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**The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Larry Renfro  
Conducted by Kelly Crager  
2 September 2008; 23 September 2008; 4 September 2009  
Transcribed by Cecily Darwin**

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

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting an oral history interview with Mr.  
2 Larry Renfro. Today is 2 September 2008. Mr. Renfro and I are on the campus of Texas  
3 Tech University in Lubbock, Texas. Good morning, Mr. Renfro.

4 Larry Renfro: Good morning.

5 KC: I want to first thank you again for participating in the Oral History Project  
6 here. It's important that we capture these voices of Vietnam before time inevitably takes  
7 them away from us. First off, I'd like to ask you a little biographical information. Can  
8 you tell me when you were born and where?

9 LR: I was born September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1948. Today is my birthday.

10 KC: Happy birthday (laughs).

11 LR: Thank you. Sixty years old today.

12 KC: Congratulations.

13 LR: I was born in—actually I was born in Seminole, Texas, but lived at the time  
14 down at Andrews, Texas, which is south of Seminole. I actually grew up in Andrews and  
15 graduated high school and then moved to Lubbock after that. So I live here in Lubbock  
16 now.

17 KC: What were your parents' names?

18 LR: My dad's name was Paul Renfro, my mother was Pauline. Both of those—my  
19 mother and dad both are deceased so they have been gone several years now.

20 KC: What did your folks do for a living?

1           LR: My dad worked in the oil field. Of course, Andrews, that's oil field country.  
2 He worked in a plant, gasoline plant, and my mother was a nurse, she worked at the  
3 hospital in Andrews.

4           KC: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

5           LR: Only child.

6           KC: An only child?

7           LR: Yes.

8           KC: All right. Well, tell me what it was like growing up there in Andrews with a  
9 father who worked in oil fields, a mother who is a nurse, only child. What was it like for  
10 you out there in Andrews?

11          LR: Oh, well, probably at the time I thought it was terrible. I always wanted to be  
12 in a big city, you know, because there wasn't that much to do in Andrews I thought. I  
13 guess now looking back on it, it was pretty good because I pretty well had free reign of  
14 the city. You know, when I was growing up it wasn't like now. We just kind of went off  
15 and did our own thing during the day in the summer time, you know, if we weren't at  
16 school. We didn't have to worry about being kidnapped or anything like they do  
17 nowadays it seems like. I guess it was actually pretty good, you know. I probably had a  
18 normal childhood, nothing major come along or anything.

19          KC: What sort of things did you like to do as a kid?

20          LR: Oh, well, I guess a little bit of everything. I wasn't into sports a whole lot so I  
21 did—I loved to go fishing so, you know, we were always going fishing. We would go  
22 arrowhead hunting around there, there was places you could go arrowhead hunting, just  
23 goofing around. The sand hills were there so we were always going out to the sand hills  
24 and messing around with buddies and having cookouts and campouts and all kinds of  
25 stuff.

26          KC: Kind of like a standard West Texas childhood is what it sounds like.

27          LR: Just about, yeah. It was probably about like everybody else around here.

28          KC: Sure, sure. I guess you went to school there in Andrews then.

29          LC: Yes, graduated high school in Andrews, Andrews High School.

30          KC: What sort of things did you like to do in high school? You say you weren't  
31 much into sports. Was there anything else that attracted your attention?

1           LR: Well, I wasn't really—I wasn't the type that liked school a lot so my whole  
2 aim in life was to get out of high school and I just wanted to—I wasn't always, I wasn't  
3 interested in going to college so my deal was to graduate high school and get a job and  
4 make some money. I thought I was going to get rich like everybody else back then, I  
5 guess.

6           KC: Sure.

7           LR: As far as high school I just enjoyed I guess being around the guys and friends  
8 and stuff at school. You know, I was probably more into things like shop and woodwork  
9 and stuff like that.

10          KC: You say you wanted to get out and make some money. Did you have any real  
11 plans as an eighteen year old out in Andrews?

12          LR: Not really. I wanted out of Andrews is what I wanted. I thought the golden  
13 egg was somewhere else and I just wanted out of Andrews because I thought that's what  
14 was holding me back. When I graduated, well, I didn't really want to go to college. I  
15 never had an ambition. That just wasn't part of my plans. Of course, my mother and dad  
16 just kept after me all the time, you know, "You need to go to college. You need to go to  
17 college." You know how that is. I'm sure you have heard the same deal.

18          KC: (Laughs) Yes, yes, indeed.

19          LR: So I finally gave in and enrolled. It was a business college up here at  
20 Lubbock so that's what I did. I thought maybe that will please them. I really didn't want  
21 to go but I just did it so they would quit ragging on me about it. That's kind of what I did,  
22 I enrolled in a business college up here at Lubbock and moved to Lubbock in 1966, the  
23 summer of '66.

24          KC: What was the name of that college, do you remember?

25          LR: A place called Draughon's Business College. I don't know if you are familiar  
26 with it but it is long gone. It was just—gave you basic business skills as far as operating  
27 adding machines and typing and all this other stuff. It gave you some skills on how to get  
28 a job and what to do if you did get one. They also had some book keeping and stuff like  
29 that, just give you some basic skills.

30          KC: So you graduated from Draughon's then?

1           LR: I actually didn't. I stayed in that—you know, I don't know. I was probably  
2 there probably eight months or so until I figured out that that really wasn't what I wanted  
3 to do there, either. At the time we had the draft back then so as long as you were in  
4 school you were exempt from the draft, you had an exemption. But once you quit school  
5 then you were classed, re-classed, and you were basically up for draft if you weren't in  
6 school. The thought was to stay in school and you wouldn't get drafted. I basically, while  
7 I was up here I didn't mind the draft and the more I watched television and heard about  
8 the war in Vietnam and, of course, that was the main thing going on then was the war in  
9 Vietnam. I just, I don't know. I felt like that was just something I thought I need to go  
10 over there and that is what I needed to do. I just felt obligated to go I guess do my part. I  
11 quit school and basically just waited until the draft got me. As it turned out I actually  
12 didn't get drafted. I did—I had to go in for a physical but before I went for my—usually  
13 what they would do was they would call you in for a first physical and they would  
14 classify you there either 1-A, you know. They different classifications. 1-A was you were  
15 ready, you know, they could draft you at any time. Usually they would send you home  
16 and then once you got to the second notice well that (noise) you were in. When I got my  
17 first draft notice or my first physical notice, well, once I got back, well, I went ahead and  
18 signed up. I wanted to go to Vietnam. I actually wanted to go to Vietnam. I talked to  
19 several people and they said, "Well, if you want to go to Vietnam you need to get in the  
20 Marine Corps because that's a ticket to Vietnam for sure." So I went down and joined the  
21 Marine Corps. I actually heard they were drafting so I was going to volunteer for the  
22 Marine Corps draft. I went in and talked to a recruiter and he had never heard of a draft.  
23 He said, "Marine Corps doesn't draft." I said, "Oh, okay. Well," I said, "I heard you  
24 could get drafted and you only had to go in for two years," and I said, "I want to go to  
25 Vietnam. I just want—I want to go to Vietnam and I want to come back. I don't want to  
26 make a career out of the military." He said, "Well, the Marine Corps right now has got a  
27 two-year enlistment." He said, "We can do that for you." I said, "Sign me up." So I  
28 signed up. That's kind of the progress from there, I guess.

29           KC: Now, when did you sign up?

30           LR: That was in 1968.

1 KC: '68, okay. Now, you mentioned earlier that you felt some obligation to go  
2 your part in serving in the Vietnam War. Where did that come from do you think? Was  
3 your father a veteran in World War II?

4 LR: My dad was in the Marine Corps in World War II. I had an uncle in the  
5 Marine Corps in World War II. I had other uncles that were in Army and other branches  
6 of the services during World War II. I can't really say as I felt obligated because of them  
7 so much. I think it—actually I can't tell you why I felt obligated. I just did. You know, it  
8 was just something that I would watch the news reports every evening and, of course, I  
9 don't know how old you were at the time but back then, I mean, every evening that was  
10 the first thing that was on the news was Vietnam and, of course, they were giving  
11 casualty lists and telling how many guys were killed in Vietnam that week or that day or  
12 whatever. It just got to me. It was like, my gosh, I just felt like I need to go do my part. I  
13 mean, I felt like that was what I needed to do.

14 KC: Was your family encouraging in this?

15 LR: No, no. My mother and dad both threw a fit when they heard I joined the  
16 Marine Corps, my dad especially because he knew how it was. My mom she was, I think  
17 she thought she could go down and make them take my name off the list when I told her.  
18 "I've already signed up. I'm gone." They didn't want me to go but or they didn't want me  
19 to go in the Marine Corps but I guess they finally decided there wasn't really anything  
20 they could do about it. But I mean they didn't encourage me to do it or anything like that.

21 KC: You mentioned that you were, you had watched the evening news and the  
22 body counts and things like that in Vietnam at the time. How would you characterize how  
23 closely you were following the war?

24 LR: Well, you know, I don't—back then it seemed like there wasn't any way to  
25 get around keeping up with the war. It was just everywhere you looked or it seemed like  
26 that to me because everything, I mean, your whole life was kind of around it. I mean, it  
27 was designed around it. My age group, anyway, because I knew if I didn't stay in school I  
28 was going to get drafted and if I got drafted I would probably go to Vietnam. You could  
29 see it on TV every night, I mean, every night Walter Cronkite or somebody was talking  
30 about all the stuff that was going on over there and stuff. Of course, 1968 was the big Tet  
31 Offensive over there so for the first part of 1968 that is all we heard, you know. You

1 know, I don't know. It's just one of those things that we just lived with. It was just  
2 around us all the time, I guess, or it was me. Maybe not everybody but it just seemed like  
3 it was always there in my face.

4 KC: Sure. What were your thoughts at the time, if you can remember, about  
5 America's role in Vietnam?

6 LR: Well, I felt like what we were doing was noble. I felt what we were doing  
7 was right. In other words, I thought it was like, you know, the communists were trying to  
8 take over a country and they were wanting to fight back and we were over there trying to  
9 help them fight back. I felt like it was a noble cause and I think that's why I wanted to get  
10 involved. I felt like, you know, I need to do my part to help those people out.

11 KC: Did you have any friends or relatives who were in Vietnam prior to your  
12 going?

13 LR: Well, I had some classmates. Of course I—once I got out of high school I  
14 moved to Lubbock so all I heard was just every now and then when I would go back and  
15 visit my mom and dad, well, they would tell, you know, "You remember so and so? Well,  
16 they got wounded in Vietnam." Some of the guys right out of high school went into the  
17 Army or something, you know, or Marine Corps and, of course, you know, I would  
18 always hear about them every now and then. I guess that's basically the only ones that  
19 really I kept up with was just classmates. As far as like relatives I didn't have any—I was  
20 kind of the older one in the family so like cousins or anything like that I didn't have any,  
21 they were all younger than me so I didn't have any relatives really in Vietnam or  
22 anything.

23 KC: All right, now, you say you joined in 1968, of course, you also mentioned  
24 that this was the year of the Tet Offensive in January, February of 1968. How did this  
25 impact your decision? I assume that you joined up after the Tet Offensive. Is that true?

26 LR: Yes. Yeah, I joined up—I got a ninety-day—let's see. So I probably joined  
27 up about (pause)—I probably joined up in May of '68 right after the Tet Offensive  
28 probably because I got a ninety-day extension which that's one of the things they did  
29 back then, they give you ninety days before you actually had to go in. You could sign up  
30 and you had a ninety-day deferment and then you reported at ninety days from the date

1 you signed up so that's what I did. I went in in July of 1968 so back up ninety days from  
2 there and somewhere in there is where I signed up.

3 KC: Sure. Now, the media coverage of the Tet Offensive, regardless of what you  
4 may think about it now or the way we look at it now, but it was certainly portrayed, I  
5 think, in the American press as being a major defeat for the United States. That drove  
6 many people to doubt, to continue to doubt, and then some to doubt strenuously and then  
7 voice all this opposition to the war, but that certainly didn't seem to have that same effect  
8 on you. It seems that the country was going one way in its opposition to the war as a  
9 result of the Tet Offensive but you seemed to have been, I don't want to use the word  
10 inspired, but certainly you felt this obligation, this sense of duty, responsibility, to join.  
11 What sort of things did you see in 1968, prior to your enlisting, as a result of the coverage  
12 of the Tet Offensive. I mean nationally or locally or whatever.

13 LR: Well, I think part of the thing was that—I think you're right, the news media  
14 was portraying it as we were getting defeated over there. Which I think that's one of the  
15 reasons that might have encouraged me to join up because I felt like if we were losing  
16 then I need to go to my part to help out so we don't lose. However, I think that this part  
17 of the country then and I think now is very conservative so we in this part of the country  
18 didn't view it like the rest of the country did. We were kind of, I don't know, delayed or  
19 behind the times or something. We hadn't caught up with this idea that the protesting and  
20 all that, there wasn't that much of it going on in this part of the country. As a matter of  
21 fact, you know, war protestors would not have been welcomed in that day and age in this  
22 part of the country. Now, West Coast, East Coast is a whole different story, West Coast  
23 especially. I mean they were very radical out there, you know, and all that stuff. I don't  
24 know why that I can't really—I can't really put my finger on it to tell you why I felt the  
25 opposite way. I just, I don't know, I have always felt like—I have always felt like  
26 America is the best country in the world and I still feel that to this day and I have seen a  
27 lot of the world. I still feel that America is the best country. Even though our government  
28 is not—we have a lot of problems a lot of times I still feel that it's the best system and all  
29 that. I have a, I guess a deep, deep-rooted, I don't know if it's patriotic or whatever but I  
30 just feel obligated to this country so I feel like being obligated and thankful that I live  
31 here, I should be willing to give something back to my country to do something. I think I

1 felt, back then I felt an obligation to give something back. Seeing all the news reports and  
2 stuff of what was going on during the Tet Offensive and all that I think that just kind of  
3 tipped me over and said, you know, “I need to go something I can’t just sit here and  
4 watch this every night.” I joined up and I guess I thought I was going to change the war  
5 and found out differently (chuckle).

6 KC: What were your opinions of the anti-war protests, etc.?

7 LR: Oh, I had no use for them. I was absolutely against it. I am still to this day. I  
8 think that that’s—well, if you want to say Vietnam was a loss for the United States, we  
9 are going to have to—I always, I have to—well, the American military, the way I look at  
10 it, from my experience being there, the American military did not lose the Vietnam War.  
11 The politicians in America and the news media lost the Vietnam War for America. We as  
12 soldiers where I was at we never lost a battle. We won ever one that we were ever in. I  
13 mean, we took casualties and stuff but we never backed down. But as far as the overall  
14 war I guess, yeah, we can say we lost the war. I have a different opinion about that, I  
15 guess, and to this day I still hold that opinion. The war was lost by the politicians in  
16 America and the press. I think the politicians were unwilling to let the military win the  
17 war and the press chimed in and turned the American public against the war. So to me it  
18 was two things working against the soldiers. Then what happened was that the protestors  
19 rather than protesting the government and what they were doing they turned on the  
20 soldiers and were protesting the soldiers and what we were doing. We had no choice as to  
21 what we did. We did what the government told us to do and yet the protestors turned on  
22 us and made us the bad guys. We were the baby killers. We were the ones that were  
23 killing innocent civilians. We were the ones burning down villages. We were the one that  
24 were committing war atrocities and all the other stuff, which was not true but that’s what  
25 they convinced the people of. I had no use for war protestors and to this day I have no use  
26 for people that protest the war. Now, if they want to go an vote for a candidate that is  
27 against the war that is fine with me but don’t get out in the street and carry a sign and talk  
28 about how America is the bad guy and the soldier is the bad guy or anything like that  
29 because I don’t like it. So war protestors? I have no use for them.

30 KC: Even back then.

1           LR: Back then absolutely none. I didn't like them. You know, we've had some of  
2 that with Iraq and all this stuff that's been going on. I am 100% behind our military and  
3 what they are doing. If we find out later our government has done something wrong that's  
4 fine. Let's put the blame where the blame belongs and that's on the politicians in  
5 Washington. Let's don't put the blame on our soldiers over there that are fighting. It  
6 doesn't help them out any if you have people in the United States that are carrying signs  
7 griping about how the soldiers over there are shooting civilians or anything like that. I  
8 don't like that at all. Those guys do what they have to do to survive. I've been there. I  
9 know how it's like. I know what you have to do and sometimes what you do is not pretty  
10 but it's necessary. War is not a pretty thing but when you're there it is all about surviving.  
11 I'm not—to make it short, I don't care for war protestors at all.

12           KC: All right, very good. Now, you mentioned you had a ninety-day deferment  
13 before you had to join. You knew that you were going to the Marine Corps and you knew  
14 that the Marine Corps was going to send you to Vietnam. You've got ninety days before  
15 you become that guy over there. What did you do in those ninety days?

16           LR: I lived it up. What would you do (both laugh)?

17           KC: The same thing. Tell me what you did.

18           LR: You know, it's been so many years ago. I don't remember working. I think I  
19 quit my job and I had a little bit of money saved up and so I just took a trip and drove  
20 around and went up to Colorado and messed around and just partied for ninety days, I  
21 guess, is all I can say.

22           KC: Did you take anyone with you on this trip or did you go by yourself?

23           LR: I had a cousin and he was about three years younger than me and he went  
24 with me to Colorado and we went up there and just—we went up there because I was  
25 under age. I was nineteen at the time. You had to be twenty-one to buy liquor. If you go  
26 to Colorado you get 3.2 beer in Colorado so we went to Colorado and drank beer like big  
27 studs, you know, because we were eighteen and so that's what we did. I just messed  
28 around and just, I just tried to have some fun. I had no idea what I was getting into so I  
29 just partied. That's all I can say.

30           KC: I was going to ask you if you had any, during this ninety days, you had any  
31 opportunity to reflect on what you were about to do.

1           LR: You know, I don't remember ever really just sitting down and thinking, you  
2 know, "What have I really done here? What have I done?" I don't think I ever thought  
3 about that. Like I say, I wanted to go so I think the only thing I might have thought about  
4 was maybe just what boot camp was going to be like and the only reason I thought about  
5 that is because my dad had told me some things that happened in boot camp with him in  
6 the Marine Corps and so I am thinking, "Oh, my gosh." My uncle, my uncle was the  
7 same way and he took me to the side and he said, he said, "Larry, man, I can't believe  
8 you did that. What did you do that for?" I said, "I want to go to Vietnam." He said, "Oh,  
9 man," and he had been in some pretty serious combat in World War II and he told me, he  
10 gave me some pointers. He said, "Let me give you a few things that may save your life."  
11 He told me about some things that happened over there and he said, "Be sure you  
12 don't"—he told me, like crowds. He said, "If there is a bunch of—if there is a place  
13 where soldiers hang out don't hang out with them." He said, "Stay away because if  
14 they're going to hit something, they're going to hit something where there's a lot of  
15 soldiers. If they're going to drop a bomb or mortar or something they're going to drop it  
16 where they can get the most causality rate," and he said, "so don't cluster with anybody."  
17 That actually did save my life at one time in Vietnam. I thought of that and I was quite  
18 thankful for what he told because it did keep me from, maybe not getting killed but  
19 maybe wounded or something else because they dropped a rocket in on some guys that  
20 were—we were at fire base one time and had a bunch of guys—every now and then when  
21 we were doing hold watch at a fire base or somewhere we would get a hold of—they  
22 were cans and it had hamburger patties, dehydrated hamburger patties in a can and you  
23 could open the can up and fill full of water and let them soak a while and you would have  
24 these dehydrated burgers so they were having a cookout over there and wanted us to  
25 come over there. I told them, "Nah, I would just hang out over here." They got hit over  
26 there and it actually killed one guy, one of my friends and wounded three or four other  
27 guys. So I was kind of glad of what he told me.

28           KC: That's pretty good advice.

29           LR: It was actually, it really was.

30           KC: So in July of '68 you enter the Marine Corps. Where did you go for your  
31 basic training?

1           LR: I went to San Diego, California. MCRD (Marine Corps Recruit Depot) San  
2 Diego. I spent I guess—boot camp was probably about fourteen weeks and then after that  
3 went to Camp Pendleton, California, which is between San Diego and Los Angeles up  
4 there. Marine Corps, you went to boot camp for about fourteen weeks and that’s where  
5 you got all the basic stuff, how to fold your clothes, all the stuff about being in the  
6 military. When we went to Camp Pendleton then it changed. It was ITR is what they  
7 called it, Infantry Training Regiment. There is where you started training on how to work  
8 as a unit and—I’ll take that back. Once we got out of boot camp they classified us as  
9 what our MOS (military occupational specialty) was. MOS is what your job was going to  
10 be in the military. Well, nearly all of us was 0311, 0311 in the Marine Corps was a grunt,  
11 is what they call them. A grunt is infantry so when you leave boot camp and go to Camp  
12 Pendleton to ITR then they broke you up into whatever your MOS was. Well, mine was  
13 0311 so we started infantry training and that’s where we learned how to do all the stuff,  
14 infantry. We went through bomb school, explosives, you know, we went through all the  
15 stuff, how to operate in the field as a unit and stuff like that. That lasted, you know, I  
16 can’t remember. It seemed like it lasted about eight weeks or maybe eight or nine weeks.  
17 My memory is not all that good but right after ITR then they bump you to another one  
18 that is called BITS (Basic Infantry Training School), B-I-T-S, and it was basic infantry  
19 training something. What it is, it just gets more specialized in how the infantry worked.  
20 You are just taking steps along the way. BITS lasted, oh, it seemed like it was about four  
21 or five weeks and then after that you got twenty days’ leave to come home. Once you  
22 came back then it was into what they called staging. Staging was about four weeks.  
23 That’s where you—it’s more training even more specialized as far as we actually they  
24 had gook, well, South Vietnamese or villages set up. Gook is what we call them over  
25 there. I don’t mean that to be derogatory. We did when I was over there. I mean, that’s  
26 just the name we had for them. They had actual villages set up and we’d go in there and  
27 run sweeps and stuff. It was just training on how to operate and stuff like that. I did that  
28 for about four weeks and while you are doing all that you are getting all your shots and  
29 all that stuff so you can go overseas and that lasts about four weeks and after that (noise)  
30 on a plane and away we went.

31           KC: Let me back up a little bit here. I’d like to get a little more on your training.

1 LR: Okay.

2 KC: You mentioned that your dad and that your uncle had warned you a little bit  
3 about basic training and you were wondering about it. What was it like for you? Describe  
4 basic training for me.

5 LR: Oh, well, some of it's funny now but it wasn't funny at the time but, I mean,  
6 it was tough. I mean it was—as far as boot camp, boot camp I think is the part that they  
7 give you the mental toughness to be in the military or Marine Corps I am just going to—I  
8 will say Marine Corps because I don't know how the Army or Navy or anybody else  
9 works, but I think that was what it was all about. It was mental. They tried to break you  
10 down. I mean, the whole thing was to break you down and then build you back up into  
11 what they wanted you to be. The first part of boot camp was nothing but tearing you  
12 down. I mean, they just made you—you felt terrible. I mean, it was the worst thing ever.

13 KC: How would they do it?

14 LR: It was you name it. I mean, they never referred to you as a human being or  
15 anything. They had lots of names for us and I won't repeat them because there is a lady  
16 present but there was a lot of names they called us which none of them were good. You  
17 know, I always thought, you know, Marines were always sharp and everything is pressed  
18 and you looked sharp all the time. Now, not in boot camp they made us—we had to wear  
19 old raggedy looking utilities. We couldn't starch them and make them look good so we  
20 wore the raggedy old stuff. Our boots, of course, Marines you know how the blouse there  
21 trousers and they come up and you are just looking good, you are just looking good all  
22 the time. Well, nah, we couldn't do that. We couldn't blouse our trousers, our button on  
23 our shirt had to be buttoned all the way to the top all the time. You know, you were just a  
24 sloppy looking bunch of guys. I mean, you just felt terrible about yourself. You know,  
25 they—we marched all the time, we got up at the crack of—well, we got up before dawn,  
26 at the time I didn't know what time it was. It must have been around five o'clock or  
27 something. You know, they just, everything is in a hurry. I mean, we always called it  
28 hurry up and wait because we would have to be at the infirmary over here or something at  
29 seven o'clock. Well, we'd be there at six and stand at attention out in front for an hour,  
30 you know, and everybody just dropping out and passing out and stuff. You know, they  
31 just beat you down with words, they beat you down with how your—the way you looked.

1 The whole thing was just to tear you apart. I mean, you just really—we had guys really  
2 just lose it. We had guys go mentally insane and just, you know, go crazy, go over the hill  
3 and do all kinds of goofy stuff. The ones that were left were the ones that were mentally,  
4 I mean, you were mentally tough. Then probably the last couple of weeks of boot camp it  
5 was like a whole different deal. It was like they switched on you all of a sudden. One day  
6 the DI (drill instructor) comes in, you know, after you have been to graduation and all of  
7 a sudden they tell you can blouse trousers, you can put on your starched utilities. Our hats  
8 were starched and stuff where they were just perfect and we got to wear those around.  
9 When you marched around you looked like a unit. God, you know, you felt good about  
10 yourself. It was like, you know, great. I mean, the first part was a complete mental tear  
11 down and the last couple of weeks was build you back up and you were a Marine then.  
12 They actually, after we graduated we were still there for about a week and they actually  
13 called us a Marine for the first time and we couldn't believe, you know. It was like,  
14 "What did he say? He called us a Marine. He didn't call me a something else," you know,  
15 which some of those other words we had been called. Boot camp was just basically to me  
16 mental. After I got through it I realized that is what it was, it's a mental—it's a thing to  
17 take you from civilian life to military life. They don't want people who are individuals  
18 who think for themselves. They want people who can be part of a unit and think as a unit.  
19 Whatever you do, you know, you do as a unit and that's basically the way they taught us,  
20 you know. Even if you do something wrong you do it as a unit and they would honor it,  
21 they didn't care. But the fact was they wanted you to learn how to operate as a unit so  
22 that's kind of the way it was to me.

23 KC: Sure. You mentioned that some guys (clears throat), excuse me, broke down  
24 or couldn't make it. Was there ever a time in boot camp where you questioned yourself  
25 whether you would make it?

26 LR: Oh, yeah. There was times when I thought, "Man!" You know, I would lay  
27 there in the rack at night thinking, "What in the crap did I do? Why did I sign?" I just sat  
28 there beating myself up, "Why did I sign those papers?" I would run through my head  
29 going, "Oh, you're an idiot. You're an idiot," you know and just thinking, "Man, I wish I  
30 hadn't have done that." As far as getting to the point where I thought I was going to lose  
31 it? I didn't get there. I guess I was capable of—I think I realized kind of what they were

1 doing in a way and so I kind of learned how to keep my mouth shut when I was supposed  
2 to and do what I was told. You know, it doesn't take long to figure out what they are  
3 looking for. The rest of it's just trying accomplish what they want you to do. I never was  
4 a—I think the ones that we had just really breakdown that couldn't handle it were some  
5 of the kids that were more pampered in life, you know, they had a harder time dealing  
6 with it because momma had always taken care of them. Momma and daddy had took care  
7 of them and everything was great. Well, I had actually left my mom and dad and was  
8 living on my own up here in Lubbock so I was kind—I learned how to take care of  
9 myself so I think that helped me a little bit. We had some guys actually, I mean, mentally  
10 lose it. We had guys that would go over the hill, you know, or go AWOL (absent without  
11 leave). Not a whole lot. When I first started we had two of them go AWOL. One of them  
12 actually hid underneath—we had some old, at the time we were in tents, tents with wood  
13 floors and he had actually crawled under the wood floor and was hanging out under there.  
14 They didn't know it and they looked for him for days and he would sneak out during the  
15 day and steal what food he could around the area and stuff and hide back under that floor  
16 and they finally found him but that's how goofy he was.

17 KC: Did you know this was going on with him?

18 LR: No, we didn't know anything about it. I mean, they told us later that they  
19 finally found him and told us what had happened. Of course, they tell you. I mean, they—  
20 when I first got there when a guy would go over the hill they would make sure when they  
21 brought him back they would march him right—they would line us up at attention and  
22 they would march him in shackles marching him right back to the brig. They'd would  
23 march him right in front of all of us and they would tell us, "That's what happens when  
24 you go over the hill, girls. You better remember it." It was like, "Oh, my gosh. Okay."

25 KC: That's quite an impression.

26 LR: Yeah, it is and you realize, you know, you are here for the duration and you  
27 might as well just learn to deal with it and get it over with and that is kind of what I did. I  
28 felt like if I keep my mouth shut, do what I am told, this thing is going to last eight or  
29 nine weeks or twelve, fourteen whatever it is going to be then I will out of here and  
30 hopefully things will change and get better. That's how I dealt with it.

31 KC: All right. Well, you make it through.

1 LR: I made it through.

2 KC: You made it through there in 1968 and, not that you had a whole lot of  
3 choice in this matter, but was their one thing in particular that you hoped to do once you  
4 finished boot camp? Was there an area you wanted to go into where your MOS would be  
5 something other than being a grunt, first class?

6 LR: You know, actually there wasn't. Like I said, when I joined I wanted to go to  
7 Vietnam. I knew that 0311 was a sure ticket to Vietnam and when they hit me with an  
8 0311, they called everybody's name out after graduation they called our names out and  
9 said, "Renfro! 0311. So and so! 0311," you know, everybody was nearly. We had like  
10 two guys, you know, that was something else but everybody was 0311 and that's  
11 basically what I wanted. I didn't go in trying to do something else. We had a few guys  
12 that, I can remember one in particular he had signed up—he went in on four years and  
13 went in on what they called aviation guarantee so it was supposedly in writing said that  
14 aviation would be his MOS when he got out of boot camp. Well, he got an MOS with so  
15 and so, 0311. He went, "Wait a minute. I am supposed to be aviation guarantee." And  
16 they said, "You didn't read the fine print, son. The fine print says 'If there is a school  
17 available at the time you graduate you will get aviation.' Right now there are no spots  
18 available in aviation so you are 0311.

19 KC: I am sure the recruiter didn't mention that.

20 LR: No, I am sure he didn't, just sign the papers.

21 KC: All right, so you are going to ITR(infantry training regiment), explain that a  
22 little bit more in depth, if you will, weapons training, and then things like that.

23 LR: Right. Well, okay, boot camp, like I said, was mental. It wasn't so much  
24 physical. We lifted weights a little bit. We had to pass certain physical requirements like  
25 so many push ups and pull ups and all that stuff and we did some three-mile runs and  
26 stuff like that. But it wasn't that much physical stuff. It was merely or it was mostly to me  
27 mental. ITR went from mental to physical. ITR is where we had to start putting on the  
28 packs loaded down with all our stuff carrying an M-14 and we humped those hills in  
29 Camp Pendleton. I mean, we were climbing hills day and night and we always from our  
30 place where we, our billets or whatever you want to call them, our dorms where we slept  
31 and stuff and where we ate, we would line up in the morning and we would take off and

1 everywhere we went it was called route stepping. Route stepping was basically just you  
2 couldn't run, they wouldn't let you run, but it was taking big steps and walking really  
3 fast. A small guy like me, my steps, you know, it was pretty tough. You know, I was  
4 doing this and so other guys were doing that. It got to the point where physically it was  
5 tough on everybody. We had guys fall out and just couldn't handle it, you know. What  
6 they do is if we were going along and we had a guy drop out, if he dropped out at the  
7 front it was up to one of the platoons in the back to pick him up, help him up. If not the  
8 squad leader it was his obligation to take care of his man, he would have to pick him up,  
9 take part of his gear or whatever it took and catch up with the rest of us. Unfortunately,  
10 when I graduated out of boot camp I made a rank so I was a PFC (private, first class)  
11 when I got to ITR. Well, everybody that was PFC in ITR got to be a squad leaders so I  
12 was a squad leader so I had guys drop out. I got bigger guys than me dropping out and I  
13 have got to go back there and help this big lug out and get him caught up with the platoon  
14 so it was pretty tough.

15 KC: I thought that was what you meant by "unfortunately."

16 LR: Yeah, it was—the emotional part of it wasn't bad in ITR, it was the physical  
17 and it was really, I mean it was tough because humping those hills like that. When I got  
18 back from—when I came home on leave my legs were so big they wouldn't fit in a pair  
19 of Levis and that's no joke. I couldn't wear Levis. I had to go buy dress pants because  
20 they had bigger legs so my legs would fit in them. I just, I was solid muscle, you know,  
21 from the waist down. Up here, you know, even upper body strength and stuff it was just a  
22 physical thing. It was the thing to teach you that—well, to me ITR was, it was the part  
23 that taught you that you don't leave a Marine behind. You know, that was a big deal for  
24 the Marine Corps. We never left a man behind. If you get somebody shot up on a hill we  
25 would go back up on the hill and get them, whatever it took. No Marine was ever left  
26 behind so we took care of our wounded and dead and all that stuff. Even if we had a dead  
27 Marine on the hill we would take that hill again to get that dead Marine off that hill and  
28 get him back so that is what ITR taught us. It was all about that thing of sticking together  
29 as a unit and taking care of your guys. Like squad leaders it was the part of being a  
30 leader. You know, if I had a guy in my squad mess up they would come to me and I

1 would be the guy that would be in trouble so I would have to take it and talk to him about  
2 it.

