11 together and five of us in the same troop and two of us came back out of that troop. Wait
12 a minute, fifty three of us went over together to the 1st Cav and twenty seven of us came
13 home, that's what it was.

14 KC: Okay.

15 LB: And there were, thirteen of us went to the 1st of the 9th together and of that
16 thirteen, five of us went to one troop and two of us came out of that troop.

17 KC: Wow.

18 LB: Three came home. One was messed up pretty good but was evacuated out of
19 the county, two of us made our full tour.

20 KC: What did you know about the 1st Cav?

21 LB: Very little, just what you learned in school. I remember before I ever left
22 home to go in the Army was out one night in Portland and a young man had just come
23 back from, actually right after the Ia Drang Valley, was in Portland, in his uniform, out
24 one evening with some friends and in his dress greens and they had a Cav patch on, I
25 remember seeing that patch, it kinda stuck in my mind. Later on, I found out who that
26 was, or when I was in the military and never really thought much about which unit I was
27 going to, you know, if the need of the Army and, of course, you're very young or
28 inexperienced, not necessarily very young, but you're inexperienced. You don't know
29 what, where you're gonna wind up and what's going on and which one you'll be in but,
30 and later on wound up knowing I was going to the 1st Cav together with some friends so,
31 "Okay, that's where I'm going. That's where they need me." Didn't know much about

1 the different types of units 'til we got there. They probably told us about it in flight
2 school or that may have been one of those times that you're kinda like, "Oh, here's these
3 thirty two different, you know, varieties of mustard that you can choose from. You
4 know, and okay here's the ingredients in this one, here's the ingredients in that one,
5 they're all mustard. It's all Army so, you know, okay, the different makeup's of each
6 division, whether it's airmobile, you know, airborne or infantry, mech, whatever, your
7 kinda like "Oh, golly." You know, "That's not what I'm here for, I'm here to fly."

8 KC: And, of course, you're eyes are glazing over when you're hearing this.

9 LB: I think we've all been in those classes before. But down the road, you know,
10 and it makes all sense in the world right now, how come you don't understand it?

11 KC: And it makes a very big difference to you, as well.

12 LB: Yeah, but at the time, you know, heck, I didn't know you know okay were in,
13 were in Vietnam here and setting in the 1st Cav division in-processing center and in a hot
14 morning, sweaty, you know, starting to smell a little bit because we're still wearing the
15 same uniform we left the States in. We may, you know, had to be in some starched
16 fatigues by then and they were, you know, not the best in the world in that kind climate.
17 So we're all sitting around—of course, we all thought we were a bunch of hot shots.

18 KC: Sure.

19 LB: You know, we were all helicopter pilots, you know.

20 KC: So you say that you volunteered for Vietnam. When you finally got the word
21 that you were going to go, what's going through your mind?

22 LB: I guess you go through, you know that there are going to be casualties. I
23 don't think in my time in Vietnam I ever thought I was really going to be one. You
24 know, there are people, "Oh, I'm really deathly afraid I'm gonna die or something." I
25 don't think I ever really had that ongoing, lingering, I'm going to die, or this could kill
26 me, type thing. In the back of your mind, you know it could, but did it, it's not one of
27 those "Oh, my gosh, every morning I wake," you hear guys say every morning they woke
28 up and they just knew they were going to get killed that day or they, you know. I never
29 seemed to have that issue.

30 KC: What about your family? What do they think when they find out that you're
31 going to Vietnam?

1 LB: Well, my mom and dad knew that we'd be going, you know, the reason being
2 is and, of course, they're being a service family, pretty much understood what it could or
3 couldn't be about. Maybe that was one of the reasons early on, I didn't say a lot to my
4 folks about what we were doing in-country and kinda poo-poo'ed some of the stuff along
5 you know, or we weren't involved, you know, early on you say something about some of
6 the things and then you start realizing Mom and Dad are getting, Dad understands,
7 Mom's getting a little worried, so you kinda tone down what you were actually involved
8 in.

9 KC: And were you married at this time or was this after?

10 LB: No, sir. I was footloose and fancy free and just thought I had the world by the
11 tail.

12 KC: Alright, so you've got your orders. You're going to leave for Vietnam. From
13 where did you leave in the United States, was it Travis?

14 LB: We came home, I was home for fifteen days back in Washington at the time,
15 then went down to Travis Air Force Base in California, the San Francisco area, and we,
16 my group that all of us are going to Vietnam together all linked up there and got put on at
17 that time a lot of civilian aircraft were flying us back and forth. Not everybody went over
18 on military transports but they were civilian aircraft that were chartered, happened to fly
19 over initially on Braniff Airlines. I don't know if you know who they were?

20 KC: Yes, yes.

21 LB: But they've gone out of business since. But years ago, it took us over on
22 Braniff and we landed in Long Binh or at Tan Son Nhut, rather.

23 KC: Okay.

24 LB: And there out of the, in the Saigon area and then were bussed over to the 90th
25 Replacement Center where you awaited for your in-country orders to take you to
26 whatever unit you're supposed to go to.

27 KC: Alright.

28 LB: We knew we were going to the 1st Cav Division. We stayed there about two
29 or three days and then they loaded us up on a C-130 in-country out of Tan Son Nhut, flew
30 us in initially into, went up to Da Nang. I'm sorry, went into Pleiku and dropped off some
31 guys there and those of us that were going on to the 1st Cav in An Khe, we flew then from

1 Pleiku over to An Khe and got off there and as we came off the aircraft, our aircraft was
2 going to be used as a evacuation bird to take casualties back. So as we stepped off the
3 aircraft there were litters on the ground down the ramp out there, the guys gonna be
4 moved on the aircraft to go on back down to the hospitals. So, you know, kinda, okay
5 things can happen here. Here's guys that have really been hurt and we start from there.

6 KC: Now were there any dead Americans in this group or were they just
7 wounded?

8 LB: I don't, I do not remember seeing any body bags.

9 KC: Okay. Alright, that would be quite an eye-opening experience. You've left
10 the United States and you get off the plane in Tan Son Nhut and as everyone says, just a
11 real shock, a physical shock, a psychological shock to some degree in a very strange land.

12 LB: Well, the Tan Son Nhut stories sometimes get a little out of hand because I
13 don't know of many people that came off an aircraft at Tan Son Nhut were running from
14 mortars or saw huge, because Tan Son Nhut were much more orderly. The hospital evac
15 birds weren't the same ones we would've got off of going back and everything. They
16 were more of the military transports that were taking kids back to Japan and stuff like that
17 so they wouldn't be necessarily where we'd come off and say,"Oh, at Tan Son Nhut,
18 here's the ramp is littered with stretchers and everything," that's not general, was not
19 generally the case because those aircraft came in, they were 141s and C-130s that were
20 going take the kids and because they were cargo type aircraft where you could put the
21 litters in and they had flight nurses on board, flight medical people on board, unlike the
22 transports we flew back and forth on which were configured to hold passengers, just
23 regular ambulatory passengers.

24 KC: Sure.

25 LB: But when we flew into An Khe, it was in a C-130 that had, you know, jump
26 seats. It was combat load so the cargo bay was open and they could put litters in that had
27 to go out of that were smaller area to take 'em back down to either into Cam Ranh
28 whether Cam Ranh Bay where there a good-sized hospital or down to Qui Nhon where
29 another hospital was or further south into the Long Binh area where there were a couple
30 of hospitals down there and the one in Saigon. So most of the outlying hospitals
31 transported to either Cam Ranh Bay, Qui Nhon, or down to Long Binh and then from

1 there they would be evacuated through the appropriate site to either, generally to Japan
2 for the stabilized, you know, to get you ready to come on home or treatment while you
3 were there in Japan and then bring you back into a facility in the States somewhere.

4 KC: Okay, well, now you've, you've finally made it out to the 1st Cav, and again,
5 this is An Khe, is that correct?

6 LB: Yes, sir.

7 KC: Okay. What are your impressions upon arriving at An Khe and with the 1st
8 Cav?

9 LB: Well, the joke was the air field at An Khe was always called the Golf Course
10 and, of course, the joke was that some lieutenant showed up one day with a golf bag
11 thinking he was going to the golf course, you know, "Where's the golf course?" That's
12 just a big open area with revetments and aircraft parked out here in the middle of this area
13 that's encircled by this division so, you know, whether a lieutenant really did do that or
14 not, you know, that's lieutenant's are the brunt of all Army jokes.

15 KC: Sure, of course, they are.

16 LB: And so, you know that An Khe was just an eye-opener. Here's hundreds of
17 helicopters the 1st Cav was the first airmobile unit in Vietnam and was already doing
18 things that later on would become the mainstay of how the rest of the war went on so it,
19 you know, it was, it was hot, dusty, and dirty, you know, as far as aircraft blowing dirt
20 around and everything. You're sweating, all the dust sticks to you, there are no paved
21 roads that you know, there's tarmac and penaprime which is an oil base you drop on a
22 roadway to kinda hold the dust down but and then don't step in a puddle of it because it'll
23 you know, gum up on you like your stepping in wet tar and that's what it is. It's a thick
24 resin oil and you know so you gummed up your boots and everything or whatever you're
25 wearing. You know, everyone was living in some semblance of a building, some better
26 than others depending on how much you were in that area, and how well and what kind
27 of facility or unit you were in, whether you had engineers help you build it or you
28 scrounged the stuff and built it yourself but early on I think the division had a lot of help
29 building some of the huts and most of the barracks but then guys kinda latched on to
30 supplies or whatever scraps left over and made their own little huts and stuff so you'd
31 have a mixture of stuff but it was an eye-opener.

1 KC: Sure. When do you, when did you receive your orders to report to the 1st of
2 the 9th?

3 LB: That was kind of a, you didn't receive orders, you were, when we got ready
4 to go over on the airplane, Braniff took us, a storm had kept the aircraft from departing
5 when it did so that Braniff Airlines had accepted us and they had to put us up in a hotel
6 down or off base there for a little bit and then took two days later and, of course, being a
7 bunch of knowledgeable aviators that we were and so experienced we all, you know, par-
8 tayed and had a great time and you know steak and eggs, steak every meal because the
9 airline is having to pay for it. Got on the airplane and bootlegged a bunch of whiskey
10 onboard we weren't supposed to, but on takeoff got ice. A couple of the stewardesses
11 thought they liked ice, too, so it was a great adventure 'til we got to Hawaii and on from
12 there 'cause we ran out by then. We got to Hawaii by then we had run out of supplies so
13 no more ice to party with. Well, we had lots of ice, nothing to put in it, so 'cause military
14 transport you're not supposed to be drinking onboard.

15 KC: Sure.

16 LB: And, of course, we brought all our own stuff onboard and we ran out of time
17 when we got to Hawaii. Then so we got the, when we got into the 97th Replacement we
18 got to An Khe, actually, we went to the briefing the next morning and at that point there
19 was a lieutenant colonel came in and this room was only filled with the pilots that were
20 going, that had been assigned to the 1st Cav, the replacement center there in the Cav for
21 infantry and guys like that. They had their own, you know, another area they were doing
22 all the enlisted. This was only, there were some commissioned officers in there that were
23 going to certain units and most of us, the fifty-three or fifty-four of us that or fifty-two of
24 us that were going to the, came there as pilots were all sitting in there and a couple, like I
25 say, infantry officers and stuff and this lieutenant colonel stood up and started addressing
26 all the different types of units within the division. Gave their numerical designation,
27 basically what they were about and half, about halfway through the litany of units, he
28 mentioned the 1st of the 9th being the reconnaissance unit, eyes and ears of the division,
29 da da da da, and then moved on down the list. Then he kinda came back through and
30 started back down the list again and said, "Okay, X unit, I need seven guys for this one."

1 Just so happened on that particular day the division needed just the number of pilots that
2 were sitting in that room, you know.

3 KC: That's not a coincidence.

4 LB: You know how that is.

5 KC: Sure.

6 LB: The need is whatever we have to fill it with.

7 KC: Right.

8 LB: So, he went down the litany and he came to the 1st of the 9th, again about
9 halfway down the list. A classmate of mine, a kid name Terry Connor who wound up
10 going with me to the Bravo Troop, had had an instructor in flight school that was, had
11 been in the 1st of the 9th and kept telling Terry, "Oh, you gotta join it." Terry leaned over
12 sitting next to me, leaned over and said "Hey, let's join this unit. This is a good one," you
13 know, so and so and, hell, like I say, "1st Cav. Whatever. I'm here," you know. I don't
14 know what the units are. I'm gonna volunteer for something. He says, "This one is our
15 chance to fly gunships and stuff," you know. "Oh, okay." So they said we need twelve
16 guys from the 1st of the 9th. There were thirteen of us that happened to raise our hands
17 and this colonel took it all down and then they went on and went through the list and
18 finished up and we're, of course, now, we get to the last here and we're one pilot short
19 because there were twelve raising their hand for the 1st of the 9th, thirteen of us did. So at
20 the end he said "Well, were one short here." One of the thirteen raised his hand and said
21 "Hey, colonel. You know, I'm one of the volunteers for the 1st of the 9th. You only wanted
22 twelve. There were thirteen of us so I guess I'll volunteer and go for that other unit." Clue
23 number one was this colonel says, "Oh, no, son. That's alright," you know, that we were
24 getting into something a little bit different. He said, "Okay." So clue number two was
25 "Alright, we're getting ready to sign everybody up. All you guys that signed up, raise
26 your hand for the 1st of the 9th, come up here first." That's clue number two. Clue number
27 three was, as we went through the line and handed our paperwork in and get it signed and
28 get it stamped that we're going to the 1st of the 9th, whichever particular troop we got
29 assigned to, you know, at the end of the line, this lieutenant colonel's standing there and
30 he's shaking each of our hands saying "God bless you, son." Soon as he shook the last
31 guy, number thirteen in our line, he turned around and left the room. So, we were, you

1 know, “Well, what the hell is this?” you know. And we wind up in the squadron and from
2 there we find out about at the time it was the only light unit in the Army, in combat, and
3 it went on from there being, you know, had a hell of a record.

4 KC: Sure.

5 LB: I'm not sure if you're familiar with the 1st of the 9th. The 1st Cav Division was
6 supposed to be the most highly decorated unit in Vietnam and the 1st of the 9th is the most
7 highly decorated unit in the—hang on, let me stop this other phone. Larry? Hey, sorry.

8 KC: No, no problem.

9 LB: Okay back to you, the 1st of the 9th was the most decorated unit within the
10 division. I didn't know what I was basically getting into, really, and none of us did, you
11 know. Everybody that served—probably at one time I was a little outspoken going the
12 other way on this but everyone that served in Vietnam probably 95% of 'em, 98% of 'em
13 always thought their unit was the best in-country. Everybody did their part. One unit
14 couldn't do the whole war by itself. Young men and women, and there were women over
15 there that, you know, worked in units. It may have been supply, it may have been doing
16 whatever but it took every one of 'em to get the job done. So I just, we just happened to
17 be a little more flamboyant. The casualty rate out of the unit was very high. Like I say,
18 thirteen of us went to the unit, seven of us came back. You know, fifty two of us went to
19 the division, I think there were twenty seven of us came home so the casualty rates within
20 the division were fairly high but we did a lot of things that were on the cutting edge and
21 just met a lot of good friends, lost friends over there but I have some life-long friends
22 that, you know, may not see 'em very often but it's just like yesterday when were
23 together.

24 KC: Right. Well, you volunteered for the first of the 1st of the 9th

25 LB: Yes, sir.

26 KC: What are you going to do for the 1st of the 9th? When do you find that out
27 and what are you going to do?

28 LB: Well, you go up to the squadron headquarters which is the rear and the units
29 were all, the troops were all deployed in other parts of the division's area of operation,
30 the AO, and for a couple of days you sit around there in the rear getting and gathering up
31 your stuff. You had to go to the replacement center training and which a lot of the pilots

1 kinda dodged out on after a couple of days, or a couple of hours because you, my gosh,
2 it's really oriented for the infantry, you know, what they were going to do but we had to
3 sit through part of that training. Got up to the troop and at that point there were five of us
4 standing there and the XO came out to talk to, the executive officer came out and talked
5 to us for a little bit and the troop commander was there. He said, "Okay, I need," they
6 were kinda standing, the way we were standing was two guys and then three of us kinda
7 together. He says, "Okay, I need two of you in the gun platoon. I need two gun pilots and
8 I need three lift pilots. You two are going to the guns and you three are going to lift." I
9 raised my hand and I said, "Sir, I want to be a gun pilot." He says, "I don't have time for
10 you there, mister. I told you where you're going," and turned around and walked off. You
11 think that's pretty short but, you know, there putting, you've got no experience, they're
12 gonna train you, they're gonna teach you and bring you along, you know. How else was
13 he going to make a decision, you know, flip a coin for each of you? You know, and one
14 of the things that got my attention early on was he says, "You've got thirty," you know,
15 "in this unit," and he told us about, a little bit about it and he says, "You've got thirty
16 days to prove yourself or either you'll find a new home or I'll find one for you." Now, at
17 the same time, that morning we had flown up to being picked up back in, we left An Khe,
18 had gone up to a place called LZ Two Bits and had been there and the troop was on up
19 the road at another place at the time called LZ Montezuma which would later become
20 known as Duc Pho. The young warrant officer that flew us up that morning was a gun
21 pilot named Godfrey. One of the reasons the commander was so short with us was they
22 were missing an aircraft at that point. Godfrey's aircraft, he'd gone up, got back in his
23 gunship with the young captain that he was flying with and they had got separated with
24 their team that was out and they'd come in and refuel, went back out and had not
25 returned. We found Godfrey's, they found Godfrey's aircraft a couple hours later and the
26 crew, they had been killed in the crash. They'd been shot down. That particular day, the
27 squadron flight surgeon was with the troop and he had jumped in one of the gunships and
28 said, "Well, I'll ride along and in case we find these guys, this aircraft" 'cause their all out
29 hunting it, you know trying to look over the area, try to find the aircraft. He says,
30 "Maybe I can be there and give some assistance." A round came through one door of the

1 aircraft, went through the flight surgeon's head and out the other door, did not touch the
2 aircraft or anybody else in the aircraft, killed the flight surgeon.

3 KC: Wow.

4 LB: So, welcome to Bravo, 1st of the 9th. I can understand looking back on it now
5 his shortness with the way he talked to us. He had bigger things on his mind than four, or
6 you know, five young W-1s that had just come in and knew we were going to win the
7 war for him.

8 KC: Right.

9 LB: You know, he had the aircraft missing. Within an hour or so, had a, this
10 squadron flight surgeon dead and a crew of four when they were found all dead. So I
11 wound up going to the flight platoon, or lift platoon initially. Great guys. I still wear Don
12 Burnham's bracelet from MIA-POW bracelet from Vietnam. Don, we lost him in
13 February of '68 a few days before he was due to come home. But, you know, went down
14 there and asked, "Well, where's the lift platoon?" They said, "Oh, those aircraft parked
15 down there." Well, we started walking. John Flannagan and Griff Bedworth and myself
16 walked down there 'cause we were—not Griff. I take that back. Oh, golly. Bedworth
17 went to guns with Connors, John Flannagan, myself, and, oh, started with a B and I can't
18 think of it right now. That's a shame. Well, anyway, we walked down to talk to 'em in
19 the lift platoon and, lo and behold, we had to cross over the fence to get out to where they
20 were parked and looked around and said, "Hey, we're so and so. Glad to meet you guys.
21 Who are we here replacing?" Then our guys, "Well, you're replacing the guys that got
22 shot in a landing zone about three days ago while we were sitting on the ground waiting
23 for the infantry to come back." So again, opens your eyes and here we go, guys. Now
24 everybody in that unit knew that they were, we were doing unusual things or pushing the
25 limits but no one thought of themselves as being heroes or anything. It's just when you
26 join a unit and one day this guy's doing that you say, "Well, that's what expected." So,
27 you know, the bar just kept moving up and up and up. It already was pretty damn high
28 when we got there. The unit made one hell of a reputation, that's to the point that they
29 were forming before we ever got there, there started forming like units back in the States
30 to get 'em ready to come over because every division and every organization wanted an
31 air cav troop 'cause they saw what it could do. Yeah, it was an economy of force. We

1 couldn't hold ground but we could sure buy time for somebody. It's a reconnaissance
2 unit. It went, it took the fight to the bad guy. The lift companies and the battalions that
3 were out there carried the infantry around, to come in to do what we would start and I'm
4 not sure if you're familiar with the configuration of the 1st of the 9th or air cav troop but
5 you had your headquarters platoon. You had a lift platoon. You had a gun platoon, a
6 scout platoon, and an infantry platoon. The lift platoon was to carry the infantry and the
7 infantry was to be inserted to either develop or a situation that the gunships and scouts
8 found or to go in and secure the downed aircraft and help recover the crews. So the gun
9 platoons, when I we first got their guns flew each other doing reconnaissance and scouts
10 flew with each other doing reconnaissance. Only did we start what to be called later,
11 those were called pure teams, or so it would be either be a red team or white team,
12 depending. Guns were red, scouts were white, became, was the norm. When there came
13 a situation at Duc Pho that we had taken a bunch of gunships shot up we had to keep a
14 certain amount of teams in the area of operation every day, the troop commander decided
15 to mix the teams. We went to what was called a pink team. Initially everyone was, most
16 of us were, of course, I was too new to know what the hell and didn't know but the guys
17 that had been around awhile all complained. Guns said, "No, the little bird can't pick up
18 our whole crew if we went down." Little bird said, "No, you can pick us up but you can't
19 be as, stay as close to us and protect us if I'm down, there's another scout." So it was
20 mixed feelings going into the operation when we changed over. I remember flying out
21 my first day as a scout and—I'll digress here in a minute—but for my first day flying out
22 and calling up into an infantry unit on the ground and making the call and I told 'em we
23 were a pink team. He wanted to know what we had and I said, "It's a pink team." He
24 was, you know, 'cause I called in as White 1-4, my call sign, and he said, "Well, Do I got
25 a white team?" I said, "No, you got a pink team coming." Because they were used to,
26 guys on the ground used to either getting two scouts or two gunships.

27 KC: Right.

28 LB: And he said, "Well, what's a pink team?" I didn't know what to say other
29 than "What 'til you see." I'm still a new guy so I'm selling the boss's story. I said, "Wait
30 'til you see. It's gonna be the best thing you've ever had." I remember making that

1 statement and so be it, down the road that's what they became, down, you know, years as
2 time went on, everyone flew the mixed teams.

3 KC: Sure, sure. It was an important change.

4 LB: But, initially I went into the lift platoon. Had some great guys there. The job
5 of the lift platoon, now this, here's a, in a lot of units, other units, lift guys, you know,
6 they're gonna do ash and trash, hauling stuff around, putting infantry in, picking 'em up,
7 and doing things like that. Our lift was there mainly for one reason. If the teams, when
8 they were in the area of operations, out in the AO, found something and it needed it
9 developed the lift platoon was gonna haul our infantry platoon into that area and let them
10 go on the ground and try to develop or continue a fight that we'd already started. They're
11 gonna fly probably in as many times as not into what we would call the hot LZ. The
12 other mission or primary or secondary or primary to us was if one of us went down, the
13 lift platoon was bringing the infantry platoon in to secure the downed aircraft and help
14 get the crew out. Now, normally, you just didn't land anywhere out there in the, what we
15 called the wild area or whatever you want to call it, land for the hell of it and say, "Come
16 get me." Occasionally there would be a maintenance issue, somebody was down but nine
17 times out of ten, you're on the ground because you've been shot down. Knowing, if
18 somebody shot you down and somebody else is coming to get you out, they know the
19 reason you're on the ground is you've been shot down, there's probably a good chance
20 you're gonna go into a hot area. There was a pecking order within the cav troop.
21 Supposedly it was the scouts then the guns and then the lift guys and but it was all in
22 good natured fun, you know, 'cause any one of us would've done anything for the other
23 one.

24 KC: Sure, sure.

25 LB: You get a new guy in that came directly into one of the platoons and didn't
26 know any better and if you were sitting around at night, they might start lipping off and,
27 "Oh, I'm a scout guy and you're just a lift platoon." You know, "You're just a, you
28 know, you're just a lift guy." Well, most times the older guys would just reach over and
29 say, "You know, son," and we say older, I may have been thirty days before this other
30 guy 'cause it came in at increments. everyone seemed to come in thirty days apart
31 because that's graduating. Early days in '60s, early to mid-'60s, a flight class graduated

1 once a month. Later on in the early, late '60s '69, '70, they started graduating a class
2 every two weeks. So initially every month you'd get new replacements. So I may have
3 only been there a month ahead of this guy but I turned around and say, "You know, the
4 day you get shot down and one of those guys that your picking on comes in here and
5 picks you up, comes into a hot LZ, he's getting shot at coming in to get you out, you're
6 gonna have a different attitude about how you're making this statement."

7 KC: Sure, sure.

8 LB: And, you know, you were gonna instead of being vindictive about it and
9 trying to insult these other guys you're gonna realize, "Hey, we're all part of this big
10 group together and without the other one, you aren't gonna get out of here." So it made a
11 different feeling. We may have picked and laughed and joked with each other about it
12 but I tell you what, I flew in the lift platoon for awhile and saw some, going into some
13 hot LZs, sit there and listen to the bullets snap into the aircraft. Sounded just like it did in
14 the scout or the gun later on, but it sure in the hell was a lot more helpless feeling sitting
15 there waiting for 'em to load, offload the ammunition or load guys on that were hurt and
16 knowing that you can't just jerk out of here and break away, you've got to sit here and
17 wait unit everything's done and then get going.

