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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Charley Baker
Conducted by Jason Stewart
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Transcribed by Emilie Meadors**

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.

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1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University conducting an Oral History Interview with retired Lieutenant Colonel Charley
3 Baker. Today is January 21, 2009. I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections
4 Library on the campus of Texas Tech, and Mr. Baker is joining me by phone from
5 Laurel, Maryland. Is that correct?

6 Charley Baker: That's correct.

7 JS: Okay, why don't we begin if you could start off if you could tell me a little bit
8 of biographical information about yourself? First of all, when and where were you born?

9 CB: In a small town in Alabama. Indian Springs, Alabama, on October 11, 1940. I
10 only lived there about four days. My parents were living in Montgomery at the time and
11 we returned there and that's where I spent my early years.

12 JS: Okay.

13 CB: I started off in military school in the first two grades.

14 JS: Okay, could you tell me a little bit about your parents? What were their
15 names, and what did they do for a living?

16 CB: Well, they were Bill and Anne Baker, about as common of names as you
17 could find. My dad was one of the early caterpillar mechanics. His father had been one of
18 the earlier wrecker operators and junkyard guys. You know, in the early days, we're

1 talking about the thirties here. The cars hadn't really been spread out along the south all
2 that much until the twenties. It was his task, his career that brought us to Florida where I
3 really grew up.

4 JS: Okay.

5 CB: He had been job opportunities down there after the war, expanding the space
6 program and all that. So we moved down there in '48. I finished the third grade there in
7 three schools in third grade. And then stayed in until I graduated my high school in 1958
8 and then went back to Alabama to Auburn and got a bachelors there. In 1962 I
9 commissioned an armor. I had a little time in the Navy reserve joining that in high school.
10 The atmosphere of the town was different in those days. I'm sure you must have heard
11 that from others. It wasn't a question of whether you were going to be in the service, it
12 was the question of when and what. The draft is pretty solid. All of us had a little bit of an
13 uneasiness that we might get drafted while we were in college. A lot of us did go into the
14 reserves and just transferred to the Navy Reserves and the Army Reserves. And it all
15 worked out.

16 JS: Well, before we get into you joining the Army and your training, if we could
17 back up for just a moment and talk about—well, as a kid growing up, I know you were
18 fairly young, but do you have any memories of World War II?

19 CB: I remember VJ Day.

20 JS: Okay.

21 CB: I have the memory of something that happened. One of the earliest memories
22 is something that happened that was unrelated to the war, but it was during the war. It
23 was a humungous tornado hit Montgomery when we lived there. We were on the side of
24 Maxwell Air Force Base in the government housing that we lived in. It really, it twisted
25 bridge gutters and it was a terrible tornado. I remember hiding under my mother's sewing
26 machine, I was about four. This would have been '44. I do remember VJ Day and how
27 crazy it was. I'll never know what memories I have of those days are real memories that
28 reinforced all the John Wayne movies that came out.

29 JS: Right, sure.

30 CB: I had three uncles that were in uniform.

31 JS: Okay, and that was my next question.

1 CB: Neither my father nor any of this siblings served, which I guess predicated to
2 the school I was going to. Anyway, three of my mother's brothers did and I remember
3 them coming home. One of them had been in quite a bit of combat and the other two
4 didn't really see any. One had followed earlier in North Africa he was bringing gas to
5 him. He was driving a fuel truck.

6 JS: Right.

7 CB: Yeah, I remember them coming home and that's of the old photos that I had
8 around.

9 JS: Sure, sure. All right, well, because of some of your Uncle's service, did you
10 have any interest in the military as a kid growing up?

11 CB: Oh yes, yes. I expected to be in uniform sometime or another anyway, but
12 yeah that was my choice of Saturday afternoons of John Wayne double features. I guess I
13 probably saw every war movie that came out from.

14 JS: Would you mind talking a little bit more about, I guess just about growing up
15 and what growing up was like for you in the forties and fifties? What did you do for fun
16 as a kid and that type of thing?

17 CB: Well, I played all the sports, little league and back in those days you couldn't
18 play football when you were really young. Instead I played high school ball. I was the
19 catcher in little league. You have friend just to play around with and hang out they say
20 these days. I was always fond of playing monopoly with whoever would be willing to. I
21 learned to play chess and everything. I was an avid reader. We didn't get a television
22 until 1950 and I already had the habit of reading quite a bit. I would spend some time
23 when it was hot, some afternoons in Florida I'd spend in the air conditioned library
24 reading World War II Life Magazines.

25 JS: Right.

26 CB: They had a good collection of things like that looking in the library. I don't
27 know, I guess like any other kid I ran and played and also studied. I was a much better
28 student in primary than I got to be in high school. In high school I liked to play too much.

29 JS: You said you went to Ocala High School?

30 CB: Yes.

31 JS: Okay, and you graduated in '58?

1 CB: 1958.

2 JS: Okay, all right. As you were growing up, of course, the beginning of the Cold
3 War was happening during this time period. Did you pay much attention to that given
4 your interest in history and World War II and the military? Did you pay much attention to
5 the Cold War and what was going on?

6 CB: Oh yeah. In the Eisenhower years we were all alert to the threat from behind
7 the iron curtain, you know. I know a lot of people talk about doing this duck and cover
8 routine. I don't recall us ever doing that. I know that was a thought process that went on
9 in those days. Yeah, like I said, I was an avid reader. I read a newspaper every day and
10 watched at least one segment of the news. It wasn't a broadcast of the news. We didn't
11 use broadcast in those days, not as nearly ubiquitously in these days. You can get
12 something that reports to be in news just about any time of the day now.

13 JS: Right.

14 CB: Because of cable. Yeah, I was pretty kind of all that was going on. I
15 remember the day that in June when the North Koreans invaded the South and I
16 remember when they assigned the officers. It was ten and thirteen respectively. Well
17 actually, it was one more, but other than that it was twelve, I guess. I would spend—one
18 of my uncles, one my mother's brothers married a girl whose father had a large farm in
19 South Alabama and they lived down in the other house almost the same farm, but about
20 three house on the farm. I would go stay with them for a week or two every summer so I
21 think I got a little taste of life in those days.

22 JS: If you don't mind me asking, where in South Alabama?

23 CB: Enterprise.

24 JS: Okay, I'm familiar with Enterprise. The only reason I ask is I'm from Mobile.

25 CB: Oh, are you?

26 JS: Yes, sir. I know not relevant to the interview, but I was just curious as to
27 where.

28 CB: Yeah, I had a lot of fraternity brothers in Mobile and in Foley. Is it Foley,
29 yeah?

30 JS: Foley is in Baldwin County.

1 CB: Okay, all right. One lives in Foley and one lives in Mobile. I didn't detect
2 Alabama in your accent.

3 JS: I don't know; maybe it's dissipated over the years, I don't know.

4 CB: I say mine never did.

5 JS: Anyway, let me ask you, on this issue of the Cold War growing up. I guess
6 could you talk about just the atmosphere at that time and the view of the—I guess your
7 perspective on the Russians and on the communist threat from your perspective?

8 CB: Well, they were the definite meanies, you know, they were the blue meanies.
9 There was a certain amount, particularly when I see the old film now, a certain amount of
10 just blatant propaganda from the government on that, but still, I think there was quite a bit
11 of espionage going back and forth in those years. Of course, I have some knowledge
12 some had from a later work. There was an atmosphere of tension, I think, through that
13 whole area of Europe.

14 JS: Well, after you graduated from high school, was it directly to Auburn at that
15 point?

16 CB: Yeah.

17 JS: Okay, all right. What did you major in at Auburn?

18 CB: Well, I started off in engineering and intended to be an Aeronautical
19 engineer, but very quickly I found out that my high school is that I love it but did not
20 prepare me for engineering and so I ended up in business and I got a business degree.

21 JS: Okay.

22 CB: Business administration they called it in those days. They've got a whole
23 school of it now at Auburn.

24 JS: Well, could you talk a little bit about, I don't know—well first off, let me ask
25 you this, you said that you joined Navy ROTC at that time at Auburn?

26 CB: Well, I went in the Navy ROTC because I was already in the Navy reserves.

27 JS: Okay.

28 CB: I was a Navy enlisted man on paper and a cadet at the same time. The Navy
29 lets you do that and still draw your big thirty dollar a month check. The Army wouldn't
30 so when I transferred over to the Army reserve to go in advanced ROTC, I did two years
31 of Navy ROTC and transferred over. It was really a romantic thing. My first wife and I

1 had already planned to get married at the end of my sophomore year. And we got a
2 marine colonel in for the professor of naval science. He and sure hoped we were golden
3 now. the first thing he said, he goes, "Hope everybody remembers it there." The
4 commitment which I had not yet signed, what they called a contract student, I hadn't
5 signed on for the full ride until the end of my sophomore year. He said, "I hope you
6 remember your commitment to stay unmarried until your permission." I said, "Goodbye."

7 JS: Right.

8 CB: The has already been sent out, having been as social as that. So, I went
9 shopping and I always wanted to fly and so I checked out the Air Force at first, but they
10 wanted five years of that which looked like a lot to me at the time, now it's in the middle
11 to go to flight school. I said, "I don't think I want to do that. I want to serve my two and
12 get out." And so then we got to the Army and they said, "Well, we can't take you in the
13 flight program, but you can apply any time after your commission." They said, "Well, we
14 don't have any space." You imagine the draft had already hit them up pretty good. The
15 classes were full, always. He said, "We don't have the space until next quarter." So I
16 skipped a quarter, maybe a quarter late graduating and I graduated in August of '62
17 instead of June, but. Before I got done with ?

18 JS: Oh, just talking about ROTC and how you made that transition from Navy
19 ROTC to Army ROTC. I was going to ask you a few questions about that, but was at this
20 time in Auburn was ROTC an elective or was it required?

21 CB: It was a way of drafts cut.

22 JS: Okay.

23 CB: Actually, two years of it was required.

24 JS: Okay.

25 CB: It's what they called, I just mentioned about Advanced ROTC. Okay, that's
26 the last two years and basic is the first two years. You know, I spent the first two years
27 studying doing naval and the last two years. I have pretty with ROTC. I endured it.

28 JS: Could you talk just a little bit about that training. Was most of it done there at
29 Auburn? Was there some summer camp?

30 CB: There was summer camp.

31 JS: Okay.

1 CB: But all in one between the junior and senior year. It was a good long one. It
2 was about eight or nine weeks. What it was, it was like Army basic training with a little
3 bit of leadership thrown in, leadership classes. Of course, I haven't said this yet, but we
4 were a branch school there. We had armor and engineers and signal corps and artillery
5 strength. You could choose one of those branches from day one in advanced ROTC and I
6 chose armor and I figured the tank was close to ship heads. I armor, too. We had two old
7 M40881 tanks and a very early model 48 that were obviously surplus. The ROTC was
8 housed in this World War II expansion type hanger. It was a big bulbous thing and it
9 looked rather like—have you ever seen blimp hangars?