3 KC: How would you deal with something like that?

4 LR: About what? About being a squad leader and dealing with—having—

5 KC: Yes.

6 LR: Well, we had different ways. There was an incident when I was in ITR where  
7 we had some guys that would go—we would have sick call so in the morning if you were  
8 sick or something wrong with you, you would request sick bay and then you would stay  
9 behind and go to the infirmary or whatever to find out what was wrong with you and then  
10 you would come back to the barracks and wait for the unit to come back. Well, they  
11 found out some of these guys were going on sick call and they weren't going to the  
12 infirmary, they were just going up on the hill back there behind our barracks and just  
13 hanging out up there and goofing off all day. The DIs found out about that—or back then  
14 it was called troop leaders, there weren't DIs in ITR. A troop leader found out about it so  
15 what do you think happened? Every squad leader, we got back to the barracks one night  
16 and they made us go out there and they wanted to talk to us. They went out there and told  
17 us what was going on and then they sat out there and PT'ed us we called it. PT, physical  
18 therapy, or physical training where you do push-ups, sit-ups, and squat thrusts. We did  
19 that out there in the dirt for about two hours because our men messed up. When we got  
20 through we went in there and we lined everybody up and we beat—I mean it was a  
21 wholesale beating the crap out of those guys. I mean we lined them up and basically, we  
22 took care of it. After that we didn't have a problem. I guess what the deal was—I think  
23 that's what they wanted, they wanted us to learn to deal with our men so rather than  
24 punish those guys they didn't punish them, they punished us as squad leaders. That was  
25 one of the things that we ran into. The whole thing to me was, I guess leadership, some of  
26 it leadership skills dealing with people and just learning it, you know, the hard stuff I  
27 guess, I don't know.

28 KC: Were any of the people who were training you here Vietnam vets? Had any  
29 of them seen action in-country?

30 LR: Yes.

31 KC: What were they like?

1           LR: They were mean. We had a—one of our, well, one in particular of our DIs  
2 when I was in boot camp he was, we thought he was crazy, absolutely we thought he was  
3 crazy and that's no joke.

4           KC: Why?

5           LR: He did crazy stuff. I mean he would, I mean when he would come on duty—  
6 they took shifts, you know. We had like, if I remember right we had like—we had one DI  
7 that was the main DI. He was the head DI. I don't know what you want to, I guess the  
8 number one DI. Then they had like two others and they would take shifts like every third  
9 day, you know, or something. They would come on and they would be on. Well, when  
10 this dude came on to us he was a mental case. I mean he hated us. I mean it was like he  
11 wanted to kill all of us and that's no joke. We really felt like—I mean, there was times  
12 when I felt like that guy is capable of killing somebody, you know. He would just go  
13 ballistic. He would PT us to the point that we would just drop. You just couldn't—and  
14 there was no pleasing him. At night time when we would go to bed he would be over  
15 there in the barracks screaming and yelling. I can remember one night we were laying  
16 there and back then we had, in boot camp we stayed in those Quonset huts, you know,  
17 those little half-moon metal buildings. So a platoon we would have like, there would be  
18 like four Quonset huts for the platoon and there would be one for the DIs. The Quonset  
19 hut right across from the DIs building was where my Quonset hut was, several of us guys.  
20 One night, this is no joke, he—you know, they have a pole that they put the flag on and  
21 all that you know back then we had a flag and we had our platoon colors and our  
22 platoon—every time you did something really good, if you won a contest against other  
23 platoons you would get a ribbon that you would hang on your pole, your flag pole. I think  
24 they called it a guide iron or something like that but anyway. We were laying there one  
25 night and he was screaming and yelling and we were setting there going, “This guy is a  
26 nut case. He is going to kill somebody.” About that time he threw that spear end of that  
27 flag pole, threw it right through the door and it stuck through the door of that Quonset  
28 hut. I mean we seriously got worried that this guy is going to, he is going to kill  
29 somebody but he didn't. But he was a basket case. He had just gotten back from Vietnam  
30 and he was a staff sergeant. He was something else.

1 KC: What about at ITR with somewhat more advanced training, physical training  
2 things like that?

3 LR: Right. ITR, you, know we didn't have any, I don't remember any of those  
4 guys being from, having experience in Vietnam. Most of the ones in ITR were lower  
5 ranking people, the guys that they called troop leaders. Actually we had some that were  
6 PFCs so I always had a problem with that because I was a PFC and the troop leader was a  
7 PFC but he is over there giving me orders and I'm thinking, "Wait a minute. I'm the  
8 same rank as he is. Can he do that?" It's one of those deals where I think like the highest  
9 ranking one we had was like a sergeant. None of those guys, I don't remember any of  
10 those guys—well, there might have been. Really I can't say. I don't know for sure. But  
11 we didn't have any crazy ones in ITR like we did in boot camp. They were all pretty  
12 levelheaded. I mean they did stuff that was crazy but it wasn't like mentally crazy like  
13 that other guy. We felt like he was mentally unstable. To this day I look back on it and  
14 think he was mentally unstable. He needed to be out.

15 KC: What about in BITS?

16 LR: BITS was about the same. We didn't have any, there wasn't any nut cases  
17 there. It seemed like when we got to BITS all the troop leaders were a little higher  
18 ranking. We had some E-5s and E-6s there that did all of that. If they were veterans, if  
19 they had been to Vietnam, I figure probably most of them had, but they didn't to me act  
20 unstable or anything like that other guy did. They were all pretty good. I don't remember  
21 any incidents.

22 KC: What kind of weapons training are you receiving throughout this?

23 LR: Well—

24 KC: You mentioned the M-14 a little while ago.

25 LR: Boot camp—at the time, see, the military, the Marine Corps. I am not going  
26 to say military but the Marine Corps was switching from M-14s to M-16s. The M-14 was  
27 a heavier, I don't know if you are familiar with it, but M-14 was a heavier rifle that they  
28 used in World War II and Korea and stuff like that. Basically it's kind of like the old  
29 Springfield M-1, you know, but a little bit different design. They were switching over to  
30 the M-16 which was more adaptable to the jungle situation which we had in Vietnam. So  
31 boot camp we carried M-14s and then when we got to ITR we carried M-14s but when

1 we went from ITR to BITS we switched to M-16s. So M-16s we started getting training  
2 with the M-16 instead of the—when we qualified on the rifle range and all that stuff we  
3 used M-14s. When we got over to BITS and got into the more the jungle warfare and then  
4 staging was more the Vietnam stuff we used M-16s.

5 KC: The M-16 was, especially early on, pretty controversial.

6 LR: Yes.

7 KC: What was your opinion of it?

8 LR: By the time I got there the first ones they came out with, you know, had the  
9 bolt and it was real susceptible to locking up or jamming especially when it got a little bit  
10 dirty or something. In Vietnam it was going to get dirty. I mean that was a fact, so you  
11 had to clean them all the time, constantly or they would jam up on you. They later on  
12 changed all of that. They went back in there and they put a stainless steel bolt and made a  
13 few changes that made it a little better out in the jungle. The one I had was one of the  
14 newer ones that had a stainless steel bolt in it and stuff so I never had a problem with it  
15 jamming. My M-16 never jammed on me so I never had that problem. But we were aware  
16 of it and every chance we got we cleaned our weapons and made sure they were kept  
17 clean. We also, my outfit that I was in, it was a big deal that we carried our ammo and  
18 our extra magazines and stuff like that in a place where we didn't get them dirty and  
19 nasty. What I always did, I carried the—the M-16 ammo would come in what we call a  
20 bandolier and we would take those boxes out and then once we loaded those rounds into  
21 our magazines we would take that bandolier and put our magazines upside down into that  
22 bandolier which it would cover the rounds and keep them clean. Then I always just slung  
23 them around my neck and I usually carried about two of them most times. I looked like a  
24 Mexican bandito, you know. I had the cross thing here with all the rounds on your chest  
25 but that's kind of the way we worked. It kept them clean and also we changed our—every  
26 so often they would come in there and we would take all of magazines, just dump all the  
27 ammunition out of it and clean them up real good and put new ammunition in them.

28 KC: Was there any other kinds of weapons training you underwent here, mortars  
29 or—?

30 LR: Mortars? No. But anything that a infantry man would carry we were trained  
31 on, M-79, we carried LAWs (light anti-tank weapons). I don't know if you are familiar

1 with a LAW. You probably are since you have given these interviews. Anyway, we  
2 carried a LAW. We carried—let's see. What else? M-79—.45s, we had some training on  
3 pistols, a .45 pistol, a .45-caliber pistol. Let's see. What else did we carry? We had a little  
4 bit of training in explosives carrying C-4 because we carried C-4 to blow LZs (landing  
5 zones) and stuff. Mortar rounds. We did carry mortar rounds but mortar they were a  
6 specialty. It wasn't 0311. It was probably an 0351. I don't know. Honestly, I couldn't tell  
7 you what it is but they were their own outfits. Now, we carried mortar rounds but it  
8 wasn't for me to use. It was when we got into a firefight or something we would pass all  
9 that stuff up and they would have more rounds to use so that is kind of how we did.

10 KC: Any medical training while you were there?

11 LR: The only thing we got was basic stuff like how to take care of a sucking  
12 wound, like if a guy got shot in the chest you know how to cover it up with some plastic  
13 or something and if he was bleeding lay him on that side so the good lung didn't feel up  
14 with blood, you know just basic combat stuff, how to use that battle dressing. Everybody  
15 carried one battle dressing on their helmet. It wasn't for your buddy it was for you. That's  
16 the way we looked at it. Your battle dressing was for you so if you got wounded they  
17 would pull your battle dressing. I carried mine on my helmet with a strap and they would  
18 just pull it off and pop it open and basically it was just a big pad of gauze that they could  
19 slap on a wound or something and tie it up around you and tie it on where it would kind  
20 of stop the bleeding or help with the bleeding and stuff.

21 KC: When do you finish this last level of training here?

22 LR: The staging?

23 KC: Yes.

24 LR: When did we finish that?

25 KC: Yes.

26 LR: It was in December. I couldn't tell you the exact dates but on December of  
27 '69, sometime in December because—the only reason I can remember that is because it  
28 was right before Christmas and staging, you know, where we—right before we went to  
29 staging they gave us a weekend pass so I thought, "Well, I am going to go home." The  
30 pass was only good for a hundred miles so I got me a ticket to—well I got, let's see, I  
31 went to Midland-Odessa. I got a ticket to Odessa, Midland-Odessa airport and I flew

1 from Los Angeles out there and saw my family before I went back and got on the plane  
2 and went to Vietnam just because I wanted to see them before Christmas. So I did that  
3 and got back and then we were there probably, I don't know, maybe week before we  
4 actually left. I got to Vietnam and it was—dates have skipped my memory over the years,  
5 but it was right after Christmas of 1969, of 1968.

6 KC: Okay.

7 LR: I think it was either right—it maybe like December 31<sup>st</sup> or maybe January 1<sup>st</sup>  
8 or whatever when I got to Vietnam.

9 KC: I think I have mistaken a little bit of the timeline here.

10 LR: Okay.

11 KC: This is after BITS training that you have, what was it? A thirty-day leave?

12 LR: Twenty.

13 KC: Twenty-day leave. Okay. Then you came back after that to go through  
14 staging.

15 LR: Right.

16 KC: Okay, all right. Well, when you finished BITS training you have that twenty-  
17 day leave. I assume did you come back home to Andrews?

18 LR: Yes, yes. Oh, that's what you were asking about, wasn't it?

19 KC: Yes, yes, I am sorry.

20 LR: Oh, I'm sorry. I just misunderstood what you were asking. But, yeah, I came  
21 home on leave and my wife that I married, my wife now, but we were still dating so I  
22 came to Lubbock and saw her and goofed around up here and just messed around for  
23 twenty days. I just tried to have some fun because I knew where I was going. I knew I  
24 wouldn't be back for a year so I tried to enjoy life a little bit.

25 KC: So is the impending war starting to wear on you a little bit? Are you thinking  
26 about it more and more?

27 LR: Well, I think it's become—at that point it was becoming more real to me. I  
28 mean the fact that I was going, it was a sure thing and not knowing what to expect. I had  
29 no idea what to expect, you know. My only thing to judge what war was all about was  
30 what I had seen on the movies, you know, in Hollywood, you know, watching John  
31 Wayne flicks. So I thought that was what it was all about I thought that's how it was

1 going to be. Not knowing what to expect, I think. I probably did start thinking about it a  
2 little bit there but I still, I had no idea what I was going to be involved in. I was still naïve  
3 so I can't really say that I spent a lot of time thinking about it. I think it is one of those  
4 deals where you tried not to think about it. It was just, "I'm going so I am just going to  
5 have fun and deal with that when I get there." I really didn't—I can't say it was starting  
6 to wear on me. In other words, like am I starting to worry about it or anything like that?  
7 No, I don't think I did that.

8 KC: What about your family or girlfriend or other friends?

9 LR: Ah, you know, they were upset. My mom I know, my mom—I didn't see it  
10 so much in my dad but my mom, she cried all the time, you know. You know, she was all  
11 upset. I do remember one thing that sort of made me start thinking, "Hey, wait a minute,"  
12 you know. "I could get killed in this deal," because my mother and dad took out an  
13 insurance policy on me.

14 KC: That brings home the cold reality right there, doesn't it?

15 LR: Exactly, it was a life insurance policy so while I was down there with them  
16 they said, "We want you to sign this policy," you know. "We are taking out a life  
17 insurance policy on you." I'm sure what it was it like a burial thing. I didn't read it. I just  
18 signed it. Then they brought the preacher over, you know, to talk to me and all this so I  
19 am thinking, um, you know this is getting kind of serious here you know. But I mean  
20 even at nineteen years old or whatever it was, by then I was twenty. I had just turned  
21 twenty years old so I'm still bullet proof at that point. It didn't bother me.

22 KC: You mentioned you just signed it and didn't read it. You've been a Marine  
23 long enough to know better than to do that.

24 LR: You would think I would know better than that wouldn't you but I guess I  
25 trusted my mom and dad to not rip me off like the Marine Corps did.

26 KC: Okay. You make it back to staging again, explain that to me.

27 LR: Staging?

28 KC: Yeah.

29 LR: It was basically just the same old stuff just more training. Oh, one thing they  
30 did do in staging was that all the times before we—all the guys going through like ITR  
31 and BITS, we were all privates and PFCs, it was all the training. When we got to staging

1 it switched over to that was more the more specialized stuff, like I said, and getting the  
2 shots, inoculations and all that stuff that you had to go overseas, signing all the papers,  
3 the waivers and all the stuff that you had to do. Well, when we got there we were all  
4 mixed up. I mean we were sharing our billet or I guess our, that's what we call them,  
5 billets, we were sharing that with E4s, E-5s, sergeants and stuff. It was kind of different  
6 for us to be actually sharing quarters with guys that outranked us, you know, quite a bit  
7 so it was kind of a shock. I—speaking of that, I did kind of have an eye-opening  
8 experience while in staging. We were sitting there one night just writing letters and stuff  
9 kind of like what you did in the evenings, you know, before the lights went out. I  
10 remember there was a sergeant down on the end down there. He was an E-4 or E-5 and  
11 he was down there and, man, he had teardrops. I mean he was crying. I went down there  
12 and I said, “Hey, Sergeant. What is the matter with you?” He said, “I’m going back to  
13 Vietnam.” He said, “This is my second tour.” He said, “I have been over there once.” He  
14 said, “I won’t make it this second time.” He said, “I’ll get killed. I know it.” That kind of  
15 rang a bell with me. This is a grown man crying and, you know, what’s—at that point I  
16 realized this may be a little different then what I expected. That maybe this is not like the  
17 John Wayne movies and stuff. I think that kind of got me to thinking in a way. But I  
18 mean, even at that I still, I just kind of blew it off and went on about my business. Staging  
19 was basically, everybody was in the same, we were all different ranks and, of course, the  
20 guys that had higher ranks than us they would make them squad leaders and platoon  
21 leaders and stuff like that. We went through stuff, like I said, going through villages and  
22 stuff like that. We went through a POW (prisoner of war) camp. We had to learn what  
23 your rights were and you had to sign papers. Geneva Convention, we had to sign a bunch  
24 of stuff for all of that. We got our Geneva Convention cards you had to carry with you all  
25 the time. Like the communists cared about a Geneva Convention card, but we carried  
26 them anyway. We had that and we got those and learned what—if you were captured  
27 what you were supposed to do and how to survive, a lot of survival stuff, you know.  
28 That’s kind of what BITS was. It was about four weeks of just intense getting your  
29 records all prepared, getting your shots all done and learning survival skills, you know,  
30 and stuff like that. It was basically just getting ready to go to Vietnam is what it was, to  
31 go overseas.

1           KC: So it was December of 1968. You have been through all of this Marine Corps  
2 training. You have been following the war. You have heard about it firsthand from people  
3 who were there. Do you feel like you are prepared to go?

4           LR: Uh, no. Well, I think I was prepared physically but mentally I don't think, I  
5 don't think you can prepare for that mentally. Even having been there now and made it  
6 back, if I were to have to go back into a situation like that I don't think I could prepare  
7 for it, really. It's just something that its, once you are there it is just survival, I guess is  
8 what it is and you just have to, every situation is different and you just have to learn  
9 survival skills that hopefully will get you through. As far as being prepared and ready to  
10 go in there gung-ho and all that stuff I would say yes, but now looking back on it when  
11 you get there what you actually deal with, no I wasn't prepared. I don't think anybody  
12 could be prepared. I think that's where the sergeant crying, you know, I think that's what  
13 made me realize that there maybe something there that I didn't know about.

14           KC: Because he knew.

15           LR: He knew, and he knew what to expect when he got there. I think physically,  
16 like you say, I think physically and all that stuff the Marine Corps had me prepared to go  
17 over there but as far as actually what we did and what we were going to face when we got  
18 there, I don't think there is any way to prepare for that.

19           KC: All right, now, you leave in December of '69 you go out of what? Travis, I  
20 guess?

21           LR: El Toro.

22           KC: El Toro.

23           LR: El Toro, California.

24           KC: Makes sense. What was the flight like over there?

25           LR: Quiet. We left El Toro and flew to Hawaii. We stopped at Hawaii and  
26 basically got to get off the plane and stretch our legs and walk around a little bit while  
27 they refueled and then got back on the plane and flew to somewhere in the Philippines. I  
28 don't know where we landed in the Philippines but it was a stop off point before you  
29 went to Vietnam.

30           KC: Probably Clark would be my guess.

1           LR: It could be. We stopped there. It was night time when we got there, I  
2 remember that and we spent—when we got there some guys told us that, “Y’all might as  
3 well get comfortable.” He said, “You will probably be here a couple of weeks before you  
4 get a flight to Vietnam.” I thought we were going to be there a while. We spent the night  
5 and the next morning they gave us a bunch of shots the next day. I don’t know how many  
6 shots we got but it was just more of the same stuff, you know, of getting prepared to go.  
7 We were on a plane within twenty-four hours headed to Vietnam, Da Nang. Landed at Da  
8 Nang, South Vietnam is where we went.

9           KC: All right, now you have made this massive change, transformation, if you  
10 will, small west Texas oil field. You want to get out and you want to see the elephant, as  
11 it were. You feel this obligation. You’ve been through the training whether or not it  
12 prepared you is obviously still up in the air. Now, PFC Renfro, you are getting off the  
13 plane at Da Nang. Explain that to me. What is the first thing that you remember?

14           LR: Well, the first thing I remember getting off that plane was the fact that the  
15 runway was not concrete or asphalt or whatever, you know, most runways are made out  
16 of it was that metal stuff that the military lays out. I thought that was kind of unique. And  
17 we flew, we flew Continental Airlines is what we flew on but it was like a charter I guess,  
18 charter airline. Anyway, we got off and when we stepped out of that plane, well, we  
19 stepped off and we were all nice and clean and starched utilities and boots all shined and  
20 we were looking sharp. I stepped off that plane and got down off of it and there was a  
21 whole bunch of guys lined up over there and they were the nastiest looking bunch of guys  
22 I ever seen in my life. They were all dirty, their hair was long and straggly, their clothes  
23 were nasty looking, their boots were all wore out, and these guys were over there  
24 laughing at us and pointing at us going, “You guys are going to die in Vietnam!” Making  
25 all these—I am thinking these guys, “I thought we were on the same side here,” guys and  
26 they are over here making fun of us. That made a big impression on me. I thought—when  
27 I saw them I thought, I didn’t know what to think. Honestly, I thought maybe they were  
28 just a bunch of prisoners or something that had gone AWOL or something. I didn’t know  
29 what they were. But they were Marines that were actually rotating and going back home  
30 and we were just getting there. That kind of, you know, that was an impression on me.  
31 Then stepping off that plane it was warm over there, you know, it was pretty hot and

1 humid. I remember that. That old red dirt was everywhere and that's what those guys had  
2 on. They were just a nasty looking reddish color you, know, everything was dirty.  
3 Basically just from there they took us inside to an area there somewhere and broke us  
4 down to where we were going to go. See, at that point we had no weapons; we hadn't  
5 been issued weapons so we were just—I was kind of getting worried, here I am in  
6 Vietnam and I haven't got a weapon yet. I am thinking, "You know, I need to have  
7 something to shoot back at." If I have got—if we get in trouble I would like to at least  
8 shoot back at them but we didn't have anything. They broke us down into units and told  
9 us where we were going and, you know, they'd call out your name and tell you, "You are  
10 going to Alpha Company, Bravo," or whatever, you know. They broke us down like that.  
11 From there they tell you where to go to get the transportation to go to your unit. They had  
12 given me—I was supposed to report to Kilo Company, Kilo 3/3 is where I went, 3<sup>rd</sup>  
13 Marine Division. I went over there and me and about, seemed like it was about four or  
14 five of us, they picked us up on one of those deuce-and-a-halves, they called them, those  
15 old trucks and we left out of the gate and (noise) here we go. We're going out across, it  
16 wasn't jungle there it was more or less just elephant grass, not elephant grass really, it  
17 was just grass, you know, just kind of flat. We are going out across there and hooking  
18 them and all of a sudden you hear (noise) all these shots. We are all ears perked up and  
19 this one guy up there he ducks, you know, he had been there a while and he ducks down.  
20 We still don't have any weapons. We are still going along there. I was getting a little  
21 more worried about this. I was starting to kind of worry about this situation we were in.  
22 Anyway, they took us up to—you know, my memory kind of skips around in there a little  
23 bit. We went to Quang Tri. Quang Tri is where 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division's rear area is and I  
24 honestly I can't remember that. We went from Da Nang and we got on that deuce-and-a-  
25 half and went somewhere and I don't know if they took us by helicopter or what from  
26 there. I don't know how we got to Quang Tri. We might have went, I don't think we went  
27 in a deuce-and-a-half the whole way to Quang Tri because it was quite a ways up there  
28 from Da Nang to Quang Tri so we are bound to have taken a helicopter or something or  
29 one of those C-130s or something. That's one thing about this whole situation with me is  
30 my memory is not as good as it—you know, I can't remember guys' names and things  
31 like that and all that. It's bits and pieces to me. Anyway, we went from Da Nang to

1 Quang Tri and Quang Tri is where 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division's rear area was. Then from there  
2 they broke us down even more and decided what outfit we were going in. I went to Kilo  
3 3/3, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division and from there we took a chopper and Kilo, 3/3 was on a big  
4 operation, Operation Taylor Common up in—it was somewhere up, here again, I was  
5 never privy to a map. I never was part of the—I wasn't an officer or somebody that was  
6 in charge of the map so I don't know a lot of times where we were. I just know we were  
7 up in the jungle or something like that somewhere.

8 KC: Sure.

9 LR: I just have some ideas of kind of where we were at. We went up there and  
10 that's where I joined my outfit was right after that. They chopped us up there and here we  
11 are up in the jungle.

12 KC: All right, you have made it to Vietnam, you have been assigned to 3/3—Kilo  
13 Company of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, and you are not longer at Da Nang. Da Nang at least had  
14 some semblance of American civilization as busy as it was and ice cream and movies and  
15 all those kind of things. You are on truck, a deuce-and-a-half and shot at, no weapons.  
16 You make your way—you say you can't remember exactly how it was, either chopper or  
17 whatever it was—to Quang Tri and you are immediately going to thrown into the midst  
18 of this pretty massive operation, Taylor Common up there in that area, An Hoa area, etc.,  
19 facing front line NVA (North Vietnamese Army) troops in this effort. For a West Texas  
20 boy, what's going through your mind here?

21 LR: Well, at least by then they had given us, they had issued us a weapon. So I  
22 had an M-16. They had given us some frags, you know, we had been issued just some  
23 basic gear. They had given us—we had been issued flak jackets and all the stuff that you  
24 needed and everything. When we got off the chopper up there we had all the stuff with us  
25 but it was a different experience. I think that's when it started kind of dawning on me  
26 what we were getting involved in here. They were set in on top of a hill in perimeter and  
27 as soon as you get off the chopper, why, they would tell you, "Well, you are going to be  
28 in so and so's squad. Go over there report to sergeant so and so," you know, whatever. So  
29 that's what I did. I will never forget that. To this day it's still, it's fresh on my mind that  
30 part of it. But I reported to my squad leader and he was a, I don't remember if he was a  
31 sergeant or a corporal or whatever he was but he was a guy from Rhode Island and he

1 was a redheaded guy, tall guy, and talked—you how people from Rhode Island talk, you  
2 know, “You’s guys,” and all this stuff. He looked at me and I will never forget it, he said,  
3 “Well, I can tell you this much. You are never going to make it in the Nam.” I said,  
4 “What do you mean by that?” He said, “You are too little. You can’t hump the load.” I  
5 said a few choice words to him and told him, I said, “Let me tell you something, bud. I  
6 will hump you’re A-double S in the ground any day of the week.” I said, “I can carry as  
7 much as you can carry any time.” “Well, we’ll see about that.” Actually that was  
8 probably the wrong thing to say since he was the squad leader because you can imagine  
9 when we got ready to move what happened to me. I got loaded down with stuff. Anyway,  
10 that was kind of—that was reporting to my squad. Of course, I got payback on him later  
11 on. But anyway, reported there and of course they’d give you some—they would put you  
12 in a hole with someone, you know. They’d—when you sat in on perimeter, well, you  
13 would have a foxhole every so often, you know. They’d call it hole watch or whatever  
14 and we usually ran, most of the time it was three-man holes. If you had a real good area,  
15 if things were real good it would be a four-man hole and if things were real bad it would  
16 be a two-man hole. A two-man hole means you were on watch 50%, that would be 50%  
17 watch so that meant one of you were up and one of you were asleep so it was just back  
18 and forth. If it was a three-man watch that means you got two hours of sleep and one hour  
19 on watch, two hours of sleep one hour on watch. Four-man hole then you get three hours  
20 of sleep and one hour on watch. So the more guys you had in the hole the better off it  
21 was. But it seemed like we were like three-man holes or something there, which was  
22 pretty normal. They put me in the hole and here we are, Vietnam.

23 KC: All right.

24 LR: I was on top of a hilltop looking out in the jungle. They were up in, well, I  
25 don’t know where. All I can think, if I am guessing I would say it was probably  
26 somewhere west of Da Nang or northwest of Da Nang up in the jungle somewhere. An  
27 Hoa area is probably where it was. I never was in An Hoa but we were up in that area  
28 somewhere up in there.

29 KC: Right. Well, you are in this foxhole and you are brand new and you have  
30 already had a run-in with the corporal, sergeant, whoever it might have been. How did the  
31 rest of the Marines, the veterans, how were they treating you?

1           LR: Well, they were—most of them it was one of those deals where, “Hey, where  
2 are you from? What did you do?” Asking all the questions. “Man, did you do this? How  
3 are you?” Just asking, “How was it in The World?” you know. “What was going on?  
4 What was the music like?” All this stuff they basically just asked you what was going on  
5 in The World. We called it The World which meant back in the States. There was a lot of  
6 that but there was also a lot of—they weren’t all that friendly. I mean you had to kind of  
7 earn your spot. When you first got there it was kind of like (noise). You were always the  
8 point man. You were always the one that got the crappy duty, you know, if something  
9 come up. Whatever came up you were going to be on it for a while until you kind of  
10 earned your position. Usually after the first firefight or so when they learned that you  
11 weren’t a coward and take off running, if you stood your ground and did your job then  
12 basically you were kind of accepted then. It took a while to kind of get accepted by all of  
13 them other than the fact that just the questions of what was going on in The World.

14           KC: Any special treatment because you were from Texas one way or the other?

15           LR: Not really, no, because I actually—there was several guys from Texas. Of  
16 course, you know, they were all friendly wanting to know “Where are you from in  
17 Texas?” you know. “I’m from Lubbock.” Most of the time it was, “Where’s Lubbock?”  
18 “Well, go west of Dallas about 350 miles, just due west. That’s pretty close to where  
19 Lubbock.” “Oh, yeah. I think I know where that’s at.” Most of them from Dallas, Fort  
20 Worth, or somewhere like that or San Antonio. I had one guy from, I was friends with  
21 him. He was from San Antonio. I had a couple from Dallas but I mean Texas is Texas,  
22 you know, we were all buds, you know, if you were from Texas.

23           KC: Sure.

24           LR: As far as any special treatment one way or the other, nah, about like  
25 everybody else.

26           KC: How long were you here before at this particular area before you saw your  
27 first combat?

28           LR: Hmm (pause). I don’t know as I can really give you a time period there as to  
29 how long it was. If I remember right we didn’t have a lot of—we ran into a few booby  
30 traps on that operation. When I got there we were on Taylor Common about thirty days  
31 after I got there so we were in the bush about thirty days. I don’t remember any real

1 heavy, any heavy firefights we got into in that whole operation. We saw some—we ran  
2 into a gook hospital or hospital area where they would take care of their wounded and  
3 stuff we did find that up in the jungle.

4 KC: This is North Vietnamese, I assume. Right?

5 LR: Yes, yes, yeah. I never—the whole time I was in Vietnam I never saw the  
6 black pajama with the little flat hat. The only thing I ever saw were NVA regulars. We  
7 fought NVA troops. We were right up—I was in I Corps, which I Corps was way up right  
8 by the DMZ (demilitarized zone) and the only thing we ever fought was NVA troops.  
9 They were trained and supplied and they were not a bunch of rebels. They were trained  
10 troops like we were. That's all we ever dealt with. As far as any big firefights at  
11 Operation Taylor Common, we didn't run into any or I don't remember running into any  
12 big ones there. There was one incident that I think made a mark on me while we were  
13 there. It wasn't firefight but it was—we had only been there, or I had only been there  
14 maybe I would say a couple of weeks and our platoon was on a hilltop and they wanted  
15 part of us—I mean, our company was on a hilltop and they wanted our platoon, I was in  
16 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, they wanted us to go down into a valley and back up and set in on another  
17 hilltop over there. We left out one morning and we got all the way down to the valley  
18 floor down there and we had left the rest of the company up on this hill. Any time we  
19 crossed a stream or something we would always fill up our canteens. Whoever was on  
20 point when we would hit the stream we would put out security and then let the rest of the  
21 company walk through us and fill their canteens. When they got to the last man they  
22 would let us know and then we would get back and we would be on the rear end of the  
23 column then and we'd just keep going. Well, this squad leader I had at the time, and it  
24 wasn't—I had switched squads. They had put me with somebody else, a Mexican guy  
25 and I will never forget his name. His name was Sergeant Rios. He was a sergeant. How  
26 he got to be a sergeant? I couldn't tell you. He will probably be listening to these one of  
27 these days and he will probably want to come shoot me or something, but anyway his  
28 name was Sergeant Rios. That guy he was about as incompetent as you can imagine. I  
29 was the new guy so we hit the stream. We were on point so he sent us out. He sent me up  
30 the creek, literally, up there for security. I went up there a little ways and I said, "Is this  
31 where you want me?" you know. You didn't yell you just, "Is this where you want me?"

1 He motioned for me to move up further so I moved up further. Well, I got up there and,  
2 you know, I sat down with my rifle and I'm just looking up the hill and the stream is  
3 running downhill, you know, and I am just watching to see what is going on there. I hear  
4 all these canteens flopping, you know, behind me and people filling their canteen and it  
5 keeps going and going and going. In a little bit it gets real quiet and I am thinking, "Man,  
6 it got awful quiet back there." I turn around and look and they are gone. My platoon had  
7 gone. I am going, "My gosh! He left me up the creek!" I go back down and I hit the trail  
8 and I'm thinking now what I am going to be doing I am going to be coming up on the  
9 rear end of them and I am liable to get shot because that was one of the things the guy on  
10 the rear always watched for is for somebody to come up behind, you know, you had to  
11 identify yourself. I thought, "Oh, man." So I take off and I'm running along there  
12 watching the trail, got up there a little ways and the trail forked; it split. I went, "Oh my  
13 god!" So I tried to look—you know, I tried to think, "Man, maybe I can see some  
14 footprints or something." I couldn't tell where they went. I got scared, you know, I was  
15 literally—I was thinking, "I'm up a creek without a paddle." I sat there and I tried to—  
16 you know, the panic wanted to set in. The first thing you want to do is just go, "Yahh!" I  
17 sat there and I thought, "Oh, man. What am I going to do?" And then I thought, "Okay.  
18 All right. The rest of the company is up on that hill and I do know how to get back up that  
19 hill." So I went right back, I back tracked and went back up across the stream and went  
20 right back up the hill and went up on the top of that mountain. Well, I am going up there,  
21 of course, they are set in on perimeter and they have got a machinegun setting on that  
22 trail where I am coming up. When I thought I was getting close to the top of that hill I  
23 started hollering. I was saying, "Kilo, 3/3! Got a friendly coming in! Kilo, 3/3! You've  
24 got a friendly coming in!" I got up there and, sure enough, they let me in, luckily I didn't  
25 get shot they heard me and stuff. Well, they radioed to the rest of my platoon and told  
26 them that they had left one of their sheep, on the radio, you know, they called it sheep so  
27 they said you left one of your sheep behind. They had to send somebody up there to get  
28 me, back to get me. Well, it was my platoon sergeant and the staff sergeant that he was  
29 like our company staff sergeant. They were the ones that had to come get me. Well,  
30 they're pissed off by the time they get there. I'm sorry. I have got to watch my language.