18 KC: What was you're job with this lift platoon?

19 LB: My job in the slick platoon?

20 KC: In the lift platoon, yes, what were you doing?

21 LB: I was just, I was co-pilot for the aircraft or for the platoon leader and flew
22 lead bird with him. Basically after a few days, I started doing a lot of the flying. He was
23 running the radios and doing the navigation and as time went on depending on how it
24 was, you know, I was in the lift platoon about three to four months and then an
25 opportunity came to go over to the, I was wanting to go to guns but I got an opportunity
26 to go over to scouts and when I realized I wasn't going to get to be an aircraft commander
27 right away in the lift platoon, I went over to the scout platoon. Probably within the first
28 week of being in the scouts I realized their cushion in the seat that we were sitting on
29 wasn't as nice as it was and over in the lift platoon. The seats that were in the Hueys,
30 'cause were flying H-13s and old Bell 47s and had to learn to fly the reciprocate and the
31 throttle again in a Bell and starting wondering, you know, "Hey, did I make a mistake

1 here?" But had a great time in the scouts, too, and Braman is the name I was trying to
2 remember earlier.

3 KC: Okay.

4 LB: The three of us that went to lift was John Flannigan and Braman, Bressam
5 I'm sorry, Bressam, and myself. Then they stayed over there and then Bressam was going
6 on the ground one day with the infantry and an aircraft blew up just as they went up to try
7 to pull the crew out of it, a gunship that had been supporting us from ARA, aerial rocket
8 artillery, 2nd of the 20th, blew up on the ground in front of 'em just as they got to the
9 aircraft and he was evacuated. Early on we lost several guys and had our infantrymen
10 killed in that and several wounded pretty bad. So I left Flannigan in the lift platoon and I
11 went over to scouts. I learned from some super observers. My observer was a guy over
12 there, Sergeant Don Crosby, had been there sixteen or about sixteen months before I got
13 there, was just coming back from a hospital in Japan, became my observer, did not want
14 to fly with a new guy but the guy by the name of Burt Chole, Captian Chole, C-H-O-L-E,
15 said, "Well, you're the most experienced observer we've got and that's the newest scout
16 we've got. You two are going to fly together."

17 KC: And he was stuck.

18 LB: And I learned a lot from Crosby. Once I started realizing here's the guy that
19 knows what he's talking about out here and finding stuff and the first time we got shot up
20 and I was, got my first Purple Heart 'cause I, we were out early on in my scouting career
21 and he said, "These are bad guys." I said, "Well, let me look and check it out." Next thing
22 I know is we've been, we've got shot to hell. I've been hit in the face with shrapnel and
23 everything and Crosby is trying to help me get the aircraft landed. That night when I left
24 the hospital, actually escaped from the hospital, went AWOL (absent without leave),
25 went back to the unit. Got a hold of Sergeant Crosby and says, "I've made a mistake
26 today." I said, "If you'll still fly with me, I'm willing to listen." We became a great team
27 from there, I thought.

28 KC: Let's take this back. That's something I want to spend little bit more time on.
29 Let me take it back even further, before you were a scout. Let's take it back to when you
30 were at that lift platoon.

31 LB: Yes, sir.

1 KC: Can you take me on your first mission with the lift platoon? Can you take
2 me through that day?

3 LB: Probably one of the first ones that'd been in insertion.

4 KC: Okay.

5 LB: We would've probably been flying, that's where we were flying out of Duc
6 Pho, LZ Montezuma at the time, and we would've been going out to the, going west
7 toward the hills and I remember getting in the aircraft and at that time, being told okay,
8 you know helping getting the aircraft started it kinda thinking I'm doing the checklist or
9 doing what I'm supposed to be doing, being watched a lot, but infantry's getting you
10 know, getting ready to get on board. Same guys, same infantry platoon, or squad rode on
11 each of the same aircraft every day so they were almost like part of the crew. We had our
12 own platoon of infantry that what we called the blues, were assigned to the troop and
13 they, the squad rode the same aircraft every day.

14 KC: Okay.

15 LB: They were just like, you know, they watched you and knew who you were
16 and it wasn't a bunch of strangers you're picking up and hauling. We went out there and
17 I remember being, my job that particular day was to kinda read the map and see if I knew
18 where we were and the aircraft commander was doing the flying and I was there to of
19 course could fly if something happened or whatever but to do the insertion, he was gonna
20 fly it in and I was gonna recheck the map. I remember watching the artillery prep go in
21 and then the artillery prep was cut off and the lift platoon several miles out hit the deck
22 and started, we started going in low level and the guns were with us and they started
23 prepping the area, also, daisy chaining down both sides of us, shooting the rockets into
24 the area. As we hit the ground, they would, they expanded their pattern that they were
25 shooting both in front of us and off to the side further and then broke off, stopped the
26 shooting, still had armament onboard and kept the daisy chain going. The lift platoon
27 came in to the smoked and prepped area. Basically you've seen the pictures of the guys
28 jumping off the aircraft while it's still in the air?

29 KC: Yes.

1 LB: The blues rode the skids the last probably half mile into the LZ, landing zone.
2 They would've moved off their seats and were standing on the skids holding on. If we are
3 in a hot area they were wanting off that aircraft as soon as possible.

4 KC: Sure.

5 LB: And it became, it was really ironic, you know, coming in and you're thinking
6 the guys are supposed to be sitting back there and all of a sudden you know that they're
7 standing up on the sides on the skids and as the aircraft decelerates to a, almost a walk
8 depending on whether it was hot or not, we're either gonna touch down and they step off
9 or this is gonna be a pass through and we're gonna come in, you guys are gonna jump.
10 They're leaving the aircraft and the aircraft never touches the ground.

11 KC: This first time, was it hot?

12 LB: And it's not a, well I come to a hover and we all step off. These guys were
13 good enough that as it came in, it may be still moving at five knots, you know, about, you
14 know, six, seven miles an hour and we were decelerating, holding that coming through
15 and start to, you know, they step off as the aircraft is still moving and they hit the ground
16 maybe depending on, I've seen them leave the aircraft when we were in a hover hold and
17 drop off twenty, thirty feet 'cause they had to get on the ground or they step off three or
18 four feet and on of these, I think, we had enough room.

19 KC: Now at this first insertion, was this a hot LZ?

20 LB: No, it wasn't. As I remember, it wasn't a hot one. They did make contact
21 later. They had found, what we were going into was a cache site that the, one of the gun
22 teams or scout teams had found, and I remember going back up later in the lift aircraft to
23 recover some of the things that they had found. Mostly it was food caching that, what it
24 was that we went into and, you know, dropping off some C-4 and stuff like that and then
25 water for the guys. You know, one of the advantages of being in a cav troop as far as our
26 blues was concerned, they're really never on the ground by themselves. They had a team
27 over 'em working with 'em all the time and they could get supplies brought in to 'em.
28 Our infantry, when they went on the ground, had a sock hanging off their web belt that
29 had three or four cans of C rations in it. Otherwise, that was the only supplies they took
30 with 'em, everything else was, they were loaded up with three or four canteens. As many
31 magazines and/or as much ammunition as an individual could carry and that was it

1 because they went on the ground to fight, to move fast if they were chasing somebody
2 and they didn't need to be carrying their rucksacks and everything else because they had
3 a team with 'em and we could bring 'em what they needed when they needed it if we
4 could get to 'em.

5 KC: About how long did this last before you came back to pick them up?

6 LB: They were in probably four or five hours that day before we picked 'em up
7 and then I think we picked 'em up and moved 'em right away to another site and dropped
8 'em off again and then picked 'em up probably within an hour or so afterwards and they
9 came in.

10 KC: Can you take me through your first insertion in a hot zone?

11 LB: First one would've been in May '67, 27th of May just outside of Duc Pho. We
12 put eighteen infantrymen on the ground, eighteen of our blues on the ground. They
13 walked into a battalion CP, a battalion-sized command post, CP. They got into a heavy
14 firefight. They were totally outnumbered, probably ten to one.

15 KC: Now this was the, the NVA I guess?

16 LB: Yes.

17 KC: Okay.

18 LB: And they were probably outnumbered eight to ten to one. They started taking
19 fire right away, had the point man was one of the first ones hit or hit right in the initial
20 contact. He was, had a sucking chest wound, he was laying there. Doc Haney was trying
21 to take care of him. You had him down. The guys were pinned down inside a rice paddy,
22 inside this area probably twenty, thirty feet across. These eighteen kids laying in a circle
23 using the dike on the rice paddy as their protection and fighting. The gunships initially
24 trying to initially get to 'em. Took a lot of heavy fire, couldn't do it. Finally flew over.
25 They were running low on ammo and kicking out some ammo out of the gunships.
26 Probably within about an hour they were needing water and resupply and needing to get
27 the point out, sergeant that was there, get him out that had been hit. Don Bernham and I
28 were flying together. We went in. He was not the lift platoon leader at that time. He was
29 designated to take the platoon over. He and I, he was my aircraft commander. The first
30 bird couldn't get in there. Don and I had landed, got in, was taking, kicking, or pushing
31 boxes of ammunition off. We were landing it in the middle of this little rice paddy, guys'

1 feet were right under the bubble of the aircraft there. You could hear the snap of the
2 bullets hitting the aircraft. Nothing was seemed to be going wrong on the gauges. Crew
3 chief was out, got the ammunition out and helped load the, help load the casualty
4 onboard. We left, pulled up out of the LZ and headed back to Duc Pho which was
5 probably, or LZ Montezuma, which was probably about fifteen miles away. Flew direct
6 into the medevac site, landed, got off took our blue off the aircraft. They took him into
7 the operation or into the aid station right away. We landed, left the aid station, flew back
8 down to the troop area and landed and at that point found out that we had taken several
9 hits through the tail of the aircraft, one of which hit the drive line causing the aircraft
10 some problems there. We didn't feel it. One round had gone through the, what we called
11 the cherry chain or the chain drive on the tail rotor pedals and had damaged that. We
12 managed to fly the aircraft and didn't know we had that problem. But both were, both of
13 those issues, the drive line was almost severed and that cherry chain had been damaged
14 pretty badly. Either one of 'em could've caused the aircraft to crash, but ignorance is
15 bliss.

16 KC: What type of —?

17 LB: About the same time we found out that our point man had been, time we got
18 him into the aid station, he had lost so much blood that they couldn't save him. You
19 know, the sergeant lost his life that day.

20 KC: What type of fire were you receiving in the helicopter?

21 LB: Mainly small arms, AK-47, SKSs. There was some, you know, an AK-47 can
22 be fired on automatic, of course, but there was occasionally some sounds of some heavier
23 machinegun. I wouldn't, I don't know what I'd guess it was but there would be heavier
24 than an AK, you know, one of the Chi-Com machineguns of some sort. But it looked like
25 the rounds that hit us mainly were AK.

26 KC: So were you able to patch up the ship and go back?

27 LB: They patched it up, had it ready to fly within a couple hours and we were
28 ready to go back out.

29 KC: And did you go back out?

30 LB: I think we were out later that day, did some more resupply as things kinda
31 cooled down a little bit but we were unable to most of the rest of the drops, we got, had to

1 kick stuff off to ‘em. It wasn’t until the next morning that actually ground forces could
2 get into ‘em to help ‘em, but they had done most of the mopping up themselves before,
3 by the time the ground unit had got to ‘em and we were, you know, ready to bring ‘em
4 out the next morning.

5 KC: Is that right? So they were able to withstand this, all those battalion
6 command posts, these eighteen blues as you say. Wow.

7 LB: And one of the reasons they were withstand it was the fact that, you know,
8 they were those kids fought like hell but, you know, they had at least one or two gunships
9 over ‘em all the time to help, you know, they’d direct and fire and, you know, so they had
10 fire power with ‘em.

11 KC: Right.

12 LB: We just couldn’t get on the ground to help ‘em or put anybody else in there
13 with ‘em but we, and we kept aircraft up over all night long. When our blues were out
14 and if they had to stay over, at night, we kept aircraft up all night with ‘em.

15 KC: Incredible. So this is, it finally draw to an end, say, the next day after it,
16 they’d mopped up. This is your first taste of real combat.

17 LB: Yes, sir.

18 KC: So far in Vietnam.

19 LB: Yes, sir.

20 KC: What kind of emotions are you experiencing at this point?

21 LB: Thinking back on it I guess I took it as, you know, damn, that was exciting,
22 you know? You know, we could’ve been hurt but we weren’t. I’ve just seen my first
23 casualty up close, some kid that we knew, or kinda knew, you know. You’d been, I’m still
24 fairly new in country. This is May and you got there in April so hadn’t been there too
25 long to be in the first real firefight or hot LZ that you can, you know, sometimes you get
26 shot at but you don’t think, they’re maybe not classified as hot but not like this one. So
27 this is the first real one I’ve been into, realizing what, you know, it kinda gave me an
28 insight down the road like I’m going back into, as I was telling you earlier, about that idea
29 that we sat there, couldn’t do anything until they said, “Okay, you’re ready to go.” You
30 hear the bullets hit the aircraft but you had to, that was our job, that was the lift platoon’s
31 job is to go in, get resupply in, get the kids in or get kids out.

1 KC: Right.

2 LB: And we were all kids at that time, but looking back now, you know, I was
3 twenty-three. I turned twenty-three in November of that year in Vietnam so I was kind of
4 an older guy. But most of my classmates were in their late teens, early twenties. I think I
5 felt the emotion of, “Man, that was something.” But I never did, I don’t think I had the,
6 because of it, the idea of, “Oh, I was, I almost died.” I never had that feeling. Not that
7 guys weren’t honest about having it, you know, but I never, I guess I never thought that I
8 wasn’t going to come home, you know, there were probably a couple of times that you’d
9 go through that but as an overall thing, no, I wasn’t, afterwards you’d get like, “Jimminy
10 Christmas, I could’ve got hurt,” and you get a little shaken afterwards but you don’t have
11 time for it at the moment.

12 KC: Sure, sure. Well I think that’s a good place to stop.

13 LB: Alright, sir.

14 KC: For today and we can pick it up at another time.

Interview with Larry Brown
Session [2] of [3]
25 August 2008

1 KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Mr. Larry
2 Brown. Today is Monday, 25 August 2008. I am in Lubbock, Texas, and Mr. Brown is
3 joining us from his home in McMinnville, Oregon. Alright now, off the recorder a
4 moment ago you were talking about this change from the lift platoon to the scout platoon.
5 Could you pick that up again, please?

6 LB: Yes, sir. Okay, when I moved from the lift platoon to the scouts, we were
7 flying the H-13 S model which is a civilian Bell-47 or if you're familiar, if people are
8 familiar with *M*A*S*H* the movie and/or the TV series, the little helicopter that flew in
9 that is the Bell-47.

10 KC: Okay.

11 LB: And that's the H-13. We were using that as a scout aircraft so I had to get
12 checked out in that and that took about twenty five hours and then was assigned a
13 position or a, yeah, a position within the scout platoon and got my call sign which was, I
14 became Saber 1-4, Saber White. Saber being a squadron or the, correction, the troop call
15 sign, Flashing Saber. White platoon was the scout platoon and 1-4 was my position, so
16 by saying Saber White 1-4, they knew that I was from Bravo Troop, scout platoon, and
17 who I was individually. The gun platoon was the Red platoon, and the lift was the Blue
18 platoon so everybody—and then if you in scouts, you were and individual in an aircraft
19 and the guns, there was a, like Red 2-8 and then the Red 2-8 X-ray. 2-8 would've been
20 the aircraft commander and 2-8 X-ray would've been his co-pilot.

21 KC: Okay.

22 LB: Same thing over in the lift platoon only they would've been Blue 3-5, which
23 would've been the platoon leader and Blue 3-5 X-ray would've been his XO, or I'm
24 sorry, his co-pilot. So but in scouts there's just one pilot in the aircraft so we each had our
25 own number.

26 KC: Now, why did you want to change to the scouts?

27 LB: Well, I think I wanted to be, I wanted to it a little more as far as retaliating for
28 being shot at and things like that. Our lift platoon and I think as I told you before, the

1 guys didn't, they flew into some, it takes a real dedicated bunch of guys to do it and I
2 don't mean that I don't think I was dedicated, I just wanted to be able to shoot back and,
3 and the guys that flew lift, really, you know, they were something special. They'd come
4 in and our lift aircraft did not carry door gunners. Didn't have, because the extra weight
5 so they could carry more of our equipment and/or troops in and out of some of the places
6 we went. So they were dependent on the scouts and the guns for their gun cover or
7 coming into a hot place on their own, they just, they knew that, you know, they there
8 were something else. They were special guys. So I moved over to the scouts, got a
9 chance to work over there and learn what was going on. Of course, it went like a month
10 or two and I didn't see anything, find anything. I received a, was assigned a crew chief
11 or not a crew chief, but an observer by the name of Don Crosby. He was a staff sergeant
12 and he had been wounded and was returning from Camp Zama. When he became my
13 observer he'd been in-country as a scout observer at that time when he was wounded I
14 think about eleven months. He became my observer reluctantly. He was the senior
15 observer in the platoon and thought he should be the scout platoon leader's observer but
16 Major, or at that time Captain Chole, and that's C-H-O-L-E, Captain Chole White
17 thought he should, he'd already had an observer assigned to him or picked one and he
18 thought Crosby ought to go with the newest guy. We had a few events together and as
19 things started progressing, okay, I was learning from Crosby and, but he was still not
20 sure, the, it was in October. We had moved from down in the Bong Son Plain up to the
21 Chu Lai area and this is about October now, so I've gone through a transition. We hadn't
22 seen a lot on the Bong Son and/or out of Duc Pho area, they moved us north. We started
23 getting into more and more activity. In October, the I think it was about the tenth or
24 eleventh of October, we were out in the what's called the Que Son Valley out by LZ
25 Ross, just west of Ross when the 2nd of the 12th that was there at Ross at that time
26 contacted us on the radio and said they had activity the night before and would we go
27 check it out. It's fairly new, it's a real low, they're working low as a scout and, of course,
28 we had Crosby along so we were ready to go look and within a few minutes of being
29 probably five, six clicks west of Ross, jumped on some guys that were wearing the
30 PAVN (Peoples Army of Vietnam) blue uniform. I wasn't sure what they were. Crosby
31 immediately knew who they were and at that time our gun, Mr. Phee, was flying low

1 level, chasing us behind us 'cause we were still going through that transition of leaving,
2 either the two guns working together or two scouts working together and had moved into
3 the configuration of the two scouts, I mean a scout and gun working together forming the
4 pink team. So the scout was going to be low and the gun was going to be high. Initially
5 it was a setup of whoever was the most experienced went low or flew the position he felt
6 most comfortable with, which was generally low and let the other bird chase him at
7 altitude. We found after a short period of time it was better to have the guns at altitude,
8 the scout low and that way when the scout identified a target decided he needed the, he
9 couldn't engage in himself enough or was being shot at too heavily and needed to
10 evacuate. The gun was in position to immediately be able to roll in out of his orbit and be
11 able to use all his weapons systems as he saw he needed to, which put his rockets into
12 play immediately. His door gunner for the break and his flex guns if he had 'em, run by
13 the co-pilot on immediate operation. With the gun at low level, rockets were not always
14 available immediately, until they made a pass, climbed out, and then rolled in and used
15 rockets. So it brought the gun air platform, the gun aircraft into a situation where they
16 were immediately effective with all systems onboard. So, when we saw these guys, I
17 made a pass, broke away and told the gun, I said, "We've got people here." Phee made
18 his pass over 'em and identified, "Yes, they were," and started shooting them up. Crosby
19 immediately was mad at me, upset because he wanted to know who they were and
20 wanted to engage 'em. I started—a really dumb new guy thing. The gun called me and
21 told me to give 'em coordinates for where this contact was. Scouts don't read the map
22 when you're low level. You just know where you were at. I tried to get my map out.
23 About that time we heard some more firing going on, only it was immediately out
24 Crosby's door. I looked at Don, Sergeant Crosby, and there's one of the those looks on
25 his face like, "Yeah, that's what it's all about, son." You know, it wasn't the first time I
26 heard gunfire and/or been shot at or anything but it was the first time where I had, was
27 supposed to be able to go after 'em and had hesitated on something. So, map went back
28 behind the seat or behind the cushion and being a, what I thought was a well executed
29 event or maneuver, I said, "Well, the gunfire came from here so I'm going to fly around a
30 short distance and loop around and come in 180 degrees on that pinpoint." In doing that,
31 just as we rolled in, I triggered the skid gun we had on board. We only had one on the

1 aircraft that particular day as I was flying an aircraft from another unit and the skid gun
2 quit. It jammed on us. Just as I looked out the door to see what why it had quit, I looked
3 back in at the front of the aircraft we came straight in into a .30-cal machine gun head on.

4 KC: Oh, wow.

5 LB: And they had opened up on us. Three rounds went over the top of my left
6 shoulder, just as I ducked my head back in, went passed there. A few moments later I
7 probably would've had it in the head or the neck or somewhere. If you're familiar with an
8 H-13, the console in the center started erupting where it was being hit and the rounds
9 were going between Crosby and I, up through the overhead out the bubble, the top of the
10 bubble. I received a bunch of shrapnel in the face and the neck and we were flying a
11 dual-controlled aircraft. Crosby marked the target, did his shooting, and got on the
12 controls with me. He said I never let go of the controls but I wasn't talking to him. He
13 knew I'd been hit and he immediately called the gun and told 'em that we were hit and
14 we were headed toward LZ Baldy. He did not know how bad I was hit. I do remember
15 him, talking to 'em, I do remember him making a comment, "I don't know how bad 1-4
16 is but he's bleeding out of the mouth, spitting blood up." What it was was a bunch of
17 shrapnel in my face and in my gums so I was bleeding fairly good out of the mouth but it
18 was nothing, you know, it wasn't like I had a stomach wound or something like that.

19 KC: Sure, sure.

20 LB: I was going to severely, I was severely hurt. We flew back, got close to
21 Baldy. He said we were gonna put it on the ground there. Don Crosby could do anything
22 with, just about, with that aircraft. He'd been in there long enough, he learned how to fly.
23 The only thing he couldn't do is hover and stay over one spot but he could fly the aircraft
24 and put it on the ground, and the reason we flew a dual-controlled aircraft it he was
25 always concerned about or had been in situations and seeing observers where they had
26 crashed when the pilot had been shot and they were in a single-controlled aircraft and the
27 pilot was either dead or hurt bad enough he couldn't fly the aircraft and the aircraft
28 crashed. So Don always had, that was his, his phobia was that he wanted to be in a dual-
29 controlled aircraft so he could take the controls if necessary.

30 KC: Well, it certainly sounds like it paid off in this case.

31 LB: It did.

1 KC: It showed these —

2 LB: By then, I was starting to get where I could see a little better and/or was
3 doing and we set the aircraft down immediately. The medic, the aid station sent some
4 people down and took back and we, I started receiving some treatment. The aircraft was
5 evacuated by the maintenance officer. Don had gone on back to the unit. I was at the aid
6 station there at Ross and then evacuated to the aid station at LZ Baldy which was about,
7 oh, it's a twenty to thirty clicks or kilometers to east of Ross and I was taken there to the
8 brigade aid station for the 1st Cav Division's aid station there. I was going to be there for
9 a few days or evacuated from there to Chu Lai where we were living to the hospital down
10 there. I still had my weapon with me, which was my personal weapon, my .357 magnum
11 my dad had given me at graduation from flight school, so I was never going to leave that
12 behind anywhere. I had my flight helmet and my chest protector. Alot of people later on
13 called chicken plates, but they were only chicken plates when we weren't being shot at.
14 That little armor, or that ceramic plate that we wore, chest protector, you know, no one
15 was willing to fly without it once they'd been shot at for real. So I had my stuff with me.
16 I was being held in a tent after they had removed a bunch of the shrapnel from my face
17 and was waiting to see another doctor. I told the corpsman there, the medic, that I needed
18 to get my stuff to the, back to the squadron or back to the troop and there was an aircraft
19 of ours that might be out at the medical pad. So I picked my stuff up. I was ambulatory,
20 of course. I picked my stuff and walked out the tent like that's what I was going to do. I
21 was headed to the road and found a jeep going by and asked them if I could catch a ride
22 down to the helipad. When I got there, the troop commander, Jimmy Weeks at the time,
23 said, "Well,"—oh not Jimmy Weeks. Jimmy didn't come 'til later. I'll think of his name
24 later. But anyway, troop commander six said, "Well, you know, you can just, why don't
25 you just go with us?" Oh, Burrows had taken the troop by then. George Burrows. So Six
26 said, "Well, why don't you just come on back with us and we'll get you squared away?"
27 No, I'm sorry. It was not, we had one more in between there. It wasn't Burrows. But
28 "We'll just take care of you there down at the troop area if this is what they're gonna do
29 with 'ya." So I went AWOL from the hospital technically and went back, just got on the
30 aircraft and went down. Got to the hospital down at, or went AWOL from the aid station.
31 Went to the hospital when I got to Chu Lai just as I walk in, said I needed to have

1 something looked at. They found some more stuff in my neck and I left there, went back
2 to the troop and was flying within two days. From there, I started getting into more
3 firefights, found some, two days later found some people along the trail. Didn't hesitate
4 this time. I got my first kills.

5 KC: Let me interrupt, Mr. Brown, if I may here, and take you back to being shot
6 here in this particular engagement. First off, how badly were you wounded?