10 JS: No sir, I haven't.

11 CB: Well, in California they still got them, I think. They're huge because the
12 blimp blown up, blew it up. Anyway, the same kind of thing, but not quite as big as what
13 the hanger would look like. Again, I'm sure it must have been left over World War II
14 stuff because they it was and that sort of thing. All the ROTC sections worked out. They
15 had offices up on campus and I think that whole area that we used to drill on now was
16 just some sort of forts for. The emphasis has obviously changed.

17 JS: Right, right. Well, did you feel that the training you got there in ROTC was
18 pretty good?

19 CB: Most of the time, of course, well you've talked to a lot of veterans and you
20 don't really learn the military until you're in the military. I mean, all the courses in the
21 world that make you think you know what you're doing, but again, I've got to say that
22 after I was commissioned, I learned most of everything I learned from my NCOs and the
23 old experienced guys.

24 JS: All right.

25 CB: I was smart enough to listen to them.

26 JS: So back to Auburn for a moment. Did you graduate in—when did you
27 graduate from Auburn?

28 CB: August of '62.

29 JS: August of '62. Did you go to any Auburn football games while you were
30 there?

1 CB: Oh all of them. Everyone I could afford. The last two years I was married and
2 working at several supposedly part time jobs. I worked forty hours and had to give up my
3 ROTC job, but I worked forty hours a week at a service station. I learned to be a little
4 better mechanic in the process. The football is a very big thing at Auburn and it's
5 honestly one of the reasons I went there. They had been an uncrowned national champion
6 in '57 and in '68 they tied one ball game against Georgia Tech in that conference. But
7 yeah, football was always a big thing. I joined a fraternity Theta Chi when I was a
8 freshman and lived in the house for about a year in a half. That was the center of the
9 social life on campus with dances after the football games. There was a lot of fun times. I
10 even can manage to tell you sometimes in Vietnam. I try to enjoy life when I can.

11 JS: All right, I was just curious about Auburn football because being from the
12 state I know how big college football is there. Unfortunately I grew up on the other side
13 of the rivalry.

14 CB: Oh, most of my family's over there. The ones that are still in Alabama, I
15 guess they're split right down the middle come to think of it. My sister is my only sibling,
16 she's an anesthesiologist and she went to med school there at the University of Alabama
17 med school Birmingham and she went to Birmingham. She grew up in that atmosphere.
18 Everybody used to claim that Birmingham was a neutral city, but it never was.

19 JS: Right, right.

20 CB: I put up with that a lot. Particularly in the lead years when he was coaching.

21 JS: Right, right yes, sir. All right, well upon your graduation from Auburn were
22 you commissioned as a second Lieutenant at that point?

23 CB: Right, but not. I was in the MBA program for one quarter so I had five
24 football seasons there and went on active duty in January of '63.

25 JS: Okay, all right. And once you went on active duty, where did you go from
26 there?

27 CB: I went to Fort Knox which is the armor center and got what they call the
28 armor officer orientation force. Most people just call it the basic force. It was about eight
29 weeks they sent new stuff in eight weeks. Anyway, it was about eight weeks long and had
30 a lot of class. We had maintenance training on the tanks and all that sort of thing. And
31 then we had field problems that we ran. That was some of the bigger challenges there

1 because mid-winter in Kentucky right on the Ohio River there. One night when we were
2 out on the tank company, the Tank Infantry Company, the temperature dropped to the
3 lowest they had on record, below zero and it was a mess. You can imagine the tanks we
4 were on had four lieutenants and the enlisted driver, would usually at most. Nobody's all
5 that familiar with the Army and the Army's ways. They've been freezing their tails off
6 running around half way out of the tank. And so when they got to the thing, they got the
7 position they were supposed to be in and they policed everybody up because it was
8 getting so cold. They put up a medium tent and put some of these little stoves, these
9 portable stoves. Of course, you woke up the next morning and the ground melted where
10 you were and you were in. Nobody thought to clear the road wheels or the sprockets or
11 the wheels on tanks with all the mud and it's frozen solid. You know, it warmed up
12 enough during the day for it to have melted and then get all frozen solid. In that platoon
13 that I was in, we must have thrown about three of the five tanks was thrown with tracks
14 on it. So that's what we spent all that day doing. Strangely enough the NCOs and officers
15 that we trained thought that was a good training. But we froze our buns off. Oh, I
16 remember I could hardly get in, I was really pretty slim in those days. I never got over
17 160 and that was in football season. I had everything on that they issued me and wedged
18 myself down in the tank, but I was still cold. I had never been that cold in my life in
19 anywhere. Korea, Germany it wasn't that cold. I've been in hot, elsewhere I have in
20 Vietnam. I've been warm in Florida, but in fact, I'm the one that acclimated there, but
21 anyhow that was the way that train went and it did a pretty good job on us. We had some
22 practical. I did fairly well in the cold I was still trying to learn how to play the Army
23 game and it took me a better part of the first three years I've been there.

24 JS: All right. Well, were you training on what was it, M-48s there?

25 CB: Yeah. Yeah, you know, I think the 60s had started coming in.

26 JS: Okay.

27 CB: I think we did train on the M-60s. was, but you know, they're sort of first
28 cousins and 60s sort of a step up. These days they don't even give them the different
29 number when they changed things that way. You know, an apache helicopters. They call
30 them long bow or plot three or some damn thing like that.

31 JS: Right.

1 CB: But in those days they changed the numbers and the 48 was definitely the
2 precursor of the 60 because it was not hard. more than the other. The 60s, of course, had a
3 diesel engine whereas the 48 did not. It had a big. It had a better gun and a 120
4 millimeter. No, 105 where the 48 had a 90.

5 JS: Okay. So overall you thought that the training there was pretty good as far as
6 preparing you?

7 CB: Yeah, my youngest son was in the Army for a time and their basic was at
8 Fort Knox. I did not consider the training he was getting to be nearly as good as what I
9 got there.

10 JS: Well, how about the instructors there? Did they do a pretty good job?

11 CB: Yeah, I think so. I can't remember saying, "Oh god, and his ego." I don't
12 remember that and things of that nature. I'm to turn off to an instructor that not doing
13 preparation. I did end up on the gum when I was little there.

14 JS: Well, any other particular memorable moments at Armor Officer Basic course
15 that stick out in your mind?

16 CB: Well, first time I'd driven on snow pretty much.

17 JS: Okay.

18 CB: That was an experience no matter what I happened to be in. The track or a
19 tank or. I just really didn't expect Kentucky to be that dang cold. Anyway, that's the
20 other thing I remember about that is the cold. We were trained a lot differently from what
21 we had experienced at summer camp. We were treated like officers and we were treated
22 with some respect. For instance, in ROTC there's a famous hill at Fort Knox going out to
23 the rival ranges, it's called misery hill. It's about a sixty percent grade and a loaded deuce
24 and it had a two and a half ton truck loaded with troops. It has a really difficult time
25 making it up so the ROTC students, they unloaded at the bottom of the hill and they had
26 to march up to save the stress on the truck, but lieutenants ride on a bus. It was some
27 improvement. Yeah, I got to say I made a lot of friends. I want to seem to. My first wife
28 was sort of a bubbly personality, too so she made a lot of friends. There's a family
29 atmosphere in the Army. Within a unit or in this case we were all in the same class. She
30 made a lot of friends with the other wives and so we had a lot of couple things we did.
31 We played bridge a lot and we went to the club together. The officer's club was an

1 essential part of my life in the early days. I was crushed when they disestablished the
2 officer's club a few years back. I even kept a member ship there for me long after I
3 retired. I guess that's all the memories. You know, everything was was pleasant enough
4 so that didn't really store up a memory.

5 JS: Sure, sure. Well, once you completed that course, did you get your first
6 armored assignment at that point?

7 CB: Yeah, I'd gotten what I'd asked for. The Calvary in California and that's the
8 first and last time I got anything off the dream sheet, you know. Anyway, that was the
9 first and the last time. Well, no it's not, I got flying school. Anyway, all of it happened
10 that first year.

11 JS: Right.

12 CB: But we drove out to California. The unit I was with in the 109th Calvary was
13 it had been an old Buffalo Solider outfit. I guess it was loosely associated with the 1st Cav
14 Squadron. Anyway, our housing was at Fort Ord which was a very unusual place. They
15 can't grow grass there so they grow what they call ice plants. This is generally along the
16 California coast. Vanderburgh is that way, too. Anyway, we had housing there and our
17 orderly room was there, our headquarters was there, but five days a week—five and a
18 half, actually, we were at a place called Hundred League Military Reservation down
19 south passed Robles and Holon Junction was actually the name of the little burg, but that
20 was only the service station. But we had a bib wax set up down there. We did all serve
21 the day duty down there. You had to be an NCO down there. So we had, on the weekend,
22 we had people at both places, but if you pass a Saturday morning inspection, and usually
23 they did. You could go back to Fort Ord for the weekend which is consistent of a day in a
24 half actually because then you'd have to come back down and I. It became the
25 appreciation for what field life was like because I slept in a tent for five days out of the
26 week. It also gave me appreciated for what is striking difference areas between California
27 and the rest of detention. Fort was always cool. They didn't ask to show of the troops out
28 there. Everybody wore greens and winter uniforms. It rarely got over sixty degrees. It's
29 right on the coast and right where the two ocean currents run together like a double beach
30 and very windy, very windy. And also fog like San Francisco. Then you cross over the
31 pacific coastal range and go down into the valley to get to the highway to go to and you

1 go through Salinas, California, which you may have been familiar with from Steinberg's.
2 Anyway, and the weather is totally different.