31 Natalie Swindle: I can handle it.

1           LR: They were mad. They were upset that they had to come get me. The first  
2 thing out of that mouth of my squad leader, that Sergeant Rios was, “I told you to come  
3 on!” And I said, “You idiot!” I said, “Do you think if you told me to come on that I  
4 would have stayed up that creek and just hang around so y’ all can just run off and leave  
5 me? Does that make any sense to you?” “Well, I told you.” I said, “Ah, whatever.”  
6 Anyway, the staff sergeant of our company—I think he could see the light where it  
7 wasn’t my fault so he just kind of brushed it over and said, “Well, load it up and let’s go,”  
8 so we headed out. That was my first—I think that’s always affected me how close I came  
9 within two weeks of being a dead man. If that would have been our company had moved  
10 all at once and they hadn’t been on that hill I would have been up in that jungle and  
11 wouldn’t have known where to go, I would have been (noise) lost in the jungle of  
12 Vietnam. I might have still been rummaging around trying to figure out where I was.

13           KC: Was this your first time out to the bush?

14           LR: This wasn’t the first time in the bush it was the—well, it was within two  
15 weeks of me getting into the bush, probably maybe three weeks, two or three weeks;  
16 probably two weeks because, like I said, we were Taylor Common about thirty days so  
17 this was probably within fourteen or fifteen days of being in the bush that’s what  
18 happened to me. After that I learned that was—I learned a valuable lesson right there. I  
19 learned to never trust anybody there. I learned to take care of me first then take care of  
20 my guys around me next. So I learned something that day. After that I didn’t get left  
21 behind nowhere. I always had my outfit in sight. I don’t know if that—it might have  
22 saved my life later on. I don’t know.

23           KC: After this initiation with Rios what was your relationship like with him from  
24 this point forward?

25           LR: Never was good. I was in his—for a long time I was in his squad and I never  
26 liked him, I never—I didn’t trust him and nobody. I mean it was not just me it was  
27 everybody that was in his squad, they didn’t like him. They didn’t trust him. He just  
28 wasn’t leadership material. I even carried the radio for him for a while, was his radio man  
29 and he was terrible. I just, it was one of those deals where I just wanted out of his platoon  
30 and I finally did get out of his platoon. Or not out of his platoon. Out of his squad.

1           KC: Well, you mentioned this one time where you were moving down the hill  
2 away from the rest of the company and this adventure that certainly followed. What was  
3 the purpose of this? Why was your squad out? What were you going to do?

4           LR: Oh, our platoon coming off the hill? Well, it was one of those deals where we  
5 were going to move—we had the whole company on one hill and I think what they  
6 wanted to do was just move one of us over to another area. Anytime you set in on a  
7 hilltop like that what you would do is run ambushes and go out on patrols during the day  
8 and just patrol the area. The only thing I can figure is they probably just wanted to spread  
9 us out a little bit because they had everybody on one hill. They wanted to spread us out  
10 on this other hill and kind of check that area out over there while they were still checking  
11 this area out.

12           KC: Did you go out on any ambushes?

13           LR: Yes, lots of times.

14           KC: Describe that for me.

15           LR: Um—

16           KC: Either one in particular of just in general.

17           LR: I was on lots of ambushes. It was always (pause)—well, it was—I don't  
18 know. I'm having a hard time finding the words. In the evening usually—we ambushed at  
19 night. Well, we did do some day time ambushes but not very often, only if we suspected  
20 that they were moving along a trail, it was a real well used trail, we might ambush it  
21 during the day but most of the time our ambushes were at night. They moved at night and  
22 ambushed us during the day. We moved during the day and ambushed them at night  
23 while they were moving so it was a kind of cat and mouse deal. At night time they would  
24 always tell who had the ambushes, who had the LPs. LP was a listening post that you just  
25 put guys out front somewhere out close to a trail and if someone was coming up the trail  
26 they could call back and tell them they had movement or whatever. Ambush is the same  
27 way. But you would usually load up, carry only your fighting gear. Fighting gear was just  
28 your flak jacket, M-16, your rounds that you carry. There wouldn't be no backpack or  
29 anything like that as far as food or anything it would just be an overnight deal. We would  
30 usually leave out at dusk right before the sun went down, sometimes right after the sun  
31 went down where it was getting duskier or kind of dark where if they were watching us

1 they couldn't tell where we were going. We'd usually during the day time when we were  
2 on patrol would find areas that would be a good ambush point. We would stake it out and  
3 then at night we would go back and basically just like if it was a trail we would get back  
4 off the trail ten or fifteen, maybe ten yards off the trail and just set in the jungle and sit  
5 there all night and wait on them. It was just basically the same deal. We would have three  
6 guys in each—we would have like maybe four places there. They would usually—it  
7 would be probably about eight riflemen and then we'd carry a machinegun with us. A  
8 machinegun would be the gunner and his helper, the guy that put the ammo in the gun so  
9 that would be about ten. We might carry a medic with us, one of our corpsmen, they  
10 might go out. Corpsmen didn't normally go out on ambushes but it depended if it was a  
11 big ambush they might go out with us. So it could consist anywhere from eight to ten  
12 people to maybe twelve or fourteen, fifteen, depending on what size ambush we were  
13 doing. You would go out there and basically set in and wait overnight. We always  
14 liked—like I say, we'd pick a spot that we thought was being used and just sit there and  
15 wait for them at night.

16 KC: How would you set up the ambush? What would the configuration be?

17 LR: Well, there were different types. We always liked to do what we called an L-  
18 shaped ambush. An L-shaped ambush was always real good. An L-shaped ambush is just  
19 where the trail would make a turn and so what we could do if we thought they were  
20 coming either way on the trail, in other words, if the trail came up and made a turn you  
21 could set a machinegun right where the trail was where it made the turn and then that way  
22 the machinegun, if they were coming up either direction, the machinegun could point  
23 right down the trail on them and cut them down. Then everybody else would sit up along  
24 the trail itself. That was basically what we ran just to—then sometimes if we didn't have  
25 an L in the trail we would just set up right along the trail somewhere. Anytime we got  
26 into a firefight and we had killed a bunch of NVA soldiers they would sometimes come  
27 back at night to try to get their dead soldiers out. We would always pile them up. I know  
28 this sounds kind of cruel, but we would pile the bodies up in a bomb crater or somewhere  
29 along the trail and then we would ambush all the trails coming into that area so we could  
30 get whoever was coming after those bodies. We got some of them several times so it was  
31 just a—I don't know. I know that sounds—I don't mean to be cruel but that's just the

1 way we did it. We would take their dead and pile them up and then ambush all the trails  
2 going into that area and hopefully kill some more of them.

3 KC: Do you remember your first ambush where you had contact with the enemy?

4 LR: Oh, lord. Actually I don't remember like a first ambush. Like I say, my outfit  
5 we were really in a heavily—I guess what I'm trying to say is we saw a lot of combat. I  
6 saw, and I am not trying to brag and I especially don't want to do that in this interview. I  
7 don't want to sound like I am bragging. We did have a lot of contact with the enemy. We  
8 were in contact with them regularly. So I have a hard time distinguishing where was the  
9 first one or where they all were. I just remember, I do remember some ambushes that  
10 stick out.

11 KC: Well, describe one of those for me, then.

12 LR: Well, there was one in particular that is, was an L-shaped ambush, as a matter  
13 of fact and we had left—there was a fire base called Charlie 2, C-2 we called it, but it was  
14 Charlie 2. It was an Army fire base and we had been standing hold watch for the Army  
15 fire base there. They had taken us out and we were going out on a little operation out  
16 there, our company was, and they had sent some tanks with us. So we had tanks going  
17 with us. Well, we hated that. We didn't like tanks going with us because they were like  
18 gook magnets. I mean, if the gooks saw a tank out in the bush you were going to run into  
19 trouble so we hated that. Anyway, they were with us and sure enough—we hadn't been  
20 out there in the no time that we started taking mortar rounds and all this stuff. We finally  
21 got set in on a little old hilltop over there and that night they sent—my squad went out on  
22 an ambush out there on that L-shaped ambush. We set a machinegun up right at the trail  
23 where it made its turn and then early that morning, well, the main column over there got  
24 hit, our perimeter did. They were on the radio hollering that they had gooks inside the  
25 perimeter. They had actually fought their way through one side of the perimeter over  
26 there and was inside which meant they were within the inner circle of our perimeter  
27 which is not a good thing. They had actually taken out at least one tank with an RPG. We  
28 were sitting out here on this trail and we are watching all this you know they had a big  
29 firefight it was just all kinds of crap going on. They were popping off illumination  
30 grenades and stuff, you know, illumination rounds, calling in artillery illumination. We  
31 were sitting out in elephant grass and this is all the cover we had so we were sweating

1 bullets because we were like a sore thumb stuck out there. They could see us for miles.  
2 Every time they popped off an illumination round it was like day light out there where we  
3 were and we are going, “Oh, my gosh.” We are trying to get down. Well, all this kind of  
4 died down after a little bit and they called us on the radio and said they are heading  
5 y’all’s way and you better get ready. They got hit with a bunch of them. Well, in a little  
6 bit we heard them coming. You could hear them coming down the trail. You could hear  
7 things rattling like canteens or something rattling. We waited it out and in a minute they  
8 went in front of us and when they did—well, the first thing we did or the first thing we  
9 always did was you never hit them with the machinegun and your M-16s first. The first  
10 thing we always did was we threw all the frags at them that way they didn’t know where  
11 we were. You would pop a frag and you would throw it. Well, they didn’t know where it  
12 came from. The first thing you did is popped all the frags and did that and then we  
13 opened up on them. At the time we didn’t know what kind of damage we had done so we  
14 are sitting there and then all night long now, it still kind of bothers me but (pause)—I am  
15 sorry.

16 KC: That’s fine. We can pause for a little while.

17 LR: Anyway we sat there for a good while. One of the ones that we had shot or  
18 whatever, they were wounded, one of the NVA. They were laying over there somewhere  
19 and we couldn’t figure out where and they were moaning. We kept trying to shut them up  
20 because the main thing was we didn’t know how many we had out there. We didn’t know  
21 what was going on. We just knew that our main column had been hit hard. We were stuck  
22 out here where there was only like eight of us out there on this ambush which you were  
23 really in a bad spot. We had no cover. It was like we were just—we were in a bad spot.  
24 We wanted this guy to shut up because he would give away our position and he was  
25 moaning out there and kept moaning. Well, we kept throwing frags out there trying to  
26 shut him. You know, we would toss a frag and try to basically kill him. We did that all  
27 night long. All night long we laid there and this guy moaned for hours just, “Oh, ohh,”  
28 and we are going, “Oh, my god,” and we are trying to shut him up. Finally daylight came  
29 and of course we went out there and we—there was a lot of blood trails and stuff. I don’t  
30 know how many. There was only like four or five that we killed but we finally found this  
31 guy. The reason we couldn’t get him shut up was because when he had gotten wounded

1 he had jumped over behind a little old bush there and that bush was kind of about four or  
2 five foot tall and of course we were throwing frags and of course the frags weren't—we  
3 couldn't throw them up enough where they would get on, whatever. Anyway, we spent  
4 the night there listening to that guy moan all night long and next morning checked it out.  
5 Honestly I don't remember exactly how many we killed. I'm guessing four or five and a  
6 lot of blood trails and stuff. Anyway, that was one of the more traumatic. There was a lot  
7 of ambushes that stuff went on but that's been one of those that has just kind of stuck in  
8 my mind all these years. I just hadn't been able to forget. Well, I hadn't forgot most of it  
9 but that has just been one of the more traumatic ones, I guess.

10 KC: Sure.

11 LR: There has been some funny ones. Maybe I can regroup here. We were sitting  
12 out on an ambush one time, went out after dark. We hated to move after dark because you  
13 didn't know what you might run into after dark. But anyway they made us wait until after  
14 dark before they sent us out on this ambush. We trudged out there and it was at this same  
15 fire base, C-2, and we trudged out there and set us up an ambush on a trail. All of a  
16 sudden we were sitting there and we started hearing all this racket, this noise. It sounded  
17 like a hundred NVA soldiers just running through the jungle, you know, and screaming  
18 and yelling. It was like they were doped up or something just screaming and coming right  
19 at us. Man we got—I remember being nervous, you know, what I am saying, shaking like  
20 a leaf going, "This is it. I'm going to die." It just got louder, and louder, and louder and  
21 all this noise and racket and all of a sudden right through our ambush runs a big old wild  
22 boar, not a boar, it was pig that had a bunch of little piglet's with it and they were all  
23 screaming and yelling and following and that was what that was all about. Man, we were  
24 all saying, "Oh, my gosh." All of that nerve wracking stuff and it was nothing but a pig  
25 running through our ambush. I mean there was some stuff like that that happened, you  
26 know, but those ambushes were pretty tough. I think it's affected me a lot these days. My  
27 son is a deer hunter and stuff and he has asked me and begged me to go deer hunting with  
28 him but I just can't do it. I've got deer rifles and I have got guns and all that stuff but I  
29 finally told him I said, "Son, you know it's not that I don't want to go hunting with you.  
30 It's that I just don't think I can handle going hunting because hunting a deer is like  
31 hunting NVA," you know. You go out there and you set up an ambush. You set up a deer

1 feeder. You wait until they walk in there and what do you do? You ambush them. You  
2 shoot them. I said, “That’s the only thing I can figure,” and it took me years to figure that  
3 out. For years I didn’t know why I didn’t want to go hunting. I just couldn’t handle the  
4 thought of it. Over the years, these last few years since I have been messing around with  
5 this PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) I’ve got now well I think I have come to  
6 realize that maybe that is what it was just that fact that the similarities between the two is  
7 like I just don’t want to do it no more. I just can’t stomach going and doing it. It’s not that  
8 I don’t want to—I don’t think I would have a problem shooting a deer but it’s just the  
9 whole aspect. You know, you go out there before dawn, you know, and you set up in  
10 your blind and you have got your feeder out there and it is basically just like an ambush.  
11 That’s exactly what you do. You ambush a deer on a deer trail. So I just I am not a deer  
12 hunter and never have been. Since I got back from Vietnam I have never been deer  
13 hunting and I won’t ever go. With that said, you know, we run ambushes. That was just  
14 practically every night that I was there when we were out in the bush. We had ambushes  
15 and LPs out so and if you didn’t go out on an ambush or an LP at night the next day you  
16 would have the patrol so you would be out patrolling the area. My outfit, the one that I  
17 was—my outfit Kilo 3/3, we didn’t have like an area that we just sat in and waited for  
18 them to come to us. At times we were there like every now and then we would go back  
19 and maybe stand hole watch for a fire base or something. For the most part if nothing else  
20 we were out looking for them. I mean we trudged the jungles. We lived in the jungle.  
21 That’s all we did and basically just tromped out there looking for them.

22 KC: Which was the best and which was the worst, the listening post, the ambush,  
23 or patrols for the next day?

24 LR: Ooh, you know, I think if I was going to say the worst it was probably an LP  
25 because in LP you were going to die. If you got hit the LP always died because—or you  
26 would get shot at, may not die. You might get wounded but you were going to get messed  
27 up because that’s all you were. You were the feeler out there, you know. If somebody hits  
28 you at night all you were suppose to do was get on the radio and say, “We’ve got  
29 movement and they are coming your way,” and that is all you were.

30 KC: How far away were you from the rest of the main body?

1           LR: It depends. It depended on where you were, you know. If we were up in  
2 dense jungle or something like that you wouldn't get too far out. If it was out, you know,  
3 in elephant grass or something you might be out there fifty yards or something like that.  
4 Some of that depended on what you could get away with. We tried to—we called it  
5 sandbagging. If you could sandbag and get away with it you might be able to not go quite  
6 as far out. It depended on really what kind of terrain you were in.

7           KC: What about the day patrols. What was that like?

8           LR: Patrols, they were kind of bad because that's when we had to worry about  
9 walking into one of their ambushes and we did that pretty frequently, too. So it always—  
10 whoever was on point—you could figure the point man and probably about the next three  
11 or four guys behind him probably were going to get either wounded or killed if you  
12 walked into an ambush, depending on how they had it set up. Now, sometimes, I mean  
13 they had—like I say, we weren't fighting untrained rebels. We were fighting trained  
14 infantry people like us so they were disciplined. Their leaders, they would set up stuff  
15 that would get us so there was times—when I got wounded, as a matter of fact—

16          KC: Tell me about this time, please.

17          LR: Okay, well that was in August, it was August the 11<sup>th</sup> 1969 I got hit. We  
18 actually had left out of a fire base. We were on an operation. We were tromping through  
19 just high grass, elephant grass we called it, and we were on a company-sized movement  
20 so we had all three platoons. My platoon had taken up the rear end that day. We were on  
21 the back end. Actually, my squad or my—we were actually the Tail-End Charlie they  
22 called it. We were Tail-End Charlie so we were the end of the whole column. Well, the  
23 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon was in the front and they actually saw two NVA soldiers on the trail and they  
24 called back on the radio and asked permission to pursue them, go after them. The CO  
25 (commanding officer) said, "Yeah," you know, "Go up there and see what you can find."  
26 So they took off. Well, the rest of us had sat down we had just—the area where I was we  
27 had just gone down a dry river bed going down the bank. The bank was about, oh, I am  
28 going to say about five foot high so we just went down off the bank and went through the  
29 dry river bed about as wide as this room here and then back up on the bank and up there  
30 was more elephant grass and stuff. There was a bomb crater over here to the left and  
31 everybody had to kind of just sit down. Me and my best friend, they sent me and him out

1 on a—anytime we sat down like that we would send out flanks. Basically the flanks were  
2 just out there to make sure we didn't have anything out there we didn't know about. Well,  
3 me and him walked out there and sat down in that elephant grass. We didn't see anything.  
4 We hadn't been there five minutes until they opened up on us with a machinegun. What  
5 they had done, they had let our whole company walk through their ambush until they got  
6 to tail end of us and then they ambushed the tail end of our column and that was us. They  
7 hit us heavy with all kinds of machinegun fire and grenades and everything else, you  
8 know, crap was going on all around us. Me and my friend, we crawled back over to the  
9 main column and when we got there, well, there was a lot of guys over there that had  
10 already been hit. I remember there was probably six or eight guys that was all messed up.  
11 We had one guy that the machinegun when they shot out across there it was just knee  
12 high and it had just wiped out his knees. He was laying there screaming and yelling.  
13 Anyway, they sent me and this friend of mine and they told us to go back to that river bed  
14 and go up the river bed to keep them from coming up on us, you know. That's all we  
15 were going to go is go up there and secure that area. We jumped over, jumped back into  
16 the river bed and there was a couple of Marines here and a couple on this side watching  
17 this side and they sent us up the river. We went up there. We hadn't gone probably—it  
18 wasn't over maybe twenty yards and we were just kind of easing along real quiet, being  
19 real quiet because they were still shooting at us. I mean, right beside us we hear the  
20 machineguns just shooting over our head, you know. We finally got down and we were  
21 crawling. Just as I got down on my belly and started crawling up there a little ways he  
22 was on one side of the river bank and I was on the left-hand side over here. Well, I heard  
23 something what I thought was one of them—it sounded like to me a gook had jumped  
24 down off the edge and had jumped down into the river bed so I just instantly, I turned  
25 around like that with my M-16 behind me and I was laying down and there wasn't  
26 anybody back there. I thought, "That's strange. I wonder what that was that dropped."  
27 Well, I looked and I just happened to see down there about that far, about two foot from  
28 my feet, was a Chi-Com. We called them Chi-Coms. It's like a grenade only it was made  
29 a little different. Y'all probably are familiar with what we call a Chi-Com. It is kind of  
30 like a can with a little handle on it, you know, but it was a grenade is what it was. It was  
31 laying about two foot from my feet. Well, before I could think to get down or anything

1 like that I was just standing there looking at it and it was like, you know, all of a sudden  
2 you see it and it's like, "Oh my gosh." Well, it just blew up. I was looking at it and it just  
3 went "Boom!" When it blew up it knocked my head back and knocked my helmet off and  
4 knocked my rifle out of my hands. It just kind of knocked me kind of loopy for a minute,  
5 you know. I kind of got my senses back and I am going—the first thing I thought was,  
6 "I'm am dead," you know. You think, "I'm dead. A grenade blew up within two foot of  
7 me so I'm dead." But I kind of woke up and come to my senses and that is the first thing I  
8 started to do was looking to see if I had any shrapnel wounds. The first thing I thought  
9 was my feet are gone because I thought it probably blew them off. I looked and both feet  
10 were fine. I wiggle them around and everything is great and everything worked. I didn't  
11 see anything. I am going, "My gosh." I made out like a snake on this deal, nothing  
12 happened, you know. I reached down to get my helmet, it was laying there, I reached  
13 down to get that and it felt like my nose was running so I wiped my nose like that and  
14 when I did, well, I had blood all over my hand. Oh crap, so I started trying to—the first,  
15 you know, we were trained to do is stop the bleeding. So I started trying to figure out  
16 where I was bleeding. Well, I felt up here and I had a hole in my face right here. The first  
17 thing I did I was going to put my thumb on it to stop the bleeding. Well, I put my thumb  
18 on it and the hole was as big as my thumb so my thumb just went (noise) and I went,  
19 "Oh, my gosh. That's not going to work." I put my hand up like this, the palm of my  
20 hand and put it over my face. So this friend of mine was over there and he hadn't even  
21 noticed that I got hit and I started hollering at him and I said, "Hey, Buck!" His name was  
22 Buck and I called him Buck. That's not his real name. His name was Herman, James  
23 Herman, but I hollered at him. I said, "Buck! Buck! I'm hit! I'm hit!" He came over and  
24 of course he went ballistic and grabbed my battle dressing and slapped the battle dressing  
25 on me. We put pressure on it and I went back up and I had actually gotten hit twice. I had  
26 got hit right below the right eye and then the shrapnel had come—my flak jacket where  
27 the arm hole was it had gone right under there so I got shrapnel right under here and right  
28 there in my face. I went back to the—they put all the wounded in that bomb crater up  
29 there I was talking about on kind of the top of the river bed there and medevac'ed us out.  
30 I went to—I spent about a week on the hospital ship *Sanctuary* and got all patched up and  
31 I'm back in the field. I have still got stitches under my teeth where they operated. Rather

1 than operate and go in this way where it would mess me up, they just stitched that up and  
2 then pulled my lip up and then operated that way so I didn't have a big scar so they  
3 operated that way. I still had stitches in my mouth when I was back in the field. I actually  
4 pulled them out myself.

5 KC: Incredible.

6 LR: Yeah, they didn't give you much time to recuperate there. You had to be  
7 really bad wounded to get a trip home or very much time off.

8 KC: Why don't we stop right there and we will pick it up there next time.

9 LR: Okay, that's fine.

**Interview with Larry Renfro**  
**Session [2] of [3]**  
**23 September 2008**

1           KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Mr. Larry  
2 Renfro. Today is 23 September 2008. Both Mr. Renfro and myself are in the interview  
3 room of the Special Collections Library on the campus of Texas Tech University. Good  
4 morning, Mr. Renfro.

5           LR: Good morning.

6           KC: When we last left off with the previous interview you were discussing your  
7 experiences after having been wounded. You were hit in the face by, what was it?  
8 Shrapnel?

9           LR: Yes.

10          KC: From a grenade?

11          LR: Yes.

12          KC: Okay. And you were carried off and you spent some time on the hospital  
13 ship. Do you remember which hospital ship that was?

14          LR: Yeah, it was the USS *Sanctuary*.

15          KC: The *Sanctuary*. Okay, very famous.

16          LR: It was off the coast of South Vietnam, I suppose. But, yeah, I was choppered  
17 out there. I was heading back to a field hospital. I think it was in Quang Tri. Honestly I  
18 can't tell you exactly where it was but I suppose they had a field hospital there. They took  
19 a look at my wounds which I guess they felt like they couldn't handle there so they  
20 basically sent me on to the hospital ship where I could get more specialized care, I guess,  
21 from the EMT doctor to remove the shrapnel from my face.

22          KC: So now that you are sitting there with shrapnel in your face and you are  
23 going to be moved from the field hospital, choppered out to the *Sanctuary*, you had been  
24 in combat and you were wounded. It didn't seem like it was life threatening but it was  
25 pretty serious to have that shrapnel in your face like you did. What's going through your  
26 mind? You are on your way out to this hospital ship. You have had sometime to reflect  
27 on this. You have got a whole in your face. What is going through your mind?

1           LR: Well, honestly I was—I can remember laying there on the chopper heading  
2 out the hospital ship and I was just laying there with my eyes closed and I was just  
3 thankful to be alive, mainly. I still didn't know how bad the wound was. I didn't know  
4 how bad, what kind of situation I was facing. Evidently I wasn't going to die or I  
5 probably would have already been dead. Laying there with my eyes closed I do  
6 remember one of the crew chiefs on the chopper coming over and putting his finger on  
7 my neck checking my pulse because my head was all wrapped up in bandages and stuff  
8 and I'm sure he thought I probably had some kind of really serious head wound and he  
9 was worried I guess or checking to see if I was still alive. Anyway, I do remember that. I  
10 opened one eye. I had one eye where I could open it and see and I looked up at him and  
11 he gave me the thumbs up and I gave him the thumbs up and so we were okay. Basically  
12 what was going through my mind is just I was just glad the fact that I was alive.  
13 Honestly, being a grunt over there I was thinking about, you know, I'm going to get a few  
14 days R&R (rest and relaxation). I mean, that's kind of—it sounds kind of bad but I mean  
15 honestly to a Marine grunt over there a stint in the hospital was R&R for us. So I'm  
16 thinking I'm alive, hopefully it's not anything serious and I'm going to get to lay in a nice  
17 warm hospital bed for a few days and get some sleep. At the time I thought maybe this—  
18 we always called it that golden wound where it was a ticket back home so I thought  
19 maybe I had a ticket back home so I'm thinking—honestly, I wasn't upset. I was thinking  
20 I'm alive and I'm going to live and I maybe heading back home. I didn't feel all that bad,  
21 honestly. I wasn't in any pain so when I got hit it evidently severed the nerves in there so  
22 I didn't have any pain or anything so I was okay, I mean, honestly. I was doing okay.  
23 There was not much else going through my mind, I don't guess, other than kick back and  
24 relax until I got there.

25           KC: Well, once you are on deck of the *Sanctuary* what happens to you next?

26           LR: Well, of course, a team of doctors and nurses and all that grab you and the  
27 first thing they do is rip all those nasty clothes off of you and cut your boots. I hated that.  
28 I tried every way in the world to get them not to throw my boots away because your boots  
29 in Vietnam was your, it was like your mark. If your boots were all worn out and nasty  
30 looking and worn out that showed that you wasn't a new guy. You had been there a  
31 while. If I had to go back to the bush I didn't want to have to get new boots because you

1 were like a new guy. So I didn't want them to mess up my boots but they told me, "Nope,  
2 they go in the trash like everything else." They strip you down naked and then you are  
3 like a piece of meat laying on a table. The first thing they did is start the doctors checking  
4 the wound in my face and he was checking my eye to make sure it didn't sever one of the  
5 optic nerves. I remember him running his finger back and forth across and having me  
6 follow his finger going across. I remember him telling me, he said, "You're a lucky  
7 young man." He said, "That shrapnel missed your optic nerves," and stuff in there, and he  
8 said, "It looks like you are going to be able to retain the movement of your eye and your  
9 sight," and all that stuff. So he said, "You're lucky there." They—at the same time they  
10 were doing this they were sticking me with IVs and poking me and prodding me. Of  
11 course, they found another—I had another shrapnel wound underneath my arm that I  
12 didn't even know about. I didn't even know I had that piece of shrapnel under there but  
13 they found it. The next thing I know they said, "We're going to be putting you to sleep  
14 and see if we can get rid of all this stuff, get it out." The next thing I know I wake up in  
15 the bed with my head the size of a basketball and bruised up and that's where I was. I do  
16 remember waking up and I knew I was on the ship because the beds were rocking back  
17 and forth. I could see them bouncing and I am going, "Oh my gosh. I hope I don't get sea  
18 sick on top of all this other stuff."

19 KC: Did you?

20 LR: No, I didn't, luckily.

21 KC: Now how long had you been in country before you were wounded?

22 LR: About eight months.

23 KC: Eight months. So it was quite a while then.

24 LR: Yeah.

25 KC: The lion's share of your tour was over with by that time.

26 LR: It was getting close, yeah.

27 KC: What was it like to be on a ship with Caucasian nurses?

28 LR: Honestly, there wasn't any on that ship. I didn't see any on that ship. Nah,  
29 they were all corpsmen, Navy corpsmen that I saw. I didn't see any—the whole time I  
30 was on the ship—if I did see a female nurse I think I would have remembered it since we  
31 didn't see very many white, we called them round eyes, they weren't very—we didn't see

1 very many of those. I would have surely remembered it and I don't remember seeing any  
2 on the ship. All of the ones I saw were just Navy corpsmen.

3 KC: Okay. When did you realize that this was not the million dollar wound that  
4 was going to send you back to West Texas?

5 LR: I realized that when they came in there and told me that—they checked me  
6 out and said that they were going to have to deploy to Subic Bay for resupplies. Every so  
7 often they had to go back to get resupplied and all this other stuff so I heard—one of the  
8 corpsmen came in and said that they were fixing to go back to Subic Bay. I had always  
9 heard that if you happened to be wounded and you were on one of those ships when they  
10 went back to Subic Bay it was like getting an R&R. I mean, you get to—you know, you  
11 go back with the ship and you get liberty and all this other crap. What I didn't realize was  
12 the fact that before they would go back like that they got rid of all their patients that they  
13 could because—I guess, I don't know if they got through all of them but they would get  
14 through a bunch of them and get rid of a bunch of them because if they got to Subic Bay  
15 and had a bunch of patients that meant less R&R for all the Navy personnel on the ship so  
16 they didn't want a bunch of damn Marines on there that took up all their time. They  
17 would shit can us back to a field hospital. They come in there and told me you are going  
18 to be shipped back to Quang Tri field hospital and let them deal with you. My old head  
19 was still swollen up the size of a basketball. I still had stitches on the outside of my face  
20 and inside my mouth where they did the operation and everything. The next thing I know  
21 I was putting on my stuff and I'm back at Quang Tri, back in-country.

22 KC: How long were you on the *Sanctuary* before they shipped you back out?

23 LR: Oh, Lord. Honestly I can't tell you exactly. I'm guessing maybe about five  
24 days, six days maybe and I don't even know if it was that long or not. I have a hard time  
25 remembering exactly how long it was. I do remember I was on there long enough that I  
26 had a Marine Corps general come in there and give me my Purple Heart. He gave me  
27 that. I do remember one of the corpsmen coming in one day or, actually he wasn't a  
28 corpsman. He was the doctor. He came in and asked me, he said, "Are you able to sit up  
29 and write a letter?" I said, "Yeah, I suppose so." And he said, "Either you need to sit up  
30 and write a letter to your mother and your wife and let them know that you are all right."  
31 Of course, at the time I didn't know what was going on but I did. I wrote a letter and told

1 them I was okay and kind of explained to them what my wound was and, you know, I  
2 was going to be okay. But later on I found out that—I wasn't married when I went to  
3 Vietnam. I took R&R in July and I married my wife, my wife that I am now married to.  
4 When I went to Vietnam I signed papers, waivers, that the Marine Corps wasn't supposed  
5 to notify my mother and dad unless I was killed in action. If I was wounded they weren't  
6 supposed to notify them and worry them so it was only if I was killed would they get a  
7 notification. My mother never received a notification that I was wounded. However,  
8 when I married my wife in Hawaii I failed, I didn't think about signing that waiver when  
9 I went back to Vietnam from Hawaii and she was my wife. Well, when that happened the  
10 Marine Corps and the Red Cross knew I had a wife so they notified my wife that I was  
11 wounded in action in Vietnam. Well, of course, they didn't know how bad. All the thing  
12 said, all the wire said was that "Lance Corporal Larry Renfro wounded in action August  
13 11<sup>th</sup> da-da-da, from hostile fire." They had no idea how bad it was. Well, my mother was  
14 on the phone calling Congressman Mahon in Washington trying to get some information  
15 on me. Which you get a congressman involved in something like that and the Marine  
16 Corps gets real nervous and they are on your ass like stink so that's why I got the little  
17 notification, "You need to get your ass up out of bed and write a letter home and let them  
18 know you are okay," because my mother was raising all kinds of hell trying to figure out  
19 how bad I was wounded. I didn't find that out until I got home and later discovered that.  
20 Actually have—after my mom died she had kept all that information that Congressman  
21 Mahon had written her about that incident and I've got the paperwork at home from the  
22 congressman explaining that he had contacted the commandant of the Marine Corps,  
23 which when you do shit like that it's like you just don't do stuff like that. I told my wife  
24 later, "God! It's a wonder they didn't court martial me or something over that deal."  
25 Anyway, with that said, I wasn't on there but just a few days and then it was back to  
26 Quang Tri and away I go.

27 KC: So I've got to think that you were somewhat disappointed when you make it  
28 back to Quang Tri. You are not going home and you are not even going to Subic Bay.  
29 You are going back to Quang Tri and this field hospital and they are going to finish  
30 treatment there. How long were you there at this field hospital before they shipped you  
31 back out to your unit?

1           LR: I was at Quang Tri about, oh, I'm going to guess probably about five or six  
2 days again because I remember they took the stitches out in the front of my face and once  
3 they took those out they told me I was good to go back to the field. I still had stitches  
4 inside my mouth and I told them about that and they said, "Ah, those will dissolve. Don't  
5 worry about it. They will finally go away." "Okay." I'm guessing probably five or six  
6 days and I had my crap and I was back on the Rock Pile I think is where the guys were, I  
7 joined them up there on Mutter's Ridge we called it. That's where I choppered back in  
8 and I remember getting off the chopper and all my buddies going, "What? You're back?  
9 We thought you were for sure going home with that wound." "No, here I am."

10           KC: Before we get you back with your group I want to ask you just generally  
11 what your impressions were of your medical treatment there?