7 LB: Well, I had a piece of shrapnel go through, I was wearing, I always wore my
8 visor down on my helmet. The dark sun, sun cover visor, the dark visor. I had a piece of
9 shrapnel go through the lower portion of that and lodge under my left eye, tore through
10 the skin there. The magnetic compass had exploded so the glass face on it had shattered
11 and the instrument, and we were sprayed, mainly I took it because the compass was on
12 my side of the aircraft. I took most of the alcohol, just kinda sprayed on top of me. It
13 wasn't like that's a real serious thing or anything. But as each of the instruments in the
14 cockpit were hit, the glass faces on them basically shattered and I was sprayed mainly
15 from the angle we were at most of the shards of the spray wound up coming in my
16 direction. So this dark visor became milk white with glass shards. I was having trouble
17 seeing because of the alcohol and some of the glass that had gone underneath the visor
18 had gotten in my eyes. Basically from about my nose, if you had your, if you wearing a
19 large pair of sunglasses, think about the bridge of the glasses extending down to about
20 two-thirds of your nose from that and the bottom of glasses down to my shoulder line was
21 basically where I was hit with fragments anywhere from the small glass and/or Plexiglass
22 shards to pieces about the size of half a match stick of metal shards and/or glass through
23 the neck, close to the jugular vein, that's what they were concerned about when I left
24 Baldy, that's what was removed when I was at Chu Lai, was the three large pieces up
25 alongside the jugular vein.

26 KC: What is, if you can recall, what is going through your mind while you're
27 being shot at? You say it's .30-caliber fire.

28 LB: Yes, sir.

29 KC: And you have these things, I would assume, seemingly exploding in the
30 cockpit around you and you know you're getting hit and you know you have

1 responsibilities to Crosby and to yourself to get the helicopter out of there. What's going
2 through your mind at this time?

3 LB: Well, initially it's like, "Oh, gee," and/or you're responding that, I shouldn't
4 say, "Oh, gee whiz." The initial response is, "I've gotta do something." We were hit so
5 quickly, in other words, the first as they started shooting their first rounds, starting hitting
6 the aircraft. They were hitting us head on. Basically, when I got hit, I realized I was hit,
7 my first thoughts were, you know, like, "Am I okay?" And I was trying to look to see if
8 Don was okay but I could hear his gun still shooting and I heard him start talking so I
9 knew he was possibly a little better than I was or he was okay altogether, was not sure.
10 Why I didn't talk immediately, I think I was trying to assess my own situation. I knew I
11 had, I was still flying the aircraft and taking it, trying to evade the gun. By the time we
12 really go hit, one of the, probably one of the saving graces was the fact that we were so
13 close to it when it happened, we were almost over the top of 'em before they had the
14 opportunity to really shoot at us a lot. My evasion maneuvers and everything probably
15 started taking place as we were crossing over the top of 'em, so they did not get a chance
16 to shoot at us. They waited too long but we turned in too tight on 'em when they opened
17 up on us to get a long bead on us, otherwise maybe if we'd been a few, maybe fifty yards
18 further out or whatever if I hadn't turned quite where I had and he had a few more
19 seconds of head-on fire, it may have been a big difference.

20 KC: Now, did your —?

21 LB: Like I said, I did all the evasion and got us out of it. I really think we were
22 on top of 'em so quick they didn't get to shoot at us as much as they want. There were
23 other weapons that started shooting but they were behind us by that time.

24 KC: Were your evasive maneuvers, was this something that took over almost
25 instinctively or were you still making a conscience effort to do this?

26 LB: Well, you start doing 'em. They are fairly, by that time they would've been
27 you know, kinda like well this is kinda instinctive because I had already been flying for
28 several months with the lift platoon. We'd been shot at there for several times so its
29 okay, turn away from the gunfire or break and do this, make some hard maneuvers and
30 you know, and as you break away from the fire if you're not hearing it then you try to
31 accelerate and/or you know move it in the direction in a, in a serpentine movement as you

1 move away. So you could set yourself up to come back in but knowing I was already
2 hurt, we weren't going back in. I was trying to head in the direction to what I thought
3 was relative safety back toward LZ Ross.

4 KC: Now, was Crosby hit at all?

5 LB: No, he was not. He had a lot of blood on him, you know, face, head wounds,
6 stuff like that, do a lot of bleeding, wind blowing, whipping around the aircraft he had
7 some blood on him but, no, he was not hit. Most of the fire is just the angle that it came
8 through. Basically the weapon would've been to his immediate front. They were firing
9 at us kinda head-on, so to speak, so it gave it an angle where everything basically came
10 through, started about center of the aircraft and worked, if you were facing it, the center
11 to the right or if you're in the aircraft, center to the left which took most of the fire
12 through the instrument panel and out over my side. So luckily, Don was not hurt at all.

13 KC: How long was it that you continued to fly before Don took over?

14 LB: Well, he was probably, I'd say he was on the controls within about ten
15 seconds. Ten seconds in that is a fairly long time.

16 KC: I'm sure.

17 LB: But at the same it seemed, you know, you'd say, "Well, ten seconds. That's
18 not very long," but in that kind of a situation, it was, it does that it, you know one, two, it
19 goes fairly slowly. He was engaging with trying to get his machinegun on target to
20 provide suppressing fire. At the same time, he got his red smoke out the door. Red
21 smoke grenade out the door to mark the target so that the gunship could engage it. Then
22 when he realized I was hit, he then moved over to help take over the aircraft. Don told
23 me I'd never let go of the controls. I'd continue to fly with him and we landed and
24 basically went from there.

25 KC: Sounds like he was a very —

26 LB: So, by the time we were hit until we were actually on the ground was
27 probably five minutes. The time Don was on the aircraft was on the controls was
28 probably ten seconds or so after we'd initially really started getting hit and, like I say, we
29 were on top of the gun so fast that that's probably what kept 'em from doing more
30 damage to us than they did.

1 KC: It certainly sounds like Crosby was not just experienced but pretty cool under
2 all this fire.

3 LB: Yes, Don, some of those kids that flew with us—Don wasn't a kid. He was, I
4 think, older than I was but some of these guys, you know, these NCOs and/or young kids
5 that both that flew the aircraft and/or rode in 'em, you know, did some heroic things.
6 Don had been around. He was well experienced. It wasn't his first rodeo he was in so he
7 knew what was going on. He taught me a lot of things. Joe Leathers later on did the same
8 thing, you know, guys that were just, they were phenomenal and they kept us alive. They
9 did a lot of things. They risked their life on a daily basis with you. There became a bond
10 between the pilot and the observer. Very tight to the point that, you know, once that bond
11 was formed or taken, that night when I did get back the rear area, I went back to Crosby,
12 told him that I had screwed up that day. If he was still willing to fly with me, there
13 wouldn't be another day like that and that as far as not knowing what was going on when
14 we were there, if he'd continue to fly with me I'd like that very much. From there our
15 bond of friendship became very tight, and as I said, once that bond was formed, a pilot if
16 his observer was with somebody else that got hurt, he'd go talk to that other pilot or go
17 over and tell the command, you know, "Hey, my guy doesn't fly with so and so
18 anymore," or vice versa. You know, it was like one brother looking out for the other
19 brother even though within the troop, the whole troop was that way, watching out for
20 each other and taking care of each other. But that bond within a crew was just that much
21 more of a closeness and here it is you got two guys in an aircraft that one's depending on
22 the keeping the aircraft in the air and getting into position. The other one's depending on
23 the guy sitting next to him to do all the firing and help track and see things and protect
24 each other. One's ability to fly and the other one's ability to shoot is what kept you alive.
25 As well as both of your abilities to read sign, track and/or know when it was time to get
26 out of the area or, well, let's just stay a little bit longer.

27 KC: Was the gunship able to take out the machinegun?

28 LB: They fired into the area but they didn't, with the scout gone at that point, they
29 did not stay to check it out. They followed, orbited back overhead at Ross, knew that we
30 were on the ground, made the calls back to the troop area and then they headed on back. I
31 think they finished dropping their, they salvoed their, their loads back into that general

1 area and then went back to the troop because without a scout you don't operate one
2 aircraft by itself.

3 KC: Sure, sure.

4 LB: Not in that kind of environment as far as what we were doing, you don't
5 recon by yourself. So, they just put everything they had down on that general spot and
6 then head back to LZ Porazzo where we were based out of.

7 KC: Now you were only gone for, you said, two days before you back in action
8 again. Why were you—?

9 LB: I was back in the troop that night and then I think they told me I could have a
10 day off and the old man says, "No, I think you need to start flying." So I was either flying
11 the next day or the day after. I think I was flying the next day.

12 KC: Why were you in such a hurry to get back in the middle of things?

13 LB: Well, a couple things. One, you're young and excited about, "Oh, they got
14 me. I got to get even." And/or the organization we were in was one of these, you're trying
15 to live up to the standards that they had set. There were guys that were hurt when were
16 flying and there were guys that were hurt very bad and when you'd see them in the
17 hospital the first thing they'd say is, "Well, I'm coming back just as soon as I can."
18 Crosby, instead of going to the States after his wound while he was in Japan, instead of
19 letting 'em send him home, he got himself back to the unit. That kinda thing just sets a
20 tone. There were great organizations over there. Everybody did their part. Of course,
21 everybody has bragging rights or whatever. You always think you're the best unit. But it
22 took every type of organization and everybody doing their job to do what we had to do
23 over there. We just had a little different attitude about it and also at the time, the 1st of
24 the 9th was the only unit of its kind in the world so it was kinda like you had an elitist
25 attitude and I'm not going to be left out of this.

26 KC: Right.

27 LB: Not that I wasn't a little worried, don't get me wrong. It wasn't like, "Oh,
28 yeah," but I honestly do not think I ever had a fear that I was going to die in Vietnam.
29 Now, there were times when we were getting shot at pretty good and you get this flash
30 like, "Are we going to get out of this or not?" But I didn't have this ongoing, you know,
31 "Oh, my gosh. I'm going to get shot. Oh, my gosh. I'm going to die." You know, I never

1 had that kind of feeling or thought. That didn't mean I didn't get shaky knees, wobbly
2 knees every once in a while going into something but I just wasn't preoccupied what this,
3 you're gonna be shot or you can be killed attitude or type of a thought, not an attitude.
4 So, that's why I got back into flying and the boss also said, "Well, you know, it's gonna
5 get you back going and you'll be, it'll be better for you," you know. I guess they were
6 trying to see if I could get back out there or if they needed to maybe put me into another
7 section or do something else.

8 KC: Sure. Well, tell me about this, the next time out. What was it like for you
9 having been shot up previous time, what was it like for you the next time out?

10 LB: Well, you're trying to look under every leaf and you think, "Man, they're
11 here," you know, "any second I'm gonna see 'em again. I gonna see 'em again." And it
12 wasn't until almost the end of the second mission we were out on on that particular day
13 that we jumped on some people and Crosby and I engaged 'em and we got the people on
14 the trail.

15 KC: Well, tell me about that in a little more detail if you would please?

16 LB: Well, we were actually, the XO, that's where Burrows was the XO at the
17 time. I found the people up ahead and made a pass over 'em. He was at altitude and
18 identified 'em and moved me up closer to—I was working my way up the trail and had
19 seen some people ahead of us. So he notified me, he'd seen people ahead of us to get on
20 up the trail further. We got up there and found 'em hiding along side the trail and we
21 engaged 'em immediately. Then, you know, Crosby says, "I've got 'em. Here they are.
22 They've got the gear with 'em," and at that point they gave him the go ahead to shoot. He
23 engaged them. So it was a little bit of revenge, exhilaration type feeling you get: "Oh, I
24 got them before they got to shoot at us." We didn't actually spot 'em. We were working
25 toward 'em. George Burrows had seen 'em from altitude running down the trail and duck
26 off the side. He got us into the general area. We found 'em and engaged from there. That
27 was about the end of the mission and toward the end of the day and we headed back to
28 base and so it, all of a sudden that was my first two accredited kills for the aircraft and it
29 felt pretty good. You have some second thoughts afterwards like, "Did we shoot the right
30 people?" They had the equipment with 'em. They had a lot of other things and we were
31 in a area where there were not any friendlies in the area far out in a recon area which was

1 along area that the French brought in called "The Street Without Joy." I don't know if
2 you've read that book or know about it?

3 KC: No, I don't. I'm not familiar with it.

4 LB: Okay, it's when the French were in that area, it's north of Chu Lai, there's an
5 inland waterway between the highway and the coast and all through that area there's
6 plenty of bunker complexes and stuff and the French had many a heavy fight along
7 through there and they called the area The Street Without Joy. So we kinda said and that
8 Street Without Joy was Highway One so if you were between The Street Without Joy and
9 the coast you were up shit creek and that was the inland waterway, where it was. It was a
10 pretty heavily defended area. There were hamlets out along through there. I'd say 80%
11 of 'em were mainly made up of VC or VC sympathizers because the NVA and the
12 PAVNs ran rampant through that area, had free run of the area. There were no ARVN
13 posts in that area. Even if you saw friendlies, they were probably waiting to be VC at
14 night, so you didn't, what you'd classify as friendly, you didn't engage 'em but you know
15 they were not, you just never had a safe feeling in there and you're just as apt to see half
16 a dozen, two or three to a half a dozen NVA walking down the trail with their weapon
17 over their shoulder because they knew they were in a safe haven area. The locals were
18 not going to turn 'em in, they were gonna be supportive of 'em, so that's where that
19 engagement took place.

20 KC: Let me ask you about these first two confirmed kills. What did that mean to
21 you then and has that changed over the years as you look back on it?

22 LB: I think the first two just mean that I, okay I didn't hesitate. I did what I was
23 supposed to do. We identified 'em and was not hesitant. It wasn't like, "Oh, we got to
24 shoot anybody because I've been shot." That was not the issue. When we'd found,
25 because we'd seen other people out during the day, but they weren't, either there was no
26 reason to shoot 'em because they had no equipment with them, no identification that they
27 were or way of identifying that they weren't anything but friendly Vietnamese out doing
28 their job or going to market or coming back. These had equipment with 'em, so even if
29 that was identified, I felt that I responded properly because I identified 'em. We weren't
30 going to be able to take 'em prisoner. Go ahead and engage 'em. We didn't know if
31 there were others in the area so we engaged, Crosby engaged 'em. I gave him the go

1 ahead and that evening I felt like, “Well, I did what I was supposed to do that day.” But
2 sometimes you think, “Well, I just shot two people,” or had that done but it didn’t, it
3 wasn’t that kind of , “Oh, my gosh. Now what am I going to do? My life is ruined.” That
4 was not the issue. I felt I had done what I was supposed to do and it went from there.

5 KC: Very good.

6 LB: So, and I still see it that way. It was kinda like, well, my first baptismal as a
7 scout was hesitating. My next baptism as a scout was I engaged when I knew what I had
8 immediately and responded properly.

9 KC: Probably very fortunate to have that second opportunity, I would think.

10 LB: Yes, yeah.

11 KC: Okay, well, what about after this particular mission? Where do you go from
12 here?

13 LB: Well, went from there that seems like I became a very prolific scout. They
14 kept, for some reason kept a tally and the headcount in those days was, you know, “Oh,
15 back in the States they want to know what was going on,” or whatever and those things.
16 So they kept a tally in the troop headquarters on which birds had how many kills. Don
17 and I went from those first two to within a month leading the troop in kills to up through
18 Tet of ’68. I think from October to March, October of ’67 to March of ’68 we had one
19 hundred and twenty something kills.

20 KC: What accounts for this proficiency, do you think?

21 LB: Well, one, I had a great observer and/or others that flew with me different
22 times. These kids were good with their weapons. I had a reputation, developed a
23 reputation of doing a lot of hovering, slowing down, getting slower than everybody else,
24 blowing the brush out of the way or just happened to be ten people could fly over the
25 same area and I’d fly through it and find something that they hadn’t seen. Whether it was
26 all luck, some talent, experienced observers or my learning how to track and/or spotting
27 things as well as they did or a combination of all of that, we became very good to the
28 point that after we lost the troop commander, just before Burrows, they were shot down
29 out there and recovered them. Got them outta there. We ran into a situation with the
30 intelligence community, had done a triangulation on some radio intercepts and found a
31 village south of LZ Ross about eight clicks that was indicating it had a lot of radio

1 communication coming out of it. They sent us out there, Don and I out to take a look at it.
2 Couldn't initially find something. I knew something was wrong. You get this feeling that
3 there's something here but we can't see it. What is it? You know, what are we missing?
4 There's something wrong. There was no chickens out running, usually even if you fly
5 over a village and you're reconning, occasionally you'll see somebody peek their head
6 out the door if they're hiding or, you know, the friendlies, you know, somebody will peek
7 out, some little kid or something a bunch of chickens will run across out of the building
8 or run across the yard or area or something. This village had none of that going on. You
9 knew it was an occupied village. No one, it was very disciplined. There was no loose
10 animals, you know, no pig broke out of its little pen a ran, no chickens were running, no
11 mama san stuck her head out the door as you hovered over the top of the hooch to see
12 what was going on. We knew something was wrong in there. Don and I were working it,
13 and finally we saw this trench and it had a bunch of banana leaves laying in it. I told the
14 gun that I, you know, hang on a minute, we're going to engage. We were just going to do
15 some shooting into this trench with banana leaves and as we did, we pulled up alongside
16 of it, came to a slow hover. Don engaged it. He ignited the propellant on a sixty-
17 millimeter mortar round. We didn't know it at the time what it was but that's what it
18 turned out to be. Ignited propellant, it went scooting down the trench the opposite way
19 from us. 'Course when I ever, you know, ever immediately reacted to what was that and
20 we came back around and the round didn't go off or anything but it just shot down
21 through the trench area there. Couldn't figure out what it was. We dropped a couple of
22 grenades in the area and started uncovering what this trench was an L-shaped trench with
23 the leaves laying on and/or over it so it just kinda looked like they'd all fallen there. The
24 key to this whole thing was, there were no banana trees in that particular area but here the
25 unit which turned out to be an NVA regiment, the 3rd NVA Regiment had moved in outta
26 the jungles and were occupying the village. They had still kept everything camouflaged
27 with what they were using, coming out of the jungle area where they were holed up the
28 day before which was in a banana belted area, oh, probably eight clicks away. They had
29 not changed their camouflage. Everything they put down on the ground they left the
30 camouflage, same camouflage they were using was these large banana leaves. Did not
31 fit, that was the key. There were, yes, there were banana trees in that village but all these

1 places where they were all laid out, there were no banana, there are not that many trees to
2 cause this whole area to be covered and/or big, big places of, you know, so everywhere
3 we found banana leaves, we found weapons. We destroyed thirteen crew-served
4 weapons that day.

5 KC: Thirteen?

6 LB: Thirteen.

7 KC: Incredible.

8 LB: And weren't being shot at. The NVA were in a tunnel complex that was
9 underneath the village. We've got, we were hopefully going to get friendlies in there to
10 do something about it. We by then after doing this stuff we jumped on some commo
11 wire. The only way we found it, we were flying along, besides this little trench of stuff,
12 we found some commo wire crossing a little stream. Only reason we happened to see it is
13 we crossed over this particular spot there was a couple of leaves hung up on it. So there's
14 enough water movement that left a little bit of a ripple off of it. He turned me back
15 around, we got over the top of it and we started trying to follow and we had a rain the
16 day, a couple days before. This installation wasn't something that they had just built. It
17 was one of these spots that they were into, out of, into, out of, you know, on a regular
18 basis so it was well fortified, had all its stuff already there. The commo wire became,
19 started becoming evident as we moved along, "Oh, here it is. It's buried again. Oh, there,
20 right up there another few feet you can see where it was uncovered again." Then we
21 started following around reporting all these spider holes and fighting positions. The troop
22 reported it to brigade, the brigade did not believe, brigade headquarters. You know,
23 "How does a helicopter spot commo wire from the air?" Well, when you're hovering
24 eight, ten, fifteen feet off the ground, you can see the wire.

25 KC: Sure.

26 LB: You know, I'm not flying around like a command and control aircraft at
27 1500, 3000 feet above the ground. So they initially didn't believe what we'd found. By
28 now, Crosby and I, we found a half a dozen of these positions. We were running low on
29 fuel. We've got to head back in. They're sending a new team out to replace us. The team
30 has a brand new scout and he's flying with the artillery FO, not a regular observer. They
31 did not get on station before we had the break station to go. We tried to brief 'em en

1 route over the radio. They got out there, could not find what we were talking about.
2 Either they were on the wrong side of the village or whatever but could not find the
3 positions. Don and I were back in the troop area waiting our turn to go again. We were
4 back at LZ Porazzo waiting to go back out. Crosby came to me and he was pissed.
5 Came over and says, "Six has just come to me and wanted to know, would I explain to
6 him what a 57-recoilless rifle looked like. Did I know what a mortar looked like." You
7 know, here is a, sure it's a major but Don Burrows or George Burrows had just become
8 the troop commander. He'd been the XO for a while but he still hadn't been vetted as the
9 guy in the AO yet and he's coming talking to Don Crosby who was one of the most
10 prolific observers, he and Joe Leathers, that I've probably every worked with. Crosby
11 comes to me and says "You know," explains what Burrows had talked to him. What it
12 was was the brigade because, first of all, this other team couldn't find the targets and
13 brigade is now questioning what we found out there. You know, why are we finding
14 these weapons. How did we see commo wire from the air, da da da and on and on and on.
15 Finally Burrows comes over to me and he said something to me and I said, "Well, let's
16 go. I'll show you," or he asked me if I could find 'em I said, "Absolutely. Let's go. I'll
17 show you." So we saddled up, Crosby and I in a bird and we went on out there.
18 Immediately we got in the area. The other team was still out there. They were kinda
19 waltzing around the area. We flew into the target. I told Burrows I said, "Okay, here's
20 one right here. You see where I'm hovering at the corner of this tree line?" He said,
21 "Yeah, I got 'ya." I said, "Okay, come on over here." I had Crosby drop a grenade out the
22 door. Not only uncovered a 57 recoilless rifle laying there and blew it up out of the little
23 depression that it was laying in and so it was laying out in the open. I spun back around,
24 saw what it was, I said, "Okay, now come on in here and you tell me what this is," you
25 know. Of course, his call sign was Saber-6. I said, "Six, you come in here and tell me
26 what this is then," you know, "but I think it's a 57 recoilless." So he comes in there and
27 then comes to a slow hover and, "Oh, my gosh. Da da da da." So now everyone is starting
28 to find stuff everywhere. We're getting fast movers now, artillery and we call for fast
29 movers. I found a spot probably 200 yards away from there that was just like a big
30 mound, like a mound covered with leaves. They hit it with a 500-pound bomb. It was
31 packs, backpacks where they had been laid in this depression and all this stuff that they

1 didn't need immediately underground was covered up there. As the aircraft were
2 bombing the area, we had whole sections probably ten feet wide and twenty to thirty
3 yards in length would just collapse, the ground would collapse. Tunnel complexes that
4 were caving in underneath this little village.

5 KC: Now, is this how you found out that it was indeed a tunnel complex?

6 LB: Yes. Right after or earlier I had seen a couple shafts and they were huge but
7 couldn't see anything down in 'em. Knew that they were shafts. They look almost the
8 size of well shafts to begin with, but two of 'em were side by side and they were air
9 shafts. You could see that the bottom there was no water in 'em and see that it went out
10 one side other but there was no sign of any indication that there was anything in it just
11 like, well, this is some kind of well that was here. Why is, you know, why are these
12 here? That's been when we started realizing that they were airshafts and that's why the
13 ground was collapsing like it was. They never put anybody, infantry was never put into
14 the area. Brigade was over-committed that particular day. We had armor not too far
15 away but they were afraid to put them in there without being able to have infantry with
16 'em and our blues, this looked like too big of complex to put eighteen guys on the ground
17 by themselves. We had just gone through the situation on the 27th of May where we had
18 eighteen kids walk into a regimental CP or a brigade or battalion CP on their own and
19 took, that's the one where we took twenty-four hours to get back to them to get them out.

20 KC: Right. Yes, I remember that.

21 LB: And so, Burrows was not going to commit the blues into that situation by
22 themselves. By the end of the day, we, as I said, we destroyed, we know our aircraft had
23 damaged and/or destroyed thirteen crew-served weapons anywhere from the .30-cals to
24 .50-cals, the recoilless rifles and the mortars. We did get two kills out of the area that
25 confirmed for our aircraft, two guys started coming out of a hole toward the end of the
26 day. I think they were off on some place by themselves and they were looking for
27 another place to hide. Crosby and I saw 'em and we engaged them and we got them.
28 After this particular day was over, or during that day, Burrows flew up to, after he'd seen
29 what was going on, flew up to the group or the brigade headquarters, told 'em what was
30 going on and that the next time, you know, his scouts reported something, they ought to
31 be listening, although he probably put it a little differently. George was that kinda guy.

1 One of the things that had kinda spurred part of this was, I could hear some of the brigade
2 communications going on but when they're talking to the troop, but because we're flying
3 low level, they couldn't always hear what we would say as from the scout bird. So part of
4 the conversation I got or had been told about earlier and I made one of those calls that
5 you're not supposed to but I called the gun and told 'em I said, "Well, if those so and so's
6 are," put it a little differently, called them REMFs (rear echelon motherfuckers). Rear
7 echelon.

8 KC: Sure, sure.

9 LB: "Would come out here, maybe they'd learn what it was all about. Like I say,
10 after Burrows had gone up to squadron or up to brigade and done his talk there and then
11 was on the way back, he'd call the old man and send 'em on the way back or called the,
12 the XO at this time and the S-3. Now, the 3 by now is Chole has moved up to be the 3 in
13 the troop and from the scout platoon leader to the S-3 of the troop. I called them, told
14 them I'm going back out to see the super scout and my nickname from there on became
15 Super Scout.

16 KC: Is that right?

17 LB: The old man would say, "Well, we're gonna go find something and send
18 Super Scout out here. We need to develop something."