3 JS: Okay.

4 CB: It's warm most of the time. It's bright and sunny. The fog never makes it
5 over there. And very little rain apparently, but enough to make that a verdict growing
6 area. It grows a lot. I remember we would start off from Fort Ord. I had a friend who had
7 two cars. He had a that he took back and forth. asked me if I wanted to come along and I
8 said sure. So leave the car for the whole way. Anyway, we would start off with starch
9 fatigues and we wore these scarves in those days, yellow scarves. Field jackets and
10 gloves and hats and by the time we we had the field jackets off already and before we got
11 to, we be down to a t-shirt. It was incredible as of the weather differences over there, the
12 terrain differences. was a good place to train because it'd give you a lot of challenges. I
13 learned a lot of things to know about. While I was there, I ran into a couple of captains
14 who were aviators on ground duty which was required in those days. Every five or six
15 years you had to do a couple years on ground duty. One was and one was sanguine silent.
16 And the one that was the sanguine silent happened to be a returned brother of mine from
17 Auburn. He had graduated the June before I came in the Fall of '58 and he just sort of
18 adopted me. People do that in the Army. It's like welcoming an orphan child into it or
19 something. Anyway, he took out birddogs which I later flew frequently and beavers
20 which I flew frequently on fire patrols because that was the one that seemed dangerous.
21 Two are troops and two are installations there with fire because it was so dry. The moss
22 that's on the trees is green, but it's not damp, it's dry. It's not as tender. And it used to get
23 caught in our muffler zone of tanks which was the M-41 tanks, it was very old, hard to
24 get parts for, for our tracks, APCs. The driver would sling around the vehicle a little bit to
25 get it to fall off so it wouldn't cause an explosion because it already caught fire the
26 minute it hit the buffer. And it hit the ground and then we would have to put out a small
27 fire, but it would be a big fire very soon. Yeah, that was a very dry place. And weird, too,
28 because as it dried out, it only rained what like two months out of the year or something
29 and it rained pretty steadily for two months, almost monsoon weather. As it began to dry,
30 it'd get a crust on it and below it would be good. And if you happened to take a fifty
31 gallon tank over that crust, you were going to sink up to you. It was a challenge. Anyway,

1 my experience flying these fire patrols with these two captains convinced me I still
2 wanted to fly so I applied for flight school. To do that, I had to go volunteer in definite. I
3 had a definite two year commitment when I was commissioned.

4 JS: Okay.

5 CB: Anything you do after you commission is modified. So they were getting to
6 only three years after I got my wings so that's all right. I can live for a year for wings.
7 And implied that if I didn't make it through flight school, I wouldn't have additional, but
8 I didn't know if that was true or not to tell you the truth. Anyway, so in November we
9 went back to Rucker, we went back at Enterprise and lived in Enterprise for that matter
10 for about three months until we built those. And right across from flight school. Of
11 course, like all the homely guys said relative to all those places, but flight school was
12 different.

13 JS: All right.

14 CB: Anymore you want to say about that?

15 JS: Well, one thing I just wanted to ask you about that real quick, that was
16 November of '64 when you went?

17 CB: '63.

18 JS: '63, okay.

19 CB: Yeah.

20 JS: All right, that brings up my next question. I was going to ask you where you
21 were when the Kennedy assassination took place.

22 CB: I was in flight school.

23 JS: Okay.

24 CB: That's another very strong memory of mine. We were about two weeks into
25 the course, I think.

26 JS: Okay.

27 CB: You flew in the morning and had classes in the afternoon. And in between
28 your expected to go home and change into khakis and come back to classes. I had the old
29 grey bag flight suits in the morning. Or, you went to class in the morning which I hated
30 before I started. I didn't find it nearly the challenge to go to the flight line in this time and
31 didn't go to the classroom. Anyway, you know, you'd have to flip flop that. Usually they

1 would have about three classes going at once. You could tell who was who by the color
2 of the baseball or like people do with t-shirts. We were blue hats and it was a gold hat and
3 the red class at the same time. Somehow in there, maybe one of them was a little bit
4 ahead of us, but somewhere someone was flip-flopping the other way every week. We
5 had just come in and were getting off the bus, in fact. They had the maintenance
6 classroom building. And somebody's wife had brought him over. I guess he didn't make
7 the bus. They were listening to the radio and I said, "Hey, what's going on?" and he says,
8 "The president's been shot." And before that class was over, he was dead. I was crushed.
9 I really revered the Kennedy's. Well, I never loved Bobby though. Anyway, we were like
10 in a wake there for the whole weekend. This was on a Friday and we were just glued to
11 the television and watched everything that happened. They cancelled classes. Maybe
12 that's what it was. Maybe it was the third. All I know is we were glued to the TV and,
13 you know, I guess if my wife hadn't fed me sandwiches, I probably would have never
14 eaten. It was heartbreaking. I think the whole nation mourned over that. I don't think
15 there's any question.

16 JS: At that time, around the time after the Kennedy assassination happened and
17 soon after, well, soon after it happened rather, what were the theories or beliefs at that
18 point about why?

19 CB: Why he was killed?

20 JS: Yes, sir.

21 CB: Well, I don't know about that so much. Jumbled in my mind from war and
22 reporting everything cover to cover. I probably shouldn't say this being a historian
23 experience, but there was a n undercurrent in a lot of things felt maybe had something to
24 do with it. I never bought into it, but I've heard people say that. If you were born in
25 mobile you know it's the Deep South.

26 JS: Right.

27 CB: There's always an undercurrent or something going. Anyway, I think the vast
28 majority of people were prepared to accept the war. They just wanted to put it to rest and
29 it's always easier for people to think that a crazy did something like that rather than, you
30 know. I've never been much of a conspiracy theorist.

1 JS: Right, right. Yeah, I wasn't trying to feed really get into that, I was just
2 curious as to what the general sentiment was at the time, so.

3 CB: Well, I think everybody would like to settle on it being a crazy and was able
4 to plan it well enough. Yeah, I suppose you'll find similar settlements after Lincoln was
5 killed.

6 JS: All right, well I guess getting back on track here to the fix wing aviation
7 school. I guess if you could talk just a little bit more about the actual training itself and
8 how did you do in the training?

9 CB: It was a mixed bag. As in all military courses, I did pretty well academically.
10 In fact, I was ahead of the class academically. We had flight instructors that were
11 civilians. They were contracts. All of them had been in World War II, I think. And all of
12 them had been flown in a dozen different airplanes. And they got really short with us
13 because we didn't pick up exactly how to fly these sporty little planes. My instructor took
14 the longest time and finally did not release me. This is a primary for the first phase. And
15 we trained in the Byrd dog. Anyway, it was the most numerous of the aircraft the Army
16 had. So he turned me over to a prog-ride, a progression ride, a progress ride. And these
17 were done by Army captains who were also flight instructors. We went around the
18 patterned twice, I think out in the stage field. We were captured in the back. He said,
19 "Pull over here by the tower." He said, "I don't know why you had solos yet. Go ahead
20 and do three times around and pick me up." I said, "Okay." And I did and that feeling of
21 exhilaration, particularly when the cloud was there over my head. That feeling of
22 exhilaration when I first broke ground and didn't drag and it was great. I did pretty well
23 from then on in everything. I ate tactics up. We would go out and land on road strips and
24 things like that. A dirt road and fields, open fields that the only thing it did was make sure
25 the lumber and the tree branches and things were cleared out of the smooth part. And we
26 did all these kind of missions. Some of which I never saw again out of flight school, but
27 everything from aerial photography with a pod on one wing and to bundle drops and it
28 was pretty through training. And then we got till we were in three phases. First was
29 primary and that's the only place I had trouble and I still maintained good academic
30 standing. Second was the tactics which was really the meat of the Byrd dog which was
31 what the aircraft would do. In phase three was S-trucks and we took that into Beaver.

1 Some of those incidents we had a little bit, about five hours I think or maybe something
2 less. PO1-D where the panel was moveable and you could move the in the back seat and
3 the students sat in the back seat and it was hooded in and could fly a little bit. You know,
4 it's very curious. You know, cause of that frog ride and solos, they put me right back on
5 with the same instructor and we didn't have any problems. I think maybe he had some
6 problems under the making level. Anyway, we learned to fly the Beaver first of all. And
7 then we had to fly it under the hood. That was my first close shave was after we had
8 finished instruments. Well, maybe it's better I. I can't say I didn't have some problems
9 with this. I never grew low, but I learned how to do it right. We had one of the next to last
10 things you did was to fly on the S-wing cross country. Our stick chose it was three
11 students and an armed gadget instructor. We chose to go to New York and then two or
12 three others chose to go to one of the Texas border towns where we could buy booze over
13 in Mexico. You could do that stuff in those days. Today you go to jail. Anyway, we beat
14 seat as fast as we could as well as Beaver up to New York so that we could have some
15 time on the ground in New York. So we were all were on the town in New York, you
16 know, it was like a budget truck, but slightly bigger. Then after that, you could see it's
17 cross country—you were great in all this. You know, if your instructor was great and all.
18 Mine taught me to always pay attention to instruments. It's not what you feel, on that
19 trip. He pulled my hood off at point somewhere up in the Carolinas and he said, "Okay,
20 take a look." I look down and I was flying one wing down just almost perfect one wing
21 down. I was wondering why I hadn't used some pedal. He said, "You'd been flying like
22 that for a half hour." He says, "If you ever gotten off airway I ought to kick your but.
23 Clearly the instruments were telling me I was flying one wing down, but I just didn't
24 believe it. You learn, you learn all those kind of things and the best way you learn is to do
25 it. So, the very last thing we did in flight school was to learn to fly the Beaver without
26 instrument school. I fly tactically which is just a few tactical flights. I'm quite sure this is
27 scheduled to be my last flight. We lost an engine in our aircraft coming back from
28 Tallahassee and the engine on the Beavers are 985, I believe. Anyway, the cylinders are
29 arranged in a circle and that type of. They had to master a lot that holds the distance
30 together. One of those master rods failed and put a hole in one of the jugs, one of the
31 cylinders about the size of a quarter. It didn't run very well that way. So you had to put it

1 down in a cut through fashion and we had to critique about what we did and didn't do.
2 The emergency procedures took about a week after that. On the first bounce we lost a
3 gear, got airborne again and called the lymph of a gully there on the other side. And you
4 couldn't see any of this from a thousand feet because Cuts was all over it. Anyway, we
5 flipped over on our back and the thing about a Beaver that makes it dangerous to be on
6 your back is that its gravity fed fuel from wing tanks into the belly tanks. And so we were
7 pretty much full anyway. And so the minute we got upside down, starting burping like a
8 fountain out of the overflow. The aircraft was being bathed in the gasoline and I would
9 have never thought even as soon as I was in those days, but it a parachute on which we
10 flew on it that I could have cleared the small area between the two sweat seats and the
11 peeler. Somehow, I did. I was still the second one out. The kid that was in the back that
12 was going to expose that had the first segment of the flight was already standing by a tree
13 though he was moving faster than I was, but then we waited. We got picked up by what
14 they call the flat iron, which is the medivac helicopter, the OH19 in those days at
15 Rutgers. They flew us to the hospital and then we sat around for two hours waiting to see
16 a doctor. Army medicine. Over a week later I think—I don't remember whether we flew
17 again or not. The standard prescription is get back up right away, you know? It's like
18 falling off a bike. I don't remember flying anymore until I got to Korea.

19 JS: Well overall, how long did this training last?

20 CB: Nine months.

21 JS: Right, right.

22 CB: compared to that.

23 JS: Right, and did you find that it was pretty good training and that the instructors
24 were pretty good with the exception of the one guy that you had some trouble with?