12           LR: Uh, on the ship?

13           KC: On the ship or back in the field hospital either way, the medical care you  
14 received.

15           LR: I think the medical care was great. I mean, they were very, I mean they  
16 treated me well. I mean, I don't think I would have gotten better care in a hospital at  
17 home here any better than what I got there. I mean, they were very thorough. Like I say,  
18 they stripped me off. They didn't just take your word that I got hit here. They turned you  
19 over and looked you over. Anytime you got hit with shrapnel I guess a lot of times it was  
20 like me you didn't even know you had shrapnel wounds and you might not even know it  
21 until they actually saw it. They would turn you over and check you out real good and  
22 make sure that you didn't have any other wounds. The medical care, I think, was great. I  
23 think those—I mean, the doctors probably weren't as easy going as they are on civilians  
24 but I mean they basically, the care was good and they took care of me. I have no  
25 complaints about the medical care. It was good. Even in the field hospitals because I had  
26 other times been medevac'ed back to Da Nang and there was a hospital at Da Nang and  
27 the care there was good, too. I don't have any problem with the medical care. It was  
28 good.

29           KC: So you were medevac'ed back to Da Nang at a different time?

30           LR: Yeah.

31           KC: Again then.

1           LR: I was wounded. I got sent back—well, I was with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division at  
2 that time. This was probably after, say, the 15<sup>th</sup> of October because they pulled the 3<sup>rd</sup>  
3 Marine Division out of Vietnam sometime in October about the middle of October of  
4 1969. At that point all of us guys that were in 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division they just transferred us  
5 over to 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division and so I got sent to Mike, 3/7, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. At that  
6 point we were down on the lower low lands or the rice paddies and stuff more than what  
7 we were up north with 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division. First Marine Division was more, if I  
8 remember right, kind of north, a little bit northwest of Da Nang and all that area out in  
9 there was kind of what 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division where there operation area was. Being out  
10 there in the rice paddies and stuff all the time I got emersion foot. Of course, I probably  
11 shouldn't say this but I got it and, of course, I didn't know what it was and my feet  
12 swelled up and got to hurting real bad so I went to the corpsman one morning and talked  
13 to him. He said, "Ah, you've got emersion foot. It's no big deal." He said, "I want you to  
14 go back to your squad." He said, "I want you to take your boots off, take your socks off,  
15 and I don't want you to put them on. I want you to dry your feet out all day real good  
16 today and let your boots dry out good and your socks dry out and then you can put them  
17 back on." I said, "Okay." I went back to my squad and told my platoon commander that  
18 I—I was a squad leader at the time and I said, "I would like to have the patrol today." So  
19 he said, "Okay." I took my squad out on patrol that day and I tromped through more  
20 water and mud and shit.

21           KC: Because you wanted this—(Laughs)

22           LR: (Laughs) Yes, yes, and I guess that's bad. But honestly I tromped through  
23 more mud and shit and I sat there all day long with my feet wet with my boots on. By the  
24 next morning when I woke up my feet were in such bad shape I couldn't walk. I mean it  
25 was to the point where I couldn't hardly walk on them. At that point I went back to the  
26 corpsman and I said, "Man, my feet hadn't gotten any better. They're worse." He looked  
27 at them and he said, "Ah, we're going to have to medevac you. That's all there is. We  
28 can't get you back to the rear." Well, I got medevac'ed and got sent back to the rear. Of  
29 course, what they did to you was they would take you in there and of course you had to  
30 get rid of all your clothes and I did get to keep my boots. They put you in—you get a  
31 shower and clean up and put on some pajamas and you get in bed and you have to lay in

1 bed with your feet hanging out the end of rack not covered up so they can just dry out.  
2 They just want them to air and dry out. Of course, they give you some medicine,  
3 antibiotics and put some stuff on them. But for several days you just get to lay in bed. I  
4 mean, what better for a Marine grunt out of the bush, what's better then laying in a nice  
5 warm bed in a nice area. It's not raining on and you are not sopping wet and you just get  
6 to lay there all day. It's air conditioned in the day it is nice and cool. It was great. I mean  
7 all you do is right letters and bullshit with the other guys around you. That was what  
8 that—that was the other medevac I got. I was medevac'ed a third time which was actually  
9 a complication from the shrapnel wound that I had. Honestly I didn't want to get  
10 medevac'ed then. I was to the point then that I was about to rotate but our outfit, we had  
11 been on a little operation and we came back with 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division and we were back  
12 in our rear area and was resupplying and kind of getting some R&R and rest up and we  
13 were fixing to go out again. The supply sergeant, I kind of got to be friends with him and  
14 he told me, he said, "Man, I need some help getting some stuff done." He said, "You're  
15 fixing to rotate. Why don't you talk to the gunnery sergeant and see if he won't just leave  
16 you back here to help me until you rotate?" So I did, I went and talked to him and the  
17 gunny said, "Sure. If he needs the help." He said, "We'll just leave you back here and  
18 you can help him until you rotate," which was great. I mean this was like, I mean, you  
19 can't ask for anything better then that because this meant I didn't have to go back out to  
20 the bush. I was going to be relatively safe until I rotated. I spent one night there and woke  
21 up the next morning, had just gotten this great job, I woke up the next morning and my  
22 face was all swollen up. I went to the corpsman and they said, "Well, you've got an  
23 infection." They medevac'ed me to Da Nang and so I got to Da Nang it was on like a  
24 Sunday and so I went to the—I actually had to hitch a ride over to the hospital at Da  
25 Nang, got off there and the hospital was closed. I didn't know they had an emergency  
26 number, I mean an emergency bell you could ring they just said they were closed until  
27 Monday which, I mean, doesn't make a lot of sense in Vietnam but it was it, it was  
28 closed. I had to go back to—there was a place there by Marble Mountain where guys  
29 would come in and out on R&R and in-country R&Rs and stuff it was kind of like a  
30 staging area. So I spent the night there. The next morning by then my head again was the  
31 size of a basketball nearly and made it to the hospital and finally got to see the doctor. He

1 ate my ass out because he said, “You should have pushed, we have got an emergency bell  
2 out there and you can ring that and we could have gotten to you right away.” He said,  
3 “Now everything is all swollen up.” Anyway, I got put in the hospital and they had to do  
4 a second surgery on me there at Da Nang. They operated a second time. They took out—  
5 before they operated there was three pieces of shrapnel still left in my head there.

6 KC: Did they know that from the first time?

7 LR: Yes.

8 KC: They knew it was still in there?

9 LR: Yeah, the doctor told me they weren’t able to get it all out because it was too  
10 close to an artery.

11 KC: Okay.

12 LR: So this second time they went in and they got—there was three pieces and  
13 they got two pieces out and then they told me that that last piece was sitting right next to  
14 an artery and they were afraid to mess with it, afraid they would puncture that artery and I  
15 would have bled to death so they didn’t want to mess with so they left it in there and to  
16 this day I have still got that one little piece left in my head there. With that said, the  
17 doctor came in one day and said, he said, “I’m going to keep you about another two  
18 weeks because I want to keep you on antibiotics and make sure we get rid of the  
19 infection.” He said, “Then after that then I will release you back to your unit.” I said,  
20 “Hey, Doc, you know. Can I get out of here a little faster because my rotation date is  
21 about a week away?” He said, “Well,” he said, “Why didn’t you tell me that to start  
22 with?” I said, “Well, I didn’t know it was important.” He said, “Well, yeah.” He said, “If  
23 your rotation date’s up,” he said—he said, “I’ll give you a choice,” he said, “I’ll keep you  
24 a couple of weeks and we will do this and I will get you back and he said maybe I can get  
25 you out a little sooner or,” he said, “I’ll medevac you out of here.” He said, “I will leave  
26 it up to you what you want to do.” I said, “Well, if I choose medevac when am I going to  
27 get out of here?” He said, “We can probably get you out tomorrow or the next day.” I  
28 said, “Get my ass out of here. I want out now.” I hit a medevac bird out of Da Nang just a  
29 few days later. While I was in the hospital I did get to go see the Bob Hope Show. It was  
30 in Da Nang. They took all the guys, or not all of them but they took a bunch of us from  
31 the hospital over there and we got to watch Bob Hope. The next day I was over at the Air

1 Force base over there and caught a, I think it was a C-141 or something like that, a jet,  
2 medevac bird, and I was back home, heading back. That was the last time I was  
3 medevac'ed and it was back to the States. Or actually I take that back. They medevac'ed  
4 me and we went to Guam so I spent about week in Guam because they had screwed up  
5 and my paperwork went to Japan and I went to Guam so they didn't know who the hell I  
6 was. I spent a week on Guam waiting for my paperwork to catch up with me there. Once  
7 they got my paperwork and saw what the scoop was on me then they just sent me right on  
8 back to San Francisco. I went from there to San Francisco to a medical hospital there.  
9 From there they sent me to a Naval Air Station Corpus Christi and then I spent a couple  
10 of weeks in the hospital there at Corpus Christi before I was able to get some time off and  
11 come home.

12 KC: Well, let me take you back to this second time you are medevac'ed. You had  
13 what you called emersion foot. Given the conditions in that part of Vietnam it would  
14 seem that this would be something pretty common for soldiers or Marines to have  
15 tromping through all this wetness all the time. Was it common—do you think that is was  
16 common that other soldiers or other Marines would do this to their feet on purpose to be  
17 medevac'ed out, to get out of the bush for a while?

18 LR: Some of them, yeah. I don't think a whole lot of them did it because it was  
19 something that kind of snuck up on you. You didn't know it was happening until it really  
20 got bad because a lot of times we didn't have time to take our boots and socks off. I mean  
21 we just didn't do that. I never did it a whole lot, I mean, honestly I don't remember  
22 spending a whole lot of time taking my boots and socks off. Especially up north we never  
23 did it, down south it got to be more important and of course that might have been why it  
24 snuck up on me. Like I say, once I found out I had it I didn't give a shit about making it  
25 worse because it was just R&R to me. I feel like there is other Marines that did that. I  
26 mean, yeah. Unfortunately, I mean, good or bad that's to us it was R&R.

27 KC: Sure.

28 LR: I mean, I can remember times we actually hoped for getting wounded or  
29 something, just something to get some damn rest a little bit of time to get some sleep  
30 because, you know, we didn't get enough food, we didn't get enough water, we didn't get  
31 enough sleep. I mean, it wasn't a fun time out in the bush. It was pretty tough.

1           KC: Let me ask you, you mentioned that you would like to have a little R&R even  
2 if it meant doing things like this or potentially even getting wounded because it would  
3 provide you with rest which clearly y'all needed out there. Had it ever entered your mind  
4 that it wasn't just about the rest but it was just about the physical danger you didn't want  
5 to face anymore, at least temporarily?

6           LR: Well, I can't say it wasn't some of that but I don't think that was in the—that  
7 wasn't the main idea. The main idea was just to get some rest. I mean, we just—we were  
8 so tired it was just, I mean—tired, hungry, you name it that is the way it was. I don't  
9 think at that time that I was thinking about getting out for the safety. I mean, even though  
10 in the back of your mind I can't sit here and say no that wasn't part of it because it could  
11 have been. I don't remember that being the main thought in my mind. The main thought  
12 in my mind was that nice bed with them clean sheets on it and, you know, getting some  
13 rest and sleep was the main thing. But, yeah, I'm not going to say that couldn't have been  
14 part of it. I mean, the danger was there and getting out of that would have definitely been  
15 a good thing, too.

16           KC: Sure, sure. I think that's certainly to be expected.

17           LR: Sure.

18           KC: Now let me—let's take you back to after you were wounded your first time  
19 and you spent the time out here in the field hospital and you are going back up to Quang  
20 Tri. What was it like going back to your unit? How were you received? What were you  
21 thinking about being back into this incredibly dangerous position again?

22           LR: Well, it was—knowing where they were at the time, at the time they were up  
23 on we called it the Ridge, Mutter's Ridge, the Ridge, Rock Pile. I don't know if they are  
24 all the same. We had names for all that shit and, like I say, I never was privy to having a  
25 map and knowing exactly where we were at any one time but I mean the word spread  
26 around, you know, from guys that did have the map when we were heading back up on  
27 the Ridge. Well, when they sent me from Quang Tri out to our unit they said they were  
28 up on the Ridge so I knew going into that was a, I mean, that was a hell of a bad place. I  
29 mean, that was always, we had—you were going to get into some shit while you were up  
30 there. It was just a known fact. Having nearly been killed and just getting out of the  
31 hospital from that incident and going right back into a situation where you're going to be

1 in a pretty hostile area and facing a lot more firefights it was (pause)—I don't know. I  
2 don't want to say traumatic but it was just not the best thing. It is not something you  
3 wanted to do, but I mean I felt like there was no way around it. I had to go. There wasn't  
4 any way to get out of it so you just pack your shit and go if that is where they told you. I  
5 can remember getting off the chopper and, of course, like I said, the buddies they sent me  
6 back to my old squad and everything. Well, they were just amazed that I was back  
7 especially so quick because they thought I was gone. They thought that dude, he got the  
8 golden wound and he is back in the States. He's gone Stateside, you know. I didn't, so I  
9 came back and there we were. I mean it was—I don't know. It was just strange, I guess.  
10 You actually feel strange coming back. You almost feel like a new guy in a way.

11 KC: I was going to ask you about that. What was it like to see these guys again  
12 knowing that they had gone through, say, probably two weeks of things you weren't a  
13 part of. You were part of them for eight months or however long it was and every day  
14 you are living with them, you are tromping with them, you are fighting with them, living  
15 with them in every imaginable way. I assume that you had created some sort of  
16 friendships and bonds that were strong in this combat infantry unit.

17 LR: Absolutely.

18 KC: Being gone for a couple of weeks and you came back and it was—what was  
19 it like, your reunion with your buddies in the squad?

20 LR: Like I say, it was almost like being a new guy. I mean, you had to—I don't  
21 know. You had to kind of get re-associated with guys. You had to get back into the  
22 group. It took you a little bit to kind of get back into the groove of what was going on and  
23 where your position was and all this other stuff. You had to kind of just—it was just  
24 strange. I don't know any other word to describe it. It was just a little bit different coming  
25 back like that. But it didn't take long. I mean, it wasn't like they didn't accept you then.  
26 They accepted you but it just took a little bit of time to kind of get used to it again. It may  
27 be because, may be because of all that nice rest you had had in the hospital and all that  
28 stuff. You were kind of used to that now and here you were back in the bush and your  
29 whole world was on your back, you know, whatever you had was on your back in a pack.  
30 Then at night time you were out in the bush which is a whole different world and so it  
31 was just different. It took a little time to get used to it again.

1 KC: But your buddies were accepting of you immediately.

2 LR: Sure, oh yeah. It wasn't like they didn't want to be around you or anything  
3 like it was when you first get to Vietnam. You were part of the group. As soon as you got  
4 back it was like they were glad to see you because they thought you were gone forever,  
5 you know. Even some of them, you know, you never know when you get a guy  
6 medevac'ed like that if he's even alive because nobody tells you. When they leave on that  
7 chopper you don't know if they are alive or if they died or what happens to them. When  
8 you show back up on a chopper it is like, "Oh, my god. There he is. Hey, you made it  
9 back, dude. We thought you were gone. We thought you were headed back to The  
10 World," you know, and all this other stuff. "No, here I am." "Well, okay. Hey, come on  
11 over here and, you know, you can share my hole with me." So you are back in the group.  
12 From your perspective it's like you have to get used to get back in that groove again  
13 because you are not used to that. It's real quick to get out of that and it takes a little bit to  
14 kind of get back into it. You know, you want to get into it pretty quick because you didn't  
15 want to screw up and get your ass killed after doing something stupid.

16 KC: Sure. I can tell that the relationship that you had with your buddies in the  
17 squad and the platoon was pretty important. Like you mentioned, when they were cutting  
18 your boots off onboard the ship, that's one of the things you didn't want them to do  
19 because, like you said, it was your mark. The worse your boots looked the more was said  
20 about the time and the things you had seen there.

21 LR: We called them salty. We wanted our boots to salty. If they were—if you had  
22 salty boots that means you were a salt. If you were a salt that means you had been there a  
23 while. You knew your shit and all this stuff. New guys come in and had those brand new  
24 shiny boots on and the nice utilities and all this stuff and they looked all pretty and green  
25 and spiffy and they didn't know shit. They were the newbies so they—you know, we call  
26 them BNGs or FNGs, brand new guys or FNG a fucking new guy or whatever, different  
27 outfits had different things. You absolutely didn't want to be the new guy so those boots  
28 were your mark. It was like, you know, like when I was a firefighter here you wanted  
29 your helmet to have that look, you know. There is a certain look about your helmet that  
30 said you had been there and done that and that's the way your boots were in Vietnam.

1 They said you had been there and done that and so it was like a (badge) of courage or  
2 honor or something to have salty boots.

3 KC: Sure, makes perfect sense. For you once you are back in the unit and it's all  
4 somewhat brand new to you again. You've been gone for this time and you are trying to  
5 get used to, you're back up on the Ridge and what's going on. What was the most  
6 difficult thing for you to adjust to once you came back?

7 LR: Well, it would probably just be the way of life. I mean, because your way of  
8 life in the bush was kind of like an animal. I mean, we lived like animals. I don't have  
9 any other way to describe it. We didn't have a lot of things to make—creature comforts,  
10 we didn't have that. Everything we had was on our back, like I say, it was in our pack.  
11 You know, our pack we always carried a lot of water and all this stuff but just the idea of  
12 the heat, the living conditions, the getting used to being out there in the jungle at night,  
13 walking through it in the day. Everywhere you went you had to be on the guard and  
14 worry about ambushes so it was a whole bunch of things you had to readjust to. I guess  
15 that would be the main thing, the hardest thing would be just readjusting to the life you  
16 led in the bush as compared to the sailors on the ship. Those dudes had it made. I mean,  
17 they would piss and moan about the fact that they might miss a day on Subic Bay of not  
18 going to the bars and shit. If they would have just let us stand watch on that ship that  
19 would have been R&R to us, you know. That compared to what we were dealing with it  
20 was a whole different thing so we had to just readjust. You get used to all those nice  
21 things real quick and then when they take it away from you it hurts. It takes you a while  
22 to get used to that hurt and realize that I'm back here and I have to deal with what I got  
23 and so maybe that's what it was, just the way of life.

24 KC: Now you are back out in the bush again. How long would you typically be  
25 out with your unit before you would come back to a base camp for a little bit of a break?  
26 About how long would you be out?

27 LR: It depends. It depended on what we were doing, like if we were on a big  
28 operation like when I first got there, Taylor Common. We were out in the bush almost  
29 thirty days before we got any kind of R&R. In thirty days out in the jungle, I mean, your  
30 clothes rot off your body. I mean, you just—everything—you get used to just living like a  
31 freaking animal. That's all I can say is you don't have anything, any kind of thing that

1 might make you a little bit of comfortable in your surroundings. You just have to learn  
2 to—you sleep in the bush, you have to fight the mosquitoes and all of that stuff. The first  
3 time was thirty days before we got some kind of relief. There was times when we would  
4 go out on small like platoon patrols and stuff where we would be out three or four days  
5 before we would get back. For the most part we were out in the bush most of the time in  
6 one way or the other. We considered being back like at a fire base, if we could ever make  
7 it to a fire base and we would stand hole watch at a fire base to us that was R&R. I mean  
8 we considered that R&R. Being at a hilltop or a big fire base like C-1 or C-2, that to us  
9 was great. Most of the time we were out patrolling the jungle. We were out looking for  
10 shit all the time either on an operation or we are on a company-sized movement from one  
11 area to the next or whatever. Lots of times when we would move we walked—I mean, I  
12 walked so freaking much in Vietnam that I used to—when we would sit down to rest I  
13 would just sit there and think to myself, “When I get back to the States, if I make it back,  
14 I am never ever going to walk anywhere that I can’t drive or ride something. I will never  
15 walk another step you know that I don’t have to.” But, you know, we would leave out on  
16 patrol and we would have to walk up those freaking mountains and you would just hump  
17 your ass off all day long. It varied. As far as time out in the bush before we were back  
18 doing hole watch at a fire base there was a couple of times while I was over there that we  
19 would come off of an operation or something and they would take us right straight to an  
20 in-country R&R for about three or four days. Basically all that was is to just give you  
21 some rest, give you some beer, and some Cokes maybe. Let you get some haircuts, get  
22 some new clothes and kind of get resupplied and all that stuff. They would always bring  
23 us back to a place it was there on the coast it was called Cua Viet and Cua Viet is—I  
24 don’t know what else it was but for us it was in-country R&R. We would actually stay in  
25 tents out there on the beach and, shit, it was great. I mean, we would go swimming in the  
26 ocean during the day and fart around all day long and rest and sleep and that’s what they  
27 wanted us to do is to kind of just get, recuperate from a long operation or something.

28 KC: How often did you visit Cua Viet or places like that?

29 LR: I was only there—the whole time I was there in Vietnam was twice. I was in  
30 Cua Viet twice. Then, of course, I had an R&R that I went to Hawaii and got married and  
31 that was about it.

1           KC: You're out in the bush and whether it's a two-week long operation or a four-  
2 or five-day operation, when you got back to the fire base you said that even that was kind  
3 of like an R&R to you. What sort of things would you do at a fire base in terms of  
4 relaxing?

5           LR: Yeah, well, the main thing was that usually when you were there at the fire  
6 base we had—out in the bush you were lucky to have a three-man hole. Okay, a three-  
7 man hole meant that you were up one hour and you would get two hours of sleep and  
8 then you was up another hour and two hours of sleep. Sometimes back at the fire bases  
9 we would have a four-man hole which was a luxury. I mean, a four-man hole meant you  
10 could get three hours of sleep and one hour up. So you would only have to be up on  
11 watch about twice during the night, the rest of the time you could get some sleep. Plus,  
12 during the day you could lay around a little bit and sleep if you didn't have a patrol or  
13 something. We didn't run very—we ran ambushes every now and then but for the most  
14 part we stayed in the holes and pretty well watched what was going on. One of the big  
15 things was it was like if we were at one of the places we would come back to every now  
16 and then was C-2, Charlie 2. It was a big firebase. I know it's somewhere up there. It was  
17 by Cam Lo village up in there somewhere. But it was in a big flat area kind of and it was  
18 an Army artillery base. While we were there the Army was always good about letting us  
19 eat at their chow hall so we could get hot food, which was unheard for us. We just didn't  
20 get how chow anytime hardly. I mean, other than if we were like a Cua Viet on R&R we  
21 did get some hot chow there, but when were in the bush it was C-rations. That's all we  
22 got. Back on the—at the firebase the Army would allow us to come over there and eat at  
23 their chow hall which was pretty good. A lot of the other branches of the military like Air  
24 Force is one that I have a real bad taste in my mouth about. Because I was R&R one time  
25 at Da Nang, me and another guy, we were walking around and looking at all the crap and  
26 we were walking by a big Air Force base and seeing how those dudes lived as compared  
27 to how we lived and they had barracks and they had a big swimming pool and they were  
28 out there swimming and shit in Vietnam. I mean, here we are, we're out there standing  
29 watch for these assholes while they swim. Well, they got a, over there at the side they had  
30 a hamburger stand where, you know, you just walk up there and get a hamburger. We  
31 think, "Dang! Let's go get a hamburger." We go up there and try to get a hamburger and,

1 of course, they told us they didn't serve Marines, wouldn't give us a hamburger. After  
2 that we decided, "Well, if those assholes—if we're ever standing watch over an Air Force  
3 base and it starts getting overrun we are going to invite them on in and say, 'Right over  
4 there, boys. Just keep moving right on in here.'"

5 KC: (Laughs) Have a hamburger on the way.

6 LR: Yeah, get a hamburger and have a swim before you go in. Get a piece of their  
7 ass because you know it chapped us. Anyway, I guess I got off the subject. I'm sorry.

8 KC: No, that's fine.

9 LR: But with that said, you know, we—I forgot the question now. What we were  
10 talking about?

11 KC: Is was the kind of things that you would do, you know, during your time on a  
12 fire base.

13 LR: Oh, yeah, at the fire base. Yeah, we, I mean, stuff like that. The Army treated  
14 us right but the main thing was just the fact that—another thing, too, you felt a little safer.  
15 You weren't out in the bush. I mean, the bush was within ten foot of where you were. I  
16 mean, you didn't have a big area. Like at fire base you had concertina wire, you had a  
17 big—like C-2 had a minefield out in front of it and then another row of concertina wire  
18 so, I mean, if they came at you during the night and tried to hit you then they are going to  
19 have to cross a lit of stuff to get to you so it was like they would have to cross the  
20 concertina wire first of all, which would set off some trip flares and stuff we had out  
21 there. Then they would have to cross the minefield which by then we would be popping  
22 flares on their ass and it would be like shooting turkey, you know. You didn't worry so  
23 much about getting hit because they just normally didn't hit those fire bases like that  
24 because there was just too much shit there. I mean, they couldn't do it. I mean there was  
25 too much firepower there to make it prudent for them to even chance hitting the fire base.  
26 Now what they did do, they would probe the lines every now and then and fart around  
27 with us. We would run patrols out there and we would run into them out there but as far  
28 as a big major offensive on a fire base when I was there, they never tried that.

29 KC: Now, of course, you are dealing with NVA and not VC which were much  
30 further south.

1           LR: Yes, yeah, we didn't—like I said, I think I said back in the first part of the  
2 interview the whole time I was there I never saw what would be considered the pajama,  
3 the rebel, the Viet Cong that had the little flat hat, you know, and the black pajamas and  
4 carrying a rifle, never saw that. The only thing we ever dealt with and the only thing I  
5 ever saw was NVA soldiers. They wore the little bush hats, not bush hats, but it is kind of  
6 like those jungle hats that I guess you see in the movies safari people, you know like—

7           KC: Kind of like a pith helmet.

8           LR: Yeah. It had an NVA star on the front of it and they wore uniforms and  
9 carried rifles and had supply. They were resupplied and all that other stuff. We dealt with  
10 NVA trained regular soldiers.

11          KC: Well, why we are here describe for me your impressions of the NVA soldiers  
12 you faced. What was your impression of them, of their fighting ability, of their  
13 motivation, of what it took to be an NVA?

14          LR: Well, they were good soldiers. I mean, we hated their freaking guts. I don't  
15 mind telling you that. Now that I can look back on it they were well trained, like I said,  
16 they were resupplied, they had weapons, good weapons. They were well trained. They  
17 pulled off some pretty bad ambushes on us. They were very disciplined. I think they were  
18 probably more disciplined than what we were because they—I know when I got wounded  
19 they let a full company of Marines walk through that ambush before they sprung it on the  
20 ass end and that's where my platoon was when I got wounded was on the ass end of a  
21 column, a company of Marines moving. That's pretty disciplined that they didn't fire on  
22 us until the ass end got there and then they opened up on us. They were well trained,  
23 disciplined. You know, I only—one time while I was there we captured—let's see, well,  
24 we did capture two of them. We went into the DMZ one time and we captured two alive.  
25 When I was in 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division we did capture an NVA soldier alive. We wounded  
26 him. He turned out to be a—he was a fourteen-year-old kid is what we found out later.  
27 He was real young but he was an NVA soldier had a uniform and the whole works. I  
28 mean, the NVA were very well trained soldiers. I'm not going to set here and say they  
29 were bad. They were very good. They were somebody that you didn't want to deal with  
30 which we had to on a regular basis, like it or not. They were good soldiers is all I'm  
31 saying.

1           KC: Sure. Now you mentioned earlier this move, administrative move as much as  
2 anything of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division moving out and then you were transferred into the 1<sup>st</sup>  
3 Marine Division. How far up did this transfer go? Was this a, was this just your  
4 company? Was this a larger than that? How far did it go administratively?

5           LR: You mean the movement?

6           KC: Yeah, the transfer from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division to the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division.

7           LR: Oh, honestly I couldn't tell you. We thought, we heard when they first pulled  
8 us out they were telling us we were going home because Nixon had pulled out the 3<sup>rd</sup>  
9 Marine Division. He was pulling troops out of Vietnam. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division was one  
10 of the first divisions in there, into Vietnam when it all started so they were the first  
11 division to come out. We had all these news reporters and stuff when we hit the airbase  
12 where they landed us—they pulled us off a hot LZ and brought us back and we landed on  
13 those choppers. We got off the choppers, the first thing we always did was go over there  
14 and just sit down and kick back on your pack like a reclining chair. Then we have all  
15 these news reporters over there poking microphones in our mouth saying, “What do you  
16 think about 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division being pulled out of Vietnam?” Of course, that was news  
17 to us. We didn't even know anything about it. We are going, “Oh, we didn't know  
18 anything about it. Is that what is happening?” “Oh, yeah. You guys are going home.”  
19 “Holy cow! We are going home. All right!” All of a sudden, you know, we are all happy  
20 but, you know, we found out later that that wasn't the case. They told us for a while that  
21 anybody with nine months in-country or more would go back with 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division.  
22 Well, that turned out to be a bullshit story because I had nine months or a little over nine  
23 months.

24           KC: This would have been October, right? So you had been there almost ten  
25 months, probably.

26           LR: Yeah, and so me and all these other guys found out we are going to 1<sup>st</sup>  
27 Marine Division so we knew that was bullshit. We heard later that the only ones they  
28 took back with them—the only thing that actually went back, and I don't about any of our  
29 like the lieutenants, captains, and on up, I don't know what happened to them. I never  
30 heard. I actually haven't talked to any of the ones that were there since we got back. The  
31 ones that I have talked to had left before all this happened. I don't know how far it went

1 up the chain as far as your rank but we heard later that the only ones they took back were  
2 the young guys, the ones that had just come in-country. If you had three months in  
3 country or less then they took you back, which didn't make any freaking sense to us at  
4 the time but now that I think back on it, if that's actually the case—I don't know that to  
5 be the case—but if that rumor was true I can kind of see it because those guys that had  
6 just gotten there still had a speck of that military training in them, that spit and polish and  
7 all that stuff that went with the Marine Corps. Whereas we had been there so long that we  
8 had gotten to a point that we didn't give a shit about nothing anymore. I mean, we  
9 basically felt like we were just walking dead men. I mean, that's kind of the way it was  
10 after a while when you had been there. You just kind of give up the hope of ever getting  
11 back home and you just decide "I am going to die," and so I'm just going to try to live as  
12 long as I can and take care of my buddy next to me and we will see what happens.  
13 Basically you just felt like you were walking around dead. I can see where they wouldn't  
14 want to take you back to the States because they'd have to give you a whole new attitude.  
15 It would have been impossible for us. I mean, when I got back from Vietnam, I mean, I  
16 didn't care. To me, I mean, the Marine Corps didn't mean shit to me no more because I  
17 was at the point where I just didn't care anymore. I didn't care about the Marine Corps. I  
18 didn't care about none of that stuff anymore. I can see why they might have wanted to  
19 bring the younger guys because they still had that little bit of the boot camp training in  
20 them that we didn't have any more.

21 KC: They were still salvageable.

22 LR: Yeah. They would have had to spend a lot of time with us getting us back  
23 into that mode of keeping yourself clean and polishing your boots and that Marine Corps  
24 deal of "Yes, sir. No, sir," because I mean we didn't have none of that in the bush. We  
25 never ever, you never ever saluted lieutenants or captains. Nobody wore insignias  
26 because you didn't want to because if you get in a firefight or an ambush and a gook is  
27 looking for somebody to shoot he is going to want to shoot the lieutenant or the captain  
28 whoever is in charge. That's who they are going to try to pick out. Lieutenants and  
29 captains didn't want us saluting them or anything like that in the bush because they didn't  
30 want to be picked out and singled out as the officer. Nobody wore insignias. I mean, they  
31 were just like I us. They wore the same clothes as we did and if we got in a firefight and

1 somebody is shooting at them they didn't look no different from the rest of us. The only  
2 way a gook could figure out who was the lieutenant is he was always the guy right there  
3 next to the radio man. He was either in front of or behind the radio man all the time. Even  
4 the radio man, if you carried a radio you kept it inside your pack and the antenna that  
5 stuck up you never let it stick up you always pulled it down and stuffed it in your flak  
6 jacket pocket so it just made a little loop right over your head and then over your ears so  
7 it was harder for the gooks to see who had the radio.

8 KC: Did you ever have to pack a radio?

9 LR: Yeah, I did. I packed a radio for a while.

10 KC: Did you feel like you were marked?

11 LR: Absolutely. I hated it with a passion.

12 KC: How long did you have to do it?

13 LR: I carried one for, it couldn't have been over about a month because I wanted  
14 out. I hated it because the radio man all they carried was a .45 and that .45 was the most  
15 worthless piece of shit. I hated that. I couldn't hit the broad side of a barn with it and I  
16 didn't want to be in a firefight with a .45. Being in the middle of a firefight with a radio  
17 and .45 and that was my worst nightmare so I didn't want to do that. I wanted out from  
18 under that thing as quick as I could.

19 KC: And right next to officer, to boot.

20 LR: Yeah. Well, when carried that I actually I carried it for our squad  
21 commander. He wasn't an officer. He was a—I can't remember. He was a sergeant, I  
22 think, if I remember right. Yeah, a sergeant. He was like a—well, we had out platoon CO  
23 which would be, he was a lieutenant and then when we would go out on like a squad-  
24 sized ambush or patrol anything like that then I would carry the radio for the sergeant  
25 who would be in charge at that time. Usually the lieutenant wouldn't go out on squad-size  
26 patrol. That was only on the platoon-size. I didn't really have to carry it for the big guy  
27 but it wouldn't have made no difference who I was carrying it for. I didn't like so I  
28 wanted out from under that deal there.

29 KC: How did you get the job?

30 LR: It was one of those deals where they say, "Hey, we need somebody to carry  
31 the radio," you know. "How about you, Renfro? You want to carry it?" You go, "Oh, I

1 don't know. I've never done that before." "Ah, yeah. Come on. You can do it. You will  
2 be able to make a good one, okay?" So you are it. After a while you go, "Okay, I have  
3 had all this bullshit I want. Does somebody else want to carry this radio?"

4 KC: My next question is: How do you get out of this?

5 LR: Yeah, you start checking around. "Hey, you want to carry the radio? I'm tired  
6 of carrying this freaking radio." There's always some dumbass that will go, "Oh, yeah.  
7 That looks like a good job to me. I'll carry the radio."