19 KC: Now, does that, does this episode change the way others within the 1/9th look
20 at you?

21 LB: Probably. I know the squadron commander was paying a lot of attention to
22 me at this time, by this time by this time. I, this wasn't, you know, this is how, this is
23 about November and I'd been wounded in October the first time. So within a month, you
24 know, I'm starting to get a lot of recognition within the, with not only the troop but within
25 the squadron and within the division because I'm starting to be involved in more and
26 more contacts, finding different things when others haven't found them, developing
27 situations. The next morning, after this contact there was a trail through the rice paddies
28 about eight to ten feet wide, headed toward Ross. They never developed that. Five days
29 later, I found the same element again. We fell off the hill and didn't get to develop it. A
30 couple days later after that, George Burrows—oh, golly. What was Red's name? I'll
31 think of his name in a minute—and myself were out in an area where I'd gone down up

1 on the ridgeline from almost finding these guys a few days before, got back out there. I
2 was tracking commo wire again when we lost power and went into the hill and I got it
3 back up flying after it chopped up some limbs. We went back up there and we jumped
4 again the 3rd NVA regimental CP and it's weapons company in support of it. We killed
5 the regimental commander, his staff, collected twenty-seven pounds of documents telling
6 about the Que Son Valley offensive that was getting ready to kick off and the Tet
7 Offensive in '68, the forewarning elements of that which was not believed. When the Que
8 Son Valley offensive kicked off a few days after we captured the documents. One of the
9 problems with the Vietnamese in the lack of communication and stuff that they had, the
10 way they fought was once a plan was put in place, there was no, you know, it took a
11 while to get the information out to 'em and around and once it was in place, it was going
12 to execute. So once the fight started for the Que Son Valley in December, that first
13 morning when it all started erupting there, they immediately pulled out the paperwork,
14 the overlays they had that they had found and here was the whole battle plan. So it
15 squelched the Que Son Valley offensive within a matter of a few hours after it got going.
16 Within a day or so it was all done instead of it being this big overrun.

17 KC: This was—

18 LB: Go ahead.

19 KC: Would you say that this was directly the result of your scout efforts?

20 LB: I'd say it was a direct effort of what we—yes, and that blues on the ground
21 picking up the document that we captured that, or found that day off the bodies and the
22 people we killed. Actually three days, or a week before we, Crosby and I jumped this
23 village out there, we got in a fight with these guys on, the same guys, this heavy weapons
24 company and we'd lost, there were twenty, I think twenty helicopters, not just ours but
25 twenty helicopters shot down in one afternoon over one spot, about three clicks from this
26 village to where we found this sight. I happened to be flying, well, that was 13th of
27 November. I know I was flying because it was my day off for my birthday, which was the
28 12th so they gave me the 13th off. The lift platoon was short a guy so they asked me if I
29 would fly with 'em. I was flying trail aircraft with 'em reading a map and doing the
30 things for 'em and we got the big firefight there. The old man was shot down. Red was
31 shot down. Three of the lift birds were shot down or were shot up bad enough they had to

1 return home. We had two other guns shot up very bad, the scout, and then we had,
2 started trying to put insertions in and Mike Covey and I had led the insertions and there
3 were some, I think there was a total of twenty aircraft shot down or shot up badly that
4 particular day and then, of course, that was the 13th. Four or five days later was when we
5 found the village. Three or four days later is when we lost the, I'd lost power and went in
6 following the commo wire up on the, that just north of Ross and two days after that's
7 when we went back up north to Ross and we killed the regimental commander, his staff,
8 and he collected all the information. Then in December the war started and, of course, the
9 Tet Offensive was '68 and came along in January, first of March.

10 KC: What was it about this particular area that was—?

11 LB: All that was depicted in the documentation that we picked up that particular
12 day.

13 KC: And you say no one would believe you when this information was taken?

14 LB: Well, they sent people up from, to visit at LZ Baldy a couple days after all
15 this stuff was captured, as far as the documentations. It was one of the problems was it
16 was misinterpreted, part of it, but the command out of Saigon didn't feel that that was
17 ever you know, they couldn't ever commit such a force or do such a thing. So it was
18 kinda, "Well, we'll look at it," but they misinterpreted the date that it was going to take
19 place, the staging that would've took place over Christmas was to start into staging at that
20 time. They took it as that Christmas would be the time the fight would start for the Tet
21 Offensive. It didn't because they were getting ready to, 'cause it would actually kick off
22 on the eve of Tet, which was their holiday, New Year, you know, and so it was
23 misinterpreted in the documentation and when nothing happened over Christmas through
24 New Years for us, it was kinda like put on the back shelf.

25 KC: Now, what was in these documents? Do you know?

26 LB: Staging areas and/or, you know, where units had to move to. That there
27 would be, you know, VC and all NVA units in their general area were being alerted to
28 prepare for a fight. They had staging areas that they would work out of or be involved in
29 where they would work from, cache sites. Now, of course, it didn't give all of 'em down
30 in Saigon and everything else. They only got their general scope that they would be
31 involved in so that's what we had for that area up there. But because this prelim fight in

1 the Tet Offensive in '68 or the Que Son Valley fight which was gonna be one of these,
2 "Well, we're gonna do a prelim." Well, do this, part of the issue was they would do a
3 staging fight to cause certain units to be draw into an area which was to hold units out of
4 Saigon area and up for defense, the aviation support because the Que Son Valley
5 Offensive did not last very long like it was supposed to. It got squelched in two days
6 because the documentation we've found that, you know, there was no big movement of
7 organizations and/or troops to evacuate and be pulled out into that area and because it
8 was squelched so quickly it was not perceived as a, "Oh, here's a huge group of units out
9 here ready to fight," and that was all the luck of the draw, just finding some stuff and
10 going from there.

11 KC: So would it, in a strange way it's like the success of what you found help put
12 a quick end to the Que Son issue but in the long run, it really hurt in terms of being
13 unprepared for what came later in January of '68.

14 LB: Well, yes, and in the fact that in the midst of part of the, you know,
15 interpretation of the documentation where it said they though the holiday period was
16 being our holiday period. Christmas and New Years, when nothing transpired, this is just
17 perceived as, and also the command in country could not envision that such a large
18 activity could go on. How could the NVA or North Vietnamese stage and/or execute such
19 a large fight throughout the country without everybody seeing 'em and knowing they
20 were down there. Well, when they moved through the jungles with the impunity that
21 they had at times through some of these areas that we weren't allowed to fight in and/or
22 look at, gave 'em kind of the ability to stage. One of the, as I talked to you about earlier,
23 made the comment about the fact that the means of how they were going to execute
24 and/or their lack of communication in some ways hindered their, and/or they wrote,
25 "Okay, we were told to do this and we will not do anything until that it happens. We've
26 got to do it just this way." Friends of mine were flying first light coming out of Long
27 Binh the morning of Tet. By then they had other air cav units in-country because 1st/9th
28 had proved to be what it was and they had formed other units and brought 'em into
29 country. They found hundreds of NVA squatted down in their little positions that they'd
30 moved into in the dark, just outside of Long Binh, waiting for a rocket attack to start
31 which was their signal to do a predawn attack on to Long Binh. By the luck of the draw,

1 the artillery or the rocketing place that had or unit that was supposed to hit Long Binh
2 could be the signal for this huge ground attack to take place, had been hit that night by an
3 ARA (aerial rocket artillery) or rocket team that was out wandering around and had
4 spotted 'em and had shot 'em up. So here is this infantry units, hundreds of soldiers,
5 NVA, squatted down out in the open, outside the perimeter of Long Binh, waiting for the
6 rocket attack to take place at predawn. Now the sun is coming up and they're still sitting
7 there waiting for the rocket attack for their signal to start and guns jumped on 'em. Now
8 this didn't meant that the whole war went south on 'em or the, you know, Saigon all that
9 still wound up getting hit and everything but this particular signal did not take place right.
10 So they hear, they get a big gunfight going with aircraft shooting people up and the whole
11 thing took place throughout Vietnam, you know, down in the south, but within three or
12 four days—yes, it was such a big surprise, but within three or four days, army units,
13 marine units, and everybody, you know, U.S. units, were annihilating huge numbers of
14 NVA and as you, you know, if you look back and understand the North Vietnamese now,
15 basically they said they lost the war at that point. There was an effectively no VC left in
16 throughout most of Vietnam for a long period of time afterwards. It took until, this was in
17 '68, it took until '70-'71 before the NVA had a strong enough presence to really do any
18 more fighting.

19 KC: It was incredibly costly for them, for sure.

20 LB: Yes, and if you read their documentation and stuff like that, they felt, you
21 know, well they were within days of suing for, for peace, when you know, the media at
22 home said, "Oh, my gosh. How could this happen? How could that go on?" What the
23 heck, we've just lost the war and threw the hands up and forced the issue, basically, you
24 know. The populace here at home gave up the fight and the NVA and the North
25 Vietnamese went from a military disaster to a political victory. So they, you know, we
26 snatched victory from the jaws, or defeat from the jaws of victory by letting the
27 naysayers, not listening to the soldiers or in seeing what was actually going on, let the
28 military run the war. What we were running was a civilian run war in Vietnam.

29 KC: Well, this is something that I certainly want to spend more time with later on
30 in the interview.

31 LB: Yes, sir.

1 KC: So we'll certainly come back to that. But let's go back to the Tet Offensive
2 in '68. Describe for me where you were and what your role was during the fighting of
3 Tet.

4 LB: My, because from October until December, I received three Purple Hearts
5 and was involved in a couple of shoot downs, being shot down and the activity going on I
6 was getting, I was being watched by the squadron and the troop. At this point, George,
7 Major Burrows and the squadron commander at that time was Nevins. Colonel Nevins
8 felt that I wasn't going to go home alive because of the scrapes I kept winding up in. I'd
9 been in a couple firefights where we'd been shot up pretty badly. I'd lost, had a couple
10 observers shot up real bad with me. You know, on a particular day when Don was not
11 with me and somebody else was flying and they got hit. So it was a, they had sent me
12 back to An Khe to fly TAOR, Tactical Area of Responsibility with the 173rd which was
13 in there at the division headquarters in An Khe because the division had moved out and
14 was up at Evans at this time.

15 KC: Now, did Burrows and Evans think you're a bit—

16 LB: Pardon?

17 KC: I'm sorry. Did Burrows and Evans think you were being careless or what
18 was, why did they send you back?

19 LB: I don't think they thought I was being careless, they just didn't, you know,
20 you can only be shot at so many times. You can only go down, be shot down so many
21 times. They thought my number, maybe I was running out of luck because there is a big
22 part of that as is luck. I wasn't willing to hold back and I was involved in, up unto that
23 point either instigated or was jumped in and was in the middle of every big firefight the
24 troop had had throughout all that area. So I was sent back to An Khe to what was
25 supposed to be a lesser position to fly at and just kinda, you know, at the because the
26 173rd didn't seem to want the aircraft flying, it was kinda like, "Well, you can go back
27 there for a month or two and you can just kinda take it easy. We've got new observers
28 coming into country and we will use you back there to help train them before they come
29 forward.

30 KC: What'd you think about this move?

1 LB: Well, at the time I thought, "Okay, that's fine. No big deal." You know, we
2 were kinda slowing down a little bit. Yeah, maybe I need a few days off. And then Tet
3 broke loose and I hitchhiked, jumping on one aircraft to another 'til I got back to the
4 troop at Evans and got in the fire, get in the middle of Tet. I got to Evans two days after
5 Tet had started. So on the morning of Tet, there at An Khe we had some stuff, the 173rd
6 still didn't want us flying or doing much, didn't think an H-13 could do much for 'em out
7 there, even though it was armed. I caught a squadron bird leaving that was going to a
8 location, to Chu Lai. I caught a ride up there. They were only going to Chu Lai and
9 coming back. From Chu Lai, I worked my way up to, Hue-Phu Bai, caught a medevac
10 out of there to Evans and got back with Crosby and we went to fighting again there and
11 got in some of the good fights up and down, working our way back into Hue, working up
12 the Perfume River. Getting, jumping convoys, well, they're not vehicle convoys but
13 caravans of people working out of Nasty Valley and over in that area just west of Evans
14 into the mountains, you know, getting into some good firefights there. Got into some
15 great firefights along the inland waterway just off the Perfume River and just north of
16 Hue.

17 KC: Can you tell me about one of these in the Hue area? Is there any one that
18 stands out in particular?

19 LB: A lot of 'em were fun. One I got a flag I still keep that by the end of the day
20 we knew that we weren't coming back into this particular village, which was just north of
21 Hue. I had the opportunity, I was working with some swift boats. The blue, the brown
22 water Navy guys were just off patrolling that area and I was getting, they were shooting
23 the beach and/or the edge of this village up for us. We were doing some shooting and we
24 were trying to get into this village and hadn't got in very far. It was pretty well defended.
25 I knew it was last light getting ready to come up and I wouldn't be coming back to this
26 village and it had a Viet Cong or a VC flag flying over the village and I told Crosby, I
27 says, "We're getting that flag before we leave here." The guns called me and told me he
28 was running low on fuel and we need to break and head home. Like I say, it was toward
29 the end of the day and I knew we weren't coming back so I said, "Okay, if you've got
30 enough fuel, cover me. We're going to make a run here. I've got to check something
31 out." We started a run from the water shooting our way into this village 'til we came up

1 to the flagpole and did a big whoa boy and stopped along side of it, hovering there. At
2 that time, all the people that had been shooting at us thought we were either crazy or what
3 we were doing, they weren't sure, all stopped shooting. At that time, Crosby leaned out
4 the door, had his pocket, had his, survival knife with him, grabbed a hold of the flag,
5 'cause I'm hovering right alongside of it. Grabbed a hold of the flag. Cut the lanyard at
6 the top and tried to cut it underneath and he couldn't, so we took off and this lanyard now
7 is dragging out behind us and we took off with the flag. Immediately all hell started
8 breaking loose. The team that replaced us on station, when they got back in there said we
9 really stirred it up, you know. They were all, you know, "You son-of-a-gun, you." Those
10 guys, you know, they were pissed, you know, you took their flag and I've still got it.

11 KC: Is that right?

12 LB: Yes, sir. It was one of those things, and it's kinda why you know now this is
13 after I've come back, they sent me to An Khe. Now I've worked my way back up and I'm
14 flying again and by then George, you know, Burrows and Evans are saying, "Hell, he's
15 here. Use him." Those are the kind of things that I had been doing up until then, being
16 more and more brazen about some of the ways that we would go get stuff. The old man
17 used to get mad and say, "Well, where is 1-4 right now?" Chole as the 3 would say, "Sir,
18 we can't talk to him on the radio. Bobby Zaun won't answer. They're on their own
19 frequency again and I think 1-4 is sitting on the ground picking stuff up."

20 KC: Wow. Incredible.

21 LB: So those are the kind of things that brought it to a head where they'd say,
22 "Well, we'll, you know, we've got to get him home."

23 KC: Right.

24 LB: "He's not gonna die on our watch. We're gonna give him every opportunity
25 we can." I came back up, joined the unit again during the Tet at that point they're saying,
26 "Hey, we need everybody we can," 'cause guys are getting hurt, you know, and
27 everything else. "He's here." They don't, you know, "Just keep him here and use him."
28 And it went from there. I flew one night medevac in a lift with John Flannigan, trying to
29 evacuate some guys that were seriously wounded between Evans and Hue, an infantry
30 unit that had a couple head wounds and couple sucking chest wounds and needed 'em
31 out. They weren't gonna make it to the next morning and under the artillery on the

1 division fired every illumination round they had that particular night to you'd keep the
2 fog and smoke or low ground cover that was, as brightly illuminated from overhead as
3 possible so we could see to fly down there that night because medevacs just couldn't get
4 in. We told 'em we knew the area and we'd go do it. So, you know, things like that just
5 went on and on and on.

6 KC: Well, tell me about that episode in more detail, if you could, please.

7 LB: Way it happened was we were sitting down, I was down at the gun platoon in
8 that particular evening, sitting down there talking with the guys at the end of the day and
9 one of the scouts came looking for me. Jerry, he came, I think it was a lieutenant came
10 looking for me and says, "Hey, you used to be a lift guy and we've got this medevac
11 they're needing to do. They've called the troop and want to know if we'll take it and
12 would you fly and I'll go with you 'cause I know where we're going?" I said, "Sure." So
13 we walked back up to the troop area or the operations area and by now the lift guys are
14 up there, too, and John Flannigan who, he and I had come into country as classmates,
15 come into country together with was up there. Mike Cubby, a couple other guys and
16 myself and Jerry and I can't think of Jerry's last name right now. I will. Captain Jerry
17 Elliot, Lieutenant Elliot.

18 KC: Okay.

19 LB: And they said, "Well, we're gonna do this mission." Well, Flannigan said,
20 "Well, we're gonna take it ourselves," you know. Of course, Elliot's pissed and Cubby,
21 "Well, okay," you know. Elliot's, or Flannigan's senior, first time in-country lift guy and
22 he and I are going together. But the weather was so bad that medevacs couldn't get in so
23 we said, "Well, if you put illumination up there, we're gonna fly low level," which they
24 didn't want the medevacs doing. You know, "We know where we gotta turn down there
25 and I'll read the map and get us into the area and Flannigan, you do the flying and we'll
26 get in there and do this thing." They started some illumination. We got going down
27 there. We were probably flying about ten feet off the Highway 1 when I said, "Okay,
28 we've got to turn here because here's six's aircraft," and had been shot down on the
29 opening day of Tet right alongside the highway there. I said, "We turn here, we turn
30 inland until we get to the tree line and now we've got a, you know we're gonna have to
31 work our way along the tree line back to the north, probably with 200 yards or so." Just

1 as we got ready to land, the infantry was talking to us on the radio. They popped a
2 ground flare to light, to try to illuminate the area which then became like a bright
3 spotlight in your eyes. They covered, you know, Flannigan immediately said something
4 on the radio. They got through something over the top of it to put it down so we could
5 get in there. We landed, got the kids onboard. Just as we took off, the illumination from
6 overhead stopped for a couple of rounds. I said something on the radio back to squadron
7 and Jimmy Hughes, Jim Hughes who was up at squadron at that time, coordinated the
8 artillery who had been our gun, one of our gun platoon leaders at one time told me, “Just
9 settle down. They’d get it back up,” and within moments there was some more
10 illumination. But we go from like daylight to black, you know, that’s what the difference
11 made, you know, the fog and the everything else, the clouds were so low the illumination
12 did cause the ground to show up a little bit through all this. So we were flying basically
13 nap of the earth through the fog, watching the ground and, you know, working our way
14 back to the highway and headed home. When the mission was over, basically the
15 division had fired all but about eight rounds of their illumination that they had onboard
16 for this hour-and-a-half mission or hour mission to take place it took us to get out there
17 and get back.

18 KC: Amazing.

19 LB: That’s the kind of commitment the 1st Cav Division did to bring soldiers
20 back.

21 KC: That’s incredible. Were you just in the Hue-Phu Bai area during the
22 offensive, or were you sent somewhere else?

23 LB: Well, we stayed in the Hue-Phu Bai area. Well, actually we were north of
24 Hue. Evans was north of Hue. So we worked from, and the squadron was spread that
25 way, we worked from Quang Tri down through Hue during this timeframe.

26 KC: Okay.

27 LB: And from the cope all the way into the mountains up the edge of Khe Sanh.
28 The day I got ready to leave country, we went to the A Shau—I’m sorry. We went to Khe
29 Sanh to help do the relief of the Marines out there to get those kids who were stuck out
30 there. So that was our AO, area of operations up until then.

1 KC: What did the Tet Offensive mean to you at the time in January-February of
2 1968, by March of '68 when it's said and done for the most part. What did it mean to
3 you then?

4 LB: It was one hell of a hunting trip and we had done well. You know, it's
5 somebody used to say, "Killing's our business and business has been good." And, yeah,
6 we ran into a, you know, had been in a lot of things but we knew we were winning.
7 Yeah, the first few days had, they had caught us by surprise but, you know, it was within
8 days, you know, they were on the run and we were killing them in large numbers in
9 pockets and places, you know, catching them on the run. Didn't mean that they weren't
10 fighting when we'd catch 'em, but they were not the formidable force that everyone
11 thought, you know. They were trying to get the hell out of town and we were running,
12 you know, they were being cut off in small groups, large groups and being annihilated.

13 KC: Now, having seen this from this perspective, like you say, it was obviously a
14 very serious setback for the enemy. What were your thoughts on how it was perceived in
15 the United States at the time? Or where you aware of the coverage of the events?

16 LB: Well, we weren't really aware, although you hear about the peace marches
17 and all that stuff and we just thought that's just a bunch kooky, you know, college kids,
18 you know, and the United States can't let them and a few renegade, what we call renegade
19 congressmen and stuff like that. You know, they aren't gonna believe that the war has
20 been lost, you know, we haven't lost the war yet. You know, we'd lost a couple of
21 firefights but we never lost any major engagements or any engagements and stuff like
22 that. We just couldn't believe that, "Oh, my god." The way it was perceived here at
23 home.

24 KC: When did you become aware of how it was perceived here?

25 LB: I guess we kinda knew that was going on for a period of time but it wasn't
26 after I really got home is when, and then we on to Germany about, you know, "Oh, this
27 is—you guys, it's really bad." No, it's not really bad. We're winning and we are kicking
28 ass and taking names. It was just the mindset that had taken over at home. It was a
29 shame because, you know, the American soldiers didn't lose that war, so.

30 KC: That sounds like a good time to take a break for right now.

1 LB: Okay. I'm technically, would've been shot down or it's actually we found
2 that it would've been the time I was wounded the first time and they found the aircraft. It
3 had a couple holes in it and we would run out of oil if we'd kept flying, so. But, yeah, I'll
4 go back to, either there or do you want another one?

5 KC: Well, if the first time was when you and Crosby were shot down, where you
6 had the shrapnel in your face?

7 LB: Yes.

8 KC: Okay, well, take me on another one, if you can.

9 LB: Okay, alright, how about, yeah, we'll do one when I was with Joe Leathers
10 and he got shot up pretty bad with me.

11 KC: Yeah, please do. You've mentioned Leathers a couple of times before.

12 LB: Not Leathers. I'm sorry, Buchanan. Leathers was another issue but I'll talk
13 about getting, later on talk about getting Leathers shot.

14 KC: Okay, please do.

15 LB: Okay, so you want to talk about a shoot down?

16 KC: Sure, please.

17 LB: Okay, alright, whenever you want to start.

18 KC: Anytime you're ready.

19 LB: Okay, this would've been, well, it'd been just before one of the reasons just
20 before we went back, I was sent back to An Khe because of things were going on and to
21 get me out of the AO. I'd been shot up quite a few times or been in several big
22 skirmishes and one morning we were getting ready to, we'd been out doing a recon and
23 came back in and there was a call that a infantry unit was working along this area that we
24 called The Street Without Joy I told you about earlier.

25 KC: Right, right.

26 LB: And was working their way forward along an area that had been some contact
27 or activity that we had reported north of 'em and they wanted a recon team to come out
28 and work with 'em. Bobby Zaun, Red 2-8, who was our hog pilot, flew the 48-rocket
29 gunship, the old B model at the time that they had. He was flying that and he and I went
30 out as a team. We worked a lot of times together. I just liked working with Bobby and I
31 liked working with all the guys but Bobby and I just seemed to get along real well. Had a

1 kid by the name of Buchanan and this goes back to where one of the things I talked about
2 how tight teams were.

3 KC: Right.

4 LB: Buchanan was a young man from Seattle area who had basically been told by
5 a judge, "Join the military or go to jail." So he'd come over as about an eighteen,
6 nineteen year old young boy and got put in Bravo, 1st of the 9th and became a scout
7 observer. His normal pilot was a kid by the name of Jerry Anderson. Jerry was a warrant
8 officer. A couple flight classes ahead of me in school and Jerry was, and in fact Jerry was
9 back on TAOR doing something back there and for some reason Crosby had the day off.
10 Leathers had already been wounded with me or something and Joe said he'd fly with me
11 or was assigned to fly with me for the day. The infantry unit wanted some support in
12 front of 'em. So Bobby and I were bounced to go out there and do that because we made
13 contact, as I said, about three or four clicks north of where these guys were earlier that
14 morning. Coming back into the area, we came in past 'em and went up north of 'em a
15 couple hundred meters and swung around and came back in. As we were coming in,
16 noticed a bunch of little clumps of scrub brush all scattered throughout the sand which
17 was a way that the NVA would hide at times. They'd get out in these sand flats and
18 they'd kinda dig a small depression. They had these little clumps of brush stuck into the
19 back of their pack and they'd squat down in these little depressions and it looked like a
20 bunch, if you're looking level on the ground, it looked like they're just scattered
21 randomly out across the sand, all these little pumps of brush. We noticed those. I had Joe
22 engage the first one, or one of 'em, and we identified that, yes, they were because they
23 immediately got a kill. Yes, they were those little positions that we thought they were.
24 So I swung back in over the top of the friendlies, identified through and talking to them
25 and they're command-and-control aircraft, which was about 3000 feet about us. It was
26 telling 'em to hurry up and move along. The company commander on the ground wasn't
27 too anxious to move our across this big open area without us being there to begin with. I
28 told him, I said, "The bad guys are dug in front of you about thirty to fifty meters. If you
29 start noticing the brush out there, that's where their line starts and it goes deep about two
30 or three hundred meters deep and wide." So there were a lot of guys out there. This
31 company was going to be, they had a bad, they had a habit of letting the friendlies walk

1 through an area like that, walk out on to it and then open fire from all directions, you
2 know, because once you're in the middle of that every little clump of brush is now a
3 fighting position shooting at you.

4 KC: Sure.

5 LB: They're in the middle of you, in front of you, or behind 'ya. They're on each
6 side of 'ya. So, I told 'em I would, was gonna go out there and mark the area in front of
7 'em and they asked me if I wanted recon by fire and I told 'em, and jokingly I said, "No,
8 I want to know if they start shooting at me. I want to know about it." And on the way out
9 of there, Bobby told me to be careful and I said, "Hey, don't worry about it," you know,
10 "I'm getting too short to doing anything stupid." Jokingly. So we swung out over the top
11 of the bad guys and, again, this particular day I'm flying an aircraft other than my own.
12 My H-13 always had two skid guns, an M-60 mounted on each skid, so I had the ability
13 to do a lot of shooting myself. Mainly, not so much that it was an attack weapon but it
14 was a noise maker. My skid guns became noise makers, would possibly cause the bad
15 guy to flinch and/or duck just not knowing where the, that was being shot at and it also
16 made me feel good. I was doing something.