25 CB: You know, that's almost inevitable, you're going to have an instructor that
26 you don't quite see eye to eye with. If you train long enough. Yeah, I've had a great deal
27 of respect for the Hugger men, we called it mother ugger. I think we all looked forward to
28 going back there. And that's the officer's club in the Army at one time. And that's
29 because we were surrounded by dried salvy wire dress counties. That was the only place
30 you could get booze. Of course now you can get it in a grocery store. We were growing
31 up a little bit.

1 JS: Well let me ask you this as far as that training went. What was the washout
2 rate? Did quite a few people wash out or most pretty successful?

3 CB: Okay, we graduated in July of '64. I don't think we had a thing or person
4 wash out, but we did have some that were recycled or washed back. One of them was a
5 friend of mine, a gentlemen, and a stage in primary. Neil Bower out in North Dakota.
6 Anyway, he just couldn't get the hang of it. You know, some people seeing us in its own
7 tunnel. I saw him and didn't like him much, but I ground. And so I looked at him as sort
8 of a safety valve to get me back home if I ran into bad weather and used him that way for
9 the rest of my life. But some people really warmed to him. And some people didn't flat
10 get it. They couldn't—you got to get your picture in your mind's eye of what the
11 instruments are telling you. You've got to fix in your mind that this means the airplane's
12 this way and the decreasing air speed means they're probably climbing it and all that sort
13 of thing. Anyway, I guess Leo never really got it and put him back to class to redo
14 instruments. There may have been one or two others that did that, they did that with set
15 up. Instruments were the most difficult topics. The instrument trip and flying was the
16 most difficult topic that I found in flying school. We weren't getting anything like the
17 washout rates that we'd heard. I think we were a particularly good class. We knew that
18 some of the yellow hats and the red hats, they had like twenty percent, twenty-five
19 percent wash out. You know, the sad sound heading and some of the helicopter class who
20 were warrant officer trained candidates, they had as high as forty percent in that time
21 frame. The height of the Vietnam build up, they were rumored. I don't know that I ever
22 saw the imprint that nobody washed out. A helicopter chain during the '65, '68 timeframe
23 and maybe '69. And constantly I ran into some of those guys that should have been
24 washed out later in the dark and they were perpetual I would say and never return with
25 some of them. Our rate was better than the others between classes. We had a lot of kids, a
26 lot of guys. I was about the oldest guy in the class, but we had one other who had been in
27 the 82nd Airborne for a couple years, but we had a high percentage of ROTC flight units.
28 I mean, they already had probably a thousand when it came to flight school so that was
29 the program, they didn't have room for me when we were in the Army. That's one
30 negative thing that happened to transfer. Anyway, yeah, I think we were either

1 particularly lucky or a little bit better. They got even less later on. If you were dry washed
2 out, like I was saying through the '65, '68 time frame.

3 JS: Yes, sir.

4 CB: And I think they were prepared for it at high 40 percent of any class, but it
5 never quite materialized when I was there.

6 JS: All right, well once you finished up the school there, were you sent to Korea
7 at that point?

8 CB: Yeah.

9 JS: Okay.

10 CB: Yeah, we got orders about a month before graduating.

11 JS: Okay, all right.

12 CB: It was an unaccompanied tour in those days. Oh, the original orders assign
13 you to as soon as you hit the ground, they put you on a bus to wherever you're going. I
14 went up to Tung Chung which is South of the DMZ. I think are still there, but the
15 Americans aren't there anymore. So, we're south. Our major task was to fly the DMZ
16 every day. After a while, because I had some tactical experience before I got there, they
17 chose me to be the DMZ instructor pilot to check people out on the DMZ. Some sections
18 of the DMZ is pretty easy to tell where North Korea is and South Korea is. Some areas
19 not so much, particularly the mudflats over to the West Coast. Yeah, I guess I must have
20 flown close to 300 DMZ there.

21 JS: Okay, you're flying 01s there?

22 CB: Primarily. We had some Beavers and I did fly those from time to time. They
23 were a bit of a challenge laying on some little dingy strips we had over there, particularly
24 loaded with cargo. We had a daily mail run. We'd go down to Kemp Ho that's not really
25 in Sol, but next to Sol and pick up the US mail and distribute it to all of the compounds.
26 There must have been eight or ten compounds north or so that made US troops, quite a
27 few. Sometimes landing on one of those strips is a challenge. Particularly when you're
28 loaded. My primary function was flying the DMZ. Every once in a while, I'd pick up
29 mail.

30 JS: Okay.

1 CB: I was made the flight operations officer after in the air about three or four
2 months. I fell in love with that job and never tried to do it wherever I wanted. Of course,
3 you do a job again and again and again, you adjust to the local conditions and you're
4 better at it. Everybody's favorite Ops officer. We had an aviation battalion there and was
5 six-wing. The handle was down, actually not at KC, but down at Red Cloud. I think it
6 was called. It had a little banana guns and CH-21s and OH-23s and the Huey's,
7 observation helicopters. We got to know those guys because, you know, was big enough
8 to watch the land and land there for some reason. They'd some forties and we'd and we
9 all got to know each other. One of my classmates, the Aggie I was telling you about, I
10 think he must have had a somewhere administrative and, in the Army, because he always
11 got everything he asked for. He was flying single and twin engine aircraft. A K-55 and
12 Yong Doc Po was right in the middle of the Hon River. He invited me down to their
13 place. They were called dragonflies. The boarded with the 8th Army Headquarters. That's
14 quite an experience. And in the process, I found he never had his room that was never. I
15 said, "What, is this guy a-wall or what?" and he said, "No, he's got his wife over here."
16 "What?" He said, "Yeah, they found a place, a guest house that's run by one of the little
17 ladies from South Carolina and daughter and son-in-law were in the USO and they were
18 over there on the job. She leased his house from a Korean General. It already had security
19 measured in place like broken glass along the top of the fence." Anyway, the next time I
20 went down there I went over to find the guest house and talk to him and find out what
21 details were and was and everything. It turns out it's like a girl's dorm that the guys had
22 for sleeping privileges from time to time. Everything from an E-6 to a Ly Colonel, a JAG
23 officer headed it while I was there. I wrote my first wife, "Would you like to be
24 introduced to the." And she said, "Not only yes, but hell yes." And so I flew her over by
25 my crew sometimes and she lived in the guest house and I got down there most
26 weekends. A lot of times guys would intentionally cooperate. You know, without even
27 offering to and to pick up a mail flight that I was scheduled for. I even scheduled myself
28 and they would say, "Oh, we'll take it a mail it." Getting to Sol those was a different
29 thing. You couldn't fly down there and keep an airplane out all that time. I wrote down
30 what they called a Kim Shi bus one time and I decided I wasn't going to do that again. I
31 ran into a taxi driver picking somebody up and I said, "How far do you go?" and he said,

1 "I go to Korea." And so we negotiated a price and I said, "Okay, I'll need to go back to."
2 He says, "Okay, you got it boss." And so I rode a taxi back and forth and the base fly
3 roots what they called the main drag between for the rest of the year I was there. The only
4 significant things, we had a couple of false alarm alerts while I was over there. I had an
5 intelligence collection that got shot down over the while we're there. And they put the
6 whole 8th Army on alert. I thought it was for real. I called down and talked to my wife
7 and said, "Baby, you're on your own. Cause I got to take off in ten minutes." But nothing
8 ever came of it. I guess that's the biggest stressful thing that happened to me was the
9 flood about a month before I left. August, I believe. No, it had to be July because I
10 missed my wife's birthday. I've never seen floods like that in my life. It swept out all the
11 temporary bridges and just took them right out. It flooded out airfield especially after it
12 had to sit through it, but the helicopters, they flew up into the compound which was a
13 little bit higher and in the air field it was. And then it took us about two days to clean
14 everything up and then everybody started screaming, "Hey, we don't have supplies, we
15 hadn't seen any mail in two weeks." And blah, blah, blah. So we cranked up those
16 Beavers and started hauling mail and that was all the division headquarters air so that's
17 where all the supply units were and all the storage. Some of which had been ruined. We
18 loaded that Beaver up and we didn't take two pilots. We were just loading and loading
19 the Beaver up as full as it was going. If you could get up, you know, as much as you
20 could get off the ground with it. I had a real on one of those flights. I was going up to
21 Camp Santa Barbara which was the artillery installation. The Army engineers did a real
22 job on the strip they made up there. They just shaved off a top of a mountain. It was hole
23 on one end and it was a drop of about two hundred feet and then another drop of about
24 eight hundred feet.

25 JS: Oh wow.

26 CB: And two little taxi ways, one on each end. I came in and apparently, I had
27 some component on a tail wind and didn't realize it and I had full flaps on it, on the
28 brakes and I saw the other end of the road and I come. I don't know whatever caused me
29 to do that, but I pulled a wheel around and hit one brake real hard and did a ground loop,
30 but no damage and into the taxi way. The guys came out to unload the airplane. "Boy,
31 that was some hot landing there, Lieutenant." I said, "Man, I don't do that shit all the time."

1 (both laughing) That's the closest I ever came to bending one up. Yeah, the Beaver's a
2 little bit more of a challenge. After a while, if you fly Byrd Dog Company it's just like
3 extensions of the and you know what's going to cause a ground until you just don't let it
4 happen. It's squirmy at first until you get to know it and then you get symbiotic with
5 those. So was all right once I got my wife over there. I went crazy once she did, but I've
6 always been a straight arrow. I never wondered much. So I need to be close to my wife.

7 JS: Well, before moving on, I want to ask you just a few more questions about
8 Korea. First, you mentioned earlier as you're flying along the DMZ you could tell the
9 difference between North and South Korea for the most part pretty easy. How could you
10 do that? How different did it look?

11 CB: Well, they had the actual DMZ or the MDL, Military Demarcation Line,
12 which is the actual border. It's fenced and at that time they were clearing the area on both
13 sides. Like in Germany, I later flew the ten meter strips on those between East and West
14 Germany a couple of times. You can certainly tell because they've gotten meters on
15 either side of the fence plowed. You know, the border is naked in Germany. It's not quite
16 as naked in Korea, but you can still spot the fence lines. Or you could in those days. Now,
17 some of the pictures I've seen since I was over there, they apparently let that area go. I
18 know there are some areas that probably worked as well maintained as the ones that I
19 flew over because I only flew two-thirds of the DMZ. The other third was the first rock
20 Army area in the Republic of Korea Balance. That was the other bad thing. One of them
21 got shot down while I was there, but we never was shot at. I could always tell when the
22 radar has—nobody ever tried to shoot us or never shot at us. For the most part you could
23 tell. Right as the turnaround point was near Pork Chop Hill, you may have heard of it?

24 JS: Yes, sir.

25 CB: Yeah, down at Chong or something like that. It did not exist anymore. The
26 town did not exist. It was nothing but shell holes. It was absolutely barren. I mean you
27 knew exactly when you got in the junction, but otherwise it varied. There was not a lot of
28 foliage north of Sol in those days.