8 KC: Did you pick out the new guy for this?

9 LR: Uh, no. The new guy was never on radio. New guy was always, we put them  
10 guys on point.

11 KC: They are more expendable?

12 LR: Yeah. The new guys were point guys for a while until you kind of proved  
13 your mettle, I guess and then after that they would—when we didn't have a new guy to  
14 put on point we just took turns, you know. It's my turn to be on point and we would just  
15 rotate. Even with a new guy if we were cutting trail or something like that we had to  
16 rotate anyway because it would just wear your ass out, you know, chopping machete for  
17 hours at a time. If we were walking down a trail, though, and we had a new guy he would  
18 usually be on the point. Of course, that's just—it was one of those deals where that was  
19 just part of kind of like growing up. I mean, you had to grow up and you had to—we had  
20 to see how good you were and if you are willing to walk point and you did a good job and  
21 you didn't bitch and moan and gripe, well, then you become one of the guys. If you are  
22 one of those cry babies that cry and stuff, well, you weren't accepted so they would kind  
23 of trying to can you off on somebody else or whatever.

24 KC: Do you remember your first time on point as a new guy?

25 LR: I actually I can't. I can't remember my very first time. I remember lots of  
26 times walking point but I don't remember which one was the first time as opposed to any  
27 other time. You know, it's one of those deals you experience and you realize if shit  
28 happens you are dead. Usually the point guy dies in an ambush. They usually nail your  
29 ass pretty heavy. But I mean with that said, you know, you try to—I mean, the point guy  
30 is wanting to walk slow. I mean, you're wanting to make sure you don't have anything  
31 out in front of you especially if you are walking down a trail because you can walk into a

1 bunker complex, you can walk into an ambush, you can walk into them face to face  
2 where they are coming up the trail the opposite direction you are and all of a sudden you  
3 are face to face with some gooks. You had to be on guard and everything so, you know,  
4 you just had to be on guard. As far as first time, I am sitting here trying to think of the  
5 first time. I don't remember that. I just remember being on point and wanting to walk  
6 slow, like I said. They are always back behind you and you can hear them going—you  
7 know, the lieutenant is on the radio going, "Tell that point man to move it out! God dang  
8 it! We are getting cluster fucked!" They always called it. What happened—when you  
9 would move in a column, you know, you never walked right behind somebody. You  
10 always spread it out because the more you spread it out the less chance there was they  
11 would kill a bunch of you in an ambush. If you had it spread out, say, five or ten yards  
12 behind each guy then if you walked into an ambush they would only get the first three or  
13 four of you. The rest of you are going to be able to survive and hopefully fire back and,  
14 you know, get to the guys that were wounded up front. You kept it spread out and they  
15 were always calling on the radio saying, "Tell that point man to move it out! God dang it!  
16 We're getting all cluster fucked up here! Keep it moving! Keep it moving!" Well, the  
17 point guy is going, "Oh, hell with that. I want to walk slow because I don't want to walk  
18 into an ambush." It was always a yeah, yeah back and forth, you know. So you had that  
19 and honestly the whole time I was in Vietnam I never, on point, I never walked into an  
20 ambush. I never walked into a bunker complex or any of that stuff. I don't know if that  
21 was my guardian angel protecting me or what but I never did that. I mean, I was just  
22 fortunate that it never happened. There was times when they would pull me off point and  
23 I would go back a ways and then within an hour or so we'd hit the shit and it would be  
24 just like, "Oh, my god. I'm so thankful I wasn't up there at that time."

25 KC: What sort of things are you looking for when you are on point? What sort of  
26 tell-tale signs? You have got to be looking for a million different things. What sort of  
27 things are you looking for?

28 LR: Number one, you've got to watch out for booby traps, you know. You're  
29 watching the trail looking for trip wires or anything that might indicate there might be  
30 some kind of booby trap. Now up north where we were, we didn't run into booby traps a  
31 lot they are just—when I was there that just wasn't—the NVA didn't deal with booby

1 traps. Now occasionally we would run into what we call a trip frag and it would just be,  
2 they would take a grenade and put it in a little grass, like a—they would weave a basket  
3 and put a basket around it where it would hold the spoon down and then they would pull  
4 the pin. Then they would tie the frag to a wire across the trail so what happened when  
5 you would walk through there and trip on that wire it would yank that frag out of that  
6 basket and as soon as it yanked it out then the spoon would fly then the grenade would go  
7 off within a few seconds. That was the only thing that we ever ran into when I was in  
8 Vietnam, we ran into that about twice. Any other booby traps we never ran into. In  
9 training they always trained you about booby traps so it was in the back of your mind. So  
10 you were looking for booby traps. I always tried to kind of see as far as I could down a  
11 trail. I was always looking for bunker complexes so I watched out for that a lot. Then,  
12 you know, you just kind of watch either side of the trail for any kind of movement that's  
13 not suppose to be there, you know, in case they were on the side of trail and or laying on  
14 the side of the trail waiting for you. So I watched for that. I guess that—when I was—that  
15 is basically all I looked for. I worried I guess more about—well, those are the three things  
16 I guess I worried most about: booby traps, number one, and then I was always looking  
17 down the trail for any kind of movement on either side. Then trying to keep an eye as far  
18 down as I could see looking for bunker complexes. Usually a trail led to somewhere. I  
19 mean, it didn't just—they always led somewhere. Usually they would lead to a bunker  
20 complex, somewhere they would have them a set up there. Once we hit a trail and started  
21 down it we watched a lot for the bunker complexes.

22 KC: It seems incredibly difficult, and I have always thought this, to be on point on  
23 one of these patrols and you have got to be looking at the ground for booby traps, this  
24 incredibly thin wire going across. You have got to be looking on all sides of you not just  
25 in front, like you mentioned, both sides of you for anything that stands out but you are  
26 also dealing with incredibly thick jungle that you might not be—you could have  
27 someone, an enemy soldier two feet away from you, I would think, in this incredibly  
28 thick jungle ready to spring one of these ambushes on you let alone these incredibly well  
29 concealed bunker complexes and you have got to keep an eye out for all of them all at the  
30 same time. It's difficult enough just to walk through the damn jungle, I would think. That  
31 must have worn you out mentally having to go through that.

1           LR: It did. I mean, you had to think about that the whole time. Not so much—I  
2 mean, yeah, as a point man you did but not only the point man but everybody in the  
3 column because a lot of times the point man, just like I said, it's difficult to see somebody  
4 in the jungle. I mean, the jungle was on you all the time. For the most part up north like  
5 up in the hill country up north, the jungle was thick and so the trails would just be a little  
6 hole through the jungle. The jungle was within five or six foot of you all the time. It was  
7 so thick that if somebody was hiding ten foot out there in the bush and they used a little  
8 bit of camouflage technique you would never see them. Yeah, it was just on you like  
9 stink all the time. A lot of times a point man might walk the column right into an ambush  
10 and he would never see anybody. I mean, that was not unusual. As a matter of fact, I  
11 think sometimes that's kind of the way we operated. I think that's sort of the way they did  
12 it in Vietnam, the lieutenants and stuff. That's why they just told us to move our ass out  
13 because once the column walked through an ambush up there we would know where they  
14 were and we could do something about it.

15           KC: Trying to find it.

16           LR: Yeah, it was like they didn't give a shit that we walked into an ambush. It  
17 was like, "Just move it out. We don't give a shit."

18           KC: Did you get that feeling about your lieutenants, as well?

19           LR: Oh, yeah, yeah our C.O.s and stuff. I am not saying they were bad officers.  
20 I'm just saying I think they were doing their job. They would get something from  
21 headquarters or the general back in the rear—the way we looked at it, I don't know what  
22 they had, but the way we envisioned it was they had this big map of Vietnam and they  
23 would say, "Okay, here is Kilo 3/3 right here on this hill. Let's move Kilo 3/3 over to this  
24 hill." They would take this little pin or this little pushpin and they would stick it on this  
25 hill and say, "Okay, we're moving them over here." Well, shit, for us that little pin  
26 movement of one inch meant a whole day of humping hills. I mean, they'd just kick our  
27 ass. So that's how we saw them. They didn't give a shit what happened in between there.  
28 They just wanted us from here to here as quick as they could get us there. They were  
29 catching hell, our company commanders were catching hell from their COs up above  
30 them, the generals or the majors or whatever the hell was up there. They would catch hell  
31 out in the field saying, "Where are you guys located?" They would give them a position

1 on the map and they would say, “You guys are not moving fast enough. You need to get  
2 your ass over here. We want you over there by dark,” you know. So that’s kind of the  
3 way it was. It was like move it out, just keep the freaking column moving and they didn’t  
4 give a shit about if we walked into that ambush. It’s just one of those things that  
5 happened and we’d deal with it when it happened so just get there as fast as we could.  
6 That’s kind of the way—that’s the way we felt about it, I guess, is the fact that they didn’t  
7 really give a flip that we walked into an ambush. It was just get from point A to point B. I  
8 guess that’s why we developed attitudes a lot of time because we didn’t feel like they  
9 really gave a shit about us as people. As a Marine we were just a hunk of meat, you  
10 know, we were just something that packed a lot of shit on our back and, you know, we  
11 would walk into ambushes and if we didn’t get our ass killed we could shoot back at  
12 them. That’s kind of the way we felt, you know.

13 KC: Right.

14 LR: We were a pawn for them to use.

15 KC: Sure. Now from your experience, based on your squad’s or in your platoon’s,  
16 what was the overall attitude toward the effectiveness and abilities of your officers?

17 LR: My—we had several. Our officers a lot of times didn’t stick around long. If  
18 we got in an ambush they were usually, the platoon commanders were right in the middle  
19 of it because they would usually be in the middle of our platoon column and most of the  
20 time they would be close enough to an ambush that they would get wounded a lot. We  
21 had kind of a turnover there. I have had—let’s see we had about three different ones  
22 while I was in Kilo 3/3. But I always felt like, I felt like they were for the most part—  
23 well, it depends on which one. You know, we had good ones and bad ones, I guess is  
24 what I am trying to say. I can remember a couple of good ones and I can remember some  
25 bad ones. For the most part, now that I look back on it, I think they were just like us.  
26 They had to do a job. I don’t hold no—I don’t have any ill feelings toward any of them  
27 for any of that. I think they were just like us. They were soldiers. They had something  
28 they had to do. They had a mission they had to accomplish and we were part of it. So, I  
29 mean, they did what they had to do. When we got in firefights I do remember some of  
30 them freezing up. I can remember one particular time where a lieutenant where he just  
31 flat locked down and that was when I got wounded. When they pulled me back I

1 remember our platoon sergeant he was a, it seemed like he was an E-6, a staff sergeant  
2 and I just remember him—the lieutenant was just laying on the ground he was just  
3 frozen, I mean, because I mean they were just shooting the shit out of us. Guys were  
4 dropping like flies and I just remember that staff sergeant just reaching over and grabbing  
5 that lieutenant and just shaking him going, you know, “You need to do something! We’re  
6 going to get our shit kicked out,” you know. “We are all going to die if you don’t do  
7 something!” I remember him just shaking him like that and it was like he sort of woke up.  
8 He was probably just like us. His mind shut down. All of a sudden it was like he realized  
9 that he needs to do something. At that point he got on the radio and he started calling in  
10 an airstrike or air support from choppers and, of course, they got their pretty quick after  
11 that. But, you know, I am not saying he was a piss poor officer or leader, I am just saying  
12 he locked down like the rest of us, I guess. For the most part I think the leadership was  
13 good. I mean, I didn’t have any problem. Now, if you want to talk about the leadership  
14 that was coming from higher up, I think it was pretty piss poor. I mean, maybe not piss  
15 poor but it was—I think there was too much politics. It was based on politics and not the  
16 fact of trying to win a war.

17 KC: Let me stop you right there, Larry, and I am going to get to that in just a  
18 second but I want finish up with these junior officers that you were dealing with on a  
19 much more regular basis before we move on and I think that is important, as well. First,  
20 was it common for one of these junior officers or just a grunt, for that matter, to freeze up  
21 unexpectedly under conditions like that, combat conditions like that, but yet and say the  
22 next fire fight come out and do his job and act as he was supposed, as he was trained to?

23 LR: Uh-huh, yeah. I think that was, I am not going to say it was common but I  
24 think I did see it. I don’t think at the time I realized what was going on because I didn’t  
25 know what was going on. Now that I look back on it and see what happened I see that  
26 that’s probably what happened. The guy just flat vapor locked and just, you know, his  
27 mind shut down on him. I saw it not only like that lieutenant I was talking about that time  
28 but I saw it with some sergeants. As a matter of fact, when I was carrying the radio for  
29 one of the sergeants I can remember I was on the radio and the CO was calling us. It was  
30 the only time in Vietnam that I was ever involved in an actual frontal assault on an enemy  
31 position. In other words, we had like three tanks lined up. We had the Marine all lined up

1 on a frontal assault and we were going to assault through their position. The idea is you  
2 just stand up and just start shooting the shit out of the tree line over there and the tanks  
3 are moving up and firing just like the Hollywood World War II movies I mean, it was just  
4 like that. You just stand up and start going, well, the CO was on the radio telling me, "All  
5 right," you know, "y'all need to stand up and let's move out. Let's go." I tell my sergeant  
6 sitting here, I say, "Okay, he said stand up and we have got to move out." And he just sat  
7 there looking at me. I said, "Hey, he's telling me we have got to move out, man. We have  
8 got to stand up. We've got to go." By this time here I am on the radio and the CO is on  
9 my ass going, "By god! I told you, god dang it, get up on your ass and start moving it out  
10 right now!" You know, he's chewing my ass out. Well, by this time I look over there and  
11 he has just got this stupid look on his face and I said, I grabbed him and I hit him and I  
12 said, "Man, we have got to go right now!" I just turned around to everybody else and I  
13 said, "The CO said stand up and move it out! We have got to go!" Well, by that time he  
14 kind of, it was like he kicked in, you know, and okay, we all stood up and here we go.  
15 But for a second I think that's where he was, he was like (noise), he was kind of out of  
16 there.

17 KC: Was he good before this?

18 LR: No, this guy I never did—I had no respect for this guy. He was not a—he was  
19 a piss poor leader. I mean, this time I don't think it was just the fact that he was just a piss  
20 poor leader, I think it was the fact that he was just kind of overwhelmed with what was  
21 going on and what was going to happen. You know, the leadership honestly, I mean, I—I  
22 mean, at times you would see that and at other times I would be amazed at what was  
23 going on around me, what guys were actually doing that, you know, you just go, "Shit! I  
24 would have never been able to that," you know, or something. For the most part I would  
25 say our leadership was good. In our outfit we had pretty good leadership.

26 KC: What about the higher leadership?

27 LR: Are you talking about battalion level or something like that?

28 KC: Yes, battalion level or higher up.

29 LR: I don't know where it kicked in but there was some stupid ass decisions being  
30 made in Vietnam. I mean, as a soldier it just didn't make any sense to us what was going  
31 on. I think that's what caused us after about three or four months—about three months in

1 Vietnam you suddenly realized that you're not here to win the war. You're not going to  
2 win nothing. All you are doing is just you are going to have to try to survive for your tour  
3 of duty and try to get back home alive because you're not here to win this war. They are  
4 not trying to win a war. The reason I say that is because, I mean, number one, we never  
5 took ground and held it. Number two, like when we were going to run a big operation a  
6 lot of times if they thought there were friendlies in the area—we call them friendlies,  
7 friendly villages or anything like that—for about a week before we actually run the  
8 operation through that area or the sweep what they would do, they would fly a big  
9 airplane up overhead and they would speak in Vietnamese and warn those people that we  
10 were going to be running operations through that area and that they need to evacuate,  
11 they need to get out. Because if we came through and found people there then we would  
12 consider them hostiles and they would be dealt with that way so it was up to them to go  
13 back to one of these, they had areas that they could go to and wait until we run our sweep  
14 through there, and they would announce this in an airplane with a loudspeaker all up and  
15 down through there. Well, now, it doesn't take no dumb ass—I mean we were dumb ass  
16 grunts but, I mean, we are saying, "If the friendlies are hearing this, what about the North  
17 Vietnamese? Can't they fucking hear what's going on" What we are doing is announcing  
18 to them that we are coming, we are going to be there. So what do the NVA do? They just  
19 pack there shit and move out. We run out sweep and we don't see nothing, we go back  
20 and what happens? The NVA move right back in. We haven't accomplished one freaking  
21 thing. We used to take hills, numerous times. We took the same hill I don't know how  
22 many times up on the Ridge we called it, Mutter's Ridge. We would go up there and get  
23 the shit kicked out of us, get guys wounded, get guys killed, get to the top of the hill and  
24 we take the hill, we win the battle. What happens? Three or four days later we pack our  
25 shit and we are out of there. What have we accomplished? Not a freaking thing. We  
26 haven't held any ground whatsoever. We knew as we were packing up and leaving the  
27 gooks were packing up and moving right back on that hill where we were. I mean, it  
28 obvious to us that we were not going to win this war the way we were doing it. We  
29 weren't allowed to go into the DMZ. I mean, we weren't allowed to fire, call in artillery  
30 strikes even though at times there was places down in the valley over there like over C-2.  
31 I can remember sitting there one day and we had a pair of binoculars which we didn't

1 normally have but we were farting around and somebody had one of the CO's or  
2 something and somebody had one of the artillery guys or something had a pair of  
3 binoculars. We were looking, you know, and I was looking back over there to the north  
4 and I saw a bunch of dern dirt flying up and stuff and I said, "Man, what is all that dirt  
5 flying up back in there?" They said, "Ah, that's the North Vietnamese resupplying.  
6 That's trucks coming down to the DMZ resupplying their troops." I said, "What? Why  
7 don't y'all fire on them damn guys?" They go, "Oh no, no. We can't fire across the  
8 DMZ. We can't do that." We're setting there watching them with binoculars and we  
9 couldn't do nothing about it. I mean, after a little while all this stuff kind of adds up and  
10 you are going, "Oh, hey. We're not here to win this war. It's not going to happen the way  
11 we fight it." That war was never, the way we fought it, meant to be won. We never went  
12 in it to win. We never held ground and you just can't do that. I mean, that's just the way I  
13 feel about it. If you are going to win a war you have go to go in there and just kick the  
14 shit out of all of them. I mean, you have got to hold your ground and you have got to take  
15 over that area and that's not what our intentions were or what we were doing. You know,  
16 the North, I think we could have stopped that war in a heartbeat. All we had to have to  
17 done was invade the North. I mean, those dumb asses had all their troops in the South  
18 fighting us so why didn't we just invade the North? Immediately what would they have  
19 had to done? They would have pulled all their troops from the South back up north to  
20 defend the North and they would have been out of the South and we could have done our  
21 shit up north. That's where all the trouble was coming from. Personally, I think we were  
22 scared of China. That's my personal opinion but I will leave it at that. To me the war was  
23 never meant to be won politically. It was a political war.

24 KC: How long were you there before you developed this attitude or this  
25 understanding?

26 LR: It was pretty quick. I mean, like I said, three or four months maybe. I mean, it  
27 didn't take long when you started, like I said, you know, they announce the fact that you  
28 are coming. You are not allowed—you had areas where you couldn't even shoot at them.  
29 I mean, we had no fire zones, we had limited fire zones, and we had free fire zones. Most  
30 of our area up north where 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division was a free fire zone. We could shoot at  
31 anything that come along because they were considered enemy. But there were times

1 when we would be, if they pulled us back or something or we were on R&R at Cua Viet  
2 or anything like that then some of those areas were no fire zones. Even if they shoot at  
3 you, you weren't allowed to shoot back. I mean, you start adding all this stuff up and it's  
4 just like, I mean, it doesn't take a Rhodes Scholar to figure out that, you know, we're not  
5 here to win this war. It's about something else. My mission is just to try to get back home  
6 alive and hopefully my buddies make it back home alive.

7 KC: That was my next line of questioning for you. Once you come to this  
8 understanding, realization in your mind that this is the case, you have got no choice. You  
9 are going to be there until you are killed, wounded badly enough to come home, or your  
10 tour is finally through at the end of your twelve months. You're there, obviously you can  
11 tell that you are frustrated by this even at that time that you are there. What is it that  
12 keeps you going? Obviously, you say it's to not die and it is to hopefully not allow my  
13 comrades, my friends, my buddies to die. If that's the case, what does your buddy, what  
14 do the guys in your squad mean to you? Is it safe to assume that you are all going through  
15 the same kind of understanding about the same time, same experiences; you talk to one  
16 another about what you are saying, things like this. Is it safe to say that y'all are just  
17 trying to survive and trying to help each other survive if possible? What becomes of the  
18 relationship within this squad or within this platoon?

19 LR: Well, I think that's what we were talking about earlier, you know, before you  
20 turned on the recorder was the fact that that's that bond I think that you get, that special  
21 bond with the guys around you. I don't know how to explain it, but I mean, it's a bond  
22 that you develop that it's almost like, it's like a brother or a sister. Of course, we didn't  
23 have females then in the bush but the guys that I got to know—I didn't realize, I don't  
24 think, I didn't realize this bond. I didn't understand it until we had that reunion in  
25 Washington where we all saw each other again. It's the strangest thing but you would  
26 think after not seeing a guy or somebody basically that you weren't really—I mean, you  
27 didn't know them in your personal life. You just knew them in the military and you  
28 happen to see them thirty-five years later, you see them at a reunion you would think it  
29 would be a causal type deal, you know, where, "Oh, hey!" You know. "I hadn't seen you  
30 in thirty-five years. Great to see you again. How have you been doing?" It wasn't that  
31 way with us. It was like I felt like I was at home. These guys, it was like I found a long

1 lost brother. I mean, it was such a tight—I don't know. It wasn't like a friend. It was like  
2 a blood brother, I mean, it was like somebody, twins separated at birth and all of a sudden  
3 you find out, you know, he's my brother. You see these guys and it's like you have this  
4 special bond and it's hard to describe. Maybe, you know, like we talked, maybe that's  
5 what they talk about, band of brothers. I don't know if that's—maybe that's what they  
6 were talking about. I don't know but. But I do know that you develop some kind of  
7 special relationship that really you don't normally get with just friends. I mean, these  
8 guys were more than friends to me. They are not just friends, they are like blood brothers,  
9 you know. You know, after—it's just a strange thing to try to describe. But for years, like  
10 I say, I didn't even know about it until I saw them again and then it was like I felt at  
11 home, at ease. It didn't feel uncomfortable being around them. It was like, "Oh, my  
12 gosh." You know. "Ah! We're back home. It's like we have got the family back. Here we  
13 are," you know. "Our family group is all back together again." See these guys, they are  
14 alive, they are walking around when I thought they were dead, you know. It was all this  
15 stuff, lots of emotions going on. Somewhere in there you develop this bond. I don't know  
16 exactly when it kicks in or what causes it but it's there. You know, like said, I don't know  
17 how long it takes to get it, you know, I don't know all of that stuff, the particulars but I  
18 just know that it happens. I asked the other guys I said, "How do you feel about all this?"  
19 It was like, "Oh, man. It's like I feel back home or something," you know. You just feel  
20 like I finally found my way back home. Here I am. You know, it's just a bond.

21 KC: That explains the popularity of veterans' reunions, combat veterans' reunions  
22 after all these years. I think it speaks an awful lot about the enormity of the impact that  
23 combat, sustained combat, has on the individual that after thirty years, thirty-five years  
24 after not even seeing these guys, not being around them, not communicating with them  
25 that you go to a reunion and then automatically you realize what has been missing. You  
26 spent one year together and after thirty-five years, you know, if were any normal set of  
27 circumstances you most likely would not remember any of these individuals, their names  
28 and feel nothing for them. This says an awful lot, obviously, about the impact that combat  
29 has on the individual mind and the individual person and their understanding of  
30 themselves and their understanding of other people when after all this time you come

1 together and you have this instant connection that is so profound that in many ways it  
2 defies any sort of description.

3 LR: Uh-huh. That's true. One thing that we did notice about our group, after we—  
4 well, kind of back a little bit. When I got back from Vietnam the way I dealt with it in my  
5 mind I guess in order to get on with life and I guess try not to think about what had  
6 actually gone on over there, I think what I did was I tried to just convince myself that it  
7 never happened. That's kind of the way I dealt with it. It was like a bad dream. It never  
8 happened and now I'm back home and I have awakened from my dream so now I need to  
9 just get on with my life. All those years, I mean, I think—well, I don't think. I know. I  
10 didn't realize it but my wife certainly realized it but I dealt with all these problems but to  
11 me I didn't know what was going on. But with that said, I stuck it in the back of my mind  
12 and for years I never even really talked about it. I didn't acknowledge it and just to me it  
13 never happened. I had this friend of mine in North Carolina that called me one day. Me  
14 and him had kind of stayed in touch with phone calls and every now and then a letter  
15 occasionally. Well, he called me up on the phone and he said, "My wife and I are having  
16 to fly to California on a business trip," and he said, "If you don't mind, I'd like to just  
17 stop over in Lubbock and I would like to just see you and visit with you for a couple of  
18 days." I said, "Sure, man. Come on." So everything was fine and I went out to the airport  
19 to meet him and his wife and, of course, he stepped off that plane and he looked just like  
20 he did thirty-five years ago. I was afraid I wouldn't recognize him, you know. I was  
21 setting there thinking, "Boy, I hope he hasn't changed. What am I going to do? How am I  
22 going to do this? How am I going to"—you know, all these things are going through your  
23 mind. How am I going to deal with this? All of a sudden he steps off that plane and he  
24 looked just like he did thirty-five years ago and that bond kicked in and it was like I  
25 didn't have any problem talking to this guy. It was like he was just my brother all of a  
26 sudden and I saw him and it was just a connection. We spent two days talking about all  
27 this shit that went on in Vietnam. Of course, when you get us together, you know, that's  
28 the conversation. I mean, we just talk about all this stuff just over and over. After he left  
29 that's when I started having a lot of mental problems. I started really having deep  
30 problems and I didn't know what was going on. Now that I look back on it I think what  
31 happened to me was that for thirty-five or thirty years I was able to put that in the back of

1 my mind and say it never happened. But when I saw him and we talked about it and I  
2 realized in my mind that all of a sudden it wasn't a dream, it really did happen. What  
3 went on, he confirmed the fact that it actually did happen so then it caused all this stuff  
4 like a flood to come up on me. Even though I didn't realize it, you know, outwardly I  
5 didn't know what was going on, inside my mind I think I was dealing with that and I  
6 think he did the same thing. We had this reunion in Washington, it's been about, it has  
7 probably been about six years ago. We had one reunion and then we had a second one.  
8 After the second one we had—checking with the guys nearly every one of us started  
9 having real problems. I mean mental problems. The fact, this friend of mind that's in  
10 North Carolina, he had to go to a PTS unit because he was having such terrible problems.  
11 When I saw him the first time I asked him, I said, "Hey, Ray. Do you ever have any  
12 problems with Vietnam?" "Nah, nah. I've never had any problems. I'm doing fine." Then  
13 after all this all of a sudden it's like he's eat up. To this day he still deals with it and we  
14 all did that. I am not so sure if maybe that it not how a lot of us dealt with it when we got  
15 back to Vietnam or back from Vietnam was we just kind of tried to put it in the back of  
16 our mind and say it really never happened. Then when you have one of those reunions all  
17 that stuff comes home to you. It's like it really did happen.

18 KC: Now was this a company, a Kilo Company reunion?

19 LR: No, yeah. Actually what happened was—in Vietnam what happened to us,  
20 we had walked into an ambush, our platoon, 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon Kilo 3/3. We were up on the  
21 Ridge. We walked into this big ass ambush and we had a bunch of guys killed and  
22 wounded that day. There was forty-two of us. I can't remember if I told you this. I might  
23 have said this already but hopefully not. Anyway, there was forty-two of us that left that  
24 morning and we went up on the hill and by the end of the day there was eight of us that  
25 walked back off the hill. Everybody else was either killed or wounded in that ambush. So  
26 all these guys, all the guys that we had been over there with all this time were  
27 medevac'ed. They were gone. This happened about sometime around the first part of  
28 October. I don't know exactly when but I am guessing that is when it was. Because  
29 within a week or so was when they pulled the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division out. We have moved  
30 down the Ridge a ways but that is where they pulled us out. Well, when they pulled all of  
31 us we had never found who lived, who died, nothing. So all these guys just disappeared

1 out of our lives. When I started having my problems I started doing a little research on  
2 Kilo 3/3 and on websites and stuff and I got casualty lists. They've got a place there you  
3 can put personal ads if you're looking for people or just put your biography there and  
4 kind of tell them who you are and who you were with and when. I got to reading some of  
5 those. Well, I read one down and I was going along there and for some reason one of  
6 them it said a guy named Gary Cober. Of course, a lot of these names had gone out of my  
7 mind over the years, you know, but he said—in parentheses he had Cober, Cobra. Man, I  
8 thought, "That guy—that kind of rings a bell." I called this Ray Clark, this friend of mine.  
9 I said, "Hey, Ray. Does this guy, does this sound familiar to you?" He said, "Yeah, that's  
10 old so and so." Well, he started getting on the phone and calling on these guys and he  
11 started looking on that website. Before you know it we had a bunch of these guys located  
12 so that's when we all got together and said, "Hey, let's all come to Washington," on  
13 whenever, you know, "and let's get together and see each other," and so that's what we  
14 did. It was kind of like a reunion just for our platoon. We found some of our COs,  
15 actually, our company commander, we did find him. He didn't make it that time but two  
16 of our platoon commanders were there, two of our old lieutenants, they were there. We  
17 just kind of had a platoon-sized deal and it was good. But afterwards—it was good and it  
18 was bad. It was good that we got to see each other and we figured out, we thought  
19 everybody was dead and come to find out most of them lived. We only had like a couple,  
20 about three guys get killed in that ambush and the rest of them lived. Even our lieutenant  
21 at the time we thought, I felt sure he was dead because he was—I helped carry him off  
22 the hill and he was full of holes so I thought, "Man, ain't no way he's going to live," but  
23 sure enough, he was alive and he was at the reunion. It was good that we found out that  
24 there were a lot of guys alive but then it was bad that it caused a lot of us or most of us to  
25 have problems after that.

26 KC: Well, like we mentioned earlier, when your brain begins to shut these things  
27 out to help protect you, when you, whatever it is that triggers the brain—obviously this  
28 reunion was such a trigger—these things start to come out a little bit more, the validation  
29 that you were there and these things did happen. Seeing these names and friends and  
30 people you served with, these things are bound to boil back up to the top. This happened  
31 at reunion thirty-some-odd years after your experiences here. Many outfits, many units

1 have reunions very, very early on. Now, I don't know if any studies of this have been  
2 done, but given what you have said if it hold true for other combat veterans and these  
3 reunions that they are very, they certainly are a catharsis to help begin this psychological,  
4 emotional healing process to allow you to come to grips with these things to hopefully  
5 help make you healthier mentally instead of trying to hold these things to the back. That's  
6 one of the things that is so important about these veterans' reunions—and we attend  
7 veterans' reunions, you know, throughout the year.

8 LR: Right.

9 KC: You certainly see this. I've not been to one where the veterans weren't very  
10 welcoming to me, very kind, very generous in their support of what we were doing but,  
11 you know you are just, you are on the outside looking in and you always will be. They  
12 are happy to take you in and happy to discuss these things with you but there is obviously  
13 something there.

14 LR: Right.

15 KC: Part of the healing process, I would think, is something that helps bring  
16 people together, these people who have this bond like you have mentioned. Healing  
17 together is as important as experiencing the terrifying aspects of combat together. You  
18 are becoming whole together, I think, is a way to say that.

19 LR: Right.

20 KC: Well, now that I have talked up the last five minutes here, let me go ahead  
21 and stop this today, Mr. Renfro, and we will pick it up at another time.

22 LR: That's fine.

**Interview with Larry Renfro**  
**Session [3] of [3]**  
**4 September 2009**

1           KC: This is Kelly Crager continuing an oral history interview with Mr. Larry  
2 Renfro. Today is 4 September 2009. Mr. Renfro and I are in the interview room of the  
3 Special Collections Library on the campus of Texas Tech University. Mr. Renfro, I think  
4 you've done a very good job so far talking about the combat that your unit experienced.  
5 You've talked when you were wounded and then you were sent out to the hospital ship,  
6 you had shrapnel, a little bit of shrapnel that got you in the face and coming back to your  
7 unit. One of the things we haven't touched on so far was life in the bush, life in the  
8 jungle, life on patrol when you would go on these sort of things. If you would, take me  
9 through a typical patrol. How long would it last? When would you start? What would be  
10 the process? The food you are eating? You have talked about radios off the record a  
11 moment ago. Take me through one of these typical things.

12           LR: Oh, well, okay. If I can remember a lot of it. It's been a lot of years since  
13 then. Usually, well, and it depended on what kind of patrol you were going on. We had  
14 different kinds of patrols. We had squad patrols. We had platoon patrols where the whole  
15 platoon would go out, and then we would move sometimes as a company. So it kind of  
16 depended on what you were doing, where you were going and stuff like that.