17 KC: Sure.

18 LB: You know, as we got out to where the, I was making a turn, I told 'em I
19 would fly the front of the line where these people were starting to be at. As I got out
20 there and turned, I said, "Okay, under me now and along this line," and about that time
21 there was a couple shots fired at us. Buchanan started to respond and the next couple
22 rounds we started taking hits. Within two or three shots at us, we started taking hits. One
23 of those first hits that we took came through the front of the cockpit or the bubble or the
24 door on Joe's side. Went between his, hit him right between the eyes and came out over
25 his right temple. Of course, the blood, his head wound is very bloody. Joe slumped over
26 and was forward in his seat and his harness. The first couple shots and then, the only way
27 I could equate it and I told the guys later, it sounded like the inside of a popcorn machine,
28 starts pop, pop, pop and then just gets so intense you can't, you know, you can't
29 distinguish one hit shot or hit from another. I was trying to break away from the fire and
30 get back to the friendlies but we had to cross over some more of these positions that I
31 hadn't seen yet. It just kept getting worse. I pulled the trigger responsibly or as a

1 reaction pulled the trigger on what I thought was my guns, forgetting I'm not in my own
2 aircraft. there were no guns to be fired at that point and luckily about the time I was doing
3 that they weren't there because we started breaking over the friendlies and I didn't need
4 to be firing into the middle of them. As I said, Joe was hit immediately. Bobby Zaun
5 saw the intensity of the fire. He basically at about 1500 feet in the air, he said the whole
6 ground under us looked like it just turned red and under us and all around us and people
7 shooting at us. He rolled in immediately and laid down forty rockets on one pass from
8 about 1500 feet to cover around us and behind us. He couldn't shoot in front of me 'cause
9 he didn't know which way I was gonna be going. I made a call to him that we were in
10 trouble, that I was going in. I thought at the moment I was gonna crash but we were
11 getting out of it. I realized Buchanan was hit pretty severely. I'd been hit in the leg. The
12 aircraft was not really responding well and I was having trouble seeing, again, the
13 aircraft, we'd taken a lot of hits in the instrument panel. I had again got some more
14 Plexiglas and/or crap in my eyes, even though the visor was down, it whips around in
15 there and I was pretty well covered with Joe's blood. The inside of the cock, or the
16 bubble had turned bright red for the most part up over our heads. This is how bad a head
17 wound bleeds and the way he'd taken the hit. Bobby immediately got low level with us
18 on the run. He pulled in alongside of us. He asked me where I was gonna put it down. I
19 told him I didn't think I was gonna put it down. I needed to get to an aid station. I didn't
20 know, I figure, I thought Joe was dead at that point, but I wasn't sure and I wasn't going
21 to take any chances. The aircraft was still flying somewhat but I needed help. I couldn't,
22 didn't know really which way to go trying to get towards LZ Baldy. So Bobby tells me,
23 "Turn right. Turn right. Turn right. Okay, straight ahead. Keep going." I had enough
24 vision, you could kinda make out like if you're kinda squinting and blurry, you kinda get,
25 make out outlines of things but you don't really see it clearly. So Bobby kept directing us.
26 They were flying alongside of us low level. Within a couple of minutes and as we were
27 talking to Bob, talking to 2-8 back and forth, you know, "We're hit. I'm hit. I'm not
28 seeing very well. I'm not sure about Buchanan. He's leaned over in his seat. I know he's
29 been shot in the head," you know, "he's holding himself—his harness is holding him up."
30 Buchanan sat up in the seat and it was like, "Oh, my gosh." Now I'm definitely not gonna
31 put it on the ground. We're going to an aid station. Bob was trying to talk us down at that

1 point and I said, "No. He sat up. If he's alive, we're gonna, I'm getting him in and we're
2 gonna get there as soon as we can, get me to Baldy." Bobby was flying alongside of us
3 and elected not to tell us what he could see was the aircraft. An H-13 has saddle tanks up
4 over the engines and they have a spill shield under 'em. We had taken several hits
5 through the fuel tanks. They were leaking and the spill shields, of course, which surround
6 the tank, were leaking down, fuel down over the top of the engine as it was running.
7 There was enough air and probably keeping it so that for whatever reason they didn't
8 catch fire. Bobby was making up his mind whether to talk us, fly us as far as we could or
9 whatever. He elected to keep pushing us, getting us to Baldy because I was telling him
10 I've got to get Buchanan in there so he decided not to tell us what was going on. As we
11 got closer to Baldy, I was able to see a little bit better but I was starting to realize I didn't
12 have full control of the aircraft and I wasn't too sure what it was. So I kept trying to test
13 each of the controls with small movements, realizing pretty soon, I had no tail rotor
14 control, is what the problem was, had a fixed tail rotor situation. We found out later that
15 the tail rotor cable had been shot in two. So as we got lined up, Bobby had called ahead,
16 got us cleared, the ramp was cleared, they told us medevac was standing by or
17 ambulances were standing by on the ramp. The aid station was close by. I wasn't gonna
18 try to put it down at the aid station because if I crashed on the helipad there, you know,
19 then that messes it up for any other guys coming in later so I was going into the runway.
20 As we started into the runway, I realized, I told Bobby, I said, "Well, I've got not tail
21 rotor control. I'm gonna have to play this with throttle but have 'em there and I'm not
22 gonna put it on the runway. I'm going to the ramp 'cause if I roll this up at least the
23 runway is still open." When we got hit and that cable had been shot, I was pulling full
24 power trying to break away and it had jammed left pedal. The cable was sheared about
25 that time, apparently, and either stayed in a fixed pitch or went to full left pedal fixed
26 pitch, so basically as I pulled power, the aircraft stayed like it should. So as I nursed it
27 down, did a slight running landing, got it on the ground, we turned a little bit sideways
28 and I noticed Bobby land about, oh, thirty yards from us off to our, my left front and side
29 about thirty yards from us. His two gunners jumped out of the back and started running
30 toward us. I looked back in and reached up to turn the fuel off and the engine quit for
31 fuel starvation.

1 KC: Wow.

2 LB: I looked and felt at that point somebody tugging at my harness. I thought the
3 two guys were there and I turned to look out the door and yell at 'em to get Buchanan and
4 I realized it was Buchanan had got out of the aircraft and come around to my side of the
5 aircraft and was trying to get me outta there, out. He was the one that was undoing my
6 harness.

7 KC: Incredible.

8 LB: Yeah, so I had taken a round just above the knee in the leg, it basically in
9 about mid-thigh. It had stopped, gone through two, and ammo can sitting between Joe
10 and I. I had two AK-47 magazines in that leg pocket and it gone through that. It's pretty
11 well slowed down. So it just penetrated maybe half inch into the leg, the round itself, so it
12 was pretty well spent by the time I'd been hit. But if would look at us, with his head
13 wound and all the blood that was over me and everything, you'd think both of us were
14 shot up pretty bad. The inside of the aircraft was—Joe had lost a lot of blood. He'd
15 probably, I would say by then he might've lost two pints of blood and you take that and
16 throw it around in the wind and all around inside, you know, both of us, we both looked
17 pretty messy. We got, the litter got there, they got Joe down on the ground. Litter was
18 brought over from the ambulance, they got him on that. Basically, I left the aircraft to go
19 over there to get in the ambulance with him. I was pretty much walking, just messy.
20 They got us over at the aid station. I stood there by the head of the, well, they were
21 working on Joe and then finally they told me to sit down and they started looking me
22 over. They had the one place of the bullet in the leg, or part of the bullet in the leg. No
23 big deal, but mainly, and then at that point the doctor was working on me at that point.
24 Asked me, he says, "Don't I know you?" Now, this is like a month and a, about a month
25 after I had gone AWOL from the hospital or from that aid station at Baldy and he says,
26 "You're the guy that left here before," because the yellow scarf that I always wore. I was
27 all of a sudden in trouble, not because I was hurt but now because I'd run away last time.

28 KC: And he remembered you after all that time?

29 LB: Oh, yes, sir, 'cause there was a big flap, apparently, about that in the medical,
30 at the brigade there and everything else that somebody had left and everything else and so
31 I'm back again and got Joe in there, getting him worked on. They put a couple patches on

1 my leg, let me go back out. I went back out to look at the aircraft, get a couple things out
2 of it. An H-13 had seven hits in the tail structure, you know what that, that erector set
3 looking tail. There were seven bullet holes through the tail section. Joe's seat, his armor
4 plate that he was sitting on had nine bullet holes jammed up against it. I had two or three
5 in mine. Rotor blades, there were twenty-one hits in the rotor blades. There were two
6 hits that had taken out one of the jugs on the engine, the instrument panel, two radios
7 were off, looked at to be destroyed but were functioning. Basically the aircraft was
8 looked at and said, you know, it needs to be gotten, you know, this aircraft is gonna have
9 to be a rebuild. They'd have to take the tail section off, put a new one on, you know, new
10 rotor blades. I think there was one hole in the transmission, in the case, the fuel cells or
11 two fuel tanks were, had a number of hits in them and basically everyone said the aircraft
12 should not have flown or kept flying and we just, the luck of the draw that the situation,
13 fixed tail rotor didn't roll it up landing it. We ran out of fuel after we put it on the
14 ground. Joe and I made it. Jerry Anderson was back at An Khe and two days later, or a
15 day later was up there to see Joe at the hospital. First question, you know, apparently he
16 asked Joe was, "Was Larry hovering when this happened?" Because he was out there
17 always telling me I hover too much. Joe told him, "No, we were doing about forty, fifty
18 knots when it happened." So, okay, now I'm okay guy again. Even though Jerry and I are
19 friends, I had just wounded, got his observer shot up pretty badly.

20 KC: Sure.

21 LB: And he was gonna come after me, not to kill me or something like that but he
22 was coming to set things straight with me if I had been hovering when this had happened
23 and what he felt what a bad procedure. If I had done wrong and got Buchanan hurt.

24 KC: What became of Buchanan?

25 LB: Buchanan was evacuated to the States. I, on my tour ended, came home, I
26 was sitting at home in Battleground, Washington, and I got a phone call that he was in the
27 area coming to see me. He showed up there with another friend from the Seattle area,
28 he'd known I was home about that time, so he'd come down to see me. Told me, he says
29 and of course if it sells, now this is, I get home in March, he's still had surgeries and
30 everything else wearing a big head gauze type thing that covered his right eye. We sat
31 and talked at my home, my folks' home there for two or three hours. One of the

1 questions he asked me toward the end, he said “Do you think I'm brain damaged or
2 crazy?” I said, “Why do you ask that?” He said, “Well, I've been told by the doctors I
3 have brain, I had been hit in the brain and this made me a little crazier or strange.” I told
4 him, I said, “Joe, you're the same kid I knew other than the bandage on you right now,
5 your talking and sounding just like you did the day before the incident when you and I
6 were flying together. I don't think there's anything.” He laughed and joked and left. I
7 never saw Joe again after that. I've been told that he has died since. I don't know. I'd
8 love to find out. I just located Joe Leathers, who, another kid that I got shot with me, that
9 was shot with me one time. I'm gonna get to see him this October for the first time since
10 we were on our second tour in '70. I have never found Don Crosby. Joe ran into him one
11 time but he's somewhere on the East Coast, south, southeastern part of the country. I'd
12 love to find Crosby somewhere, sometime, somehow but I'm gonna get to see Joe here in
13 a few days so, looking forward to that.

14 KC: I imagine so.

15 LB: But I've been told Buchanan died later on or had an early death for whatever
16 reason.

17 KC: Now, when you and Leathers were shot down, was this your first tour?

18 LB: Yes, sir.

19 KC: Could you tell me about that one? That experience?

20 LB: We were out, again, just west of Baldy, or not Baldy, Ross. Joe was flying
21 with me on this particular day. Now, Don Crosby, every observer had their particular
22 way of being in the aircraft and how they worked. First time I ever flew with Joe
23 Leathers after riding with Crosby, I was upset, got back in and told Crosby I didn't want
24 to fly with Leathers ever again. The guy was lazy. He sat in the aircraft leaned up against
25 the back. He had his arm propped up on the 60 and he didn't look like he was ready or
26 knew what was going on. Crosby enlightened me a little bit and told me about, a little bit
27 about Joe's background and so I, “Okay, will fly with him again.”

28 KC: Well, what was his background?

29 LB: Okay, Don Crosby is one of these kinda guys, he's almost like hyper, so he'd
30 sit up in the seat, lean over the gun and be looking out the door all the time. Joe was
31 kinda leaned back and doing nothing. Joe had been in our Delta Troop, which was our

1 ground troop, before he came over to B Troop and had been a gunner on one of the gun
2 jeeps that ran, did road convoys and stuff like that. They'd been ambushed one day and
3 Joe went out to help clear this ambush. Jumped out in the vehicles that were being
4 ambushed and basically took out the enemy position with his M-16 and when he ran out
5 of that, out of M-16 ammo, finished him off with his .45.

6 KC: Wow.

7 LB: So Joe had no issue of being afraid of anything. Neither did Crosby or any of
8 these kids. They weren't afraid of anything. So when Joe was flying with me, because he
9 didn't sit up like Crosby I thought he was kinda slacking off in there. But he's one of
10 these kinda guys if he just, if all of a sudden he leaned forward, you'd better be looking
11 because he's either seen something or he's got that feeling, we're in the middle of it, or
12 about to get into it. When Joe and I were working west of Ross and we jumped on a
13 bunch of guys, about the same area that Crosby and I were at when I got hit the first time.
14 All these things just kinda mill around in the same areas. We started jumping on guys
15 and we were shooting and getting stuff and by then I think we had killed five or six guys.
16 We'd caught a guy running. I'd spun around in front of him and about fifty yards in front
17 of us he came busting out of a tree line not expecting us sitting there out in front of him
18 and I hit him with both skid guns. You know, so I just took that guy out. We pulled back
19 up, saw some more guys running into a tree line, we started after 'em. Guns were giving
20 us cover and all of a sudden Joe says, "I think we ought to go in." I'm in the middle of
21 this fray and thinking, "Why? We've got fuel. You've got ammunition still in your gun,"
22 and he pulled his leg up, raised his leg up, put his foot back inside the door of the aircraft,
23 and you can see the blood just squirting out of the front of his boot and then we started
24 taking some hits. I headed to Baldy or Ross which was right behind us and we landed
25 there about the same place that Crosby put the aircraft down when I'd been hit. Aid got
26 Joe on a little, what they called a mule. I'm not sure if you're familiar what mules were.

27 KC: No, explain that to me.

28 LB: On a mule, and took him up to the aid station. I got the aircraft shut down,
29 took a look at it. We had a couple of holes in it but it was gonna make it okay. I could put
30 some oil back in it, put a plug in it, and I'd get it back into home station real quick back
31 to Porazzo and they could work on it there.

1 KC: Now you mentioned a mule, explain that to me.

2 LB: What's that?

3 KC: What do you mean by that? A mule. Explain that to me—

4 LB: I'm sorry, sir.

5 KC: You said that it took him by mule. What was that?

6 LB: Yes, okay, a mule was a little vehicle that the military in the mid-'60s had
7 come up with that was a little platform designed to be used to move some troops around
8 and/or supplies and you could sit on it with a driver's seat. You were basically sitting on
9 what looked like a wagon, you know, oversized wagon only had a little motor on it and it
10 had a steering wheel that you sat up in the front and hung your legs over the edge there in
11 a little basket and you'd drive this thing along. Now, you could either drive it, sitting up
12 there or, if you need to you could take the steering wheel and fold it forward, stand out
13 on the ground behind it and drive it going in the other direction using the steering wheel.

14 KC: Okay.

15 LB: It had four-wheel steer if needed be, need be, or you could put it in two-wheel
16 steer. So, it was not a great little vehicle if you were a bunch of pilots trying to use at
17 night trying to go from club to club. Especially if you put it four-wheel steer, you'd wind
18 up in the ditch more times than not. But so they'd run down, the aid station run down
19 there, that was their transport to get litters up to the aid station from the helipad.

20 KC: Okay, very good.

21 LB: So they put Joe on this mule. He's sitting up on it with his foot hanging off
22 the back, waving at me as he went up the hill. I checked the aircraft out like I say, and
23 went up there and they kinda had this boot off by them and basically what it'd done is the
24 joint where his big toe and his foot come together, the round had gone right through there
25 in that kinda of a, just ahead of the ball of your foot. They had given him some morphine
26 by then. I ask him one of those stupid questions, "Joe, does it hurt?" He says, "Yeah, it
27 hurts but I don't care right now." The morphine doesn't really take away pain, it just
28 kinda gives you a euphoria feeling to, you know, apparently that you don't really care a
29 lot, you know, or it numbs you in some of your senses but, you see, "I don't really care
30 right now." So they had a medevac aircraft coming in. The doctor did a few things for
31 him, put him on a litter, took him out and put him on a medevac and I went back and like

1 I said got some oil in the aircraft and a few oil tank, put a little wooden plug in it to get it
2 home and flew back to, headed back to Porazzo by myself. Probably within a couple
3 minutes of flying, I'm flying low level which was normally what we did. It kinda dawned
4 on me, one, I didn't have a gunship, my gun with me, my wingman covering me and I
5 had nobody sitting in the seat next to me doing shooting as necessary and you get that all
6 of a sudden, oops, lonely feeling.

7 KC: Yes.

8 LB: What am I doing? You know, the realization came to me so I immediately
9 climbed to altitude and then I decided maybe I ought to call and talk to 3 back at base and
10 let them know I'm coming and somebody would be aware that in case I don't get there
11 pretty soon to come look for me. Kinda all those things go through your mind all of a
12 sudden like, "Oh, I'm out here by myself again." So I saw Joe at the hospital that night.
13 They evacuated him later to Japan. I did not see Joe again until 1970. This was in '67
14 when I got him hurt. In 1970 he became, he was back in Echo 1st of the 9th where I was at
15 then or came to, he was already there when I got there. He and Don Crosby were my
16 platoon sergeant and senior section sergeant in the scout platoon when I, for Echo 1st of
17 the 9th when I was scout platoon leader there. Nevins had the squadron again and put the
18 word out as he was getting ready to leave and I'd got there that Don Crosby, Joe
19 Leathers, and myself were not allowed in the same helicopter together.

20 KC: Is that right?

21 LB: Between us we'd had nearly eleven years as scouts in Vietnam. His
22 comment was. "I'm not gonna be responsible for losing that kinda of expertise in one
23 aircraft. I'm also not gonna be responsible for somebody letting the three of them go
24 somewhere that maybe were not supposed to be, or start something we can't get out of."
25 You know, so we were never supposedly allowed to fly together even though they were
26 my platoon sergeant and section, senior section sergeant within the platoon that I had at
27 that time.

28 KC: Wow.

29 LB: So, but like I say, we had between the three of us, we had nearly eleven years
30 of scouts in Vietnam.

31 KC: Well, you can certainly see why they would want to keep you separate.

1 LB: We had a great time. They were great guys and I'm gonna get to see one of
2 'em here real soon.

3 KC: Well, before we pick up with your times that you were shot down, you had
4 just taken me through your experiences in the Tet Offensive in 1968 in the Hue-Phu Bai
5 area.

6 LB: Okay.

7 KC: For the most part, where were you located after this? When did your tour
8 end?

9 LB: My tour ended just as the relief up at Khe Sanh started.

10 KC: Okay.

11 LB: When the 1st Cav Division was, Tet had pretty we kinda wound down. The
12 Khe Sanh was being, needed to get up there and help the Marines that were, had been
13 basically isolated up there. The division was given the task of going up there and
14 clearing a road into 'em. We could fly up in that area. You just couldn't, with as many
15 things as were going around there, there just was not a great place to land but we started
16 suppressing that. So just as that started I went home. I was going home in April of '68.

17 KC: Okay, now this was, I believe Operation Pegasus, to relieve Khe Sanh?

18 LB: It could've been. I don't remember what.

19 KC: Okay, well, tell me about what you saw, what you were involved in, in the
20 relief of Khe Sanh. The short time you were involved.

21 LB: Well, actually I was not so much, I didn't really get to be in the relief of Khe
22 Sanh. I mean we did some recon up toward that way but before and it was all just
23 badlands. I wasn't getting up over the Khe Sanh base itself or anything like that. So I
24 could not, you know, I'm not a relief of Khe Sanh guy. All the guys that I left behind
25 within the next four or five days, two weeks, were the ones that did it.

26 KC: Alright.

27 LB: So I really, you know, I knew it was getting, it was started, it was going on,
28 but I was being flown, I was leaving. In fact, the guy that took me, flew me to Da Nang
29 was later killed later that afternoon on the way up there. So it just, my day was to go
30 home that day. They put me on an aircraft that morning as they started the push to the
31 Khe Sanh and I was dropped off in Da Nang and then caught a ride south to get down to

1 Cam Ranh Bay where I joined, or actually I went to An Khe to join up with Flannigan
2 and all those kids that were, the guys that were my classmates that were given, waiting at
3 An Khe to find out what was going to happen to us, where we were gonna get shipped
4 out of country. I was one of the last ones of the group to arrive at An Khe because I kept
5 staying out in the field. Every night John Flannigan for the last week had been calling to
6 find out when I was coming, you know, calling through the land lines forward to get a
7 hold of the troop to find out when I was leaving the troop to come back to An Khe. He'd
8 been gone about a week, week and a half when I finally left.

9 KC: Now, what were your thoughts upon leaving Vietnam? Did you think you
10 were going to come back?

11 LB: Well, I didn't know if we were coming back or not but you really leave with
12 some mixed emotions. One, you're glad and you're happy as heck to be going. We'd
13 survived the tour. I remember sitting in Cam Ranh Bay the morning we were leaving.
14 Waiting for the aircraft that we were gonna get on to be unloaded, cleaned up, and we
15 would get on it and all these new guys walked in and, of course, now you, they'd bring
16 you in groups. You'd come off an aircraft and all the officers are separated and they go
17 over into one holding area and the enlisted going to another because they're all being
18 treated a little bit differently and whatever how it's going. But this holding area that we
19 were sitting in that morning was full of pilots and/or infantry or officers that were getting
20 ready to leave and a bunch of warrant officers to come walk in through the door, the new
21 guys coming into country so immediately the shouts start up and, "Hoo and ah and hey!
22 We're so short," you know, "and you guys," you know, "you got a lifetime in front of
23 ya'. Let me shake your hand while you still got one left," you know, all those kinda
24 things that really make the new guy feel good.

25 KC: Sure.

26 LB: You know, that went on for a few minutes. Of course, they settled in and get
27 over in their little corner and stay away from you. Some guys, you know, visited a little
28 while, "What unit were you in? Who were you with?" you know, things like that. "Who
29 should we get assigned to?" or "I'm going to such and such a division, unit. What do you
30 know about it?" and those kinda things. Some of that conversation goes on for a little
31 while until they called us, lined us up, put us on the freedom bird so we could head home.

1 KC: Did you have regrets about leaving at that time in '68?

2 LB: Not really regrets. I think we were just wanting to hurry up and go home
3 because gonna go home and get me a new car. I was gonna go to Fort Wolters and teach
4 flight, you know, teach new pilots and looking forward to going home and, you know,
5 seeing round-eyed women and having a new fast car, 'cause that one of the things and
6 having an apartment to live in Ft. Worth. While we worked in Mineral Wells out there at
7 Fort Wolters and just looking forward to a lot of fun. Of course you get, you start getting,
8 you leave and/or you hear of a few things that are happening and you start worrying
9 about guys you left behind. The first thing you think about is, "Well, I wish I was there
10 to help them. Maybe if I could've had been there, it might've made a difference," or "I'm
11 glad I'm not, it's time for me to go home and them to do their part and I did mine for a
12 year." It settles in after a while after you've been home. A month or so you start, it
13 became two feelings. One, "I don't ever go back again," or "Damn, you know, the
14 excitement. I miss it. I want to be back there." You got the two groups, you know, fairly
15 shortly after getting home, if you weren't already in one of those mindsets. A lot of guys
16 left Vietnam early on when they were leaving with the idea, "Man, this is enough. Once
17 is enough for me." You know, "I don't need to do, don't want to do this again." I'm not
18 saying that they were, I don't mean that in a derogatory way. I don't mean that those
19 guys weren't courageous or anything else.

20 KC: Sure.

21 LB: They had seen all they wanted to see. They had done their part and they
22 didn't want to be in that anymore and there's nothing wrong with that. I was planning on
23 staying in the service at the time, so I figured if it didn't end, I was going back sooner or
24 later and I didn't know what I was gonna go back and do. I was going to be going back
25 sometime. At that time aviators were turning around at about eighteen months and
26 getting back in-country so I knew that I'd be home for a little while and probably be on
27 trip back.