29 JS: Okay.

30 CB: It was either rice patty or mountain. It was almost naked because they had
31 chopped down all the trees to make charcoal to heat the houses with. It was shortly after

1 the war, but I think about that sometimes. I was there a little more than a decade after the
2 armistice and that's a lot longer from then to now than it was back to the war. Korea is
3 nothing like it is today I'm sure if I were to go back for any reason, that would be the
4 reason. I wouldn't go back to Vietnam for the natives. These guys that say, "I'm going to
5 go to Vietnam." You're going to give those jerks your money, your travel money?

6 JS: Right.

7 CB: And eat their. Although, I found out I have been wearing a pair of shorts that
8 came from there the other day. You can't buy a jacket, I think, that's made anywhere
9 else. Particularly logo stuff.

10 JS: Well, as you're flying along the border, could you see much of an enemy
11 presence on the other side? I mean, were they aligned right there on the border?

12 CB: No, no they weren't.

13 JS: Okay.

14 CB: When you were mostly by when you were on the other side. The only place I
15 think I'd ever saw any troops there was Island which at one time a US installation and
16 then it went to Rock Marines and the North Koreans had it for a while and then they went
17 back to the Rock Marines. Anyway, I've seen troops of both sides there. We see our
18 troops all the time, but I didn't see much in the way of the enemy troops. I usually had an
19 Intel sergeant sit in the back seat and he was on the binoculars the whole time. We were
20 mostly drivers. It was when one of them didn't show up that we had to go on double-
21 duty. You rarely saw anything in force report, but I think by enlargement the constancy
22 of the missions was to make North Koreans know that we still keep an eye on you, you
23 know? They had this show piece town, I think it's still there, up north of the Im Jin River.
24 That's part of our route. It was snow white concrete. You could see it for miles of
25 Qaesong. It was obviously like a Pretemkin village in Russia, you know? It was a show
26 piece. You never saw a person around anywhere. I did not know anybody actually lived
27 there. We didn't actually have too much to report on, really. Somehow, the Intel
28 sergeants managed to fill up a sheet, but I didn't ever find that much to report on. Found a
29 lot more in Vietnam.

1 JS: Well, I wanted to ask you a little bit about the relationship between the
2 Americans and the Koreans there. Was there any anti-Americanism concern in the US
3 presence or were they pretty fine with that?

4 CB: Well, if you'd ask me that after I'd been in there nine months I would have.
5 No, they're great people, just poor, poor as hell. Because of the people, I very quickly
6 understood Asian stoicism and, you know, the Buddhist. I read some about Buddhism on
7 the way and all that sort of thing. I took it that some people didn't get ahead just because
8 they were convinced that was their role in life. That was as far as they were going to go.
9 But then in the Spring, before the flood, Sol just erupted with riots and classes cancelled
10 and of course, I was very anxiously, but one of my good buddies on the ground there—
11 well, actually two or three of them were. Their compound was right across the street.
12 They came over for dinner while I was going on about it. "What is the deal with going on
13 its own?" He said, "Oh, it's just you didn't say do that." And I guess it's just a well-
14 established tradition. The main thing they did back in those days was just keep you out
15 of. Just keep. You know, actually the relations were very good. We had a rock strip,
16 Romeo 233 I think it was. All the American strips and all the American Airfields had an
17 A, an Alpha in front of it. We were Alpha 220 and this was Romeo 219 because we were
18 220 right around the corner of a mountain from us whereas the Army engineers, the US
19 Army Engineers built out airfield directly across to prevailing winds. That rock ship was
20 right into the prevailing wind so we got in trouble trying to get down with high winds to
21 fly around at the end of the drop strip until the wind died down a little bit. We had a good
22 friend up there that one time met a liaison officer to our division and had lived, because
23 he was a pilot, had lived in our compound, the major league or major camp, you know?
24 But he was a nice guy, a very nice guy. We got along with him and we could always
25 count on him to take care of us. I would say the relationships were quite good. Some of
26 them became marital. A lot of guys brought back Korean wives. Primarily the mechanics,
27 but I guess a soldier could get in trouble in the village if he stayed in the village all the
28 time, but it wasn't part of my experience.

29 JS: All right, well, how long was this assignment?

30 CB: Well, on paper it was thirteen months. They usually shipped you out at
31 twelve and a half.

1 JS: Okay.

2 CB: And that was part of the problem. We had had, for me was the shipping it
3 out. I had to arrange for my wife's and I was hoping to meet her at some place and go
4 along with her. And so that took some doing, but anyway, I pieced all that together and
5 just about time I had that squared away. They had about a month before we left. We had a
6 visit from our personnel officer in the. The guy who came to interview us, find out where
7 we wanted to go and what to do, he must have been on some sort of other project, too. He
8 was trying to find out something, where we want to go next. I said, "Well, I've always
9 said, chief. I'd like to go back to the states to train and be on some sort of to Europe."
10 He said, "You want to train in any other aircraft?" Then about a week later, a long
11 enough time for him to get back from Washington and shuffle some papers, I got a letter
12 from I think that same guy. He said, "Well, we're happy we're able to accommodate you
13 with helicopter school." Wait a minute.

14 JS: Right.

15 CB: Yeah, and we had lost that lift company about three months with the tour left.
16 That's one reason why we had to hold all the supplies lying around because the bigger
17 helicopters went up there. They had gone somewhere down south of Korea and we were
18 being transitioned into the Huey and they were shipping out as a unit to Vietnam. This is
19 in early '65. It's just about time the first gamble was getting there. They changed their
20 flag while I was there in Korea, too. You know, I got word back to this guy as soon as I
21 could and I didn't want to have any desire to go to helicopter school. I left on orders so I
22 don't remember exactly—oh yeah; I left the orders before me. So I come here to the and I
23 said. And then train and go to helicopter transition and I'd be flying through the cab. I
24 always loved the cab and I was still learning how to fly an airplane and I didn't want to
25 learn to fly a helicopter. My home record, we finally got that. We made a stopover that
26 rendezvous with my wife in Tokyo and had a couple days in Tokyo and then we had
27 three days in Hawaii. anyway, I had before we got to Florida and they'd said, "Sorry
28 about the misunderstanding." Or something to that affect. "We'll be cutting orders for
29 you to go straight to Germany and if that's good I could let two hundred dollars." and I
30 said, "Okay." But then the orders never came and they never came. I spent all the leave
31 I'd built up in Korea. When I finally got the orders to come to and load onto the MSTs to

1 go by boat, which I never expected to do, but one of the same boats that had taken—they
2 were liberty ships, I think.

3 JS: Okay.

4 CB: From World War II. It's last trip was taking the 1st Cav in Vietnam. They had
5 all the thank you'd and everything like that posted on a bulletin board from the first kids.
6 We'd sail out of it's the roughest war I ever saw in my life in North Atlantic in the winter
7 time. It's actually march by the time we got there. No, it wasn't March. I'm sorry,
8 November. Anyway, I used up the ones.

9 JS: Okay, this was '65?

10 CB: Yes.

11 JS: Okay.

12 CB: I was there from Thanksgiving weekend of '65 to Washington's Birthday in
13 '67. Not long, about fifteen months.

14 JS: All right.

15 CB: And the only reason I was still there with several personnel people. The only
16 reason I got Germany at all was because I was just coming from Korea. I don't know
17 what you've read about that time frame, but Robert Magnumaril was still Secretary of
18 Defense. He was very, very—he was not one of my favorite people. Anyway, he was
19 constantly, but sure in the media that there was no draw down in Europe because of the
20 buildup in Vietnam. Of course, he was lying through his teeth. When I got there, I was
21 the only armor captain in an armored brigade. I was put to run an aviation section. And
22 the second and first lieutenants were running infantry company. The draw down was very
23 evident. We didn't have enough policies to fly all the airplanes we had on the airfield. We
24 had to rotate the spot with an artillery group attachment that flew out of there in a small
25 2nd Cav detachment that flew out of there. Some of them were rotary wing only pilots and
26 I was fix wing. I would fly their fix wing and they'd fly my helicopter. That situation was
27 still there when I left fifteen months later. I was replaced by two I Colonels.

28 JS: Oh wow.

29 CB: I guess they didn't have any battalions or former. Nice enough guys, but a
30 little bit of over kill. Yeah, I loved Germany. I could have stayed there five years. The
31 weather only matters here. Something always falling in Germany, but the country's

1 beautiful. I was in Bavaria, Northern Bavaria, and some people call it Franconia, but it's
2 a little town of Bamberg, universally pronounced that way by the GIs. Anyway, it was an
3 old bishopric back when Germany was nothing but a bunch of little states. It was
4 controlled by a bishop and his prominent feature is an old convent on top of the hill in
5 Altenburg. As long as you could see Altenburg below you, you know how to get home.
6 We had instrument aircraft, but no exportation on the fields. We had to fly VFR most of
7 the time and back in those days you had to get four hours of flight time every month
8 because you always. They'd give you three months to catch up on it. It's in the third
9 month you flew twelve hours. They wouldn't take any , but sometimes I was in the 11th
10 and 12th hour I spent in a panic because there was no other way to do it. They lowered the
11 EFR for military aircraft, 701, 701 feet and one mile visibility and still sometimes I
12 struggled to save. I learned more about blind instruments over there. Our Byrd Dogs were
13 a lot better instrumented than I flew anywhere until Vietnam. I shot any number of
14 approaches. I'd usually tried to go to a place that had a GC8 and an English speaker, but I
15 wasn't always able to do that. I had to shoot some radio from ADF approaches. But, you
16 know, the challenge was the weather and my challenge was keeping, you know, two of
17 the three balls in the air all the time. They also loaded me down because I was the only
18 Army captain in the parade for a while. They loaded me down with all these extra
19 additional duties and that's where I got my top secret clearance. They had what they
20 called passive action, like repel team. And these were the guys that had to own the go
21 codes. We had that artillery group that had aviation attached to the airfield. They had
22 some eight-inch self-built Howitzers and they had me do rounds for them and they were
23 locked up in a bunker somewhere and they couldn't de-arm them until we gave them the
24 go ahead. And so consequently, that was the most tightly I was ever controlled about off
25 times in the Army because they had to know where I was all the time. To go to Berlin, to
26 fly into Berlin for Memorial Day weekend, the first wife and I had to get a weekend pass.
27 You know, it was not uncommon in Korea to get a pass. Even bosses have to get a pass.
28 In Germany, it was unheard of and it has been everywhere since then. They tried to keep
29 close tabs on me and every once in a while, I'd be called in the middle of my school to
30 verify a message. I guess my biggest disappointment about getting that TS clearance was

1 how little difference it made. It wasn't that way all that much. It didn't do that much for
2 me.