17           KC: Would your preparation change if it were squad, platoon, or company sized?

18           LR: Somewhat because if it was like a squad patrol it would usually be out of like  
19 a perimeter or something we were set up in on a hilltop or it might be out of a fire base or  
20 something like that so it would only last for a few hours. There wouldn't be any need to  
21 carry your pack. All you would carry is your fighting gear, in other words, whatever  
22 weapon you carried. You would carry some water, your flak jacket, your helmet, and all  
23 of that, just what we call our fighting gear. So you would carry that. You would go out on  
24 patrol for a few hours, usually three or four hours and then you would be back. That  
25 would be just a small patrol usually out of a fire base or a perimeter. If it was a platoon-  
26 sized patrol that usually would last more than just a day. It might be an overnight deal  
27 where you stayed out there two or three days. Or you actually might be going to another  
28 hill to set up a perimeter and wait for the rest of the company to catch up or something

1 like that. But if you did something like that what they would usually do is they would  
2 come around—well, they would call for the squad leaders and all the squad leaders would  
3 go to wherever our CO was, our lieutenant, and they would give them all the instructions  
4 of what we were going to be doing and where we were going. If we were going to be out  
5 overnight or something like that for a couple of days or something then they would issue  
6 so many days of C-rations. Usually we didn't carry over a couple of days or three days'  
7 worth of C-rations. So we would have to put all of that in our packs. They would also  
8 hand out—we would have to carry stuff like gun ammo for the machinegun. Sometimes  
9 if we carried a mortar crew with us then we would carry mortar rounds. If we were going  
10 to be blowing an LZ we would have to carry explosives like C-4 and all the stuff in order  
11 to blow an LZ, det cord and blasting caps and all of that other stuff. They would pass out  
12 all that stuff. All the stuff that we needed they would just divide it up into everybody that  
13 was in the platoon or whatever we were going on. Everybody would have some extra  
14 stuff to carry along with your C-rations. You would carry your pack, which was basically  
15 your house, it had everything in it. Everybody had what we called a poncho liner. That's  
16 kind of like a little lightweight nylon blanket that we slept under at night to kind of keep  
17 the mosquitoes off of you. It wasn't to keep you warm but it was basically to keep the  
18 mosquitoes off of you so you could sleep at night. We carried that. A lot of us had big  
19 pieces of plastic or maybe a poncho or something like that that we would put together  
20 when we would set in a perimeter or something like that to keep the rain off of you. A  
21 piece of plastic in Vietnam was like gold. You know, if you get a hold of a big piece—the  
22 bigger piece of plastic you had the bigger your house was at night so everybody liked a  
23 big piece of plastic. We would carry that, the C-rations, all your personal stuff, you know,  
24 like if you had writing stuff or anything like or whatever your personal items were; a  
25 shaving kit, sometimes guys would carry a shaver not a straight razor but a safety razor,  
26 tooth brush, you know, just personal items. Put all that in your pack, get that all packed  
27 up and ready to go and then you would have to think about, they'd issue rounds for your  
28 M-16 if that's what you carried or if you are carrying M-79 you would get so many  
29 rounds of M-79. Usually you would get a pretty good shot of what we called heat rounds.  
30 Then they would issue maybe eight or so what we called flachette, well, we called them  
31 shit rounds but I think they were actually called flachette or something like that rounds. It

1 was basically like a shotgun round. We would get those. If you carried something else,  
2 you know, whatever you carried you would get issues rounds to take care of. I usually  
3 carried at least two bandoliers of M-16 rounds so I always wanted to have plenty of  
4 ammunition.

5 KC: So both bandoliers were just for you.

6 LR: Yeah, yeah. I would have two bandoliers of ammunition. A bandolier is just a  
7 holder, I guess, I don't know any other way—it's like a holder that you would—when  
8 you would get your ammunition they would be in a bandolier and I don't know how  
9 many pockets it would have in there. I can't even remember now. It was like eight  
10 pockets or something. Each pocket would have a box of twenty rounds of M-16 rounds.  
11 You would take the box out and load the rounds into your magazines on your M-16 and  
12 then you would take the magazine and poke it back down into that cloth bandolier and  
13 then you would take the bandolier and strap around your shoulder on each side. You kind  
14 of looked like one of these Mexicans banditos, you know, had this criss-cross deal of  
15 ammunition rounds on you. Anyway, you would have that. When we got ready to go you  
16 would get all loaded up. We would have to—you know, first thing you do is put on your  
17 flak jacket. Sometimes if it was was hot I wouldn't even wear a shirt I would just put on  
18 my flak jacket without a shirt so I could stay semi-cool. If it was a little cool in the  
19 morning we might wear a shirt underneath your flak jacket. Then you would put your  
20 bandoliers over your flak jacket. They would issue—we always, most of us they would  
21 issue you about four frags, grenades. I used to—when I first got over there I would take  
22 those frags and the spoon—you know what a frag looks like? It's got the spoon that you  
23 hold and a pin in it. So the pins when they come in the box are not bent over. They are  
24 stuck through there so what you would do is you would take that and bend the pin where  
25 it wouldn't come out without bending it straight, the safety pin, and then I would just  
26 hang it on my flak jacket by the spoon. Well, we got into a firefight one time and after  
27 crawling around on the ground for a little while we got through all this stuff and I stood  
28 up and I happened to notice that one of my frags I had bent the thing all up and  
29 practically pulled the spoon off of it so I am thinking, "That's probably not a bad idea," I  
30 mean, "That's probably not a good idea to carry that thing like that." After that I started  
31 putting them inside the pockets of my flak jacket and carrying. Anyway, you get four

1 frags and put them somewhere on you where you could get to them easily. You would  
2 load up, get your weapon and put your backpack on and away we'd go. We'd just go  
3 tromping through the jungle. Sometimes we would stay on a trail that was there. We  
4 would follow trails to see if we could find them. Sometimes it meant chopping through  
5 the jungle with a machete. We did that a lot. So it just kind of depended on where you  
6 were going and what was there as to how you got through it. Wherever we went once we  
7 got there then it would be one of those deals—usually, like I said, if it was a platoon we  
8 would set in somewhere at night maybe on a platoon-sized ambush or it might be they  
9 break us down into squads and everybody would be kind of separated at night, set in on  
10 ambushes at night. But whatever we did, you know, it would kind of be up to what our  
11 objective was, I guess, so we would do that. If it was a company-sized movement it  
12 would be about the same thing, not a whole lot of difference but we would move in a  
13 company size, which, you know, I have a hard time remembering exactly how many  
14 people was in a company over there but I would say it was probably a company size over  
15 there would be probably a hundred or so guys. We would move all together and usually  
16 when you did that you were moving from one area to the next. We would go from one  
17 hilltop to the next hilltop somewhere, usually move two or three clicks a day or  
18 something like that. It depended on the terrain you were in as to how far you could go in  
19 a day. If it was real mountainous country sometimes one click was an ass kicker, you  
20 know. It would take you all day to get there. It would be one click from this mountaintop  
21 to that mountaintop, you might could throw a stone over there to it but you've got to go  
22 down and then back up again so it was an ass kicker. You'd be out there all day long.

23 KC: I was going to ask you about that. What kind of toll does this take on you  
24 physically and even mentally when you are going through this hot weather, up and down  
25 through the jungle?

26 LR: Absolutely. It was, at times it was grueling. I mean, we had guys dropping  
27 out with heat stroke and stuff like that which, you know, it put a burden on the rest of us  
28 if a guy dropped out. It was hot, it was humid, you had bugs to deal with, going through  
29 the jungle, you know, we had—I can remember lots of times there would be ants all in  
30 the trees and sometimes you would hit a tree or something, a bush, and have a bajillion  
31 ants that drop down on you and you would be covered up with ants. You would be sitting

1 there dusting ants off of your chest or your flak jacket and stuff trying to get them off and  
2 they would be stinging you. It kind of got to where it just didn't mean nothing anymore.  
3 It was to the point to, "Oh, well. If they sting me and I have to go to the hospital, okay.  
4 No big deal. I'll get to lay in a bed for three or four days and sleep, so that would be  
5 great."

6 KC: What would happen when a guy would fall out? What would you do?

7 LR: If a guy would fall out of like a heat stroke or something like that what they  
8 would do the corpsmen would check them out and, of course, the first thing you have to  
9 do is cool them down so, like I said, it put a burden on you because you had to carry your  
10 water. Usually they would say pass up one canteen so you would have to pass up a  
11 canteen and they would take the canteens open them up and pour water all over that guy  
12 to try to cool his body temperature down. We had a lot of malaria and stuff like that so  
13 guys would get malaria and they would drop out and when they did, you know, their  
14 body temperature—we had guys that would get up to like 106 or -7 temperatures, you  
15 know, and so if they didn't cool them down—matter of fact, I can remember one guy that  
16 had malaria and his temperature had got so high he was just—he went goofy, you know.  
17 He was just convulsing and all that other stuff so, I mean, they had to medevac him right  
18 away. That's what would happen. They would—like if it was malaria and they were in  
19 real serious shape we would pass up canteens, they would pour water on him to try to  
20 keep him cool, and then as soon as we could get to a hilltop or somewhere, if there was  
21 an LZ or something or as soon as we could blow an LZ, clear one, then they would call in  
22 medevac choppers and medevac them out so they would get medevac'ed.

23 KC: Did this ever happen to you, either malaria or a heat stroke?

24 LR: No, never had malaria, never had heat stroke or any of that stuff. I was lucky.  
25 I don't mind telling you, for a while there when I was—I'm glad I didn't now. I will say  
26 that. But back then, you know, I was almost hoping I would get malaria because there  
27 again, you know, if you got malaria or a heat stroke or any of this stuff sometimes it was  
28 a trip out of the bush, you know. You go back to the hospital and you spend a few days in  
29 the hospital which to us was R&R. I mean, hospital stay was R&R. You got to sleep in a  
30 real bed, you had clean sheets. Sometimes, you know, like in the hospitals were air  
31 conditioned so it was like, man, this is R&R so you almost wished you could

1 medevac'ed. I never had malaria, never—and I'm glad now I never had heat stroke or  
2 anything over there so I guess I'm lucky. But all the stuff you dealt with, I mean, you  
3 were talking about the things that you deal with in the jungle, I actually made a list and I  
4 wish I had brought it, of all the stuff like that you deal with in the jungle. I know I won't  
5 ever think about all of them but, I mean, just the things that most people don't think  
6 about. The mosquitoes at night would just eat you alive. They would just bit right through  
7 your clothes, so that's why we would cover up with those ponchos liners at night. Even  
8 though it was hot, if you didn't cover up with your poncho liner the mosquitoes would eat  
9 you alive right through your clothes, you know. They'd always go after your nuts for  
10 some reason. I hope I don't offend anybody by saying that, but they would just eat you  
11 alive so you would just have to cover up. We had—I mean, everything over there was  
12 like all the bugs that we have here in the States were on steroids, you know. They were  
13 not little bugs over there. They were huge. Everything was big, you know, like  
14 mosquitoes were bigger and more vicious. The scorpions, you know, we dealt with them,  
15 the big old black scorpions, centipedes in the jungle were huge, you know, eight inches  
16 long and an inch or so wide across the back or inch and half and big old orange pinchers.  
17 I mean they just looked terrible. I didn't see a whole lot of snakes but all this stuff that  
18 was there, ants everywhere, flies, it was just the worst of conditions. But, you know,  
19 some people, I think, even my family members when you tell them you were having to  
20 stay in the jungle at night for some reason people that haven't ever been in this situation  
21 have a tendency to think, "Oh, well, you set in at night and you kind of build you a camp  
22 fire and you sit around the camp fire and sing,"—what is it? Kum-la.

23 KC: "Kumbaya."

24 LR: "Kumbaya" and you roast weenies and you have nice time and then you go to  
25 bed and get some sleep and the next morning, you know, you are back to square one.  
26 That's not the way it was over there. I mean, when we set in there were absolutely, you  
27 couldn't have fires or anything like that because it would give away your position so  
28 there was none, there was no camping out to it. What we would do when we sat in the  
29 first thing you did was you, if there were no foxholes already there we had to dig a  
30 foxhole. We had to dig something for some kind of cover if we were to get hit. You dug a  
31 foxhole, get dug in, once you get that you could get you some chow, we called it,

1 something to eat. Most of the time or if we had time to build what we called a stove we  
2 would take a C-rat can and open up a small can of C-rations and you could take it and cut  
3 holes in the sides of it all the way around and sometimes we had those, it's called a heat  
4 tab. You could drop those heat tabs in there and light it and you have you a little fire. We  
5 never did this at night. You never had a fire at night. If you had warm chow it would be  
6 in the morning after the sun came up or you could eat before the sun went down at night.  
7 But at night time even guys that smoked cigarettes learned to get down in the foxhole,  
8 cover themselves up with a poncho liner and light their cigarette, then they would stand  
9 back up and they learned how to cup the cigarette to where it wouldn't glow when they—  
10 well, it would glow but not so bad that an enemy sniper or something like that could get a  
11 bead on them and shoot them. Even at that, the whole deal was to not give away your  
12 position because that's what it was all about. Anyway, you had those conditions like that.  
13 When it rained, you know, you were just out in the rain. If you were out on an ambush or  
14 an LP, a listening post, well, you didn't have the convenience of your piece of plastic you  
15 carried around in your pack so you just slept in the rain. I mean, I can remember lots of  
16 times on ambushes—not lots of times. I can remember one time in particular where we  
17 sat in and we were on a kind of a hillside over looking a trail so we thought this was an  
18 ideal place to set up an ambush. We did. There was some—the hillside had been diked  
19 off and they had terraces that went up so we sat in just behind a dike, a rice paddy dike  
20 for the night. It was great cover. If we got hit or anything if we had an ambush go off on  
21 the trail down there we were in a great position, you know. However, it came a big ass  
22 rain that night and all that water comes running down the hill filling up those rice paddy  
23 dikes so all night long I laid there in water up to my neck with my rifle up on top of the  
24 rice paddy dike to keep it as dry as I could and trying to get some sleep. You would stand  
25 watch in the water. You were just neck deep in water and you could just look over the  
26 rice paddy dike and that's the way—

27 KC: Were you able to sleep at all?

28 LR: Nah, not really.

29 KC: I didn't think so.

30 LR: I mean, you do get to a point over there where you can just about sleep in  
31 anything. As a matter of fact, I fell asleep while firefights were going on. We would be in

1 a company-sized movement and the front of the column would get hit and they would be  
2 in a firefight and they would just tell us to sit down and wait until they needed us and so  
3 while we were sitting there waiting a lot of us would fall asleep. I mean, you were so  
4 freaking tired we got to where we could just about sleep anywhere. Once you sat down it  
5 was like, ah, you know, you would just go to sleep. Anyway that's just kind of the way it  
6 was. But you deal with all of that stuff, just the, I don't know, the fear at night when the  
7 sun goes down it gets so dark in the jungle. You know, sometimes there would be some  
8 sounds but most of the time it was pretty quiet. But your eyes played tricks on you. You  
9 know, it's like you couldn't actually see in front of you so they would teach you how to  
10 look out of your peripheral vision and watch for movement and stuff so, you know, it was  
11 just you have all these things going on, you know. You hear bushes cracking and stuff so  
12 you have all this stuff going in your mind like you are fixing to get hit. It's just the idea  
13 of being there, you know, in total darkness, no light, with people out there sneaking  
14 around trying to get a hold of you and kill you. So it's pretty hard.

15 KC: Were you ever hit at night?

16 LR: Lots of times, yeah. Yeah, lots of times we got hit at night. That's usually  
17 when they would try to hit us was in the night time and we looked for them in the day. It  
18 was kind of a cat-and-mouse deal. They hunted at night and we hunted in the day.  
19 Usually when we got into big firefights with them it would be because we caught them in  
20 an ambush during the day. Well, we ambushed them at night but we would walk into like  
21 a bunker complex or something like that in the day and get into a big firefight. We might  
22 just walk right up face to face with them sometimes on a trail or something and get into  
23 firefights. Sometimes it was a day time ambush. We would ambush them in the day. We  
24 didn't spring a whole lot of ambushes right in the middle of the day. Usually if it was  
25 daylight it was early in the morning or late in the evening right before sundown. Most of  
26 our big ambushes we had were at night time. Usually it was after—I can remember one  
27 particular incident where they hit our main perimeter. We had some tanks with us and we  
28 hated tanks. We didn't want tanks with us because tanks were like a magnet. They  
29 were—we called them gook magnets because they just—I think their soldiers got some  
30 kind of special award if they could knock out a tank or a helicopter or something so they  
31 were like looking for tanks to hit. Anyway we had tanks with us and we knew we were

1 going to get hit. You always when you went on patrols with tanks. That was just the deal.  
2 We hated those things. Anyway, we had tanks with us and, sure enough, that night we got  
3 into. They hit our main perimeter. My squad, we were out on an ambush and we were  
4 right in the middle of some elephant grass. That's all the cover we had, just some  
5 elephant grass. We had an L-shaped trail that kind of came off the saddle off that hill they  
6 were on and kind of went down and made a ninety-degree turn to the right and the went  
7 down the hill. We were set up right there where it made the turn. We had a machinegun  
8 facing the long side of the trail back toward our perimeter and then the rest of us sat along  
9 the trail here going back along the side of it. Anyway, the main column got hit over here,  
10 there is shit going on everywhere, tracer rounds going off, it was just World War III  
11 going on over there, just terrible. They're calling us on the radio, you know, they're  
12 hollering on radio they have got gooks inside the perimeter and, of course, they knocked  
13 out a tank or two and all this crap. Finally when the thing started dying down they call us  
14 on the radio and they said, "They're heading your way so y'all need to get ready." Sure  
15 enough, it was no more than they had said that we could hear them coming, you know,  
16 you hear them bouncing canteens and stuff like that.

17 KC: Coming down the trail.

18 LR: Coming down the trail and so we knew where they were coming and, of  
19 course, we sprang the ambush on them and we killed two or three—I can remember two.  
20 I don't know how many actually, the next morning we found but there were a lot of blood  
21 trails. We always looked for blood trails because, you know, when they get wounded they  
22 would take running anyway. It was a successful ambush and all that stuff but with that  
23 said, yes, we did run into a lot of night time, get hit at night a lot like that. That's kind of  
24 the way they operated. They weren't really so much out beating the jungles looking for us  
25 during the day but at night time if they knew where we were set in they would a lot of  
26 times hit us. Especially, like I said, if we had anything special with us like tanks, good  
27 gosh, we were just, it was just a known fact we were going to get hit.

28 KC: There wasn't a way to sneak by, I guess.

29 LR: We knew when we left that day we were going to get in the shit. I mean that  
30 is just the way it was. We no more got to this perimeter that day that we got hit with  
31 mortars, got a mortar attack on us. We sat in at that same spot and so, I mean, when we

1 set in that night we were all saying, “Shit is going to hit the fan tonight. We know, it’s  
2 just a known fact.” Anyway, to answer your question, yes. That is a long way of getting  
3 around an answer to say yes we did get hit a lot at night.

4 KC: Okay. I have got a couple of questions I want to follow up here.

5 LR: Okay, all right.

6 KC: One, when you have been hit like this, you have been in this pretty  
7 significant firefight. When it’s over with what are you going through psychologically,  
8 emotionally, even physically? You would have to come down from this, I would assume.  
9 What do you do? What was the process for coming down?

10 LR: Well, like—well, it kind of depends on how bad it was, if you were directly  
11 involved or if you were indirectly involved, you know, it kind of had some different  
12 aspects. If you were directly involved in a firefight it’s like a huge adrenaline rush, I  
13 guess is all I can say. It’s like you have got so many emotions going, you know, you have  
14 got fear, and you have got that hyped up hyper sensitive thing going on, you have got all  
15 these things running through your mind that you have got to do, you want to do. You  
16 don’t want to get shot, you know. You’ve got your buddies around you shot, you got  
17 things happening around that you deal with so emotionally it’s like a train wreck, is all I  
18 can say, it’s just a cluster of crap going on that later you have to sit down and process, I  
19 guess. The down—when you would finally kind of start coming down from all of this I  
20 guess, you know, you probably just talk about it to your other, the other guys around you  
21 that didn’t get shot, you know. It’s all that kind of bullshit that you just sit around and  
22 talk about, “God almighty! So and so,” you know, “this and that happened.” You just  
23 start dealing with it, talking about it over and over to the guys. I guess that talking about  
24 it probably would be one way you kind of come down off of that crap. Guys handle it  
25 different, I guess. I guess that’s probably the way I dealt with it. Some guys, you know—  
26 you would get to the point, I guess, where you would have a more and more difficult time  
27 coming down off of it because sometimes you would get really angry. I know I found  
28 myself doing that a lot later in my tour. It went from just terror to anger and so it got to  
29 the point where when things like this would happen you would be so angry you just  
30 wanted to kill their ass. You just wanted to kill all of them. If you could just find them,  
31 get a hold of them. They would ambush and then haul ass and run, so our deal was cat

1 and mouse. It was always they were hitting us and taking off running so we never really,  
2 they never would really stand and fight. Our deal was if we could just ever get a hold of  
3 them. So you dealt with just that fear, the anger. You just got to the point where you just  
4 wanted to, I guess, just kill them all. Maybe it got more difficult as time went by to come  
5 down off of that stuff when you get into a firefight. I don't know. It's kind of difficult to  
6 say how you came down. We didn't have like a psychologist we could talk to or anything  
7 like that so that wasn't available. I guess just talking to your buddies around there about  
8 some of the stuff that went on probably helped kind of relieve some of the tension. Then I  
9 guess the more and more that you went through it, it got to be—I don't know. I can't say  
10 that firefights got easier. They didn't get easier or less stressful. I don't know how to put  
11 it. Maybe it wasn't as hard to come down off of it after you had been through it a few  
12 times as it was the first few times. All I can say is I guess we just talked to each other, I  
13 don't know. Honestly, I can't give you a good answer on that other than the fact that  
14 just—you know how it just takes adrenaline a little while to work its way through your  
15 body so while it's doing that you know you have got the shakes and you have got, you  
16 know, whatever how your body deals with it. I guess it's different with everybody, you  
17 know. I can't really remember being shaky nervous. I'm sure I was dealing with that.  
18 Probably just talking to the guys, you know, and talking to the guys around you to try to  
19 kind of come down off of it.

20 KC: Somewhat of a release, more of the side of trying to process.

21 LR: Just to visit with them about it, I guess, talk to them would be the only way.  
22 Maybe some of it, you know, you didn't really get over very quickly especially if you had  
23 one of the guys that you were close to, you know, get shot up and stuff like that. It was  
24 pretty hard to deal with. I can remember that and that was pretty tough. It may take two  
25 or three days or maybe a week or two, I don't know, to come down off of that and kind of  
26 work your way through that one. Just different things, I guess, different ways kind of like  
27 that talking. About the only really, that was really about the only way we had to deal with  
28 it, I guess, was just to talk to each other about it. We didn't really have any other  
29 resources or anything to go to.

30 KC: Right.

31 LR: It was us and that was it.

1           KC: You say that when you lose someone that was close to you, someone was to  
2 get hit or killed, is this something that you think about constantly for the two or three  
3 days or the week or however long it took or is something that is just kind of nagging at  
4 the back of your mind? How would that affect you?

5           LR: Well, yeah, I think it probably did. You know, back then we were young and  
6 we thought we were pretty tough so you probably tried to act like it didn't bother you but  
7 I think it probably did. We stuffed a lot of stuff down inside of us that we didn't talk  
8 about that probably we should have talked about. But, like I say, back then we didn't  
9 have a psychologist that we could go sit down and visit with so mainly it was just with  
10 the other guys. You were real careful about looking like you were weak. You didn't want  
11 to be seen as being a cry baby or anything like that so you kind of just stuffed stuff like  
12 that down inside you. But, yeah, if you got—if one of your buddies got wounded pretty  
13 bad or shot up it was pretty serious. I think, too, after you have been over there a while  
14 you had a tendency with new guys, you kind of kept them at an arm's length because  
15 usually if a guy was going to get, going to do something really stupid and get himself  
16 killed it would be after he had been there just a little while. The new guys would get shot  
17 up pretty bad pretty quick if they didn't catch on pretty quick how things worked or they  
18 didn't stick by somebody that had been there a while, you know. It took a while to work  
19 yourself into the inner circle, I guess, or whatever and be accepted by all the other guys  
20 there, which was pretty tough. Once you got accepted and you were in this circle then if  
21 you—you kind of let guys get a little closer to you. When you did that and one of those  
22 guys got shot up, one of the guys that you are really close to then it was a different  
23 situation. I mean it really, it affected you. I can remember in particular—I had a real good  
24 friend, I kind of, I got really close to him. He was a guy from Louisiana. He always called  
25 himself a coon ass and all this stuff, you know, and he was just a nice guy. A big, tall,  
26 lanky kid that he was just the nicest guy you could ever be around. Me and him got to be  
27 pretty good friends and all be darned if he didn't get shot all to shit. I helped carry him  
28 off a hill one time and he was shot full of holes. I remember setting him down on that  
29 poncho after we got him off the hill and, man, I sat him down and we were waiting for  
30 medevac choppers to get there and I remember just busting out bawling. I just couldn't  
31 take it anymore. It was like I had been there like a little over nine months and it had just

1 got to me, it just flat got to me. I just sat down and I just bawled like a baby. I said, “Man,  
2 I can’t take this anymore. They are going to kill my ass before I get out of here. I am  
3 going to die.” You know, after a while it just, I think it kind of like a—it kind of  
4 accumulates and builds up to the point where after a while you just bust out and you can’t  
5 take it no more. I guess at that point I just got to the point where I just didn’t give a shit  
6 anymore. I just got to the point where I was dead man walking, you know. It was like the  
7 old saying dead man a walking that is what we considered ourselves because it just we  
8 felt like it was just a matter of time until that magic bullet with our name on it came along  
9 and take us out and that’s kind of the way we lived.

10 KC: Now, this was, you say, maybe nine months into the tour. You still had  
11 another three or four months to go.

12 LR: Yeah.

13 KC: How was it—I mean, did you spend the rest of the time, is it from that point  
14 that you just said, “That’s it”?

15 LR: That’s basically it, yeah. You just get to the point where you just don’t care  
16 anymore. I am not going to say you don’t care. You do care. You want to go home. But  
17 in the back of your mind it’s like, “I’m not going home.” You realize that your chances of  
18 going home are about zero and none so you start dealing with that and so you kind of take  
19 on a new attitude where, you know—I think we got to the point even, or I got to the  
20 point, and I think most of us in my outfit got to the point where, you know, we didn’t  
21 mind—we would talk back to officers and stuff like that. I didn’t give a shit. It’s like  
22 what are they going to do? We always had that attitude, “What are they going to do to  
23 us?” What are they going to do to us if they, if we do something? If I were to go over  
24 there and slap that lieutenant up side the head, what are they going to do to me? They’re  
25 going to throw me in jail. If I go to jail, what have I got? I’ve got a bed to sleep in,  
26 probably an air-conditioned prison behind bars. Nobody is going to come get me, I’m  
27 safe. They’re not after me. They’re not going to kill me. I’ve got it made. I mean, I’m in  
28 hell here where I am. I’m in hell and if they send me to prison that’s like an R&R.

29 KC: How do you keep from doing something like that, then?

30 LR: Have what?

31 KC: How do you keep from doing something like that?

1           LR: Well, I guess it is just the idea that—I mean, we had that attitude but then in  
2 the back of your mind you're saying, you know, there may be a slim chance that I might  
3 make it home. I don't want to go to prison. But we did. I mean, there was a lot of times  
4 where I just, I would tell the squad leader, "I ain't doing it. I'm not doing it. I don't give a  
5 shit what you do to me," and, of course, usually what they do is say, "Okay, well, all  
6 right," and they go to the next guy. By then you know guys. The squad leader was one of  
7 your friends and so you know this guy I see in North Carolina all the time. He's a good  
8 friend of mine and he was my squad leader for a while. Me and him laugh about, you  
9 know—at one time he came to me and he told me, "Larry, we've got patrol this morning  
10 and you're going to be walking point." I just got so mad I took my helmet off and threw it  
11 on the ground and I just said, "F it!" you know, "I'm not doing it! I'm not doing it! I  
12 don't care what you do to me!" He was like, "Oh, well, okay. Well, I'll get so and so," so  
13 me and him have a laugh about it these days about my attitude over there.

14           KC: Probably wasn't funny back then, though.

15           LR: No, it wasn't funny back then but, I mean, now we laugh about it. You know,  
16 you just—I don't know how to explain it. You just develop an attitude. You don't want to  
17 go to jail but it's like if they do send me there it's R&R. We got to the point where  
18 getting wounded was, you know, it was R&R to us. I mean, getting shot, you know, we  
19 called them magic wounds or golden wounds if you got wounded bad enough to go  
20 home. It was a trip back to The World. I can remember times, you know, we sat down in  
21 a foxhole with incoming coming in and we hold our hand up out of the foxhole hoping  
22 we would get some shrapnel in our arm or something and we could get medevac'ed out  
23 of there because that wouldn't, you know, you weren't going to get killed if you got a  
24 piece of shrapnel in your arm or something so we would set out there with our arms stuck  
25 up hoping we would get—I know that's not right but, you know, we were to the point  
26 where we just we didn't care anymore it was so bad. It'd just be some time off to us. If  
27 you took a piece of shrapnel in the arm you might get medevac'ed out of there if you  
28 were lucky, and you didn't just get medevac'ed for any little old wound, you know. They  
29 would patch it up out there in the field if they could. If it was good enough that you could  
30 get medevac'ed, well, crud, like I said, you go back to a nice clean hospital back in the  
31 rear. You didn't have to stand watch. You could go to bed at night and let somebody else

1 stand watch. They have air conditioners, you know, where you could sleep at night. You  
2 could write letters back home. My gosh. I mean, to us that was like, you know, vacation,  
3 R&R. It was just one of those deals where you didn't want to get killed but it would be  
4 nice just to get wounded bad enough to get sent back to the hospital. It'd have been great.

5 KC: Now, earlier before we started the recording today you were talking about  
6 how you were scared. How the fear that would go through you when you were in a  
7 firefight. If you would, tell me what that was like again and then—I'm asking you to do a  
8 lot of things here—and then compare it to the fear you felt once you have reached the  
9 stage where, as you say, you didn't care any more. What was the difference between the  
10 two, or was there one?

11 LR: Well, yeah, I think there was a little bit of a change there in me. When like  
12 we was talking about a minute ago when you finally reach that point where you just don't  
13 care anymore. But, yeah, firefights are intense. I mean, it's the most intense, you know, I  
14 don't know long most of them lasted. I couldn't even tell you. Depending on what  
15 happened and everything I wouldn't think they would last over maybe thirty minutes or  
16 so but sometimes it seemed like forever. Maybe they lasted longer. I don't know. Like I  
17 said, when we were talking when we get in a firefight I had a tendency to get tunnel  
18 vision and just get zoned out, I guess. I don't know what it was. I focused on what I was  
19 doing and what I was supposed to do and I didn't have that thing around me of what so  
20 much was going on around me as much as just what was in front of me. But, yeah, the  
21 firefights were intense. I can't explain how bad they really were. I mean, it's like—I  
22 don't know. I can't describe it. I don't know how to say that but it was just bullets flying  
23 everywhere, guys getting hit and hollering and screaming. I would hear them hollering  
24 "Corpsman up!" and hollering, "Get the machinegun up! Guns up! Guns up!" We are not  
25 talking about Texas Tech, either. We are talking about the gun. The gun was a  
26 machinegun and when we would get hit like that they would try to pull the machinegun  
27 up front and get a machinegun up there to lay down some base fire out there and stuff.  
28 Just all the chaos around you and stuff, so, yeah, it was—I will speak for myself. I'm not  
29 going to say everybody but I was, it was a moment of terror, adrenaline pumping to the  
30 max. You're in survivor mode, I guess. You can't run. You know you don't—when you  
31 get hit like that, that running in the Marine Corps was not an option. I mean, that would

1 get you in huge trouble so we were trained to hit the ground and start firing back and  
2 move forward and so that's what you try to do. You would start—first thing you do when  
3 you get hit, hit the ground, you would try to find some cover if you could, if you couldn't  
4 you just prayed that they didn't zero in on you and you start firing back and try to shoot  
5 more bullets at them then they were shooting at you and get them to keep their head  
6 down long enough where you could move up and move through their position. It was just  
7 a terrorizing time, scared, the adrenaline pumping and all the things that go with that  
8 adrenaline rush, hyper vigilant, I guess is what you want to say, whatever; just a crazy  
9 time. I don't know how to say it. It was just chaotic. The other question was—

10 KC: Was, did your—did this level of fear, you used the word fear, did this change  
11 after you reached the point where you said you didn't care anymore?

12 LR: Yeah, I'm sorry. Once I got to that point where, I guess I got to the point  
13 where I just felt like I was going to die anyway so I might as well—I guess I felt like I  
14 was dead and I was just kind of walking around just waiting for my number to come up.  
15 At that point I guess I got a little more, not brave but maybe stupid, you know, you just  
16 go doing things that you didn't do before.

17 KC: Like what?

18 LR: Jumping up and shooting when you probably should have stayed down. I can  
19 remember one incidence that we got ambushed and I had—my best friend was up on the  
20 front, he was walking point that day and we walked right into an ambush. Well, when  
21 they opened up on us—the point man just about always got shot up or killed so my first  
22 thing when we got hit was my buddy was up on the front. He was walking point that day  
23 so in the back of my mind I thought, “He's is dead,” you know. It pissed me off so bad  
24 that I just went charging up there, you know. Me and a couple of other guys. I just  
25 charged up there. I didn't give a shit no more. I just, we just charged right through there  
26 and chased them right down the other side of the hill. We were right behind them and one  
27 of our COs, I don't know who it was. I'm not going to say it was. A lieutenant or who it  
28 was, somebody hollered at us and said, “Hold up right there! Don't go no further!” We  
29 stopped right there at tree line and we just shot the hell out of everything down there  
30 hoping we'd get those little shits. I don't know if we shot anybody. So you do things, I  
31 guess, a little more, I guess, I'm not going to say—maybe aggressive or you just do

1 things that maybe you wouldn't do before because you just don't care anymore. Your  
2 attitude changes. I mean, like I said, with my superiors and stuff it got to the point where  
3 we didn't care what they did to us anymore. We didn't care. It was just an attitude that  
4 you got, I guess. Probably a bad attitude, I guess is what you could call it. Nonetheless, I  
5 guess it came with all the stress and stuff that was involved. Sometimes guys would just  
6 freak out. I mean, we had guys that would just go bonkers, you know. They'd do really  
7 stupid stuff. We had guys that we would, you know, kill a bunch of gooks in an ambush  
8 or something and, you know, they would go off and just start shooting bodies full of  
9 holes, you know, and stuff like that. Usually when that happened the CO if he saw you do  
10 that they would usually say, "You know what? You need some time back in the rear." So  
11 they would send you back and let you have some time to kind of wind down and get over  
12 this. Then they would send you back out to the bush.