28 KC: So you know that even when you left?

29 LB: Yes.

30 KC: Okay. And you spent how long at Fort Wolters?

1 LB: I was at Fort Wolters from May until October of '68. I went, in the meantime
2 I had received a direct commission. This was before the postcard directs came out. I'd
3 put in for direct commission while I was in Vietnam because it was put in over there, I
4 could only be promoted to 2nd lieutenant. I was offered my direct commission 1st of
5 October, end of September. I had two days to make up my mind whether I wanted to
6 take it or not. The senior retired personnel chief that was there told me, he says, "Hey, if
7 you don't want this commission," he says "I'll tell you what. I'll get you a Mohawk
8 transition if you don't want to take this commission. I'll get you something else." I
9 decided to take the commission. So in October, right shortly within, or when I got the
10 commission and was sworn in, there were orders with it to send me to Fort Knox,
11 Kentucky, 'cause that was the armor branch which was the branch that had taken me to
12 up to Fort Knox to go through my branch course. In other words, here I'm supposedly a
13 brand new 2nd lieutenant, which I was. I knew little to nothing about armor. I was
14 assigned to armor branch so I needed to go up there and go through the, excuse me, their
15 branch course to be indoctrinated as an armor officer. I left Fort Knox, I mean Fort
16 Wolters end of October, 1st of November, arrived mid-November arrived in at Knox
17 about the end of the month, got signed in, went on Christmas break immediately after
18 we'd been there a week or so. I flew back down to Wolters, visited with some of the
19 boys down there, went back after Christmas break to my mom, see my mom and dad at
20 back in Battleground, flew back to Fort Knox and got into the class on the armor branch.
21 Burt Chole arrived at Fort Knox about that time to go to his advance course. Colonel
22 Nevins was assigned at Fort Knox then. He was the head of doctrine development. So I
23 had, it was kinda like old home week. I'm in the middle of a class of most of the guys,
24 there were three of us that were warrant officers, former warrant officers that were now
25 commissioned officers that were in this class. All the rest of them were guys, ROTC
26 (Reserve Officer Training Corps) guys or National Guard through their OMAs, or their
27 military academies and everything else, that were going through so about 200 and
28 something of us that were going through armor branch together. They weren't too sure
29 how to handle the three of us that were warrant officers 'cause we'd all been in combat so
30 there were times when some of the classes we were made leaders of the class. There
31 were times when some of the things they were doing we'd already done for real. They

1 kinda give us a pass on that stuff. We attended every class and everything with ‘em but it
2 was kinda like, “Well, if you have any questions, ask these three.” Not just because, you
3 know, because we’d been in Vietnam did not mean we knew all the answers. You know,
4 we just happened to be aviators that had come back as being warrant officers and now we
5 were commissioned officers and we didn’t have any, you know, any more answers than
6 some of the other guys did. When we got there, and some of the branches as we went
7 through training, I ran into guys that I had known in Vietnam and that’s where I got into a
8 lot of, “Hey, this is really great, old home week.” NCOs (noncommissioned officers) that
9 I ran into that we had seen in-country somewhere and worked with before and they treat
10 you like royalty. It was, you know, it was a fun experience. It’s where I met my wife at
11 Fort Knox, Kentucky.

12 KC: Well, then it’s a very important experience for sure, in that aspect.

13 LB: Oh, yes.

14 KC: Did you have any difficulties in adjusting in this change from the 1st Cav to
15 the armor?

16 LB: Not in adjusting to that but adjusting to trying to settle down. I was kinda a
17 hellion.

18 KC: Okay, talk to me about that a little bit, explain that.

19 LB: I was on a regular basis raising hell on post. I wasn’t there too long when I
20 got in trouble for flying low level down the Ohio River on a Sunday afternoon. Not
21 buzzing boats but flying by ‘em and so you know, I mean I have to be the only aircraft
22 flying that day so I got caught immediately. You know, kinda dumb. Right after I had
23 gone through branch course and finished that up, Chole and Nevins were assigned the
24 task of teaching air cav tactics. They were starting a new department and in doing that
25 what it was they were finding that there were too many young men being assigned to the
26 cav, air cav of the reconnaissance units. They’re learning curve was too steep, and what I
27 mean was “too steep” they had no experience on what they were getting ready to do and
28 also they were thrown in as scouts or something and, you know, “How do you learn to
29 track? How do you learn to do this? What are you looking for? How do the weapons
30 systems work? What are you supposed to be doing?” So we were to start teaching that
31 school there. Chole was assigned as the leader of the office. We had two NCOs assigned

1 with us and one other pilot and myself. We started writing doctrinal classes to start
2 teaching. The school evolved into a situation where it became not only for enlisted crew
3 members to go through but also armor officers that were aviators to start flying in the and
4 they're gonna be assigned to cav units also. About the time it was getting kicked off real
5 good, I volunteered to go back to Vietnam. I had gotten into a little more hot water than I
6 needed to be in at Knox and so I volunteered. Heck, it'd be better for me to go back to
7 country where my attitude fits better.

8 KC: What sort of things were you in trouble for there at Knox?

9 LB: Well, flying low level, like I said, getting in more than one scrape in the club.
10 Driving too fast on post. I had a 442 Oldsmobile. It was faster than hell and I'd go across
11 the post pretty fast at times. Had the MPs (military police) chase me half a dozen times.
12 I got, get hauled in, that kinda stuff and Burt and them were having to, "Oh, hell. What
13 the hell? We got to settle this kid down somehow." I supposedly punched an MP one
14 night.

15 KC: Now, you say "supposedly." I would say that you either did or you didn't.

16 LB: Well I don't think I did, but when he put his finger into my chest and told me,
17 'cause he saw on the sticker on my car that I had a student sticker on the car. He didn't
18 look up at the windshield where the normal stickers go to see that I was assigned there.
19 The students had a little yellow square and a blue S put on their bumper so you knew they
20 students. He didn't look in the windshield and see that I had a regular sticker and he
21 kept, I'd been stopped that night and a couple young kids were standing there asking me
22 what was going on and I was talking to them and while I was waiting for them to come
23 back to talk to me after they were dealing with another car, and this MP hollered at them
24 to get out of the way and I told 'em, I hollered back at him, I said, "Well, leave the kids
25 alone. They're not doing anything." He came down there and he said, he got basically in
26 my face and said "Lieutenant, I'm gonna tell you, you're gonna go to Vietnam one of
27 these days here real soon and you're gonna be shot in the back of the head by your own
28 people," as he's putting his finger in my chest. At that point, I told him, I said, "You'd
29 better be a god dang hero if you're gonna talk to me, asshole." At that point we were both
30 on the ground and they handcuffed me and I went to jail. I went to the brig. I was put up
31 for an Article 15 investigation or for a court martial Article 32 investigation, rather, to be

1 court martialled. It was found that I was provoked in the issue. There were other NCOs,
2 senior NCOs and some junior officers around post that were having a lot of problem with
3 the MPs at that time on there. They had a renegade bunch were running around just,
4 especially if they caught an NCO doing something, been out drinking or something.
5 They were roughing them up and saying it was an issue that the NCO had got out of line
6 with them. There was a group that later on they'd found there at Knox that were, had
7 been inciting or doing all this stuff and getting away with it. Whether that was mine or
8 not, I was, it was proven that when they called the kids in, that I hadn't provoked
9 anything. They hadn't seen me hit the guy. He claimed I had hit him. So I got a letter in
10 my file which said, would stay in my file for one year or until I left the post, whichever
11 came first. Within three months I was on my way back to Vietnam. I arrived in-country in
12 March of 1970.

13 KC: Okay, March of 1970. So you have one more year in Vietnam. To what unit
14 were you assigned?

15 LB: I was assigned—I thought I was going over as a crane IP (instructor pilot),
16 flying Skycranes. 'Cause I'd gone to the crane transition course and then they sent me to
17 the IP course, the instructor pilot course, and I was going to, I thought, into crane
18 assignments from Hughes who was the aviation commander at Fort Knox, had just been
19 assigned to the 12th Group in the 1st Aviation Brigade and he had a requirement 'cause
20 there were too many crane pilots in the south air, southern part of the country. He was
21 seeing anyone that had crane time come has their orders would go across his desk and he
22 was reassigning them up north to other crane units and he was at the same time, was
23 looking for anyone that had OH-58 time 'cause the OH-58 was just coming into the
24 Army inventory. My orders went across Colonel Hughes's desk because it was crane IP
25 and had also flown on the net team while at Fort Knox on the 58 during its acceptance.

26 KC: Okay, very good.

27 LB: Hughes is the one that one of those that had the reprimand me while I was at
28 Knox for flying low level and some of the other things I did there. So he said, "Well, tell
29 you what. I got the word down at the replacement center that I wasn't going to a crane
30 unit." I was being assigned to the 3rd of the 17th, Charlie Troop, and directly down to a
31 scout platoon. I called the group to find out why I was being assigned there, when I was a

1 crane guy. I was advised that Colonel Hughes had personally said that I owed him and I
2 would go there for six months and then they would see that I got put into a crane unit.
3 Knowing Colonel Hughes, and his call sign or nickname Corncob 6, knowing him, I
4 decided it was to my advantage just to keep quiet and to do as I was told. I arrived on the
5 day of, late one afternoon into the troop or in the squadron at the 3rd of the 17th at Di An
6 where they were stationed. It was spelled D, capital D-I, D-I-A, or correction, it's spelled
7 capital D-i, capital A-n, pronounced "zeon." We called it Dianne just to sometimes
8 goofing off. But Di An is where they were stationed. I got there late that evening,
9 sergeant got me a bunk. He said, "Well, let's get you down to the troop in the morning,
10 get you assigned." Next morning I was woke up. I'm still wearing my tropical worsted,
11 which were TWs. Still hadn't been issued anything yet as far as in-country 'cause I'd
12 just been there a few days. I was told the squadron commander wanted to see me. I
13 thought it was okay, going to be one of these welcome aboard type things. I went up to
14 see, up to his office area. Sergeant major asked me if I knew how to, be sure I reported
15 when I went in. I told him certainly I know how to do that. I'm not a new guy although
16 they thought I was. A new first lieutenant by then. Walked in and reported to him. He
17 didn't return the salute right away, finally he did and his first comment was, "Just who in
18 the hell do you think you are?"

19 KC: Really?

20 LB: And my response was kinda shocked. "Well, sir, I don't know what you
21 mean. I'm just coming here." He says, "Nobody is assigned to a unit within my
22 command without me knowing about it, let alone direct to a platoon. Now, who put you
23 there and how do you get to do that without my knowledge?" I said, "Sir, all I know is
24 Colonel Hughes said I was coming here." He says, "Colonel Hughes. You mean the
25 group commander?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "I want to know" where I knew him from.
26 I said, "Sir, we served together at Fort Knox, Kentucky." He told me I wasn't going to be
27 a crane pilot. "I was going to come over here and I was going to fly in your scout platoon
28 for six months to help you get started." And here is a lieutenant colonel looking at what
29 he considers a brand new first lieutenant telling, first lieutenant telling him he was going
30 to help the squadron commander get his unit off the ground.

31 KC: You're off on the right foot there, aren't you?

1 LB: The aircraft, you know. So I'm not the, I'm not, "Just get the hell out of my
2 office." So I went down to the troop, turned my bags in, started to draw some supplies,
3 got assigned to the scout platoon, went down to see them that afternoon as they got in
4 from flying, immediately I'm the new guy so I'm going to be doing a lot of things. I was
5 advised by the scout platoon leader that I would fly fifty hours in the left seat with their
6 scouts so I learned how scouts were, what it was all about and get going and, "Oh, by the
7 way, next week we've got a slot. You have to go to Vung Tau and go through the OH-58
8 transition at Vung Tau. Having been around a little while knowing Vung Tau is kind of
9 an R&R (rest and recreation) center, go down to fly the 58 for two weeks in training.
10 "Okay. I'll go do that. No big deal. If I have to fly with you guys for fifty hours, okay, I
11 can do that, too. I'll just bide my time and wait." So I went down to Vung Tau and, of
12 course, the instructors down there, most of the guys I knew after, of course, they had been
13 assigned to that unit to come over from the States when I got, had left to go to crane
14 transition and back to Vietnam. So I spent two weeks down there kinda enjoying myself.
15 Got back, flew with the, started flying with, in right seat or left seat with guys that had al
16 of a total of two to three hundred hours of scout time, maybe a little bit more. I'd had
17 over 1000 hours from my first tour, so even their senior guys that were six, seven
18 hundred hours of flight time, you know. I still had more scouting experience than they
19 did. I kept quiet for a little while until a couple incidents took place. I happened to be
20 one of 'em, on a shoot down with our guns or one of our scouts on the, on the morning
21 that they were letting me fly the right seat and had a guy with about 400 hours of scout
22 time sitting in the left seat to observe, see how I did. Went out and took charge of the
23 operation, ran the operation, came back in and somebody asked me, "Well, you act like
24 you've done this before." The XO who had been in the 1st Cav said, "Well, no one's
25 treated him and/or looked at it right. If you'd looked and see he was in Bravo, 1st of the
26 9th as a scout pilot for his first tour. He already knows more about this than," you know,
27 or something like that. From there it went from there that I then became a leading scout
28 or a senior scout with the Charlie, 3rd of the 17th. We were at Di An and eventually
29 moved north, did a bunch of operations out at Quang Tri and went on until I volunteered
30 to go back to Echo, 1st of the 9th, and that's when I ran into Crosby and Leathers again.

31 KC: Now, why did you volunteer to go back to the 1st of the 9th?

1 LB: Well, after being in the Charlie Troop for the longest time and being, again, I
2 was very lucky. I had some kids that did a lot of great things or great things with me and I
3 got a lot of, was one that found more stuff than most of 'em. When we went to
4 Cambodia, I started setting the record over there by, or started setting it straight over
5 there that when I could find things that others couldn't and showed that senior observers
6 and stuff that were in the unit how to find and track and getting kills, you know, twenty,
7 thirty at a time during the Cambodia operation, we went north and then up there doing
8 things. As the scout platoon leader got ready to be transferred out, I had been made a
9 captain by then and I thought I should be the next scout platoon leader. At that time
10 Major Wolf, who became General Wolf later on and commanded at Rucker, said, "No,
11 we've got a guy that's just come in. He's senior to you in grade." I told him, I said,
12 "Yeah, but, sir, he's senior to me in grade but he's just got a OH-58 transition. He's got
13 no time. He doesn't have the experience." I'm sorry to say that the young man was killed
14 later on, during the Lam Son operation. But when they wouldn't make me the scout
15 platoon leader, I got on the phone and called Major Chole at the time, who had just taken
16 Echo Troop, 1st of the 9th, and asked him if he had an opening for a scout. Could I be a
17 scout platoon leader for him. He said, "Well, we will make it work. Give me a couple of
18 days." Nevins, Colonel Nevins, was running the command at that time again and he
19 reassigned a couple people in the squadron so it made a vacancy for me to come down
20 and take Echo, 1st of the 9th, scouts, El Lobo. So I became El Lobo White and I left 3rd of
21 the 17th in order to get a scout platoon.

22 KC: Now, when did this take place?

23 LB: Carol was down in Long Binh so it put us, again, instead of 600 miles apart it
24 put us about 30 miles apart, 40 miles apart. We were already married by then.

25 KC: Now when did this take place? When did you make this transfer?

26 LB: Pardon, sir?

27 KC: When did you make the transfer?

28 LB: November of '70.

29 KC: November of '70?

30 LB: Yes, sir.

1 KC: Okay. Now, that you're back with the 1st of the 9th and you're with Chole
2 again, what are you going to be doing here? Would it be more of the same, the scouting
3 operations, what was—?

4 LB: Yes, I took the scout platoon. I was the scout platoon leader.

5 KC: Okay.

6 LB: At that time Chole was transferred to squadron again to take over the S-3 so
7 and we had a major assigned that eventually was kinda relieved of command and I wound
8 up running off, this left the platoon, became the operations officer and basically under, as
9 they brought a new commander in, was very lucky in he asked me for advice, a kind of
10 under-the-table type thing because he was a good guy. He knew I had been around a
11 while and I was lucky enough to assist in having free run as the operations officer and let,
12 and the major that was the new-assigned major allowed me to run the operations as we
13 saw that we needed to do. So I had a great time there and then we went to Germany from
14 there.

15 KC: What sort of operations were you involved in in the second tour? Any in
16 particular stand out to you?

17 LB: Started in, shortly after I got there we went to Cambodia.

18 KC: Okay, tell me about that. Weren't you with the 3rd of the 17th at this time?

19 LB: I was with the 3rd of the 17th.

20 KC: Okay, tell me about that.

21 LB: We got over into Cambodia. We worked out of Tay Ninh. We were flying
22 over into the area outside around where they call the Parrot's Beak and Angel Wing and
23 that was our area of operation. The first time I went into Cambodia I had two of the very
24 experienced scout observer and crew chief on board with me. Luck of the draw that
25 particular day. Again, I'm still considered the new guy, no one's really, you know,
26 "Okay, he did well on this but we're not sure how good he is or what he can do." We
27 were scooting along in an area that one of the teams had just left and said there's nothing
28 in there but we had, we were assigned to go recon it again. We were in there about
29 fifteen or twenty minutes when I spotted some stuff, brought the aircraft back around.
30 Worked for a few minutes to get the back seat, the gunner, the crew chief in the back,
31 which in 58 they sat behind you just like in an OH-6. Get him on the target then we

1 started seeing people so we killed five guys on that mission, came back in and he
2 immediately went around, started talking to the guys, telling the other observers and crew
3 chiefs, "Hey, he found the stuff, not us," you know, "he's pointing things out to us."
4 During the Cambodia operation, I think our, my aircraft was accredited with fifty-
5 something kills.

6 KC: Wow.

7 LB: And we jumped on twenty of 'em one day and killed twenty of 'em one day
8 in one side spot and the kids says, "Well, I know there's a couple more here." I said, "No,
9 just count twenty. It's those bodies we can see." The others may have crawled off, we
10 don't know. For some reason, there was in infantry unit close by, they put, they decided
11 to go over and see what we had found. We jumped on one of these resupply elements
12 and they found twenty-two bodies. So we got, you know, so instead of reporting twenty-
13 two, twenty-three, we reported twenty. They came back. The infantry identified that we
14 had twenty, twenty-two kills. So it pays to your advantage not to overestimate, to do what
15 you can really see and go from there. So, you know, it was like, "Oh, no, they didn't get
16 twenty. They got twenty-two." So all of a sudden your kinda like a, "Oh, you know what
17 you're doing. You're a good guy."

18 KC: Right.

19 LB: Yeah.

20 KC: Rather than inflate your numbers just for the sake of inflating them. Well,
21 what did it mean to you, Colonel Brown, what did it mean to you when you were, I guess,
22 released to go into Cambodia for that first time? What did the opportunity to go into
23 Cambodia mean to you?

24 LB: We're gonna go get the guys that, you know, for the longest time you'd been
25 hampered. You couldn't cross the line. The first two days of Cambodia, we went as far
26 west almost to Phnom Penh, you know, then they established the twenty-two mile line
27 inside Cambodia which basically was a road that ran north/south about twenty-two miles
28 inside the Cambodian country and that became the new border, so to speak, we couldn't
29 cross that line. Well, they made it public, you know. The president and Congress says,
30 "Oh, we're not gonna go past this line." So it all of a sudden now they've got a new
31 sanctuary. They just gotta back up a little bit.

1 KC: Right.

2 LB: The hospital, the city, and all those places that the Cav just north of us
3 discovered, you know, which were huge complexes, weapons caches, and everything else
4 that were between Vietnam border and that twenty-two mile line. All these things that
5 basically all the bad guys did was back up once they could, they abandoned the many
6 bases and/or caches, tried to get out what they could when they could but they just moved
7 back across that line, behind that road to become the new border but for the first week or
8 two, it was really hot and heavy and a lot of shooting and a lot of fun.

9 KC: Very good. When do you leave Vietnam on the second, at the end of your
10 second tour?

11 LB: We left country March of '71. Carol and I were going to, had been assigned
12 to Germany so we were, that's where we were headed in March of '71.

13 KC: Okay. The 1st Cav, I believe, leaves Vietnam in March of 1971, as well.

14 LB They were starting to stand down at that point when they knew that was
15 happening. I was hoping, you know, why can't I go to with the division back to Fort
16 Hood and being told, "Well, you're a crane pilot. You're gonna go to Germany to fly
17 cranes."

18 KC: Crane pilot?

19 LB: Yeah. Now, I couldn't fly in Vietnam as a crane guy but now you're gonna
20 send me to Germany? You know to fly cranes.

21 KC: Well, let me ask you what were you're impressions or what things did you
22 see differently in your second tour as compared to the first tour?

23 LB: Drugs were probably more prevalent the second time over there. You know,
24 a lot of kids, a lot of people came to Vietnam already knowing about drugs. They didn't
25 wind up in Vietnam becoming druggies. You know, the United States had already started
26 having their own issues with drugs and the hippies and all of that, you know, the free love
27 and the all that was going on in the late, mid to late '60s. So drugs in the States, pot at
28 least, was very prevalent. So a lot of young men coming to Vietnam had either if they
29 hadn't already experimented with it, knew about drugs from what was going on in the
30 States at that time. They didn't necessarily wind up in Vietnam, now some did, not
31 knowing anything and wound up on drugs but, you know, it was like, "Hey, we can, you

1 can get some pretty good stuff over here. Well, yeah, you can and you also get dead, too,
2 and you're not going to be doing it in my outfit. A lot of that, you didn't have a lot of
3 that going on in front line units. Now, that didn't mean that these units when they went
4 back to the rear area a bunch of guys didn't get all smoked up or something. The main
5 thing that most of us were probably, if they were doing anything, was guys were drinking
6 beer and/or whiskey pretty heavy at times. But, you know some organizations were, had a
7 lot of potheads in 'em but aviation pretty well kept weeding that out. That was a definite
8 no-no. It's one thing to go get drunk one night or drink a little bit too much in the club at
9 night but they weren't doing any pot. You know, some did, and some, I'm not saying
10 nobody did but it wasn't as heavy in aviation as it was in some of the things. Now, a lot
11 of the guys that were assigned to aviation you were watching a lot of young kids that
12 were crew chiefs and/or maintenance guy or infantrymen or something inside that did
13 some problems but that was about it.

14 KC: Well, what other differences did you—

15 LB: Hang on a second please, sir.

16 KC: Sure.

17 LB: Let me see what this flash is for a minute, could I?

18 KC: Okay.

19 LB: Kelly?

20 KC: Yes.

21 LB: Okay, back to you. A painter was trying to get in touch with us. We're
22 getting to have the house painted. I'll call him back in a little while.

23 KC: Okay. I was asking you before that, what other changes you noticed between
24 your first and second tours. Between '67 and '68 and '70 and '71 an awful lot has taken
25 place both in the United States and in the war in Vietnam. You have the process of
26 Vietnamization, etc. What about the conduct of the war? Did you notice any differences
27 in the way the war was being conducted by the United States between the two tours?

28 LB: Not so much a real difference. We were still being in the type of unit I was in,
29 we were still out reconning looking for, you know, that bad areas and stuff like that and
30 so the, that type of operation still continued. There were a lot of hands being tied as far
31 as units that, you know, if they came to work with us get out there, they couldn't shoot

1 until they'd been shot at. Had to get clearance from two or three echelons above them.
2 They, you know, everyone as you arrived in a unit, you'd especially being new if you're
3 new, you only knew how it was working for y'all. A lot of guys were surprised that we
4 had free gun, basically. You know, if we couldn't go out and have clearance to clear
5 ourselves in shooting, we didn't go into the area. But that was a responsibility we had but
6 a lot of that was going on in other units. A lot tighter control. There was a lot of
7 Stateside, you're not flying a lot or whatever. We're standing you guys down. Trying to
8 make it more spit-shined and/or polished. You know, the war effort did not seem, you
9 know, it seemed like it was being fought more and definitely being fought more from the
10 White House or Congress. So we'd seen all that go through with Johnson and now we
11 knew that the peace talks were trying to go on but when we went into Cambodia, we
12 thought, "Man, this is it. We're getting ready to do some real fighting now," and we had
13 that for a while until they pulled us out of Cambodia. Then, you know, as the war went
14 on but it was certain units were overmanned and the combat units were undermanned.
15 You'd be in Long Binh and the recreation officer that running the volleyball courts and
16 stuff like at Long Binh that was working his backside off trying to, because units there on
17 base may be at 200% strength and units out at the field were at 60-80% strength. Just
18 saw that the heart wasn't there. Not that the kids didn't want to do or didn't try, but the,
19 it seemed that the will wasn't there from the higher up and/or the Stateside letting us do,
20 there were plenty of high up commanders and stuff like that wanted to, "If we're here,
21 let's do it and let's do it right." But the will wasn't with from the States.

22 KC: Sure. Mr. Brown—

23 LB: That's mainly because a small community and the press had made it look as
24 though since the Tet of '68 that we were losing the war and we couldn't win there.

25 KC: Mr. Brown, let me take the opportunity to put this interview to a close for
26 today. I've got some technical difficulties that I'm unable to deal with adequately right
27 now.

28 LB: No problem.

Interview with Larry Brown
Session [3] of [3]
26 August 2008

1 KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Mr. Larry
2 Brown. Today is 26 August 2008. I am in Lubbock, Texas, and once again Mr. Brown is
3 joining us from McMinnville, Oregon. Good morning, Mr. Brown.

4 LB: Good morning, good morning.

5 KC: When we left off yesterday, we had you back in Vietnam for your second
6 tour and you were discussing some of the differences that you had noticed between your
7 first tour and your second tour. You mentioned one particular issue, how much more
8 common drug use was especially in the rear non-combat units, for sure. What other kinds
9 of perceptions did you have of the differences between your first and second tours?

10 LB: I think when we came over the second time, well, one, we had a lot more
11 amenities available to us, you know, and as we moved around, you know, it was not
12 uncommon to things had developed a lot more as far as on base is bigger and better PXs
13 where you could get some, you know, go and get some nicer things to have. There was
14 plenty of electricity on most of these bases. Generally every hooch or at least most pilots
15 we had a lot of those little refrigerators so there were just a lot of, you know, just in
16 general because we had been there for several years. Creature comforts had surely
17 improved and it was quite nice going places instead of sleeping in a tent, you know, on a
18 cot you had actually may not be the best building in the world but you had a building to
19 sleep in. It may have been small cubicle rooms but it was a building and wooden slats in
20 the side with screens and/or a Quonset hut or something depending on the base you lived
21 in the living conditions were a lot nicer. They weren't Stateside but they're sure a lot
22 nicer than sleeping under your aircraft or in a GP medium and, you know, ten guys or
23 twenty guys in a GP medium on cots so, made it a lot, in that vein it was a lot nicer.