3 JS: Well, was much of your flying here on the border as well?

4 CB: No, no.

5 JS: Okay.

6 CB: It was mostly in support of tactical.

7 JS: Okay.

8 CB: Operations, Felix. Our brigade, despite its reduced leadership capability still
9 had to do a lot of training. They were in the woods a lot. I went along with them. And if it
10 was a big enough hunk of the brigade like two battalions, we'd just move our whole
11 section, aviation section out there and set up a GP medium tent on the edge of the airfield
12 and just pulled them right from the airfield. Away, closer to the air patch. It was very
13 much tactical training aviation. I got to know a lot more about how the Army works there
14 as I worked with Meck infantry and armor and cavalry and the artillery. I loved to shoot
15 the artillery. We would adjust artillery and we got so close to that thirty field artillery
16 group section that was on the airfield with us. They would come and as for us to come up
17 to take a mission to someplace just in the artillery I fired and it was—I really enjoyed it. I
18 can't say that there was a day in Germany I didn't like. Even in the worst of weather. The
19 people were so damn friendly and, you know, that's what led me to my graduate studies.
20 I liked the Bavarian so much I got along so well with them. They've all been such good
21 Catholics and nice people. They were all such good Nazis. I had to figure that out. It took
22 me about almost three years in to do it. But I'm finally settled on it. A lot of its inherited
23 fraternalism follow the leader. Of course, it's more, much more complicated than that.

24 JS: Right, is that what your master's thesis focused on?

25 CB: Well, you want to jump that far right now?

26 JS: Yeah, I shouldn't have asked that question then.

27 CB: Okay.

28 JS: Since you were talking about it.

29 CB: Yeah, yeah, that was my purpose and signed up for European history in grad
30 school. See, that's after Vietnam, so. I'm all over it quite a lot and risked quite a lot in the
31 meantime. I was told when I arrived, you know, giving the faculty advisor for my thesis, I

1 didn't do anything on Third Reich. He said, "It's overdone, it's overdone." This is 1969.
2 There must have been two thousand books for another Third Reich thesis.

3 JS: Right.

4 CB: So anyway, I had to choose something to buy more. I think mainly because
5 my faculty advisor said she was German. Anyway, I picked the last German chancellor
6 before Hitler was in Kurt Von Schleiger, so called gray eminence of the Reich. He was a
7 friend of and definitely an enemy of Hitler, but old style right-wing military. He, so
8 called political general, he was only chancellor about two months, but he had been in
9 two years. It was hard to dig up stuff on him, but I got to a point where I thought I'd run
10 into a dead end. I knew there was his memoirs had been saved from Hitler having him
11 killed in the Blood Purge of 1934, but family is— family, I guess had stored these
12 memoirs and kept them from the Nazis the whole war. I knew I had to get to use it, but I
13 didn't have the money. And so that's why I ended up in NSA.

14 JS: All right.

15 CB: Not the first of the last ABD's end up there. It became so frequent they even
16 came up with initials for it, all but dissertation.

17 JS: Right, right. That's for sure.

18 CB: We were still in Germany.

19 JS: Had you learned to speak any of the language there?

20 CB: Yeah, I did everything that could do in those days. There wasn't any Rosetta
21 Stone.

22 JS: Right.

23 CB: I could usually get fed and get directions and that sort of things, but it was
24 very pulmonary. I took German at night in grad school because it was one of the PH.D
25 requirements you had. Two languages, two foreign languages or one foreign language
26 and this newly emerging filled information technology. I love computers already. I took
27 both French which I did some in high school and German, those of which I used a bit in
28 Europe at night. Come to find out, I'd taken, you know, a qualification for it. It's sort of
29 like an SAT, but only for a language, one language. It would have given you a buy on
30 having to take courses. Come to find out I passed both of them without having to take the
31 courses, but I'd finished them. So yeah, I can still use my German with some slight

1 facility. If I got a dictionary, I could translate a document. I still remember the grammar
2 privilege. I get a giggle when I watch a movie like “A Longest Day.” Or something and
3 they say something in German and it translates down in the subtitles. That’s not what
4 they said. My wife at that. Yeah, I can get a war out of it pretty well with it. I tried very
5 hard in all my overseas tours and most of my before I had the six years. Not be the ugly
6 American because I’d seen the movie and I heard about and I knew we could do better.

7 JS: All right, during this time, of course, that you’re in Germany, things are really
8 starting to heat up in Vietnam, I guess.

9 CB: Absolutely.

10 JS: Were you paying attention to what was going on there?

11 CB: attention. I didn’t—well, at that time I consider myself a professional so and
12 you’ve been so many places and finally learned what the Army supposedly really about.
13 Every time I complained about anything in the early days, some sergeants say, “Oh,
14 Lieutenant. This is not the real Army. You’ll find the real Army in Korea. You’ll find
15 them in Germany.” I got to Korea, “Oh, you’ll find them in Europe.” So I decided I pretty
16 well found the real Army and I could live with it. So I knew I had to go to Vietnam. The
17 question, when and how. They started up a transition. They were really, basically
18 interested in helicopter pilots. The powers that feedback into the Pentagon. They were
19 turning out about six hundred a month, I think at Rutgers, those that never washed out.
20 Still they wanted everybody who flew just to be able to fly helicopters. And so they
21 started up a transition class, a transition course down in Munich for the guys, the pilots
22 that were officially pilots in Germany that weren’t helicopter qualified. I dodged it as
23 long as I could and comfortably. They sent the forms up without from division
24 headquarters. And there was one sheet that required you to agree to a year’s extension on
25 your tour of duty. Well, I didn’t know how long I was going to stay in the Army, but I
26 knew I’d be coming up on six years before too long. And that was the most commitment
27 anybody had, period in those days, including reserve times. I refused to sign the
28 extension. “You’re sending me to a school I don’t want to go to. You send me there for
29 free and then we’re fine, but I’m not going to pay another year for this.” stay at home for
30 two years. I just wasn’t ready to fly helicopters. I knew I would ship out soon for
31 Vietnam and I wanted to fly something that I’d been flying for years. And that’s what

1 happened. I got orders to report to—initially I got orders for Fort Sill to go onto a third
2 that was building there. Bobby Wooly who you may remember from the reunion, he was
3 in that unit initially. He trained in Seville and went over with that unit and then later was
4 transshipped to us down in the delta, but before I even left leave in Florida party for
5 Vietnam, for anywhere, it would have been to Fort Sill. I think they were waiting for me
6 when I got to Florida to go to Fort Hood instead and join the 199th. I was probably about
7 number five or six of the officers to report there. I got there shortly after the commander
8 did. I trained with them the whole time they were there. I stayed with them all the way to
9 the tour. And that was rare because they shuffled people around a lot. I held down about
10 four different jobs.

11 JS: How long were you at Fort Hood before the Vietnam tour began?

12 CB: Actually training, a little over two months.

13 JS: Two months, okay.

14 CB: But there was a lot of slack time in there. I think we had somewhere between
15 two weeks and a month to take our families to their new home or record or whatever. It
16 took them a long time to get our equipment shipped. I think we flew our airplanes. We
17 were some of the last to fly into , California. About a month before we actually shipped
18 out. I was with a group of old heads that had never fired a rockets on the. And so they
19 sent us back a for a shorter course about ten days, I think it was to learn how to fire
20 rockets. Really high tech stuff, you do three stunts or more on the windshield.
21 Consequently, the rest of the unit had already flown out and turned in aircraft and
22 ceremoniously created them up to doing. There were like five or six of us that flew in that
23 way, too, including the old man, the commander. We had a few days in San Francisco
24 and then we came back with nothing to do. We sat around Fort Hood for about ten days.
25 Anything that hadn't been shipped out was already packed up on the freight car or on an
26 airplane or on a boat somewhere. All we had was the two duffle bags we were allowed to
27 carry with us. We didn't have a hell of a lot to do for about ten days, I think. There's a lot
28 of that apparently in the war time. Hurry up and leave. I hadn't experienced it yet, but I
29 got some of it then.

30 JS: Well, we're coming up on two hours here. This is probably a pretty good
31 place to stop instead of going into Vietnam.

Interview with Charley Baker
Session [2] of [3]
Date 4 February 2010

1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University continuing an Oral History Interview with retired Lieutenant Colonel, Charles
3 Baker. Today is February 4, 2010, I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections
4 Library on the campus of Texas Tech and Mr. Baker is joining me by phone, once again,
5 from Lowell, Maryland. Okay, last time when we left off you had just pretty much
6 completed your training at Fort Hood with the 199th and we're just getting ready to talk
7 about Vietnam. I guess, first of all, could you talk a little bit about the trip over there and
8 how you actually got to Vietnam?

9 Charley Baker: Well, we flew on C-141s, 141's out of —flew from Texas. They
10 flew a great circle I expect to Anchorage, Alaska, and then to Ukota in Japan. We were in
11 Ukota for about almost a full day. And then they flew us into Bien Hoa. We got on busses
12 then and drove out to Camp LBJ in Long Bien which is very close to Bien Hoa. We
13 stayed there about three or four days. I only stayed there a little over a day. Me and three
14 other guys that were instructor pilots, unit IP's. We called around a Huey and went down
15 through the delta and spent the next three or four days with the shotguns, the unit that was
16 already in place.

17 JS: Okay, that the 221st?

18 CB: 221st, yes, sir.

19 JS: All right.

20 CB: Yeah, the time that we were still being called just Aviation Company. Within
21 a month or something and they change it to Recon Aviation Company.

22 JS: Okay.

23 CB: , but not only was known as the REC.

24 JS: Yes, sir.

25 CB: All right, before we get into your specific duties, could you talk a little bit
26 about your first impressions of Vietnam?

27 JS: Well, I kept trying to compare to Korea where I had been stationed earlier.
28 They weren't really all that much alike, but Asian cities have a tendency—the people of
29 Asian cities have a tendency to team a lot. They spent a lot of time out on the street. They

1 were always some kind of motion; something always seemed to be going on. Sometimes
2 it was a Vietnam activity, I guess, but most of the time it was a normal activity. it didn't
3 seem quite as dirty as the Korean cities in those days. I don't know that I formed a real
4 heavy impressions at first. Our aircraft had been crated up and brought over, I believe the
5 aircraft here, but they were in crates that had taken off. They were in Lung Tao, which is
6 a major fort near Saigon. I was amazed that the officer in a platoon had reassembled them
7 there and eventually, as they got them reassembled of those who had flown through the
8 delta and some of the others. They experienced guys, which I had some experience, were
9 also. So we'd test them once we got them put them back together again and then took
10 them down to the delta to Bien Long. where their destination was. I guess one of my
11 early I guess I was one of the few that acclimated pretty quickly because I grew up in the
12 Southeast in Florida, to be precise. I was more used to the heat, some of the guys. It really
13 got to them. And in those days, we were still wearing the old starch fatigues before we
14 ever wanted to get on the fatigues or wash them. It was a war. My reputation, Vietnam
15 had dry seasons and wet seasons, like Monsoons. We didn't get quite the rain that they've
16 had in some other months in monsoon seasons the year we were there. Sometimes Bien
17 Long was in times totally out of from time to time.