13 KC: Is this part of that anger that you were talking about before?

14 LR: I think it was.

15 KC: That you would get more and more angry.

16 LR: I think it was.

17 KC: Less scared and more angry?

18 LR: Yeah.

19 KC: Something like this was it a, do you think it was a mechanism by which an  
20 individual would try to gain some sort of satisfaction on that anger?

21 LR: It could be. Probably—there was a few times from my point of view that,  
22 yeah, that's probably what it was. Because, like I said a minute ago, we never really—  
23 well, not never. Most of the time this was a cat-and-mouse game. It was ambush them  
24 and they ambush us, ambush them and they ambush us. Most of the time they didn't just  
25 stand and fight, even when we would get involved, even in a firefight like that at a bunker  
26 complex, once we started really moving in on them they would pack their shit and haul  
27 butt, you know, they would be gone. We never really got them to stand and fight so you  
28 never could get really back at them. After a while I think the deal was if you could just  
29 ever get one of them to stand and fight you just wanted, you wanted somebody—you  
30 know, you little chickenshit, why don't you just stand up and fight? Quit this cat-and-  
31 mouse crap. Let's duke it out right here and get it over with, you know. Enough of this.

1 So you got really angry. I can see—you know, we talked about My Lai a minute ago  
2 about that incident and even though I don't condone what happened there I understand  
3 what happened there. I can see how it could have happened with us because we got to the  
4 point where we hated them. We hated the Vietnamese. I didn't even like the South  
5 Vietnamese people. We didn't like the ARVN troops. We didn't like the civilians  
6 because to me they were all gooks and I didn't like them. I hated them with a passion. To  
7 this day I have a problem with them. So our deal was we just hated them and wished  
8 somebody would at least stand up and fight. You got to the point where, like with My  
9 Lai, I think those guys probably got to the point where they finally felt like they had a  
10 situation where they caught them and they wanted to kill all of them. All it took was just  
11 a little spark that got it going and it was just like a snowball once it starts then it just  
12 spreads and you have a huge, you have a massacre like that. I honestly—it never  
13 happened with us but I see how it could have happened. It wouldn't have bothered us to  
14 do something like that. I mean, I think the reason that sometimes—well, with us we never  
15 were really involved with villages a whole lot because we were up in the northern part of  
16 Vietnam and there weren't a whole lot of villages up along the DMZ and stuff. If they  
17 were they were little bitty villages. I can see how, you know, it could have happened with  
18 us. I will say this, too, I think that's where our leadership came in. We had some really  
19 good leadership, I feel like. When I look back on it, you know I hated them then. I felt  
20 like they were all a bunch of pricks but now that I look back on it, you know, I see how  
21 those guys that were lieutenants and captains and stuff like that, they were just like us.  
22 They had a job to do. They knew what their job was and they were just trying to do it.  
23 Even though it involved getting some people killed and wounded, those guys were human  
24 just like me and nowadays when we get together with them I can see how the scars of war  
25 have hurt them the same as me. They have a lot of issues about the fact that they sent  
26 guys into battle and actually got guys killed, shot up, and wounded and stuff like that. I  
27 see where they're human just like I am so I have been able to forgive them for a lot of  
28 that stuff. I don't have any issues about that. But I can see where if one of them would  
29 have just let down on their leadership and not been the leader that they were, how it could  
30 have happened with us real easy, too. If we had been in a village and received some kind  
31 of fire from that village we would have blown them all away.

1 KC: A matter of leadership there at the platoon level, even.

2 LR: I think so, yeah. I just feel like we had some really good leadership that  
3 would have held us back in a situation like that. Even though we weren't, again, around a  
4 whole lot of large villages or anything like that up where we were, we did run into a few  
5 of them, you know, but they were usually just a little small village up in the mountains or  
6 something like that. For the most part we weren't down in the rice paddies and stuff  
7 down in the low lands a whole lot. We were there every now and then but not much.  
8 Most of our stuff was up along the DMZ and it's really, most of it's all mountainous and  
9 stuff like that except for a few places. We were up in the jungle all the time when I was  
10 there.

11 KC: How would you deal with a village or a hamlet as you encountered them?  
12 How would you move through it? What would be the approach?

13 LR: Well, usually the first thing to do when we'd run into one it was you would  
14 checked it out, first of all. If you were on point or something like that you would just hold  
15 up and then you would observe for a little bit and see what was going on, kind of look for  
16 any kind of signs of maybe an ambush or anything like that going on. But then it would  
17 get to the point where you would just have to move through it. Most of the time if it  
18 was—and here again, Vietnam, and I think it's that way now, but back then we had areas  
19 where we had—we had three different types. We had free fire zones, we had limited fire  
20 zones, and we had no fire zones so it kind of depended on where you were. If were in an  
21 area where there wasn't supposed to be anybody there then we treated those villagers  
22 with a lot of, I don't know, care. I don't know what word I'm looking for here but we  
23 didn't trust them because we felt like if they were still there they were probably—if they  
24 weren't enemy they were enemy sympathizers. So if they were and they still had a village  
25 up there and there were NVA up there then it told us that they were helping them out  
26 because the villagers that were friendly to us would not stick around long, you know.  
27 They'd haul butt and be back somewhere else. Anyway, basically it was just kind of  
28 move through them, you know. We very seldom set up very close to a village. There was  
29 a few times we sat up just outside of a ville and tried to set up some ambushes and stuff at  
30 night. We didn't really like doing that but we did a time or two. It was kind of just  
31 another brick, you know, in the road or another rock in the road. You just kind of deal

1 with it and go on about your business. It wasn't a big deal. When we are talking about  
2 villages, you know, like I said, we are not talking about a town, you know. We are not  
3 talking about moving through a little small town or anything like that. We are talking  
4 about a village, a ville would be just a few grass hooches, maybe a couple or three and  
5 that's it, you know. No more than maybe four or five people in it. We never saw—that  
6 was another thing. We never or rarely, well, never. I'm going to just say never because I  
7 don't remember any cases where we actually saw a male person in those villages. It was  
8 all females and children. That told us that the males were either NVA, NVA sympathizers  
9 or they were just scared of us afraid that we were going to do something to them just  
10 because they were males in the village. They would either haul butt when they saw us  
11 coming or something, you know, we didn't know what. That's why it just kind of would  
12 set off alarm bells with us when we would go through a village. If we didn't see any  
13 males it told us—you know, when you have got little kids running around with women  
14 there you know dern well there is some males around there somewhere and they are not  
15 there so where are they? You start asking yourself, you know, what are they? Are they  
16 NVA? Are they NVA sympathizers? Or are they just hiding out in the bushes while we  
17 are going through? What's going on? What's happening? We was always real careful  
18 around villages because there was always some activity going on around there.

19 KC: Well, let me shift gears here a little bit. We have been talking about some  
20 pretty heavy stuff with combat and I don't want to say the routine but the effects of it and  
21 all of that. Eventually you build up an awful lot of things, frustration, emotions, you  
22 know, the adrenaline highs and the crashes and then all these things, the physical  
23 exhaustion and the toll this takes on you. Eventually it's going to be to your best interest  
24 to get into the back, to go back to the rear. Were you ever sent back to the rear for any  
25 R&R, extended R&R, out-of-country R&R, in-country R&R?

26 LR: Yeah. We had—the way they did us was there was probably two or three  
27 times while I was there we would go on operations and stuff and some of them would last  
28 anywhere—it depended on what the operation was but some of them would last  
29 anywhere from maybe a week to, I can remember some of them going like thirty, forty-  
30 five days. We would go on operations and usually when we would get back off of an  
31 operation which was—an operation was like a, we talked about patrols, sizes of patrols,

1 squads, platoon, and then company-sized. Once—I guess maybe, I don't know how the  
2 Marine Corps works it but when they go on operation it was a multi-company deal so we  
3 were in a huge area so, you know, it might be Kilo Company, Mike Company, and Lima  
4 and it maybe, you know, different companies all up in this area and it was an operation to  
5 cover a whole huge area up in there. We would do that but—I'm sorry. The question  
6 again? I am thinking about 9,000 things here and I—

7 KC: No, no, no. That's perfectly fine. The original question, and we can always  
8 go back to other things, as well, was about getting time off.

9 LR: Right, R&R.

10 KC: Time back in the rear or R&R.

11 LR: R&R, yeah, in a company operation. Usually when we would get back off an  
12 operation, not usually but sometimes, they would try to give us a little down time to get  
13 us—they would get us back to the rear. They would send us—we had a place, our  
14 company, it was a place called Cua Viet. It was somewhere, I'm not sure, I'm guessing  
15 somewhere around Da Nang out on the coast. It was right out on the beach and so—they  
16 had tents and stuff out there and it was just a little what they called in-country R&R.  
17 They would pull us back there as a company and we'd spend three or four days out there  
18 just kind of resting and recuperating. We'd get haircuts and get shaved and get some  
19 clean clothes and all that stuff and just kind of wind down. It would give you an  
20 opportunity, you didn't have to stand watch or anything like that and get some sleep and  
21 all of that. They did that a few times. Then we had R&Rs that were individual R&Rs that  
22 you could put in for. While I was over there I took R&R and went back to Hawaii.

23 KC: Because you are married.

24 LR: Yeah, and that's where I got married. But they had R&Rs to different places  
25 like Bangkok and Singapore, I don't know where all. They had different places. Australia  
26 was one of them. What you would do on those they would just come out there in the field  
27 every so often and they would give each squad maybe an R&R so the squad leader would  
28 come out there and say, "Hey, we have got an R&R to Bangkok? Does anybody want it?"  
29 Somebody would, "Hey! Yeah, I'll take that." "Okay, you've got it." Come a certain  
30 date, well, they'd fly you out of the bush and, you know, you'd do that. Yeah, we had  
31 R&Rs occasionally. If a guy, like we talked about a minute ago, we had some guys that

1 just would go a little bit bonkers so sometimes when they would do that they'd send them  
2 back to the rear for a few days just to kind of get down off of that whatever they were on,  
3 that adrenaline high or whatever and kind give them some downtime, I guess, to get back  
4 emotionally where they should be. We had a little bit of downtime occasionally but it  
5 wasn't very often and it wasn't that long when we had it. R&R to Hawaii was seven days.  
6 Most R&Rs were anywhere from like four days to—I think Hawaii was one of the longer  
7 ones. It was seven. Australia might have been a seven. So they had different time periods  
8 to different places.

9 KC: What sort of things did you do for recreation, say, in-country R&R?

10 LR: In-country R&R. Well, in-country, like when we come back as a company  
11 like that, they'd pass out beer, you know, that was a big deal. They'd have beer coming  
12 out. They'd pass out Cokes, cold Cokes, which we never got cold anything over there,  
13 drinks. Sometimes we'd get hot chow from the chow hall which we didn't get, very  
14 seldom, you know. Most of what we ate was C-rations the whole time so hot chow to us  
15 was like, you know, it was great. We would get hot chow, actually have a cot to sleep on  
16 with a—we'd still sleep with our poncho liner or something, but we did at least have a cot  
17 to lay on. You didn't have to be out in the rain or anything. If it rained you had a tent you  
18 were in. It was just, we didn't really have to do anything. Sometimes they'd bring in a  
19 USO (United Services Organization) show. One of the nights we would have a USO  
20 show, live entertainment, you know, a band or something. They'd have a movie.  
21 Sometimes they'd bring a movie film out there so we would go to the movie. We called it  
22 the flick, go to the flick. It just, basically it was really just a time to just relax. I mean,  
23 they really didn't—the only thing they really would make us do would be get a haircut  
24 and take showers. Well, I don't think they had to make anybody make a shower but we  
25 did have an opportunity to take a shower and get cleaned up, which on operations we  
26 didn't have that. I can remember going on operations for thirty days or so and no bath, no  
27 clean clothes, no nada. Your clothes would rot off your body, so I mean there is no  
28 telling—we didn't smell each other but I am sure we must have smelled pretty rank after  
29 about thirty days out there on an operation with no showers. You would have an  
30 opportunity to kind of clean up and shave, you know, and get a haircut and you kind of  
31 felt like a human being again, you know. Then you could just kind of hang around the

1 area. We could go swimming out in the ocean. You know, they didn't have a lot of—we  
2 didn't have like jet skis to ride around or anything like that but, you know, you'd go out  
3 there and swim. Some of the guys had some makeshift like blow up, like a thing to float  
4 around on or something, you know, just a time to relax, I guess is all I can say. There was  
5 really nothing, no demands out of you other than just get a haircut, clean up, and relax,  
6 kick back.

7 KC: What were your relations like when you came in from the field after one of  
8 these extended operations? You go back to the rear in Cua Viet. What were your relations  
9 like with those individuals whose jobs were in the rear, with the rear echelon? What was  
10 your relationship like?

11 LR: Well, we kind of—I don't know. It was kind of like we sort of felt, I hate to  
12 say this, but we kind of felt better than they, we felt better than them because we knew  
13 that those guys, every one of them wouldn't want our position. They didn't want to do  
14 and be where we had been but yet they wanted the ribbon that went on our chest when we  
15 got back, that Combat Action Ribbon. Every one of them wanted that. It kind of made  
16 you feel like you were a step above them, you know. It was like I've been somewhere  
17 you haven't been and you won't ever be able to be there. So I guess that sounds kind of  
18 chicken about it, but I think we felt better than they were. We didn't really—it wasn't one  
19 of those deals where we would get into rippets with them or anything like that where we  
20 would get into fights but, you know, I mean were, they were welcome around us and stuff  
21 like that. It was just that you just kind of felt like I've been somewhere you haven't been,  
22 you know, just kind of felt for a change you felt good. I'm alive. I've been in combat and  
23 you haven't, so ha ha. I guess I mean I don't know any other way to put it. There  
24 wasn't—I guess tension-wise there was no tension, really. It was just that—just an idea,  
25 maybe pride. Maybe that's what I want to say. We had a sense of pride that we had  
26 actually accomplished what we had accomplished and that they haven't. We had—a lot  
27 of those guys would come around, you know, and they wanted to talk to us and shoot the  
28 shit about a lot of that stuff that went on. They would ask us questions and stuff like that  
29 which we were glad to tell them. There really wasn't any tension or anything like that.  
30 They were Marines the same as we were, and I think we realized even though they were  
31 office pogues, we called them, even though they were pogues, we still needed them to get

1 our paycheck out so as long as they got my paycheck, you know, I guess they had a job  
2 and I had a job. I felt like, you know, we were just a little bit step, we were a step above  
3 them, I guess maybe.

4 KC: All right, now, you've been to the rear, say, you have got two, three, four  
5 days. You have got a haircut, you got a shower, hot chow, cot, ocean to swim in, maybe a  
6 little spending money while you are back there, you have this sense of accomplishment,  
7 this sense of pride. Like you said, you see yourself as being, in one sense, superior to  
8 people who hadn't been out. You are feeling good when you are in Cua Viet. R&R or in-  
9 country leave is over. What's it like going back to the field?

10 LR: Well, hmm, I guess it's like (pause)—I guess it's like—I don't know how to  
11 put it. I guess when you are headed back out, of course, you go through the same routine  
12 like we talked about earlier, you know, you have got to get—they would always take our  
13 weapons away from us, all of our—we didn't have any, no frags, no live rounds, no  
14 weapons of any kind while we were back. Well, we did have our weapon but we didn't  
15 have any bullets or rounds to use in it so it was just if you had an M-16 you would still  
16 have your M-16. That was one of the things we did in the rear was clean our weapons and  
17 get them all back in order. But they would reissue all of that stuff and we would head out  
18 and it would be like, I don't know, you were back to—I don't know. You were back in  
19 the shit again, I guess. I don't know. It was like maybe getting on an airplane that they  
20 have told you already that the motors are bad on it so you're afraid something—you're  
21 going to get on it anyway, but you got to get on it to get to where you are going but you  
22 are wondering if you are going to make it there or not. It's kind of like you're headed out  
23 again and you're back to that situation of, well, you know, R&R is over. We had a great  
24 time, you know, we'll just have to see who lives through the next month or two or three  
25 or whatever until we get back home or whatever. I guess it was just you go from being  
26 relaxed and everything going smooth to it's like being slapped in the face and you're  
27 back out there in the bush again. I guess it's the same way like getting medevac'ed, you  
28 know. You get medevac'ed, you go back to the rear, they get you fixed up and then they  
29 send right back out to the bush. I mean, it's like everything is great for a little bit and then  
30 you're back in the shit again so it's just a big transition, I guess. It takes you a little while  
31 to kind of get—once you've been back in the rear like that it takes you a few days to get

1 back in the swing of things. I guess being on R&R it takes you a few days. I mean, even  
2 though you know what it's like and what you are facing, it still takes you a few days to  
3 kind of get back in that mode of combat, you know, back in all the stuff, just the feelings  
4 that you have. Your feelings have kind of been—it's like when you go on R&R it's like  
5 wow, you know, you forget what it's like to be in the real world. I mean, like the simple  
6 things, like turning on the faucet and getting a drink of water, of clean water, you know.  
7 You can drink right out of the faucet, nice clean water. It's amazing, you know. Or you  
8 forget what it's like to have a hot meal or sleep in a nice bed, to walk down a street  
9 without worrying about somebody shooting you. Just all the little things, you know, little  
10 things that you don't think of you get used to that and then when you come back, well, all  
11 of that's over. You're back to this again, so it takes you a few days to kind of get used to  
12 being without all this stuff that you got used to when you're on R&R. It's kind of the  
13 same way when you first get there. It's just like, I don't know, transition periods. It takes  
14 you a while. You kind of used to something and then all of a sudden it's taken away from  
15 you so it takes you a while to get used to being without it. I guess that's really not a good  
16 way to put it, I guess. I guess that's the best I can do for you.

17 KC: No, that's a great way to put it, as a matter of fact. Earlier today before we  
18 started the interview you were talking about, you were talking about what combat does to  
19 a person before we started the interview. All right, we've got you, we had you in combat,  
20 we have got you back in R&R, we've got you back in combat again. If you can, your  
21 earlier description of this, I should have had the recorder on then because I think it was  
22 just a fantastic description, but can you explain to me what combat does to an individual,  
23 then what it does—the effects it has later, what it means to you?

24 LR: Well, combat, I guess all I can say is it affects you in a way that you can't, to  
25 me, you can't ever get over it or fix it. Once it happens to you it's kind of like, I guess,  
26 with a women, once you've lost your virginity it's something you'll never have again.  
27 Once you have been in combat, it's like you have lost that innocence that you had before  
28 and you don't have it anymore and you will never get it again. You know, we talked  
29 about how when your friends and stuff you have here at home and then you go off to war  
30 and when you come back it's like you don't have anything in common with them. You  
31 can't relate to them in any way because they have a whole different set of values that you

1 don't have anymore. You've got a different set of values and you've got a different way  
2 of thinking that they can't possibly understand why you think that way or why you do  
3 things. Combat, it just changes you from the inside out and once it changes you it's just a  
4 done deal. It's forever. Then as time goes by, I know in my situation it—I guess it  
5 changes your thinking. It changes the way you deal with people. It changes your attitude,  
6 your thoughts, all of that stuff. Over the years, you know, I've had problems with it and  
7 stuff that I didn't even know I had. I've had people tell me that, "Well, you're not the  
8 same as you were before you went to Vietnam," and they're right. I don't feel different. I  
9 feel like I'm the same but I'm not. I realize now I'm not. I didn't realize that for years. I  
10 thought I was and it really pissed me off when they would say stuff like that, but now  
11 over the years I've come to realize that I wasn't the same person when I came back. It  
12 just—I don't know any other way to put it then it just flat, it just changes your inside and  
13 you just don't have anything in common with people that have never been in combat. I'm  
14 not saying you don't have anything in common with them. That's not true. There's  
15 certain things that you just don't have in common with them at that point and you  
16 probably never will again and so you have to just learn to deal with that and you have to  
17 work around it. Unfortunately, when we came back from Vietnam the public wasn't  
18 really in the mood to work with us and help us out a little bit on getting readjusted to  
19 what it's like to be back in the real world. We were kind of just thrown into the wolf den  
20 and they started chewing on us. We were told to just get over it and that the war, we  
21 weren't in a war anymore and we needed to get over it and so I think that caused a lot of  
22 problems. Basically, all I can say is, I guess, it's just, it is a life-changing experience that,  
23 really, you will never ever get over. It just affects you from the inside out and it's forever  
24 once it's happened. It can't be fixed. It can be dealt with but it can't be fixed. I hope that  
25 explains it in a way maybe that people can understand, hopefully.

26 KC: All right, now, having described all the things you have described today one  
27 thing that you are looking for when you arrive there in Vietnam in your first day is the  
28 last day, is getting out of there. Were you keeping track of what day you were leaving?  
29 Did you know roughly what day it was?

30 LR: Yep. I could tell you, yep.

31 KC: What day was it?

1 LR: Oh, when I left?

2 KC: What was the last day you were going to spend in Vietnam in your count  
3 down?

4 LR: Oh, well, now, that I can't tell you. I'm not sure what you are asking there.  
5 But, yes, absolutely you kept track of it. I had a calendar I carried with me. Everybody  
6 had one. We called them short-timer calendars. When you first get there it's not a short-  
7 timer calendar. It's a long-timer calendar. So what I did, I carried one and so I wouldn't  
8 even look at that thing because time went by so slow over there. Gosh almighty. That's  
9 the longest year I ever spent in my whole life. It was like just time drug by. All you were  
10 looking for is, like you said, that day when you got to go home. So time just had a  
11 tendency to just drag by. What I would do is I would not even look at my calendar until I  
12 just couldn't stand it anymore and then I would pull it out and I would start asking guys,  
13 "Now what it today? What's today?" Somebody always knew what it was, you know, and  
14 so I would—I had little circles. I would circle out the little dates, you know, so if I could  
15 go along and circle out a week or so or two, ah, man it was like, "Look, man, that  
16 calendar is getting shorter all the time," you know. After a while, you know, you get it  
17 kind of passed six months or so and then it's a short-timer calendar. You're counting  
18 down those days. Yeah, we were, everybody was aware of how many days you had left  
19 in-country and stuff like that. Yeah, you kept up with it. Like I say, I didn't keep up with  
20 every day, day by day, because it made time just go past so much slower. What I tired to  
21 do is just forget about it for as long as I could and then finally when I just couldn't stand  
22 it anymore I would pull my calendar out and then mark off a few days. Now, I did notice  
23 the shorter I got the less I could without looking at my calendar. It got down from  
24 marking off a week or so to marking off a couple of days or so, you know. Anyway, but  
25 as far as actually knowing the exact date when I was going to leave, no, I didn't know  
26 that. I am not sure anybody really did out where we were.

27 KC: Yeah, it obviously varied from time to time and person to person.

28 LR: Yeah, we weren't, in other words, if we got there they didn't say, "Okay,  
29 December the 15<sup>th</sup> you are out of here." They didn't tell us that. It was like we had a—  
30 back then we had a twelve-month commitment so, in other words, once you got there  
31 then they would—actually, we were always told once you left the States that was

1 considered overseas and you had twelve months from that date. That wasn't exactly the  
2 way it was so anyway we—it would be one of those deals where you would be just out in  
3 the bush one day and they'd come along and say, "Hey, so and so, get your shit packed  
4 up. You're out of here." You know, "Your rotation date is up so you're going back to the  
5 rear." That's the way they would do it. So a guy just kind of had to hang in there. Now, in  
6 my situation what happened to me was that I got wounded in August so I was back in the  
7 rear. We were actually back in the rear when I had gotten transferred—they pulled 3<sup>rd</sup>  
8 Marine Division out in like the first part of October, I believe, in 1969 and so all of us  
9 guys had been there a while. They transferred us over to 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division so I got sent  
10 to Mike Company 3/7. So anyway I had been wounded in August with 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine  
11 Division and had to have an operation and all that stuff. Well, I was getting short so I had  
12 actually gotten me a—I had talked to our top sergeant and they were going out on a big  
13 operation that was going to take a while so I had talked to him and I said, "Look, you  
14 know, my rotation date is getting close." I said, "Would it be okay if I stayed back here in  
15 the rear and helped out the supply sergeant? He needs some help and I will help him out  
16 until my rotation date comes." He basically said, "Yeah, that would be a good idea." I  
17 was actually going to be in the rear, you know, for a week or so before my rotation date,  
18 which was great. I mean it was like I was doing good. Well, I wasn't even there a day  
19 until this shrapnel in my face swelled up real big and got infected. They had to medevac  
20 me and they medevac'ed me and then, of course, from there I had to have another surgery  
21 and I was in the hospital at Da Nang for a couple of weeks. From that point the doctor  
22 came in one day and said, "We're going to send you back to the rear," or he said, "I'm  
23 going to keep you for another week," is what it was. I said, "Well, look, Doctor, my  
24 rotation date is getting close." I said, "I need to get back to my unit so I can rotate." He  
25 said, "Well, when is your rotation date?" I said, I think it was back then it was like the  
26 30<sup>th</sup> of December or something like that. I can't remember the exact date. But anyway it  
27 was the later part of December, first of January. He said, "Man, why didn't you tell me  
28 that when you first come in and we could have just done this earlier and medevac'ed you  
29 right out?" I said, "Well, I didn't know anything about it." He said, "Well, what do you  
30 want to do?" He said, "I can keep you for another week." He said, "I'm going to keep  
31 you a week because I want to make sure that thing doesn't get infected again." He said, "I

1 can keep you a week and send you back to your unit and you can rotate there, or if you  
2 want to I will medevac you out of here.” I said, “And when if I take the medevac deal  
3 when would I be out of here?” He said, “As soon as they get a plane.” He said, “They  
4 probably have one coming in in a day or two.” I said, “Get my ass out of here.” He said,  
5 “Okay.” So they medevac’ed me out and after about three or four days after that. I was  
6 there to see Bob Hope, the Bob Hope show at Da Nang. I was in the hospital at the time  
7 and they took a bunch of us over there from the hospital to watch Bob Hope and all of  
8 that. We did that and I think it was the very, like the next day or day after that they sent  
9 me over to the airbase and I was on a medevac plane headed back to San Francisco.  
10 Within, I don’t know, ever how many hour flight that is, twelve hours or fourteen or  
11 whatever it was, well, I landed in San Francisco and I was back home or back in—I don’t  
12 call San Francisco home, but I was back in the States. I will say that.

13 KC: Knowing you as I do, San Francisco is not your home.

14 LR: San Francisco in 1969 was not a friendly place for a guy just back from  
15 Vietnam that had been in the Marine Corps. The sooner I got out of there the better.

16 KC: All right, well, you talk about that. What was—how were you greeted in San  
17 Francisco? What was the environment like when you were there?

18 LR: We got off the plane—we landed, if I remember right, it was kind of late in  
19 the evening. It was not full daylight. It seemed like the sun was kind of going down or  
20 something. We got off that plane and the plane I was on it was a medevac plane. We had  
21 a lot of guys on stretchers and stuff like that that they were unloading. I was what they  
22 called walking wounded so I was able to walk off the plane. But when we walked off the  
23 plane there was, I don’t know, maybe a couple of people out there that from the—I don’t  
24 even remember who they were from, like the Veterans of Foreign War, VFW or  
25 something and they handed each one of us this little round medallion and that was it. I  
26 didn’t get a thank you. I didn’t get a welcome home. I didn’t get a kick in the ass. I didn’t  
27 get nothing. That was it. That’s how I came home. They sent us to a hospital. I was in the  
28 hospital for about, I don’t know, several days, three or four days.

29 KC: Where was the hospital?

30 LR: I don’t remember the airbase. It was an Air Force base somewhere around  
31 San Francisco. I don’t which one it was. I don’t even remember now. I probably knew it

1 at one time. I knew then, I'm sure. Then they put me on a jet and medevac'ed me to  
2 Naval Air Station Corpus Christi and then I was in the hospital there about a week and  
3 then got some leave and came home. Of course, once I hit Texas, Corpus Christi, I felt  
4 like I was back home, man. I can hitchhike from here back home. I can get on a bus.  
5 There is a lot of things I can do to get back home. It was just a matter of time.

6 KC: What was it like to be back home?

7 LR: It was great. I mean, it was like I survived, you know. For a while it was like  
8 I was glad to be alive. I just wanted to get home and see my family, my wife and all of  
9 that stuff. My wife was wanting to come down to Corpus Christi to see me and I wouldn't  
10 let her. I told her, "No." I said, "You can't get on the base," you know. "You just can't  
11 walk in out here and come out here and see us like you can at a hospital in town or  
12 something." I said, "You really can't see me much." I said, "I'm going to get leave time  
13 so within a couple of days I'm going to be home." That's kind of the way we played it.  
14 Well, I went to the doctor and finally got—I had to go see the doctor one day and that  
15 guy told me, he said, "We're going to have to keep you for a couple of weeks." I said,  
16 "What for?" He said, "Well, we have to keep, we have to observe you for a while. It's  
17 mandatory that we keep you here for a while and make sure you don't have malaria." I  
18 said, "I don't have malaria." He said, "Well, we have go to keep you around." I said, "Let  
19 me tell you something, Doc. I'm going to go home." This attitude was coming out. I said,  
20 "I'm going home." I said, "I'm going to give you a couple of days but I'm going home."  
21 He said, "Well, you're not leaving without a leave." I said, "Okay." I had to go back to  
22 see him, I don't know, I probably had to go see him every day or a couple of days later or  
23 something. Anyway, at that point I was pissed. I went in there and I told him, I said, I  
24 said, "When can I go home, Doctor?" He said, "Ah, we're going to keep you about  
25 another week or so." I said, "Let me tell you something." I said, "I'm going home  
26 tomorrow." I said, "It's either going to be with leave or it's going to be without leave. I  
27 don't give a shit." I said, "It's up to you on that deal. But tomorrow I'm heading home.  
28 I'm going to see my family." He said, "No, you're not." I said, "To hell I ain't. You  
29 watch me. I'm going." I said, "You can either get me leave or you can call the MPs.  
30 They'll be looking for me because I am going A-W-O-L. I don't give a shit." I said, "I've  
31 been in Vietnam for a year and I haven't seen my family. I'm going home." Miraculously

1 the next morning they come up and said, “You’ve got leave papers.” “All right. Good  
2 deal.” At that point I packed all my shit. I was lucky. I had a cousin that was stationed at  
3 Naval Air Station Corpus Christi. So he’d come over to see me and all that stuff and we  
4 had kind of been messing around. He told me, he said, “As soon as you get leave, you  
5 call me.” He said, “I’ll take leave and we’ll go home.” I said, “Okie doke.” Man, when I  
6 got my leave papers I called him up and I said, “Ben, I’ve got leave papers,” and he said,  
7 “Okay. Can you wait until this weekend?” I said, “Fine with me. I’ll wait right here.”  
8 That weekend, I think this was like on a, it was probably on a Thursday or something so  
9 the very next day that afternoon, well, he came by and got me and we were pay-yayed out  
10 of there. We were headed back to Lubbock. I came home and that’s kind of the way it  
11 worked out.

12 KC: What was the reunion like with your family?

13 LR: Well, it was good. I mean, you know, of course, there again, I had changed  
14 and they recognized that right away. My wife, you know, she probably was the first one  
15 to kind of say something about it like, “You don’t act like you are the same as you were,”  
16 or something. “Well, no. I’m not, actually.”

17 KC: What sort of things did she notice?

18 LR: Well, I think she noticed like attitude was a lot of it. I wasn’t the loving little  
19 guy I was, I guess, before I went over there. My attitude about people was different.

20 KC: In what way?

21 LR: I had a lot of anger. Well, I just, you know, I didn’t mind just telling people  
22 what I thought. I had a lot of anger built up in me so I would kind of get mad real quick  
23 and my language was pretty rough. I guess just overall my attitude toward her was  
24 different. We had a lot of difficulty, you know, when I got back as far as being married  
25 and stuff. I don’t mind telling you, she’s a great woman. She’s stuck with my all these  
26 years through those hard times and I honestly don’t see how she did it at times because I  
27 was pretty hard to live with. I had a lot of issues going on that I didn’t even realize I had  
28 issues, I guess. As far as my mom and dad they—they were kind of real easy about what  
29 they asked me about Vietnam. They didn’t really ask me, like, difficult questions like we  
30 are talking about. “What is it like to be in combat?” or any of that stuff. It was just like,  
31 “Well, you know, what did you do over there?” “Well, I was just a grunt,” you know. It

1 was generalized questions so they never really got into—I think they were afraid to ask  
2 me because there so much, back then there was so much talk about how Vietnam vets  
3 didn't want to talk about it and all this stuff. I think they just kind of walked around me  
4 like on egg shells and stuff. They didn't want to ask me something that might make me  
5 really lose—

6 KC: Certainly keep their distance.

7 LR: Yeah, yeah, maybe that is what I am saying. Of course, my wife, you know—  
8 and my wife never really asked me about any of that stuff. None of my friends did. Well,  
9 I take that back. They did ask some questions but not—they didn't get into the specifics. I  
10 did have one or two real close friends that did kind of get into it and we talked a little bit  
11 about it but not much. It was kind of a difficult subject to talk about.

12 KC: Why did you find that to be the case? Why did you find—

13 LR: Well, I think it's kind of like what we talked about earlier. If you asked me a  
14 question about—like you asked me a while ago. What's it like to be in combat? I can't  
15 explain it to you. There is no words that can explain to you and make you understand  
16 what it's like to be in combat, to be in a firefight. I can't do it. It's impossible. The only  
17 way for someone to know what it's really like to be in combat is to be there. It's really  
18 difficult to explain something like that. The way I explain it to people is, "What if I came  
19 to you and asked you to explain to me what chocolate tastes like? What does chocolate  
20 taste like?" How do you explain that to people? You can't really know what chocolate  
21 tastes like unless you get a piece of chocolate and put it in your mouth and experience it.  
22 Once you have experienced it from that point on you know what chocolate tastes like but  
23 you can't really put it in words and tell somebody about it. No amount of words that you  
24 tell them about, you realize they will never know the real thing, what it was like. It kind  
25 of—it was kind of like to me just a worthless subject to talk about because I knew they  
26 would never understand. I think that's why I have this feeling when I am around those  
27 guys I was with in Vietnam, we have this bond that I can't really explain. It's like they  
28 are a brother, a long lost brother or something. You know, they're not kin folks but it's  
29 like I have grew up with them. It's like we bonded or something there. I think part of it  
30 has to do with the fact that when I talk to them about combat and what it was like, I know  
31 that they know what I am talking about. They were there. They've experienced it and

1 when I say, you know, “Man, that just tore me up.” I know they can relate to that because  
2 they had the same similar experiences. I think that’s kind of why I didn’t talk about it a  
3 whole lot because I just felt like it wasn’t a subject that really I could explain to people.  
4 So why mess with it? Why deal with it?