24 KC: Well, that takes me to another question that I wanted to ask you and that is
25 morale. What kind of differences, if any, did you see in the morale between your first
26 and second tours?

27 LB: I think morale was generally about the same.

28 KC: Okay.

1 LB: Everyone still had a lot of belief in their units. I'm sure there were
2 organizations that had a lot of problem in them or something. It seemed that morale
3 usually was pretty high. You always had somebody, I'm sure, in an organization that was
4 a naysayer or a, you know, gloom-and-doom and moaning all the time and why am I here
5 type thing. There were stories or indications that throughout Vietnam there were
6 organizations that were having problems with either race or had a lot of drug use or just
7 people refusing to do what they're supposed to do but I think sometimes those were
8 probably by the time we heard the story or it was written about or told about it'd probably
9 been embellished two or three or four times, but I think morale generally was fairly good.

10 KC: What about the belief in the American cause in Vietnam in general? Maybe
11 the morale within the particular unit was good, the *esprit de corps*, etc., was good
12 because of the relationships that had developed. What was your impression of the
13 general American attitude in-country in Vietnam toward the American role there?

14 LB: Well, let's see, toward the American role? I, where we were at, what we were
15 doing in the mostly aviation units and everything, I think we all felt we could win the war
16 or were winning it and we could do something, it just needed to be turned loose and just
17 let us go do the job we were sent over there to do. I think most people in general for the
18 most part felt we were doing good and that the, if they just take it to the enemy, we could,
19 we were winning and we were doing, so it was worth the effort. You know, a lot of times
20 in combat the guys that are fighting it have more staying power and/or will to do
21 something than the people that are sitting at home not having to do anything about it. It's
22 not because it's do or die and if they don't get it done, then gonna, you know, they've
23 only got that reason that feeling because they're the only ones, you know, they're there
24 and if they don't win they're gonna, something happened to 'em. No, it's they know that
25 they are doing good and see changes happening. We at home don't always see that
26 and/or don't hear it. Just like we have kids today that are overseas. You get a totally
27 different perspective when you talk to them, when they come home about what's going
28 on over there and what you read in the newspaper.

29 KC: That's absolutely true. Well, what about your views on the Vietnamese?
30 We'll start with the enemy, whether it was the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) or the

1 VC. What was your view of the enemy you faced in '67-'68 compared to your view of
2 them in '70-'71?

3 LB: I think a resolve was pretty much the same all the way through. There were,
4 we faced not just VC but the NVA and the PAVNs (People's Army of Vietnam) and they
5 were both all aspects of the enemy. We ran into the NVA or PAVNs, of course, they were
6 better equipped and they fought better. They were better trained than the VC. The VC
7 and so, when you were, early on, there were probably north, we ran into the north being
8 up in 1st Corps and the northern part of II Corps. You ran into a lot more NVA than you
9 did down in III or IV Corps. So we fought—being how that's where I spent most of my
10 first tour is up in the 1st and 2nd Corps. We ran into well-armed, pretty well disciplined
11 and trained troops. They didn't understand helicopters very much. The old joke was
12 they would aim at the aircraft and not aim, lead it or do whatever properly. They thought
13 sometimes hiding in a hole. Didn't understand overhead cover as well but kinda felt that
14 if they just sat still or a lot of times you wouldn't see 'em and that's true depending on
15 how high your flying or what you're doing. But the VC was just, you know, here's a guy
16 that has some kind of weapon hidden somewhere. At night when he thinks he's safe or
17 sometimes when he thinks it's safe he gets it out and he may take a few shots at you and
18 then he puts it away and goes back doing what he's doing. You know, the typical
19 guerilla type warfare. So they were not as well armed early in '65-'66, up in the early '67
20 that we ran into but in mid to later '67 they started getting a lot more AKs and SKS
21 weapons as opposed to some of the older weapons that as far as the VC had in the earlier
22 onset of the conflict. Then, you know, so it was I think for the most part, the NVA were
23 fairly well trained, fairly disciplined, well regimented, and kinda had that attitude well,
24 wave attack and stuff like that, you know, they fought very well. But sometimes in the
25 tactics you wondered if it was so regimented, they didn't take a lot of initiative at times
26 and so here were, and did a lot of if they were in a frontal attack and it wasn't working,
27 they'd just do another frontal attack, you know. So in that part, I didn't see the, you
28 know, the US military has a reputation throughout the world, you know, we have tactics
29 written down with everyone, other countries they we're dangerous because we don't
30 necessarily follow our doctrine and our tactics and depending on what's going on, you
31 may have some NCO or young officer that steps up to take charge and, you know, you

1 have this—he'll wing it and pull something out and do something that totally unexpected
2 and win the day. But I think in the early days the NVA were probably the much more
3 well equipped and more disciplined element than the VC and everything. Now my
4 second tour, and it took a while after the Tet Offensive before the North could ever stage
5 another, any more real fights because basically they were decimated during the Tet of
6 '68. They were within days of suing for peace when, you know, when the homeland here
7 said, "Oh, we've the lost the war." There was really, when I came back in '70, the VC
8 was never as strong or robust as it had been before the Tet of '68. Tet Offensive
9 basically annihilated all the, you know, main VC elements in the South. The VC was
10 always there later but it was not as formable and big a group that I understood of seeing
11 before. The NVA, again, later in the year, later on, they were again well equipped. Still
12 well disciplined, much younger, I think. I remember running into 'em, they seemed a
13 younger group in the '70s and probably not as experienced in combat as the kids we had,
14 the guys we had run into in the earlier days because they were a lot of leftovers from
15 fighting the French and everything so they had a lot more experience.

16 KC: Sure.

17 LB: But a lot of that was lost in the Tet of '68 so the NVA in the '70 when I was
18 back there they were more prevalent down south, further south. But they were younger.
19 Still fairly well equipped, fairly disciplined, and all, but just didn't seem to have the age
20 group in there with the fighting experience. A lot of these guys the first fight they got
21 into was the one that they, that we bumped into 'em on and if they got their lunch handed
22 to 'em, that was it. It's kinda like the joke or the story used to be that they'd get
23 somebody and it takes them six months to walk down the trail carrying ammunition so,
24 Nguyen is give six mortar rounds in Hanoi and he'd spend six months down the trail
25 carrying them all the way to down south somewhere or three months, rather, just carries it
26 down there, somebody fires those six rounds and tells 'em to go back and get three, go
27 back and get six more so he's, you know, it's kinda like, you know, they had a slow pack
28 train but it was continuous.

29 KC: Right.

30 LB: But I see, I think the difference was the age and more NVA further south
31 later and fewer VC later.

1 KC: Okay, well, what about the South Vietnamese allies? What did you see, if
2 anything, in terms of changes between your tour in '67-'68 and your second tour?

3 LB: There were, in '67— many of the South were conscripted soldiers. There
4 was not always a lot of discipline. They were fragmented a lot. There were some very
5 good South Vietnamese organizations, the Rangers and a few of those that fought very
6 well. For the most part, a lot of 'em, you know, were working out of little hamlets and is
7 almost like a local militia. A guy could be conscripted into the Vietnamese, South
8 Vietnamese Army but he may, his base that he's working out of is probably right next
9 door to where he's living. So it's almost like his family ties or apron strings may not have
10 been cut very well, so you know, it's kinda like a day job. We go here during the day and
11 some days they gotta stay on the base at night but I wander around during the day or go
12 home at night if I don't have to stay here. In that vein a lot of times you don't have the
13 most dedicated soldier and/or some of the leadership isn't the best and then the kids don't
14 get the best training, you know. So there were some heartache, you know, in our part with
15 the, a lot of the South Vietnamese soldiers themselves. At times they seemed to cut and
16 run if the fighting got a little heavy. But like I say, there were some organizations that
17 were quite well trained, had a hell of a reputation and fought very well but it depended
18 on, I think, the individual leadership of that particular unit. The location where it was at,
19 whether it was in an area that was heavily defended by US and they didn't depend on
20 themselves very much or in an area where they were kinda in an outpost somewhere and
21 they needed to be all they could be, so to speak, or they weren't going to be there. So you
22 ran, there was a big, there was some big differences, either very good or fairly mediocre
23 and not a lot in between.

24 KC: What about your second tour? What did you see any changes?

25 LB: Second tour, again, it stayed about the same. The Vietnamese during
26 Vietnamization had more places but it just didn't seem like they had stepped up to take,
27 you know, take full charge. Again, I think it was because of the communal living
28 closeness of somebody being put into the military and his base that he's assigned to is
29 right there in the same town he lived in and he either showed up at work or, you know,
30 some of them didn't have a lot of drive. I've seen them inserted as far as a Vietnamese

1 unit and the first thing they did was get off the aircraft and start setting up to eat chow.
2 They'll fight like anyone else when they had to but not as—not like some of 'em.

3 KC: Okay. Is there anything else about your second tour that you would like to
4 discuss for the record?

5 LB: Well, when we went into Cambodia we talked about some of the fighting that
6 was going on over there. Running into the—like I say, down south I started my second
7 tour we I was working out of, out of Di An, which is close between Long Binh and
8 Saigon. We used to work up in an area called Xuan Loc, which is part of the Michelin
9 rubber plantation. Over there it was heavily influenced through that area with NVA or,
10 you know, that wasn't true in the earlier days in '67-'66, they weren't that far south. Had
11 some fairly good, a few fairly good VC elements in that area and a lot of, like I say, a lot
12 of NVA, a lot more NVA down there. Had some good fights in and around that area.
13 They were well, fairly well equipped. Ran into a lot more .50-calibers down south
14 during, or it wasn't .50-caliber, theirs is .51 cal.

15 KC: Right.

16 LB: Down south in '67, or correction, in '70-'71 than you would've in the early
17 or mid '60s. That equipment had just worked its way down and they were getting further
18 south. So there were opportunities to go 50 hunting and we used to play games, mainly
19 during the first tour, we used to play games with the .51s when we'd find 'em so we
20 could take 'em out.

21 KC: What kind of game?

22 LB: Well—

23 KC: Explain that to me.

24 LB: If we found a .50, or a .51, the problem was a lot of times they would
25 triangulate them. They'd set 'em up where one could protect another, maybe three of
26 'em out in an area. But if you got it set up and found one where he's by himself or you
27 were in the position to keep the other one from protecting him as well. They'd start
28 shooting at you from a distance so you could kinda get an idea where they were and the
29 gun would spot 'em or the scout would spot 'em and then we would, what it do is run the
30 gun and they could climb up and get it out of range technically and at altitude we'd start
31 firing some rockets. You know, not a heavy slavo but firing a few rockets at it at a time,

1 attacking toward it. As a scout, we'd go low level and get 180 degrees out from 'em and
2 coming at it on the deck, at the gun from the other side so their attention of the gun .51
3 would be at that gunship that's firing some rockets at 'em or keeping their head down and
4 he'd be shooting at 'em. As we were getting closer to the target the scout would be
5 getting closer to the gun, the gunship would tell you that okay, last pair of rockets on the
6 way and you, we'd be seeing where they were hitting so you had an idea on how far you
7 were, how close you were to it. You'd watch that last pair of rockets come down and just
8 at they'd hit, you'd want to pop over the gun pit just after they've hit. Pop over the gun
9 pit vertically over it and turn and let the door gunner shoot into the pit, you know, so
10 you'd take the gun out that way. We used to do that but occasionally you'd bump into
11 somebody and one of the times we kinda quit doing that or I quit doing it for a while was
12 when I ran right down the front end of another weapon that was sitting there was there to
13 protect the one we were attacking and we didn't see him until at the last minute and I
14 think if he'd had a bayonet on the end of that weapon, he would've got us as opposed to
15 traverse and shoot at us as we went by him.

16 KC: So were you not hit at all?

17 LB: No we weren't hit at all, and it scared the dickens out you, thought we were
18 hit but they missed us all together because we were making a hard pass and right at the
19 last moment, just as they got ready to open up for some reason, you have that feeling and
20 you make a hard turn and go, and just as you make, start the turn, we saw 'em as they
21 started shooting at us and they couldn't traverse with us fast enough, 'cause we had just
22 got up on 'em too close. They couldn't see us. We couldn't see them until we were so
23 close to 'em because they're set up to shoot up, not out, not straight out in front of 'em
24 ground level. They're used as anti-aircraft weapons in those kind of configurations so
25 they don't build themselves necessarily at way of being able to shoot level and they can't,
26 'cause they'll dig a pit with a pedestal in the center of the pit. The gun will sit up on the
27 top of the pit, pedestal and they'll walk around inside that pit, you know, using the
28 ground level as their protection for themselves. So they're down in that maybe there the
29 pit may be dug four feet deep. The gun is standing on a pedestal in the center of that so it
30 looks like somebody's cut a donut into the ground.

31 KC: Okay.

1 LB: Okay, so the center pedestal, the gun sits up on top of that. So a guy that's
2 only five-five, or five-six tall and he's standing in a hole that's four feet deep, when he's
3 holding on to the butterfly on that weapon, his only real way of shooting it, is up in the
4 air, if you're following that.

5 KC: Yes, absolutely.

6 LB: Okay, so they walk around that circle in there so they can do 360 degrees up
7 at aircraft but for them to try to fire at ground level, now they were having to reach up
8 over their head to get that weapon down and there are camouflage and things they put
9 around it a lot of times. Don't, do not make that a, that's not what they were put there
10 for.

11 KC: Sure.

12 LB: They're made, to put there to shoot at aircraft, not at, they'd set up totally
13 different if they were using it as a defensive or attack weapon for ground troops.

14 KC: How low do you think they were, would you say they were able to shoot?
15 The range of fire. How low could they get to ground level, in this configuration?

16 LB: Well, if somebody jumped up on the side of the pit or just jacked the gun
17 straight up, you know, the trigger straight up in the air and they could depress it to shoot
18 down at ground level, but for the most part they couldn't sight it very well. They were
19 just, they were at that point what they were doing is just Kentucky windage, okay? I'm
20 trying to point aim over here 'cause I've got the butterflies well above my head and I'm
21 just kinda, okay, it's about that direction. If they jump up on the side of the pit to try
22 doing that, they'll shoot, you know, the tripod sits four, you know, two feet in the air.
23 Their grazing fire can be two feet off the ground but now I'm two and a half to three feet
24 away from the butterfly so I'm trying to straddle this ditch and I can use the sights but
25 now I'm, you know, it's pretty awkward to traverse to move the weapon around. So they
26 could, you know, with sitting on a normal tripod, it would probably set about two feet in
27 the air. If they used an antiaircraft tripod or bipod for it, or not a bipod, but a ped mount
28 for it, it's about three feet tall. So if they, depending on what they did with it in the pit
29 and what kind of pod they had on it, a bipod or I mean, not a bipod, but a tripod or a ped
30 mount, how that center pedestal would be and how high it would be off the ground.

31 KC: Sure.

1 LB: So—

2 KC: How long were you in the Xuan Loc area?

3 LB: Xuan Loc, we were probably there about four months, five months.

4 KC: So you were there quite a while, then?

5 LB: Yes, sir.

6 KC: What other sorts of activity did you see while you were there? And you said
7 this is around the Parrot's Beak area, is that correct?

8 LB: No, Xuan Loc is inland, much more, they, Tay Ninh is over by the, when we
9 went into Cambodia, that was over there by the Parrot's Beak and all. If you, Xuan Loc
10 is northeast of Saigon.

11 KC: Okay. Now I see.

12 LB: All right, and it's in the flats out there where we, and that was the part of the
13 old French Michelin rubber plantation areas out through there. Huge rubber plantations
14 were out there at one time. I got shot down out there once with Carol watching it and—

15 KC: You were shot down with your wife watching?

16 LB: Well, she was a nurse at the 24th Evac so she was always, you know, "Well,
17 I'm here in the hospital working, don't get to see things. You're out flying around all the
18 time and you see all these things and"—

19 KC: Now, you were married at this time. Is that correct?

20 LB: No, we hadn't got married yet.

21 KC: You were not. Okay.

22 LB: So, she was ready to have a day off and I said, "Well, tell you what. You can
23 fly out with us tomorrow. We'll take you out there and you can see how boring our day
24 is sitting around on an airfield somewhere." So she came over, we picked here up that
25 morning. Put here in the front of a gun in a Cobra and she flew up with one of the Cobra
26 pilots and we went to Xuan Loc and that morning we had a couple recons and nothing
27 had happened and then we got a report that there was an ARVN company in contact with
28 a large force, they thought NVA or something, but they were outnumbered. They were
29 about five clicks, five kilometers, off the end of Xuan Loc, south, southwest of Xuan Loc.
30 The guy, the scout team that was up next was a brand new scout. He had just taken his
31 number and everything so, I told ops that I'd take the mission and go down and take a

1 look. We'd also had a scout that morning have a mechanical problem so his aircraft
2 didn't return to Di An so we had one extra gunship out there. On the way down I talked
3 to, told my gun we were ready to go and this extra gun said, "Well, why don't I go along
4 with you?" Let's see, the gun pilots then was Heady Bear and Hump so that would've
5 been—no, I'll think of their names here in a second, their real names—but I told, they
6 said, "Okay, we'll go," you know, "let's just team up with a threesome." We kinda
7 laughed and joked and took off about "Today's gonna be a great day and a lot of
8 shooting." We got down there, made contact with the ARVNs. One of the reasons we
9 went there is they had two US advisors with 'em on the ground and so they're the ones
10 that had made the contact, calling for help. When we got down there, they told us where
11 the contact was coming from. It was in part of the rubber plantation, right on the edge of
12 it. The guns oriented me back into the area. I made one pass and identified some people
13 and was being shot at. I told 'em I was going to go back around to make another pass at
14 it 'cause I wanted to mark it and during the second pass they opened up on us and they
15 opened up with a .60-cal machine gun, also. One of ours, a captured weapon, apparently,
16 and not .60-cal. M-60. What am I saying?

17 KC: Sure.

18 LB: .60-cal? Man, you think I'm losing it here. M-60, you know.

19 KC: No, I'm following.

20 LB: So they open up with the M-60 on us and as well as the AKs and everything
21 else. Immediately, we started taking hits. The kid sitting next to me, I was flying a 58 at
22 the time, the OH-58. The young man sitting next to me was hit immediately in both legs.
23 My back seat had started shooting, the crew chief, and he took a round through the back.
24 He got hit in the back and one leg and the aircraft was taking numerous hits in the engine.
25 We got hit in the engine and we started losing power. I started to accelerate to try to get
26 out of the area and the guns, I call, made a call to the guns that we're taking fire, taking
27 hits and we were going down. The guns as they rolled in, one of them told 'em and said
28 the last, telling me later, the last thing they saw was the aircraft going inverted into the
29 treetops. We hit the top of the trees on the edge of the rubber plantation in the jungle area
30 there about— and the trees in the jungle part was about 100 feet tall.

31 KC: Okay.

1 LB: So we had, hit the top of the trees, broke through the top of the canopy, hit
2 again another layer of canopy under that at about fifty feet and kinda slid along that and
3 then fell to the ground, nose low on my side of the aircraft, into some green bamboo.
4 Luckily, we were on one side of a ditch and the guys that were shooting at us were on the
5 other side of the ditch. Once we were on the ground I helped get the two kids out of the
6 aircraft. The backseat was able to get out by himself fairly well but the frontseater, we
7 had to help him out because of both legs being shot. So my observer had been shot in
8 both legs, my crew chief had been shot, flesh wound in one leg and a back, a bullet in his
9 back. Immediately we came under fire. Initially, the guns lost total sight of us, couldn't
10 see us. Once we have a bird go down, you scramble everything you've got. Carol was
11 sitting up by the radio, yeah, a radio operator, the RTO (radio-telephone operator) on the
12 ramp and sees everyone start running and scrambling to go for the, what's wrong. He has
13 this young boy, this young man had seen her get out there. He knew he she was dating
14 one of the pilots. He'd seen her get out of the Cobra so he thought she was, that was who
15 she flew out with was her, was the Cobra pilot was her fiancée. So he told her, "Don't
16 worry, ma'am. The Cobras are okay. It's the scout that's down." So as it went on, at first
17 they couldn't find us. We didn't make radio contact 'cause I'm trying to get the kids out.
18 My survival radio was just off channel enough, had a two selector and it was just off
19 channel enough I wasn't transmitting properly when I did go up on it. Eventually, we got
20 it into the right position and was able to talk to 'em, but it was about ten minutes before
21 we made contact with 'em, with the aircraft, the other aircraft. In the meantime, we had
22 got everybody out, everybody got out of the aircraft. We got the defense set up and my
23 crew chief was having trouble with his weapon. Of course, he was hurting pretty bad but
24 he's having trouble with his weapon firing. He'd had a ruptured casing in it and
25 everything and he couldn't get it cleared. I get it cleared for him and then we were taking
26 care of everybody. The guns finally, we made contact with 'em. They made, finally
27 spotted us under the canopy 'cause we're probably about thirty, oh, about twenty, thirty
28 yards from where we'd actually hit the top of the trees.

29 KC: What kind of defense did you set up?

30 LB: Well, basically we had the two M-60s. The ditch that we were on one side of
31 became almost like a moat for us and it was kind of a clearing on the other side of the

1 ditch so they couldn't come running out of the tree and get to you. At first once they
2 realized that we were on the ground and had a defensive, they weren't sure if the ARVNs
3 were gonna come down to us. We were about a half mile from the ARVNs and/or, I think
4 what they were really wanting to do was is set up and hopefully get more people in and
5 have a, you know, get the rescue birds that were coming in. It was my opinion later on.
6 At the moment I was more concerned about, and the guns did a lot of shooting, once they
7 knew where we were, they were definitely shooting up the area keeping people's head
8 down another side even though the rockets were bursting in the top of the trees but the
9 20-millimeter and stuff like that was wreaking havoc on the ground on the other side so
10 that kept a lot of pressure off of us. About ten, fifteen minutes, twenty minutes later, we
11 had a, one of our aircraft come up that had a ladder on board, one of these rope ladder
12 type things.

13 KC: Yes.

14 LB: They'd been carrying that for some reason. They'd done something with it
15 and they'd been carrying it and it's about seventy-five feet long. They found out where
16 we were. The XO was flying it. They brought it out over the top of the area and to get the
17 ladder long enough to get down into us, they were sitting right on top of the tree tops and
18 the ladder just barely touched, got to the top of our aircraft. So I was able to get our guys,
19 my two kids that I was with, worked 'em up one at a time up onto the ladder and they
20 were sitting in it and holding on. About that time, the NVA or VC that was there starting
21 shooting mortars at us or what they were trying to do was firing up through the trees and
22 hopefully they'd have a mortar blast knock the other aircraft down, you know. At that
23 time we called, the lift bird couldn't stay there and this, so I told 'em on the radio, go
24 ahead and get out of there 'cause, you know, pull out and I'd get out myself. They lifted
25 up —

26 KC: So you got your, two crewmates—

27 LB: Ladder out, and —

28 KC: Okay.

29 LB: I made contact with the gunships and asked them where's the closest clearing
30 that a bird could land that I could get to. He told me it's about 200 yards in a direction
31 and I told him and I said, "Well, which direction?" So they said that, way were, and they

1 flew over the top of me, I could see them through the trees. Said, “This direction.” I
2 grabbed both of the M-60s and took off running and then headed out in that direction.
3 When I got there—in the meantime, Carol is now been picked up by the troop
4 commander. They know that, first we’re lost and then we were found. Then they got the
5 two kids out but I didn’t get out. So she’s now starting to wonder what the hell is going
6 on. The troop commander came down and got her and they were going to go to the
7 hospital and wait in case we got, we came in. I got to the clearing, got out into the
8 middle of it, like a dummy, instead of staying on the edge and the same ladder bird came
9 back for me and instead of landing, they still had the ladder hanging out and the door
10 gunner came down this ladder, big old burly guy, and I'm trying to grab a hold of the
11 ladder and hang the two M-60s on the ladder by the carrying handles. The aircraft
12 thought I was on the ladder because of what I was doing, so the kid that, you know, they
13 started to take off. This big door gunner, he grabs a hold of me by the back, nap of the
14 neck and I'm trying to hang the guns up. He’s got one foot on the ladder, one wrapped
15 through it and one arm hanging on to it and the other arm hanging on to me and we’re
16 getting up in the air. About that time as we took off, the lift was coming in to try to secure
17 the aircraft and as they came in, all of a sudden, we’re being shot at. At first, I thought it
18 was our door gunners on the lift birds who were just doing grazing fire and they weren’t
19 paying attention where it was going. What it was, was the bad guys had set up a
20 perimeter on the edge of that clearing that I’d made it to and were waiting for the aircraft
21 to land.

22 KC: They’d done that pretty quickly then?

23 LB: They had followed me and were there pretty quick. They had two or three
24 weapons set up there and immediately as soon as the aircraft landed to pick me up, it used
25 the ladder which threw off what they were thinking about doing. Then they were trying
26 to shoot at us just as the infantry was coming in, so they shot at us just for a little bit and
27 then they turned tail and ran because it wasn’t a large force that they had moved to that
28 clearing. It was only a couple of weapons they’d moved there. So they were immediately
29 going to be outnumbered. So they shot at us, shot at the other aircraft and then took off,
30 which is a standard tactic they used.

1 KC: How long were you on the ground by yourself after the first helicopter left
2 with the ladder?

3 LB: Half hour.

4 KC: You're on the ground for half an hour?

5 LB: Yes.

6 KC: How much of this was running the 200 yards to the clearing?

7 LB: Probably, fifteen minutes. What it was, was a lot of these wait-a-minute, what
8 we call wait-a-minute fines. It was really thick underbrush. So it wasn't just like a stroll
9 through a city park. It wasn't just a bunch of trees and here it's wide open because it was
10 very brushy. A lot of vines and, you know, basically, going a direction until I couldn't go
11 and then you'd have to kinda wander around a little bit and the guns kept making their
12 passes in the general direction they wanted me to go so that I knew which way I was
13 having to go to.