18 JS: Oh wow.

19 CB: Yeah, it was right next door to Mei Cong. take pictures.

20 JS: Those first two days that you were there, you mentioned working with the
21 shot guns. What were you doing at that point with them?

22 CB: Well, the whole idea was to get us local order, local orientation.

23 JS: Okay.

24 CB: I'm not so fond of shot guns these days. I mean, in part because I don't think
25 they did enough to to get ready. We did get some local orientation and went into various
26 air fields, what we used to call "Dollar rides" back in the old days. I guess it comes from
27 storming pilots that charge a dollar to pick up and take you up. That was really all that
28 was to it. Nobody had to be there to learn how to fly because we were dog at that time.
29 Everybody that was there, everybody who was there at the time had trained. The Byrd
30 Dog is a primary trainer and the only those that had primary in the T-41 and they just had
31 a little bit which is the tricked out as the 172. They only had the last few hours of their

1 flight training before they got the shipped out. They got a little bit of Byrd Dog time.
2 Some of those guys got over there I had to check a lot of them out later on in the year.
3 They clearly, they didn't want more training. I think we were all pretty well squared
4 away from the aircraft. It was just a question of orienting them on the ground.
5 JS: At this point, had the 199th, had your planes arrived at that point?
6 CB: Well, all of this was sort of happening simultaneously.
7 JS: Okay, okay.
8 CB: I don't know how long it took for them all to get reassembled and that sort of
9 thing, but it must have been about two weeks before we got everything up and running.
10 JS: So once you finished up with them then you went to, was it Bien Long at that
11 point?
12 CB: Yeah. See, what had happened, when we were training at Hood, at Fort
13 Hood, I was a platoon leader. We had four platoons. A service platoon which was and
14 three line platoons. I was the 3rd platoon leader. And in the last month, maybe even less
15 that we were in Texas; we got a bunch of—not a bunch, a handful of very senior captains
16 and one major.
17 JS: Okay.
18 CB: So everybody got kind of pushed down the food chain a little bit.
19 JS: Right.
20 CB: And so I ended up as the assistant operations officer back then, a flight
21 operations officer in Korea and Germany. So, that's the beauty I had and crashing boards.
22 Except for checking people out, I put myself up as sort of a utility end fielder to take over
23 when anybody had to be off station for a while. I'd take their place in one airfield or
24 another. I got a good feel for a whole companies operations that way. At the same time, I
25 got good hunger to get out to one of these outlined areas. Bien Long was company
26 headquarters with parts of two platoons there originally. The third platoon was scattered
27 through western South Vietnam from the Cambodian border south to the Forest and east
28 to the Bosok River. The 2nd platoon was generally between the two rivers, the Bosok and
29 the Maicong at which they run generally Northwest, Southeast.
30 JS: Okay.

1 CB: And the 1st Platoon was north of the Mei Cong in June. Some of the 1st
2 Platoon had Bien Long so the 2nd Platoon was in Bien Long, but there weren't that many
3 airfields in between the two rivers. So even though they operated with units that were
4 based elsewhere in ground units, supporting ground units were based elsewhere. They
5 actually stayed in the same place with the company headquarters. We had an operations
6 shack just out of the tower, the control tower there at Bien Long with scattered Quonset
7 huts around. There were old style World War II Quonset huts. They were left over. And
8 Bien Long had not been a Japanese air field I don't think in World War II, not Trang
9 Han. Bien Long, I think was a branch air field in a giant war, but ten years earlier. It had
10 been there sometime and there really wasn't—they had to be a little bit of an initialed
11 instruction to make room for us. They had tightened up some existing structures, how you
12 do that sort of thing. You know, eventually there wasn't much instruction. Generally, the
13 platoons that the aircraft and the five pilots—well, there was a cluster at Bien Long as I
14 just explained.

15 JS: Yes, sir.

16 CB: They were penny buckets , two's and three's, generally two's. Two pilots,
17 hopefully two crew chiefs, mechanics, and two aircrafts in all these little outline space
18 fields. That's they got their missions reconnaissance requests from local MAC-V teams.
19 And generally it was the MAC-V teams. We dealt with American advisors primarily.
20 Very few of us spoke Vietnamese and because there was just American Military down
21 there. The night infantry division was there, but they had their own support that they
22 didn't take too much at a time.

23 JS: All right.

24 CB: So anyway, after about, I don't know, after about four months in Bien Long I
25 was able to talk universally mispronounced, but GI's is rock jaw.

26 JS: Right.

27 CB: To take over from Richard Capps who was a good friend of mine from. He
28 was part of the National Guard. He made major and so we had about three people making
29 major all of a sudden and their senior captains as we got into 'Nam. Although Richard
30 was that. Anyway, it took him a while to sort out what his date of rank was going to be
31 because he'd been in guard so long.

1 JS: Right.

2 CB: He made major and he came back in to take over was informed in Bien Long
3 after revenants of the others in the headquarters. They had the responsibility for night
4 flying covering all the areas, local areas at night. Which is what I did later, I seemed to
5 follow Richard around. Anyway, I went out to and it was quite an experience. I was out
6 there about four months and then came back to Bien Long for the final four ones. I took
7 over the—I can't hardly say general support because we called it the glory , but we never
8 got much of it either.

9 JS: Right.

10 CB: It's mostly night flying. I had a two plane section. My number one there was
11 Captain Jim who we called, "The littlest Ranger." He's about 130 pounds soaking wet
12 and the biggest thing about him was his ranger tat. We joked with him a lot, but he was a
13 and finally he ended up making a career out of it. San Antonio, a gun shop in San Anton
14 he got out.

15 JS: Well, would you mind talking a little bit about, I guess, some of the other guys
16 that made up the unit and some of the personalities. You don't have to go into specific
17 names if you don't want to, but if you could just talk a little bit about the group dynamic
18 and some of the people that made up the unit.

19 CB: Well, as you probably already encountered, there's a great deal of comradely
20 in the aviation unit. We didn't have to be ordered to do much of anything. We're all
21 pretty eager. We knew what our job was and we knew how to do it and so we're all pretty
22 eager to do it. Unless of illness of wound or something sidelined, I think we were going
23 steady all the time. We didn't have any real time to get bored. I particularly found this to
24 be true. What we call when you're out on one of these little two and three aircraft
25 installations like that you caused it to sector, we're not out in sector because that's what
26 they called each one of the little subsets of advisory teams responsibilities. Whenever we
27 got the chance it was not awful. They would throw a party pack at the unit headquarters
28 and we would all trying making it in and spend the night, obviously because there was
29 drinking involved. Sometimes we had one new one in the platoon like that. We all got
30 along pretty well. I don't recall a real heavy conflict. Of course, I generally got along
31 with people in the Army anyway.

1 JS: Right.

2 CB: I'm not sure if you wanted me to head to this.

3 JS: No, that pretty much covered it. Well, one thing that I wanted to ask you about
4 that time when you were still in Vien Long, you mentioned that you volunteered to basic
5 to become a utility in-fielder because you were kind of bored with your position. But as
6 assistant ops officer, what were your actual duties? What were you supposed to be doing?

7 CB: Well, like getting assistance. You do what your primary tells you to do. One
8 of my responsibilities was writing up awards and maintained a flight record. I had
9 sergeants that helped me with this. It's just not the normal flight operations stuff getting
10 Intel. I'm not sure, I probably mentioned last time about having a top secret clearance by
11 then. And so I functioned as an Intel officer, too. Close to getting new information or a
12 situation. So these guys want to stop in and get briefed on the whole company's
13 operations when they drop into the unit. See, all the unit maintenance above what the
14 individual mechanic duties was done back at Bien Long with our unit maintenance. Next
15 tire maintenance we got a cadet on maintenance level representative and even had some
16 and there were representatives. There were civilian contractors there. Although, I don't
17 think you had much. Those were mostly for the helicopters because. It doesn't require all
18 that much anyway. So the guys would come in from time to time and stop by for briefs
19 and that sort of thing. We kept flight laws in the individual flight law books in the
20 aircraft. There's a pocket on the side on the door that keeps your book in there that's got
21 your daily flight laws. You know, every so often I don't even remember the frequency
22 now, but they would bring in all their flight log sheets and dash twelve's, 248-12 form
23 number. It said when they flew in from where to where. From this and how they logged
24 their time on a particular mission is how their air medals were confused. We didn't get as
25 many air medals as some of the helicopter pilots, but it's still a mess to see if I got. I
26 always had an additional beauty as well as so there was enough flying to be done and I
27 got about eight hundred hours of Pete 91 in the air. Some guys got as many as twelve
28 hundred hours.

29 JS: Oh wow.

30 CB: But anyway, I had kept track of that stuff to make sure they got the air
31 medals when they popped up. I guess I probably was through the first couple of rounds of

1 air medals when I moved down to because obviously some people flew more than others.
2 Some people flew different kinds or all different kinds of flight time. If you were in direct
3 physical contact with the enemy, you logged it as CA which was combat, combat assault.
4 The same thing that all the ships, the Huey's lifted, fortunately everything they flew and
5 that's why they ended up with about twice as many air medals. And then there was CA
6 combat support and then CSL which was combat support lesion which is just ash and
7 trash fun. You didn't really make contact. You're just flying to Bien Long to Saigon or
8 something. That's sort of what I was doing. And like I said, I tried to plug in a little bit of
9 action to keep from getting bored. And then when I got the opportunity to go out to.

10 JS: Well, before getting to Rock Shaw , were there any memorable flights during
11 that time when you were based out of ?

12 CB: Well, I can think of several.

13 JS: Okay.

14 CB: Interesting, it depends. We'd only been there, oh, I'd say it's less than a
15 month when our company commander had taken us up there. Charles Hutchins was
16 promoted from lieutenant colonel so that was the one of the first shifts in assignment
17 came. It sort of started off with him being promoted. We had a big party for him, of
18 course, and cooked steaks. I had been invited by the two team members from the 2nd
19 platoon that supported the ARVN 7th Infantry Division that were based at the MACV
20 house in Bien Long. Most of them in the city rather than out in the airfield. They
21 happened to be having a party that night, too, so after we had celebrated with a colonel
22 for a while. Another friend, Bob Owsley, a Mississippi guardsman came on MAC-V just
23 to see the and asked me to join him for the party. I was in civilian clothes already and
24 didn't have a sign of a weapon, didn't have anything. You know, I had a short sleeve shirt
25 on and a pair of slacks and rode down in a jeep. I had a few more drinks and danced with
26 some Vietnamese chicks and then all of a sudden, all the Vietnamese cleared out. So
27 Owsley and I were sitting on the rooftop of the place and most of these houses were old
28 villas. Either French or lovely Vietnamese fellows. They all had rooftop gardens or most
29 of them seemed to. Anyway, we sat down on this rather elongated sofa to finish our
30 drinks. I was about to ask him to give me a ride or give me a drive to take me back to the

1 airfields. All of a sudden between us somebody stitched a burst of AKA 47 rounds just
2 between us.