5 KC: Would it be fair to call this—and I don’t want to put words in your mouth—  
6 would it be fair to call this a type of isolation for yourself when you were home, whether  
7 it was self imposed or otherwise?

8 LR: Well, yeah, maybe. I guess—when I first come back I don’t think I felt that  
9 way but I think as time went by and more and more things happened here back home I  
10 think I got more and more isolated. I learned—you know, I think when I first came back I  
11 thought we would be kind of like, Vietnam vets, we were war heroes, or not heroes, war  
12 veterans and people would at least when you would say, “I’m a Vietnam vet,” they would  
13 go, “Oh, hey, man. That’s great.” I didn’t expect anything, I don’t guess, but I just felt  
14 like I would be treated better than I was. So I had a different idea as to what to expect. I  
15 don’t know. I guess that’s just a hard thing to answer really. I don’t know how to answer  
16 that. Just the attitudes had changed. So maybe as time went by I learned that people kind  
17 of, they didn’t like Vietnam vets. Back then we kind of had a stigma attached to us. If  
18 you were a Vietnam vet they had this Hollywood vision of, you know, *Apocalypse Now*  
19 or whatever it was where you’re this nut case crazed killer, you know, and all of this. It  
20 got to a point where I realized that. Back then, you know, if you were dating, asking a girl  
21 out on a date you sure didn’t tell her you were a Vietnam vet. If you got to really liking  
22 each other you kind of dreaded the old go home to meet the parents because they are  
23 going to ask you all these questions and if you were to tell them you were a Vietnam vet  
24 then instantly it is like, “Oh, my god. You don’t want to date this guy. You need to adios  
25 him.” You kind of got withdrawn and so you didn’t talk to people about it. So I guess as  
26 time went by you kind of isolated yourself and you just didn’t talk about it. I think when I  
27 first came back it wasn’t that way but as time went by, yes, it became more and more that  
28 way to the point where I just didn’t talk about it. I’m not sure I would have if I would  
29 have had the opportunity anyway. I don’t know about that.

30 KC: Sure.

1           LR: Not having—I didn't do that. I haven't been there and done that so I don't  
2 know. I wish I had of. I look back on things and I wish we as the Vietnam vets would  
3 have had the resources available to them that a lot of these vets now coming back from  
4 Afghanistan and Iraq have for themselves. A lot of that, I think—if Vietnam vets can—I  
5 think we can have a little bit of source of pride in the fact that we have opened the eyes of  
6 a lot of people here in the States and our government to make them realize that PTSD is  
7 really a serious issue and that these vets coming back need some kind of counseling.  
8 They need something to wind them back down off of combat and what it does to you. If  
9 they can get that help early I think it will help them out a whole lot in their lives from that  
10 point on. I feel like really if I would have had some kind of counseling or something  
11 when I was young that would have kind of brought me down off of that, I guess that  
12 adrenaline high that I was on over there or whatever it was, I don't know what it was. But  
13 just kind of help me to work through all of that. If I would have had those resources  
14 available I think I would have been better today and probably wouldn't be dealing with  
15 what I deal with now and have dealt with in the past. I think it would have been better for  
16 my wife. It'd been better for my kids. It would have just been a better deal altogether. I  
17 think Vietnam vets, we can take a little bit of pride in the fact that I think we've changed  
18 the attitudes of people and we suffered the consequences but hopefully it will be better  
19 for vets coming back from the wars that we are experiencing now.

20           KC: That's a really good point. You mentioned before, just to kind of draw a  
21 thread together here, that when you were in combat when you would see, number one,  
22 just the sheer and utter and terror of it, that leaves its marks but when you see a friend or  
23 a squad mate, whoever it might be, being hit, being shot up pretty bad, being killed, that's  
24 something else. These experiences are massive experiences, obviously, to the human  
25 psyche but you mentioned that each time you would have to bear it. If you were weak—  
26 there's a certain standard in the Marines that you have to hold up. You want to get up and  
27 run but you can't get up and run. It's unacceptable. So you are forced to swallow these  
28 kinds of emotions. You are forced to bury these sort of things. When you got home you  
29 mentioned that you had a hard time relating to other people because they had not been  
30 through the same kinds of experiences. They had not been through combat. They couldn't  
31 understand. Even if you tried to explain it to them they couldn't possibly understand so

1 there was this gulf there. It's something, again, that you were—that you, I guess in a  
2 sense, sort of swallowed. Then you mentioned that society's reaction in general was one  
3 that was negative toward Vietnam veterans and no matter how much explaining you  
4 would have tried to do, even if you did try to do, it wouldn't have been any good. Once  
5 again, you've swallowed this, you've buried this and there is an awful lot of everything in  
6 all of this. I mean there is a million different things that goes in each one of these things  
7 and over and over again you continue to bury these kind of things. You did mention to  
8 me before that you dealt with post-traumatic stress disorder over the years. When it  
9 finally got to the point where you believed that you needed to speak with someone about  
10 this, to see someone about this, and feel free to not answer this question, of course. What  
11 was the trigger? Was this a matter of things just finally coming to the top, things that you  
12 did not deal with? What brought that about?

13 LR: Well, my own personal experience was, like I said, when I came back I was  
14 changed. I had—my wife was telling me that all the time which, like I said, it just pissed  
15 me off, made me mad. We used to have really big fights about it, you know. She would  
16 say, "You've got problems. You've got issues. You need to seek some help." Boy, it  
17 would just make me so mad. I would tell her, "I'm not the one with the problem. You are.  
18 You're the one with the problem." I never felt like I had a problem. I basically thought I  
19 was normal and everybody else was a nut. That's kind of how I dealt with it. I mean, I  
20 just didn't feel like I had a problem even though the whole world is telling me, "You've  
21 got problems." It was just a nonissue, I guess, with me I just felt like everybody else was  
22 crazy until my wife and I were having some real issues as far as our marriage. We went  
23 to counseling. We went to a marriage counselor. We went to her for several months and  
24 she helped us out but during the course of that, all of that stuff, finally when she felt like  
25 she had done all she could do she told us, you know, what the scoop was. She told my  
26 wife she needed to keep working on whatever, you know, all of this stuff. She looked at  
27 me and she said, "You know what?" Said, "I think you need to seek counseling because  
28 you've got problems that I can't deal with." At that point it was like somebody slapped  
29 me in the freaking face. It was like I never thought I had a problem until now somebody  
30 with some medical training, I guess, or psychological training is telling me I've got  
31 problems. It went from just my wife saying it to now we had a professional saying so it

1 was like maybe I do have problems. So I went to a counselor actually at the VA  
2 (Veterans Administration) and talked to him. We visited a little bit about all this stuff and  
3 he asked me, he said, “Well, look.” He said, “Do you feel like Vietnam affected you in  
4 any way?” I said, “Not really.” He said, “So you were in combat and all this stuff and you  
5 don’t feel like it changed you or affected you in any way?” I said, “No, not really.” He  
6 said, “Okay, let me ask a question.” He said, “Have you got a son?” I said, “Yeah.” He  
7 said, “How old is he?” I said, “Well, he’s nineteen.” He said, “Okay.” He said, “How old  
8 were you when you went to Vietnam?” I said, “I was nineteen.” He said, “Oh, okay.” He  
9 said, “Let me ask you.” He said, “If—he said, “Looking at things now, looking at your  
10 son, if he were to go and be placed in the situation you were placed in at the age of  
11 nineteen, do you think that would affect your son in any way?” It was like a light bulb  
12 went on in my head. I said, “Well, yeah.” He said, “Well, what makes you think that it  
13 didn’t affect you?” I said, “I don’t know. I never thought about it.” All of a sudden it was  
14 like I realized maybe it did affect me, I just don’t know it. But even at that, I didn’t go  
15 back to counseling. I still, you know, I still felt like I can deal with all this crap. Just over  
16 the years, you know, just all, I just kept dealing with it. I had these times when I would  
17 just withdraw. I just didn’t want to see anybody. I didn’t want to be around anybody. I  
18 just wanted to find me a place and be in my little spot and nobody be around me and  
19 stuff, you know. I’d spent sometimes a week or two, I would go to work, come in from  
20 work, wouldn’t say nothing to wife, wouldn’t say nothing to the kids. I would go in the  
21 bedroom and set down at the desk. I would read I would do whatever I wanted to do and  
22 my wife thought she had done something and she was crying and beg me to tell her what  
23 she did and all this. I didn’t know what to tell her because she didn’t do nothing. But I  
24 was mad. I was just mad and I didn’t know why. After a couple of weeks, well, it was  
25 like I would go to work one day and all of a sudden it was like I would wake up and I  
26 wasn’t mad anymore and I would come in and everything was fine. I would kiss her and  
27 I’m home, you know. Well, what’s your problem, you know? It was like she was mad at  
28 me by then and she didn’t know what she had done so she was made because I wouldn’t  
29 tell her so we had a lot of problems. It came to a head. This was, I don’t know—it’s been  
30 so long now I can’t even remember what year it was, but probably about, I’m going to  
31 guess fifteen years ago, maybe sixteen. I had to go to the doctor to have a procedure

1 done. I had had problems with a hiatal hernia. I had a lot of problems, medical stuff. So  
2 anyway, they were going to go down in there and they were going to run a scope down in  
3 there and do all this stuff and then they were going to dilate that hernia. Well, during that  
4 procedure I woke up and I guess I must have went into fight mode or something because  
5 I just remember that doctor screaming at the nurse to shoot me up with some more of that  
6 stuff. I remember waking up and seeing all these gauges and instruments and stuff. I had  
7 a tube run down my mouth and I couldn't breathe. It was gagging me and it was like—I  
8 just remember grabbing that thing like that then I could just hear all this screaming and  
9 yelling and all of this. Anyway, I woke up after it was all over with and I told my wife, I  
10 said, "I woke up during the procedure." She said, "You did not." I said, "Yes, I did. I  
11 remember what happened," and I told her about it. She said, "You just dreamed that." I  
12 said, "No, I didn't. I'm serious. It happened." Well, anyway, come to find out she asked  
13 the doctor and, sure enough, he told her it did. Everything was cool and I went home.  
14 This was like on a Friday. Saturday, you know, I was kind of still drugged out. Sunday  
15 morning we were going to church or going to go to church and I woke up and I mean I  
16 was in hell. That's all I can say. I was shaking like a leaf I was just (noise). I hadn't been  
17 able to sleep all night because every time I laid my head on the pillow I would hear  
18 helicopters. I could hear that (helicopter noise). I would get up and it was like, "Man,"  
19 you know. I would lay back down and I would hear (helicopter noise) and it was that way  
20 all the time. It was like I just, I was shaking like a leaf. I couldn't sleep. I was shaking  
21 like a bowl of Jello. That's all I could tell people. On the inside I was just shaking. Well,  
22 I thought it was something, I thought it may be some kind of drug or something. Anyway  
23 I went back to the doctor and they couldn't figure out what it was. By this time my  
24 mental state was—I was going downhill quick. I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't  
25 do nothing. I had lost a bunch of weight. I finally went to my regular doctor and he said,  
26 "I think you're just depressed." I said, "I'm not depressed. I'm shaking. Look at me." I  
27 was (shaking noise). He said, "Man." He said, "I think it's depression." He gave me some  
28 Prozac or something and anyway I took that and it kind of made matters worse. Well, I  
29 spent probably a year and a half or so just—all I can explain it is just I was in hell. I had  
30 finally gotten to the point where I told my wife, I said, "Look, I can't go on living like  
31 this." She said, "Well, what are you telling me?" I said, "I'm telling you I can't go on

1 living like this.” She said, “Well, you mean you’re thinking about suicide or something?”  
2 I said, “I don’t know.” I said, “I just can’t go on like this.” At that point she got really  
3 freaked out and was really worried about me. Anyway, I went to one, two, three, I went  
4 to three different psychologists trying to find out maybe if it was mental and they  
5 couldn’t tell me anything. It was just a year and a half or nearly two years of just pure  
6 hell, is all I can say. Then one day I was sitting at home—as a matter of fact, talking  
7 about the suicide deal, I had gotten to the point where I was afraid what might happen. I  
8 even called my son and asked him if he would just take me guns. I’ve got guns, you  
9 know. I said, “Why don’t you just take these over to your house and keep them for a  
10 while?” I didn’t tell him what was going on. I just said, “I’m kind of afraid somebody  
11 might break in here and get them and I just don’t want them to be here,” or something.  
12 Anyway, I did that. Then one day I was sitting at the house and I thought, “You know, I  
13 was exposed to Agent Orange a lot over there.” We were in a lot of the areas where they  
14 had sprayed the jungle with that stuff and we even drank bomb crater water and all that  
15 stuff and it was bound to have that crap in it. I probably drank the dern stuff, so I thought,  
16 “Maybe that’s what it is.” I called, I looked in the phone book trying to find some  
17 information and I happened to see the Vet Center up here. I don’t know if you are  
18 familiar with that but—well, you are because the other lady came up there and talked to  
19 us one night. Anyway, I just kind of stumbled onto it and I called them and asked them if  
20 they had any information on Agent Orange. They said, “Yeah, we do, but we like to talk  
21 to our veterans first. So why don’t you come down here and we will visit with you a little  
22 bit and we can fix you up.” I went down there and anyway they sent me in to talk to one  
23 of the counselors. I didn’t even know he was a psychologist. I thought he just worked  
24 there. It took me about a week of going in there and talking or a couple of weeks to go in  
25 there and talk to him to really figure out he was a psychologist. Anyway, at that point I  
26 didn’t mind coming in there and talking to him. One day we were sitting there and he  
27 said, he said, “Well, Larry, I can tell you what your problem is if you want to know.” I  
28 said, “You’re darn tooten.” I said, “I’ve been looking for two years to try to figure out  
29 what’s wrong with me. I want to know.” He said, “You’ve got PTSD.” I said, it just  
30 chapped my but I said, “I don’t have PTSD.” I said—because to me PTSD was these  
31 guys that grab a gun and go up in the tower at UT (University of Texas) and kill people,

1 shoot people and stuff, you know. They were crazy people. I said, "I don't have PTSD." I  
2 said, "Look at me." I said, "I'm shaking. That's my problem." I said, "I'm like a nervous  
3 wreck." I said, "I can't sleep. I can't eat. I'm just going downhill." He said, "I'm telling  
4 you that's what you've got." He let me read a few books about it and when I read some  
5 books about it, it was like I was textbook case. I mean, it was right down the—everything  
6 that they listed as being symptoms I did. I guess at that point I realized I had a problem.  
7 From that point on it's been—I've been seeing counselors. That's one of the things about  
8 the, I guess the VA—not really the VA system—well, I can say the VA but especially the  
9 Vet Center. If it hadn't been for those guys I really don't think I'd be alive today. I think  
10 something—I probably would have done something or I don't know what would have  
11 happened. I just can't tell you. I just don't know. But because of them I feel like I'm alive  
12 today and because of that counselor that I finally got hooked up with I'm alive today. It's  
13 been a long process with me. My situation, it was an underlying problem that I had for  
14 years but then all of a sudden it just kind of busted out and then it just kind of overflowed  
15 and it when it did it was like I had real issues at that point. But I've been able to get help  
16 now and they've been working with me for several years, like probably about the last  
17 thirteen years or so, probably, I've been going up there. I still—I don't quite as regular as  
18 I did as far as seeing my counselor up there. As a matter of fact, my counselor that I got  
19 started with, a guy named Dave Holland, you are probably familiar with him he died just  
20 recently. Okay, he passed away just recently but he's the one that actually got me, he's  
21 the first one I saw up there and really did a lot for me. One of the good things is that those  
22 guys up there are combat veterans themselves and so when I went in to talk to Dave he  
23 was a Marine combat vet and so we really had a bond there that when I talked to him I  
24 knew he knew what I was talking about when we talk about combat and stuff. Anyway,  
25 with that said, they've been real good to me. I've got no problems. I know the VA,  
26 they're not the best operation in the world but the psychiatrists and stuff that I have seen  
27 up there have really been helpful and they've got me on medication that—they got me on  
28 Paxil and Paxil really has been a life saver for me. I started taking that and it was like, oh.  
29 After about three or four days of taking that Paxil I woke up one day and I felt almost like  
30 my old self again. It was like my world was back and I wasn't shaking so bad. After  
31 about a week or so I'm almost back to normal. As long as I stay on my medication I do

1 pretty good. I still have ups and downs as far as those depression days and stuff but they  
2 have given me some ways to kind of work with it and stuff. I've kind of worked through  
3 it now and hopefully I'll be able to live a semi-normal life and get back to semi-normal.  
4 My wife has noticed a big difference and the Vet Center has helped her a lot because  
5 they've helped her understand about PTSD and what it does to you. It's an eye opener for  
6 her, too, because all of a sudden she realizes that I wasn't the only one doing this. That  
7 there were a lot, that all the vets that were in combat or a good part of them, deal with  
8 this, too. It's just different ways they deal with it. But we also have some common things  
9 that happened with us and a lot of things that I was doing was just a classic case of PTSD  
10 and we just didn't know it and now we do. I'm a real big advocate of these guys coming  
11 back from now Afghanistan and Iraq and stuff. I would be a big advocate of those guys  
12 need some counseling. They need somebody to talk to, to get them on the right road  
13 because if you don't it's one of those deals that it just—I guess it's kind of like HIV.  
14 Once you get it you may not know you have got it, you may not even realize you have it  
15 but someday down the road it may just flare up on you and then once it gets you it's got  
16 you and there's not turning back and that's kind of where I have been. I have always—I  
17 look at it like it's kind of like falling off a cliff. You fall off a cliff and then you grab the  
18 cliff edge and you are hanging by your fingernails up there and that's where you are at.  
19 You can't ever get back up there where you were where you are standing up on the cliff's  
20 edge. You're just kind of hanging on. You didn't fall all the way down, yet, you are not  
21 there but you are just kind of hanging on so you're in that situation. That's kind of the  
22 way I feel about it. I'm in this situation and I'm hanging on now where I can get by and I  
23 can live a semi-normal life or a fairly normal life. I've been able to deal with a lot of it  
24 and I still deal with it. I still have ups and downs but I'm just hanging on. I hang on day  
25 by day. I get up and go on about my business so that's kind of where I am, kind of the  
26 way it is, I guess.

27 KC: I really appreciate you being so open with that. I think that is something that  
28 for the historical record I think will be very, very important when looking at these kind of  
29 issues.

30 LR: Right. Maybe it will help somebody out, I hope.

1           KC: Let me ask you this. I know that in your efforts to deal with post-traumatic  
2 stress disorder one of things that you have done you said that you went with the Vet  
3 Center as a group to Angelfire, New Mexico. There's not much in Angelfire other than  
4 skiing and the Vietnams veterans' memorial that is there. I assume that is where you  
5 went.

6           LR: Yeah.

7           KC: You mentioned, I think the last time that we sat down to speak, that you had  
8 a reunion with the Kilo Company 3 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> in Washington, D.C.

9           LR: Uh-huh.

10          KC: When you were in D.C. did you also go to the Vietnam War Memorial, The  
11 Wall? What did these things do? How does, say, the Angelfire memorial, the Vietnam  
12 War Memorial, The Wall in D.C., and being with these other veterans individuals that  
13 you have this bond with. What do those kinds of things do for you?

14          LR: Well, as far as going to Angelfire, you know, it was okay to get off with those  
15 guys, some of them, and the memorial up there is okay, too. They've got some  
16 information and stuff. But I didn't find it all that emotional, I guess. It was just—I guess  
17 it was more like just going up there and seeing it and, you know, I've been there, saw  
18 that, done it and whatever and, okay, it's not a big deal. Going to Washington, D.C., was  
19 a little bit different story. I dreaded that. When I finally decided to go, this friend of mine  
20 from North Carolina we—he was going to meet me up there. We actually had a reunion  
21 and stuff where we went over to Washington, D.C., but I really—I had a lot of different  
22 mixed emotions about it, I guess. In the back of my mind I didn't want to go but yet I did  
23 want to go. I mean, it was like one of those deals where—well, I don't know how to  
24 explain it. There was reasons why I wanted to go and there was reasons why I didn't want  
25 to go. But I ended up going and it was, I think it was good for me. One reason I kind of  
26 dreaded going, I guess, in a way was because there is a few names on The Wall there of  
27 guys that I was with. There was about four or five of them, I believe, that were killed  
28 while we were over there. A lot of those guys that I talk about that got all shot up, you  
29 know, a lot of times when we looked at them in the field we thought they were dead. I  
30 mean, they were shot full of holes but yet we find out later that they actually lived, you  
31 know, they are alive today. The actual ones that ended up dying there is about five of

1 them. Their names are on The Wall over there, so it was kind of an emotional experience  
2 is all I can say. I was glad that friend of mine was with me because, you know I can—  
3 we—you just walk down through there and, I don't know. It's just a thought-provoking  
4 experience, I guess, to walk down through that wall and see all those names. I mean, you  
5 don't really understand how many guys died until you actually see their name on that  
6 wall. Then you get over there to where those guys are and you look at that. So it's got a  
7 lot of emotions in there that come out. I know he and I both stood there for a long time  
8 and I just—it took me a while before I could ever just really turn around and look at it. It  
9 was kind of one of those deals where I didn't want to look at it but then when I finally  
10 turned around and we started looking at it, oh, man, I tell you, we just sat there, or we  
11 didn't sit. We stood there and, oh, well, we just boo hooed. That's all I can say. We cried  
12 like a couple of babies. It was just so much that just comes out all of a sudden it's like a  
13 flood. The emotions were really, really something. But we got through it. But, you know,  
14 I guess with that said, you know, we made it through. I was able to get through it. We  
15 went to see some other stuff. I guess it was the—we went—I'm trying to think. We  
16 went—we had a little get together there with my—with the guys that came to the reunion  
17 and we had a little memorial service there where we put some flowers and a wreath over  
18 there by the names of the guys that got killed. You know, it was just kind of a (pause), it  
19 was just kind of a way to get a little closure, I guess, out of it that is all I can say. To  
20 realize that we made it and even with that you still have different emotions. You have  
21 that deal of you kind of feel funny about doing that because you survived and they got  
22 killed, you know. I guess it's that survivor guilt or whatever built up. It was just a whole  
23 flood of emotions that come about when you go and do that. But with that said, we  
24 worked through it and we got through it and everything was okay so I guess it's all right.  
25 Maybe—we're going back next year so—I have been back since then. I've taken my  
26 grandkids up there. Each time I go I find it less and less stressful or emotional. I can take  
27 my grandkids up there now and show them and it's not too bad on me. I still have a hard  
28 time. The last time I was up there there was some, they weren't Vietnamese people but—  
29 well, they might have been but it sounded like to me they were Chinese or something.  
30 But anyway I just have a hard times with those people and they were walking down  
31 through wall just jabbering their shit and it just really pissed me off. You know, it was

1 like, that's kind of like throwing it in their face of all these guys that have died on this  
2 wall and now we've got gooks walking down right in front them jabbering their shit free  
3 as a bird and these guys died. I'm not even sure they really give a flying flip that those  
4 guys died. They're just there looking at the marble slabs, you know. It don't mean shit to  
5 them. Or maybe it did. I don't know. But, still, that's kind of the way I felt about it.

6 KC: What about the times you get back together with your unit? You mentioned  
7 that you went to this one reunion in Washington, D.C. You've spoken a little bit about  
8 this last time that we got together. What has that meant to you since you have started this  
9 process of dealing with PTSD?

10 LR: Well, it was, I guess it was good in ways and it was bad in other ways. It was  
11 good to see those guys again. It was good to see that some of the guys that I thought were  
12 dead were actually alive. It was good to see that they had made it. Like we talked about  
13 earlier, too, that feeling that you get when you are around those guys, that bond that you  
14 have with them, once you have been through combat with them it's like you have this  
15 unique bond that they just feel like, you feel like you're back home with your brothers or  
16 something. I don't have a real good way of explaining that, either. It's just you just have  
17 this certain feeling about it. It's like you feel good being around them. You just feel like  
18 they are a long lost brother that you found all of a sudden. You know, we were able to  
19 talk about a lot of this stuff. Of course, war stories, you know, we tell all this bullshit and  
20 war stories, what happened here and guys are all they are curious, "Well do you  
21 remember this? Remember that?" And "What happened to so and so? You remember  
22 him?" So you have a lot of that. You have a lot of just BS-ing going on. Then, on the  
23 other hand, I was able to deal with a lot of this stuff, I think, when I got, the way I dealt  
24 with a lot of it was that I put it in the back of my mind and I tried to just tell myself that it  
25 was all a bad dream and that now I had awakened and everything was okay again and I  
26 was back to the real world. Just forget about all this because it was just a bad dream and  
27 that's kind of how I dealt with it for thirty years or whatever it was. But then when you  
28 go to a reunion and you see these guys again then all of a sudden your brain, you can't  
29 tell it anymore that it was a dream. All of a sudden it's like your brain wakes up and goes,  
30 "Wait a minute. This really did happen." So it brings back, a lot of those emotions come  
31 back and it really, it caused some problems with the guys that came to that reunion. There

1 was a lot of them that, there was several of them, I'm not going to say a lot because there  
2 was only about ten or twelve of us, but there was probably most of them besides me and  
3 maybe one or two others they were like me. They didn't feel like they ever had a problem  
4 with Vietnam. They thought, "I'm fine." But then after that reunion it's like that thing  
5 inside of you goes, "Wait a minute. This all really happened." At that point, when that  
6 hits it is like, "Oh, my god." Your brain just goes into overload all of a sudden and it's  
7 like you start having emotional problems and that's what happened to me. I mean, I did  
8 okay for all these years until I had the surgery, but I saw a downturn or I saw a—I can  
9 really look back on things and I can see where I started having more and more problems  
10 after this friend of mine that lives in North Carolina, him and his wife was going to  
11 California one time and they asked if they could come by and see us. He told me, he said,  
12 "I just have got to see somebody, Larry, that made it back from Vietnam. I 've just got to  
13 see somebody." He said, "I just want to come by and see you and see that you made it. I  
14 just want to see that it's true." I said, "Sure, Clark. Come on by." Anyway, they came and  
15 spent a couple of days with us. I think that's what—I can kind of see a turning point  
16 where from that point on it was like kind of a downhill deal. I could see my problems  
17 getting more and more intense and it was like building up and building up until I got the  
18 that point where I had this procedure and then it just went to shit in a hand basket. But  
19 this was about a year, maybe two years before all this happened. This is when I saw Ray  
20 Clark and he came and saw me and it was like my brain all of a sudden woke up and said,  
21 "Wait a minute. That wasn't a dream you've been telling me happened all these years.  
22 That really happened because that guy was with you." Of course, we talked about a lot of  
23 these things that happened that just brought back all these old memories. Those reunions  
24 kind of had that same effect with some of the other guys. Once we had that thing some of  
25 them started having real emotional problems. I think they had done like I did. They had  
26 just kind of dealt with it on the fact that it never really happened and I'm just, I'm awake  
27 now and I'm going to go on with my life and forget about all this stuff. Then all of a  
28 sudden you see these guys and you realize, "Hey! That really did happen." We had a lot  
29 of emotional problems after that. This guy, this friend of mine, he always told me, "I have  
30 never had problems." Well, (noise) now he's counseling and everything else and had real  
31 serious problems after we had those reunions. We have had a couple of other guys that

1 had problems that said, “I like you guys. I love you guys, but I can’t be around you. I’m  
2 sorry. I just can’t come to those things. I can’t deal with it.” So they won’t come back.  
3 You know, I guess it’s just a whole different—it’s a flood of different emotions that come  
4 up that sometimes you can deal with it and sometimes you can’t. You just have to do the  
5 best you can and do what you can.

6 KC: On the whole, do you find that the reunions are more helpful for you  
7 personally or that they are, or that they—I don’t want to use this phrase—set you back,  
8 more harmful?

9 LR: Honestly, I think that overall I think they are more helpful because I feel like  
10 if I don’t work through it I won’t ever get over it. Where I’m at now I’ve only got one  
11 way I can go and that’s up so I’ve got to try to do everything I can to try to help myself  
12 stay up or get up or whatever. I feel like—you know, they tell me that it’s better to work  
13 it out and talk about it and get it out in the open and all this other stuff. So I guess that’s  
14 where I’m at. I think to me it’s been more helpful, I guess, than it has harmful because I  
15 had already gotten to the point where I was having problems, real serious problems  
16 before I ever went to the reunion. It was just like adding more stuff on to me, I guess. My  
17 process at that point was trying to figure out a way that I can work through this. I’m to  
18 the point where, you know, if they say it helps to talk about it, I’m going to talk about it.  
19 If they say it’s helpful to take a pill, I’m going to take my pills. If it’s helpful to go to a  
20 reunion, that’s what I am going to do, you know. I’m just looking for ways to, you know,  
21 keep going and trudging on through life and try to make it the best I can. I guess overall I  
22 will just have to say that it’s probably helpful to me more than it is harmful. Hopefully  
23 those other guys that had problems after this maybe they’ll come to realize that and  
24 hopefully we can get together again in the future. We are supposed to be getting together  
25 next year so we will how many of them show up. Anyway, we’ll wait and see about that.

26 KC: Right.

27 LR: That will be Chapter Two in this. That will be another recording we have to  
28 make.

29 KC: Well, for right now I don’t have any more questions.

30 LR: Okay.

1           KC: Do you have anything else you would like to add, Larry, before we wrap this  
2 up?

3           LR: Well, I guess—I wish I could really say something that was really, that would  
4 really make an impression on people, I guess, because, like you say, people, there may be  
5 people listening to this in future. But I guess I would just like to say that, you know,  
6 Vietnam vets, we were soldiers just like everybody, generations in the past. We weren't a  
7 bunch of crazy baby killers and stuff like that. Even though that happened in Vietnam,  
8 I'm sure—and it happened in other wars. It just wasn't as publicized as it was for  
9 Vietnam vets. It was like they jumped on us with both feet. Anything we did wrong it  
10 was the five o'clock news every evening so that didn't happen in World War I or II or  
11 Korea or stuff like that. I think they're just now starting to find out a lot of these things  
12 happened in those wars, too. It's just that people didn't know about them then.  
13 Sometimes what you don't know don't hurt you, but it was never that case with Vietnam  
14 vets. We had news cameras all over that place and so whatever we did was on the five  
15 o'clock news every evening. The main thing is I would just like people to understand and  
16 know that for the most part Vietnam vets were soldiers like everybody else. We had a job  
17 to do. We did our job. We didn't kill innocent civilians. We didn't go around murdering  
18 people, assassinating people right and left and all that other stuff. We went over there, we  
19 did our job that our country asked us to do. My outfit, I feel like we did our job well. We  
20 did what we were asked and accomplished the mission. When people look back on the  
21 Vietnam War the soldiers in Vietnam, we didn't lose that war. Even though America lost  
22 the war, or if you want to look at it that way you can say we lost the war but it wasn't the  
23 American soldier that lost the war. We could've won the war, the soldier, at any time that  
24 they would have turned us loose and let us win the war. Our hands were tied. We weren't  
25 allowed to win the war. It was a political thing where the politicians in Washington lost  
26 the war for America. It wasn't the soldier in the field. I just want people to remember that  
27 or maybe in the future if these facts are forgotten that hopefully somebody will hear this  
28 and understand that we did our job. We did our job well with the equipment we had. We  
29 could have won the war at any time that America, our political leaders, would have let us  
30 won the war. We just was never given that opportunity. If anybody wants to place blame  
31 on who lost the war, place it on the politicians in Washington because they are the ones

1 that lost the war for America, not the soldier. So don't blame the soldier. We were good  
2 people. We still are. A lot of Vietnam vets are doctors, lawyers, dentists, firemen,  
3 policemen. I was a fireman for twenty-seven years here in Lubbock. I did a good job  
4 there. I've always been a good employee, I feel like. I still am working. So we are just  
5 normal folks and so try to remember that. Don't blame Vietnam vets for some of that  
6 stuff that went on because we're just like anybody else. We were soldiers. We did our job  
7 and that's just about it. I guess hopefully that's not some kind of a profound statement.  
8 I'm sure people have heard it before but I wanted this thing to be something that maybe  
9 people can look back on and I want my fellow soldiers that I was stationed with over  
10 there and the guys I fought with, I want them to be looked at on a favorable light  
11 sometime in the future, maybe, and maybe it's even that way now to a certain extent but  
12 hopefully in the future if people look back on Vietnam maybe they can understand a little  
13 more of what happened, why we did what we did and the fact that we were just  
14 ordinary—we were kids. I was actually twenty when I went over but a lot of guys over  
15 there were nineteen years old. We were young and, you know, we did a lot of hard things  
16 and stuff and we came back and changed but for the most part we went back—a lot of  
17 guys went to college and got their education and are, you know, normal citizens  
18 nowadays. We're just people like anybody else so hopefully they will have a more  
19 favorable idea of what a Vietnam vet is in the future. We're not all a bunch of crazy  
20 people that walk around in our fatigues with a long mustache and beard and wear our  
21 bush hat everywhere we go. We're just normal folks. We go to work every day like  
22 everybody else. Hopefully for me it won't be too much longer. I hope to retire. Anyway,  
23 with that said, I guess that's about all I have to say. I just wanted—the last thing I wanted  
24 to say was the fact of just what I just finished up saying. I want people to have a different  
25 idea about Vietnam vets hopefully in the future. That's about it, I guess.

26 KC: All right, well thank you very much.

27 LR: You're welcome.