14 KC: And you you're carrying the two —

15 LB: Oriented in head this way, head this way.

16 KC: You're also carrying the two M-60s while you're trying to make your way
17 through this.

18 LB: And one of the dumb things was, had one of them was still belted with a lot
19 of ammunition in it. It probably started out trailing a hundred rounds behind me by the
20 time I got to the LZ, I probably had ten rounds still hung on the belt. But I was trailing it
21 along behind me. Had my helmet on, my chest protector, and carrying the two weapons
22 and my sidearm and my, my AK so.

23 KC: Mr. Brown, what is going through your mind as you're literally running
24 through the jungle away from the communist enemy toward what you hoped would be a
25 very quick and successful pickup? What's going through your mind?

26 LB: I want out and the main thing is I'm not gonna get caught, you know.
27 Although a couple times I've, you know, you come up with something and you're like,
28 "Jimmy Christmas. I hope I'm not running right into the middle of somebody." Then, as I
29 got, after a little bit, I started worrying that I was going to run into the ARVNs and come
30 busting out onto something and be shot by friendlies. So at first it was like, just run, get
31 out of here and then it's I don't want to run into some bad guys and then it's started

1 thinking about, I'm running toward the friendlies. I think and I hope I don't get shot by
2 them coming out of the tree line, so.

3 KC: Was there—

4 LB: And I got picked up by the bird, dropped the two kids off at the hospital. I
5 went back to Di An with the bird that I was on. Carol was looking at different hospitals
6 with the commander and they found the two kids that were flying with me. They went
7 back to Di An also about that time. Two other young men that I were going back out to
8 fly again and Carol says, "That's not going to happen," and I said, "Yes," it was and went
9 and left and we broke up for two weeks.

10 KC: Just over this issue?

11 LB: Yes, sir.

12 KC: I can understand her point of view, I think.

13 LB: Looking back on it, I can, too.

14 KC: I can imagine.

15 LB: But, at the time, you know, I was twenty-five years old. I was invincible and
16 I'd just proven it again was not gonna have any problems at all.

17 KC: Incredible. What other incidents or episodes would you care to discuss
18 during this second tour?

19 LB: Second tour? Well, this aircraft that had got shot down there in Cambodia or
20 in Xuan Loc with, I was also shot down in that same aircraft in Cambodia on a mission.
21 They recovered the air, no, they recovered it out of Cambodia and had been shot down
22 once before. I got shot down in it in Cambodia and this one at Xuan Loc so, it was then
23 be retrograded back to the States. The OH-58, it took, was a pretty good little aircraft.
24 Not what everyone thought it was compared to the OH-6, but it had its advantages, too.
25 After flying H-13, OH-6, and the OH-58, they all had advantages and abilities that made
26 'em good and I enjoyed 'em. Second tour, flying the 58 initially it was more
27 maneuverable at low airspeeds than the OH-6. You could use the tail rotor pedals to help
28 turn the aircraft at low airspeed which you couldn't do in an OH-6. An OH-6, you flew it
29 through a maneuver. In a 58 you could be sitting at a hover and push hard right pedal and
30 do a 180-degree turn or a 360-degree spin, which you couldn't do in a 6 without getting

1 into possibly what was called the Hughes tailspin and augering it in the ground because
2 the OH-6 had an undersized tail rotor.

3 KC: Okay.

4 LB: Let's see. That's probably some of the more exciting things. We got up
5 north. We did, when we were back up north before I went back to the 1st of the 9th, we
6 were working with General Hill in the 1st of the 5th Mech up there. We'd been into some
7 real severe—monsoons up north basically blanket the whole area.

8 KC: Right.

9 LB: Down south monsoons are more cellular and one place can be raining like
10 heck and another place, not they're just hot and muggy. Up north, it gets cold and when I
11 say cold, when you're used to 105, 110 degrees and it drops down to 70, it's cold. It's all
12 overcast and sometimes that overcast to get right down within about fifty feet, you know,
13 fifty to one-hundred feet off the ground. Maybe a little higher, but the whole area will be
14 blanketed and we'd gone through a few days of not being able to fly and finally
15 somebody from the brigade wanted us out, even though there wasn't good enough
16 weather. What it was is it was fine weather for me, but the Cobra would have to work at
17 a very low altitude. When they went from the door gunners on the old B and C models to
18 the Cobras, Cobras became more vulnerable at low altitude because they didn't have
19 those door gunners, one on each side that could give you that side protection and those
20 two extra set of eyes looking. So it wasn't the best thing in the world to have a Cobra
21 flying around at 100 feet off the ground, just trying to stay out of the clouds and watch
22 the scout. But they wanted us out there so we out and I found a mech infantry unit that
23 was parked along the base of a ridge and it's getting late in the afternoon. I told the crew
24 chief and the gun, I said, "Hey, I'm gonna land and talk to these guys." Told the crew
25 chief, I said, "Hey, even though we got great chow back there, how about landing, talking
26 to these guys? Just tell 'em we want a case of C-rations or something and find out what's
27 going on if there's anything they need," 'cause we didn't have their frequency right then
28 The guy came over and was talking to us and said, "Yeah, you've got us a case of C-
29 rations. Hey, do me a favor would 'ya?" He says, "This is our third night having to laager
30 in the same general area and we can't get anybody up on that ridge to take a look above
31 us and we don't feel too comfortable being here and we haven't had any," you know,

1 they hadn't had any air cover or anything for a while. So I said, "Hell, yeah. We'll go
2 take a look." Jumped on top of this ridge and there was an old fighting position, or
3 fighting positions up there like a little, whether it, with a lot of stuff that there, it looked
4 like it had been a US bivouac site for a night or two, dug in. Kept looking around and it
5 looked pretty well abandoned. Old cardboard and stuff laying around but something just
6 kept telling me there's something wrong here. As wet as everything was and all and all of
7 a sudden it dawned on me, what was wrong. There were no spider webs. Spider over a
8 fighting hole or a, you know, a little spider hole that what they called, we called spider
9 holes, the Vietnamese would dig to work out of or just a little one-man fighting position,
10 built into a berm. A spider would go ahead and, you know, just like a door jam, an open
11 door, you know, a spider would build a web over it because something's gonna fly
12 through it or crawl through there and wind up in their web. Well, the moisture would
13 hang on the spider webs that were in some of the places around there but there were no
14 more spider webs over any of these fighting positions, you know. That comes from
15 experience.

16 KC: Sure.

17 LB: You know, the two kids that were flying with me were fairly experienced
18 observers but—well, one in the front seat was his first, had just started but the back seater
19 had been around a while. They didn't understand what I was talking about. I said,
20 "There's no spider webs," and then kept talking about it. So we got in and started looking
21 closer and I told the gun, I says, "You know, we got people in here." He says, "What do
22 you—?" "Well, you know," I says, "no, spider webs, no moisture," da da da. Then I
23 started finding track and I told him, I says, "We got six to eight guys and they're about
24 twenty minutes ahead of us."

25 KC: Now, how low were you flying to see all of this?

26 LB: Well, I was about, ten, twelve feet off the ground.

27 KC: Okay.

28 LB: I said, "We got six to eight guys and they're about twenty minutes ahead of
29 us." What they've done, you'd see where the ground was wet and mucky because all the
30 rain and everything and then you could see the fresh tracks but reason I knew that they
31 were fairly close to us was the fact that some of the tracks were just still filling with water

1 again. So they hadn't been, when we started, probably when we'd landed down below
2 and talking to the guys at the tracks that were down there, the vehicles, the armored
3 vehicles that were down there, these guys had seen us and then started moving around
4 trying to get into position in what they were going to do. So they were just, they were
5 starting to move and that's how I knew why I could say that they were just a few minutes
6 ahead of us 'cause those tracks hadn't fully filled up with water. They were still filling,
7 with water draining into 'em. When somebody steps alongside a wet spot that's got, and
8 it's a little higher with water. It'll start draining over into the other spot where you
9 stepped. The way you know how many people there are is you take about a six-foot
10 section of ground and you either, you count the number of footsteps that are in that six
11 foot section and divide it by two because we'll normally in the walking over, you know,
12 that we'll normally step twice in that section, or just count the right footprints. Now,
13 some of that's a joke but that's how you do it. Okay?

14 KC: Now, what do you mean some of that's a joke?

15 LB: Well, it's a little hard to tell how many right footprints were in there but—

16 KC: Well, I think it would be difficult to tell how many footprints in general.

17 LB: Well, you just kinda, after a while you start to figure it out. Not everyone's
18 gonna step in the same spot. You're gonna go down there and you say, "Okay, there's
19 sixteen or at least fourteen different impressions here on the ground." If you watch people
20 walk through the mud and one guy steps in a spot and somebody's half over their step
21 and then there's a totally fresh one and so you kinda, after getting some experience you
22 start trying to develop how many that is or what's actually happening there. It comes with
23 time and learning how to do it. When I say a joke, you can't always tell if it's a really a
24 right footprint or not but it's on kinda the right side of a—

25 KC: Sure.

26 LB: If everyone's walking in a line, there's so many on this side of that line, an
27 imaginary line drawn down the middle, and so many on this side of it and a bunch down
28 the middle of that line, that imaginary line 'cause as you're carrying things, you don't
29 walk one foot exactly in front of the other.

30 KC: Sure.

1 LB: We all walk a little bow-legged or straddle-legged. Okay? So you can't,
2 when you tell somebody you just count the right footprints, you can't really tell if it's
3 right footprints. It's on the right side of the line. Okay, this imaginary line that you draw
4 down there. So, I kept hovering around. This trail went into a little stream area. Worked
5 its way back up into the ridge. Kept following and I said, kept telling the gun, I said,
6 "They're right here in front of me somewhere, they're just," and the brush was very thick
7 scrub brush and it was about eight feet tall and I said, so we're about ten to twelve feet
8 off the ground. I said, "They're right here somewhere. They gotta be." The trail is
9 starting to thin out. It's too fresh. They're right here and we were blowing, the aircraft is
10 blowing the brush around. All of a sudden the kid just as I saw 'em, a kid in the back
11 seat said, "They're under us! They're under us!" He engaged initially and dropped his
12 smoke grenade right on top, in the middle of 'em. The gun just happened to be—we
13 were working back down a ridge and the gun just happened to be 180 degrees out from
14 us. I was coming down the ridge and he was right out in front of me about, oh, half mile
15 maybe or a little closer, maybe. It wouldn't have been that far. Been out about a, about a
16 quarter mile he was in front of me. He immediately rolled hard to the left coming at us. I
17 marked the smoke and pulled out or broke to the side and he just was lined up so perfect
18 that, and they just triggered that 20-millimeter he had hanging on the side of, that Gatling
19 gun and just, you know, just went right up that ridge and just all concentrated right in
20 there for about that quarter mile up flight to he was doing right at us and really devastated
21 the area. We got back in there and shot up some more. They killed seven guys in there.
22 Put the Rangers on the ground behind us. They came out to see what was going on. They
23 put them on the ground. They picked up a radio for communications, a radio with
24 frequencies. They picked up a 60-millimeter mortar. This is the mortar team that was
25 gonna set up, and get up over the top and shoot at those tracks that night, and a personal,
26 some weapons, a pistol, some other items and then got in a firefight with a bunch of other
27 guys on the next ridge. We got 'em all out and that ended the day. I've today still got
28 that pistol.

29 KC: It's quite a day, I would say.

30 LB: It was a fun afternoon.

1 KC: Did you make it back down to the armored guys and tell ‘em what had
2 happened?

3 LB: No, they got to report over the radio. General Hill, though, did. When it was
4 reported that I had six to eight guys we were tracking and then when we actually got to
5 put the Rangers in there and they’d found seven guys, wanted to know, I had to go over
6 and brief him. I had to explain to him how I knew how many people were on the ground.
7 Just I was telling you, to take a six-foot section of ground and count the number of
8 footsteps in it, divide by two or just count the right footstep, right footprint . Well, he
9 passed away several years ago. General Wolf, every once in a while when I’d talk to him
10 who was, Rod Wolf was the troop commander at the time for us. Hill would ask him
11 whenever they’d talk to each other it was, “You remember when Brown told us that
12 story. You think it’s really true?” Those are the kind of things you learn to do. Why I
13 found out that there was no, you know, why I noticed the fact that there was, you know,
14 there were no cobwebs over the fighting positions, why that gave it away. It just comes
15 with time and experience, just knowing that something’s wrong there. It looks
16 abandoned, but something’s not quite right. Like the banana leaves that shouldn’t have
17 been in the village.

18 KC: Right.

19 LB: All those kind of things, you know. I think in any profession that somebody
20 has, people develop sixth senses about what they’re doing. I think a lot of times if they’ll
21 pay attention to that, they, you know, they either find or do or make things different than
22 just somebody going through and just, you know, just doing the drill to get it done.

23 KC: So it sounds like it was paying off for you in both of these tours.

24 LB: Yes, sir. It did. You know, I got a reputation, some good, some bad. Had a
25 lot of fun. Met a lot of great people. Lost some good friends but they’re, you know—it’s
26 the time in service, the time overseas. Time overseas is much more intense and the
27 camaraderie lasts a lot longer. But I’ve had friends in the military for years afterwards
28 that we were never in combat together. It’s a different friendship but they’re still great
29 friends. Met some very great people, whether they stayed in or not, did good jobs for,
30 you know, guys I worked with always there to do a good job whether they wanted to stay
31 or not. But they were ready to go home at one time or another or they were going to make

1 it a career. One of the things about the draft years ago, I've had guys with master's
2 degrees as PFCs (privates, first class) in a unit, you know. Guys really smart, capable,
3 you know, finished their college. They were gonna put their two years in 'cause they got
4 drafted and they were getting out and going on to whatever they wanna do. You know, it
5 gave everybody a flavor of the military and we had one hell of a military group. We got
6 a lot of great kids today. These kids that are all volunteering but, you know, there's fewer
7 and fewer people that understand what the military is about. Whether you were drafted
8 and spent two years in or went in and spent a career, or just volunteered and spent four.
9 There used to be a lot more people that knew what the military was about. I don't think
10 today it's understood and what sacrifices the kids today are making for us overseas so
11 that we don't have another 9/11 or something.

12 KC: Mr. Brown, when did you receive orders to come home from Vietnam?

13 LB: To come home the last time, I got, about October I knew I was going to
14 Germany. So about October I'd gotten orders. Carol and I were married by then and she
15 had orders to go to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and I was going to Germany. Again, General Hill
16 stepped in and did some, an effort backchannel messages and stuff and, or I'm sorry. She
17 was going to Fort Bliss, Texas, and then General Hill got involved and got her orders
18 changed to the 97th General in Frankfurt and I went to the 295th Heavy Helicopter
19 Company in Finthen, which was about forty miles apart.

20 KC: Okay.

21 LB: So again, great people helping us out.

22 KC: So the two of you got married while you were in Vietnam?

23 LB: Yes, sir. We got married at 24th Evac Hospital in Long Binh, down at her
24 hospital. My unit by then was up north at Quang Tri. The boys in the troop couldn't
25 come down to it. Burt Chole gave the bride away. My best man was—now Burt was
26 from my first tour and was there again with the 1st of the 9th on the second tour. Colonel
27 Nevins was there. He was again the squadron commander for 1st of the 9th. Don Crosby
28 and Joe Leathers were both at the wedding and Mike Covey, who I'd flown with and on
29 the 13th of November when all the aircraft were shot down out at the Que Son Valley,
30 Mike was the best man. Then after the wedding Carol and I supposedly were going to
31 Saigon. We went out and got on an aircraft and went north and had a big reunion, or a

1 reception put on by the troop in Quang Tri. She spent two or three days there in Quang
2 Tri with us and then put her on an airplane and sent her back to Long Binh to her hospital
3 and I stayed with the troop. So those were a great experience and had a, you know,
4 everyone said it wouldn't last and but here we're now thirty-eight years, somehow.

5 KC: You've proven them wrong again.

6 LB: Pardon?

7 KC: You've proven them wrong again.

8 LB: I guess so. Well, she's put up and pretty forgiving and watched out for me,
9 so.

10 KC: Well, let me get you back to the United States and your general impressions
11 about a few things, if I may here. When did you come back to the US for good?

12 LB: We went to Germany. Spent two and a half years in Germany. In '73 I came
13 back to the, got back in the States, September of '73.

14 KC: What kind of reception did you receive when you came home?

15 LB: Well, I came to Mom and Dad, and of course, when we came back to coming
16 out of Vietnam on our way to Germany, Mom and Dad met us at the airport. We stopped
17 at my folks' house and we went on to Carol's folks and, you know, her family, her dad
18 was in World War II, served in Europe. My dad served in the Pacific in World War II.
19 So both families, within the families we had a very good reception, you know. Of course,
20 I'd known her mom and dad from before, you know. I'd met them before we went to
21 Vietnam that time before we got married so it wasn't like I'm showing up. My folks had
22 been out to Fort Knox and met Carol before. So it wasn't like I'm bringing home a
23 wartime bride and no one, neither family knows who the, you know, either the groom or
24 the bride is. We all, you know, everybody knew each other and Carol had
25 corresponded—I was very poor about writing home. Carol did most of the
26 correspondence in “Oh, Larry's doing okay, and he's this and that and everything and
27 here's what's going on.” She did all the correspondence or most of the correspondence to
28 my folks as well as keeping her folks informed on what was happening and everything.
29 Of course, coming home it was, if you talked to a lot of people no one wanted to talk to
30 you about Vietnam. You had the stigma of being, oh, you must be a dooper or a baby
31 killer. They even said that to nurses, you know.

1 KC: Did you experience any of this yourself?

2 LB: Not as much as some others. I think sometimes you get it because, it's like
3 when you walk down a dark ally. If you walk, you acted like you know where you're
4 going and stuff, you don't seem to get bothered. You might, but it doesn't mean you're
5 not gonna get bothered but if you're. It's kinda like telling somebody, you walk with a
6 presence of I know what I'm doing and where I'm going. I've had people say things but
7 I've never had anyone do the quote-unquote "spit on 'ya" and stuff but I've had them say
8 a few names and stuff but generally those kind of people if you show some semblance of
9 "Hey, look"—(speaking to his wife) What did you say, honey? "authority," as Carol said
10 or, you know, "I don't have to put up with your nonsense." They back down fairly
11 quickly. You're never going to, you know, you're never gonna persuade somebody like
12 that with words so it doesn't do you any good to get in a verbal contest with 'em because
13 all they're gonna do is get louder and keep saying the same things over and over again,
14 you know. They've only got a certain amount of stuff they can attack you with verbally
15 and they run out, their arsenal isn't very deep. It's a bunch of rhetoric, usually. You've
16 heard it once, you've heard it, you've heard about everything any of 'em are ever gonna
17 say.

18 KC: Well, what do you think led to this backlash against the Vietnam soldier?

19 LB: Don't want to make you mad.

20 KC: Oh, you won't make me mad, I promise.

21 LB: We had, a lot, you know, you didn't get drafted if you were a school teacher
22 or you ran north. Okay? I knew a lot of people that went into the teaching profession to
23 stay out of the military. Now, there are a lot of great teachers that didn't want to be in the
24 military, either.

25 KC: Sure.

26 LB: But we, we have a mindset a lot of times that—and in your part of the
27 country, it's not the same but you get into some of the more liberal schools and everyone
28 says we're going to have—and I used to go and speak at colleges throughout Oregon and
29 high schools about the Vietnam War. We had a group that we used to go around and do
30 this. You get into some of the more liberal schools and, again, the rhetoric is one way.
31 They don't want to hear what you've got to say and to keep you from, you know, they

1 say it's free speech. Well, how come I can't say my part during the discussion? I get
2 chanted down when, you know, when the other group can say all they want and we sit
3 and listen and then now my turn comes to talk and I'm, you know, booed and/or chatted
4 down, chanted down over the loud speaker system, you know.

5 KC: So that's actually happened to you on these speaking engagements?

6 LB: Oh, yes. Yes, at some different places. You know, so that's okay. No
7 problem. But we've got to if in our society we've only to tell, teach our children as they
8 grow up that this is not a great country anymore, or it's not a proud country or anything,
9 you know, stop and think about what has evolved in this, you know, we've got a lot of
10 revisional history going on in some place, in some areas. Now you're involved in trying
11 to record history as those of us that saw it, did it, how it took place.

12 KC: Right.

13 LB: That's not always the case, you know, now. I think where we ran into a lot of
14 that, I think we ran into it more in higher education. You get some very liberal thinking
15 organizations that tell you about freedom of speech but if it's not along the line of
16 thinking that they have, you're not allowed to talk. We ran into a lot of that during the
17 late '70s. It's probably now, you kinda know where it, depending on where you're going
18 if you're gonna run into it or not, depending on the reputation of the school. History
19 classes are really, in some of these, are not taught as history. A lot of revisional going on
20 the fact that we lost the war. We didn't lose the war. It was a political—we went there for
21 politics, we came out of there because of politics. You know, and a small vocal group
22 constantly protesting and a small group of media that sees that, you know, big business,
23 big oil, big anything is bad. This country, we deserved what we got at 9/11 because
24 we've done all these bad things. People in Hollywood that, you know, no war is a good
25 war unless they're making another film and then. *Platoon* was one of the worst movies I
26 think I've ever seen. Now, did a lot of those things happen in Vietnam? Absolutely they
27 did. But no platoon in a week's time had all that happen to it. So, you know, Stone is,
28 well, he's very, very opinionated in what he has to say and he does it with his, you know,
29 shows it well in his movies. Does good movies but not necessary factual and if they say
30 we created our own problems in one voice, people that says we deserve what happened to
31 us in 9/11 is because of our, they say it's because of our films but then they're the same

1 people that are making 'em. Then change the film. If we are given, if we are such a bad
2 country then maybe we ought to quit giving so much money away to help the people that
3 don't care for us. I don't, you know, it's been several years. I've been asked to go back
4 on a speaking tour again. It's been about ten years since I've been on it so I'm not sure
5 what I said, I ran into this problem in the schools. I think, you know, that may be all
6 gone by now.

7 KC: Well, I think it's the climate in general towards the American veteran has
8 certainly changed.

9 LB: Yes, sir.

10 KC: For a variety of reasons. Beginning, I guess with Desert Storm and public
11 opinion began to shift and there's enough distance from the Vietnam War, I think that
12 people's opinions began to change and, personally, I think that part of it was a matter of
13 shame that many Americans felt the way they treated Vietnam veterans upon their return
14 and they, in some cases, are trying to make up for that with a patriotism and then support
15 for the troops and things like that. Not that that's a bad thing. Don't get me wrong.

16 LB: No.

17 KC: But it certainly has changed over the last decade or so.

18 LB: Oh, absolutely, and that's, you know, I think the silent majority has stood up
19 where, you know, we still have the people that are still the same groups or types of
20 groups making, doing the protesting but there's more of the silent, you know—during the
21 '60s, late '60s and then during the '70s, the majority just stayed silent and said, "Oh,
22 that's a bunch of kooks," you know, or a bunch of kids that don't know what they're
23 doing and talking about it and it'll go away. Well, it didn't go away and it caused a
24 stigma on people that didn't deserve it. First of all, the military didn't ask to go to
25 Vietnam. The military doesn't ask to go to war anywhere. They stay prepared but they
26 don't ask to go to war. Now especially if they've been there. Once you've seen
27 somebody shot, or hurt, or been shot at yourself, the whole game changes and you realize
28 real quick that it's serious business. I went to Vietnam thinking it would be over before I
29 got there. I realized after a while now I, was I running around scared? No, as I told you,
30 I wasn't. But I realized it was pretty damn serious and I could get hurt at any time and
31 with that, didn't necessary think I wanted to be in war all the time but there is some

1 adrenaline rush with it when you are in trouble and you get out of it. People that have
2 seen combat don't necessarily want to go again. Our son is going a second trip to Iran, or
3 Iraq, rather, excuse me, Iraq as a company commander. When he went over the first time,
4 I just as soon had gone in his place, you know, but that's his place to be. He was
5 wounded twice on his first trip over there but he knows he's gotta go back. He's a career
6 soldier and we'll go through that drill. I think when I said that piece earlier about the
7 teachers and everything, there were, I think depending on where they wound up, I know
8 like I say, I know a lot of good guys that got out of the military and went to teaching.
9 They did their draft time and then went to teaching and did a great job and I still got a
10 couple of those who are good friends. But there were some, I think there were some
11 schools and/or places where it was embedded that the whole thought within that
12 community was against whatever the country was doing, you know, maybe the Berkeleys
13 of the world, maybe the Reed colleges in the world. That's where I was at on that.

14 KC: Sure, sure. Mr. Brown, do you have any other items, any other information
15 that you'd like to relate before we put an end to the interview?

16 LB: No, sir. I just want to thank you for what you're doing. If I've said anything
17 during this interview that's either insulted somebody or upset somebody, that was never
18 my intent. I just, expressing my feelings and/or remembrances about what went on or
19 what I did or what was happening. But I want to thank you and the university for what
20 y'all are putting together and trying to do with this oral history.

21 KC: Well, it's certainly been my pleasure, Mr. Brown. I really appreciate it.

22 LB: And I wish you well with your stuff with the POWs. Take care of those guys.
23 They've all given more than their share.

24 KC: Well, thank you. I'll certainly do my best.

25 LB: And when I say guys, there are young women that World War II and different
26 places and in the latest wars that have suffered, too. Taking care of the guys and/or telling
27 stories is kinda a generic taking care of the soldier.

28 KC: I couldn't agree more.

29 LB: Thank you.