3 JS: Oh wow.

4 CB: I said, "I believe somebody's trying to kill us." You know, I think you're
5 right. So we got on the elbows and knees and crawled down to his room which is one
6 flight down. He grabbed the first weapon he came to which was not an M-16. He had
7 gotten the M-16 from someone. We weren't authorized M-16s for pilots. For us it was 45
8 pistols. So I grabbed his or somebody's M-16 and I thought it was his. We went out to the
9 balcony that went all the way around the building which looked like some fifties motel
10 may have looked. Also, it was concrete rather than just an iron balcony. So we ducked
11 behind the concrete and we swapped a few rounds in there but didn't do much good. The
12 guy he worked with, his name was Klein Prebble who was well known already as a hot
13 shot. He was the one we got from shot guns. He had been in-country about four or five
14 months already. He drove out through that mess through the exchange of fire and went to
15 the airfield and got up out of the aircraft. He ended up getting the DFC for that action, the
16 Distinguished Flying. I was just lucky to get home alive on that particular incident. It
17 seems like our unit was involved in ground combat, you know, skirmishes like this four
18 times while I was still in it the year I was over there. I was involved in three of them
19 personally. I got on my test my John Wayne skills. But that was one highlight if you want
20 to call it that. Sometimes there would be interesting events when I would go out and take
21 over for people. One of our guys, I believe it was Jerry Gouge, I think he's a Texan, got
22 kidney stones and couldn't fly for a while. And so I flew into Bien Tray which is in the
23 actual belt of the heart of the Mai Comb, you know where it starts spreading out. Vien
24 Tray was sort of an afterthought, I think. When they decided to base people around the
25 delta because the facilities weren't much there and some places, the Byrd Dog pilots got
26 pretty good and some places they weren't. This is one of the places that it wasn't.
27 Everybody was double booked, double. It was a marshy area generally. You had to sleep
28 under the ski. What the other pilot there neglected to tell me was that there was a 4.2 inch
29 border right outside our window that would sometimes fire illuminations or, you know,
30 actual fire support in the middle of the night. Nobody bothered to tell me it was a mortar
31 right on my ear. And about two o'clock in the morning they dropped a few rounds into

1 that tease and I'd get almost strangled getting out of the mosquito net. After you're there
2 awhile, if you've been exposed to ground fire you can recognize incoming and outgoing,
3 but at that moment it wasn't that clear to me. That was the kind of thing, that was a kind
4 of interesting thing. We've had at least one mortar attack, probably two mortar attacks
5 itself was still there. Unfortunately nobody had been hurt yet. My first casualties were
6 during Tet.

7 JS: I guess, could you talk a little bit about just, say, a typical flight. What type of
8 things would you be doing, what type of things would you be looking for?

9 CB: Well, sometimes we were on a directed specific recon objective with MAG
10 Intel advisor would come out in the airfield and we'd go into the MAC-V team now and
11 brief us on what he wanted to find something as setaric as a gathering of around the
12 woods age or tree lines of caskets. Being buried is a very big deal in Vietnam and they
13 wanted to make sure whatever the Kong were doing. if they start stacking up caskets.
14 You could spot them sometimes like that. Sometimes we would be told to go out and try
15 to find out the VC would move into the. One time we were told to break up any groups of
16 more than two or three. We had some really strange , but like I say, it could either be a
17 search like that or just every day in every sector there were Middle East recon patrol
18 flights, so called BR flights. If you flew over the same area day after day after day you
19 could usually be able to spot the spotted holes and bunkers and trenches. Otherwise, they
20 were camouflage, but if the camouflage gets old and if they guy gets lazy, the foliage
21 turns brown. And you could tell where this happens. That's sort of the way it is. We went
22 to the aircraft. We all wore what we call FLAC vests. It was body armor. Not nearly as
23 good as the guys have today, but it wasn't nearly as heavy. It was some sort of a ceramic
24 plate. Three of them in our case. It had one on each side to side on the front and then one
25 across the back. It was laced up the side and that lacing of the sides would go into
26 sections together. Sometimes it was your vulnerable point. I know at least one sergeant, a
27 Special Forces sergeant that was killed by a piece of shrapnel right through his lace. We
28 would wear those from our hooch from our bunks to. We'd share that in our side arms.
29 We seemed to be able to acquire so-called magic weapons. We had things like grease
30 guns with sub machine gun. It was heavier than you'd think and Thompson sub-machine
31 guns. to supplement our.45 that property books if Special Forces came. I think the

1 ranging vest we each. We'd carry our weapons in a flight bag. If you got stable in one
2 particular area, you would leave your flight helmet and parachute and that sort of thing in
3 the little hanger in the storage area that fly by and you didn't have to carry it down every
4 time. You'd go down, do a brief flight inspection on the aircraft and talk with the
5 mechanic that had been working on it. and get your entire line of fire. So then you'd
6 crank and talk to the tower and taxi out. Not everywhere had a tower, obviously unless
7 these stage fields didn't. So you normally just clear yourself and taxi out. These little
8 fields didn't have much air traffic anyway. And then you were told, and I think most of
9 us maintained, generally fifteen hundred feet altitude. It was so flat you could be heard
10 and seen for miles when you're coming. You had to get a little , but we all got that place
11 eventually. With certain areas they called free-fire zones which were usually areas of of
12 the Viet Cong concentration. We just never attempted to. then we flew over. One of them
13 is called a human force called Country. Mostly you were alone. From time to time we'd
14 get observers alone. When I was in Bien Long at the end of my tour, we got what they
15 call Ni Los. The naval intelligence officers, they were brown water Navy guys that flew
16 with us to find out specific recon objectives of the seal teams. I think one of them was
17 even a marine sergeant. And then every once in a while, we would actually get
18 Vietnamese observers, but not very often. I understood they had more of them fly up. We
19 had one come to the airfield when like a Vietnamese cat and he flew one flight with the
20 Ranger. He said he wouldn't be back. Anyway, when we flew out of Vien Long we
21 usually would file flight, but they didn't go anywhere. Have you had much experience
22 flying?

23 JS: Not too much, sir.

24 CB: Before 9/11 in various and sundry and other events tightened up the airspace
25 around. Normally a normal civilian flight could just flight out of local air badge without
26 talking to anybody until he got airborne if he was giving me real distance. He would call
27 into SAA flights on the radio airborne rather than filling out a form in the operations, but
28 we had something compared to the equivalent of that in the Delta, they called it Delta
29 Sunner. It was an aircraft monitoring, flight monitoring flight fall service. I'm pretty sure
30 that Byrd Dogs were the ones that used it the most because they had information we
31 needed. It was an Air Force set up. It was like a route with the FAA Air Force personnel.

1 They knew—if you fired with them, I’m going from Bien Long to Rocky Aw forty
2 minutes in route or whatever. Oh, more like twenty, I guess. Anyway, and then call them
3 when you’re landing and he had somebody that knew where he were. Otherwise, nobody
4 would know when you went down. Plus, you had the guard channel. That’s one thing
5 about our Byrd Dogs. We had some great radios, the best radios I ever flew with in the
6 Army. The guard channel which is a UHF2430 that you can monitor constantly as well as
7 whatever other frequencies you need to for extra monitor channel on the radio. Over that
8 guard channel, the Delta Sunner would tell us if it was going to be an airstrike or artillery
9 going into someplace. They tried to get cute with it, but I’m sure their company would
10 never say it anyway. It’s the B-52, so-called arch-like bomb admission. They would give
11 it a heavy artillery at the such and such heading off of Bien Thui attack hand. We didn’t
12 need attack hands, you know, when you would have come with rose look like what the
13 compass read would be off of Bien Thui which was a Vietnamese airfield near Can Tho.
14 So we would figure out whether we where they were going to be dropping them off.
15 Otherwise, you just flat couldn’t see about 1500 feet. You couldn’t see the bombs. You
16 couldn’t look up through the top of your canopy and spot the bombers. Sometimes you
17 would see the bombs on the way down or more frequently you would see the ground
18 erupt when they would make contact. It’s a little disconcerting when they give you a
19 heading and a distance off Bien Tho. They’re going to start bombing and it’s about where
20 you are and you’re trying to get out of there. That was the kind of missions we got. While
21 I was assistant officer, I’d delivered just about everybody that rotated back to Bien Hoa
22 and Long Bien up there. We had one Beaver that we got in-country so I stayed and flew
23 those missions. Any kind of supply flights that were needed I did. Basically, we just
24 stayed with the train and tried to find from day to day.

25 JS: You mentioned with the delta being so flat that a lot of times the VC would be
26 able to see you from miles away, but you said if you got kind of cagey you could actually
27 spot them. What kind of tactics would you be using to be able to sneak up on them, I
28 guess?

29 CB: Well, It wasn’t really sneak up on them so much. They saw you and the trick
30 was to see them as well. I’m in these three fire zones any sand pan that was old boat
31 whatever you want to call it that was out there was forbidden. It was not supposed to be

1 and it's supposed to be a ready target. They saw so many Byrd Dogs after we got in-
2 country. They saw Byrd Dogs so much that they were able to fake it, you know? They
3 were able to they were just a local farmer out for a boat ride. So, what you could do is do
4 a split S. You pulled an aircraft out just above stall speed and kick in a hard run. I always
5 chose because I'm riding in it, I guess. I could go with , but anyway, it's a maneuver that
6 they did a lot in World War I. Anyway, then you'd level on and it's the most stable
7 platform for rocket fire. So once you level off like that and it goes down the scent and if
8 this guy is just strictly going someplace, he would get out of his boat and head to the
9 woods. Otherwise they would think it was an AK and start shooting at you. In which case
10 you would pop a rocket it in and something like that. Those little tricks. The whole time I
11 was at Bien Hoa early I also did a lot of night flying. There were a lot of tricks involved
12 in night flying. We got high that would rival owls, I think. After a time, we were able to
13 see things in the dark nobody else could see. One of the tricks there, we carried two flares
14 and then usually two rocket pods, four rockets and two flares so it was no problem to get
15 airborne. If there wasn't a lot of air traffic in that particular area we were working. I
16 mean, there was no problem finding something to do at night because there'd be
17 Vietnamese compounds with one or two advisors that was scattered all over the country
18 side. Two or three of them got hit every night. First thing you'd do is called for Byrd
19 Dogs. We would fly out there and take a look and drop flares and fire rockets and all that
20 spooking which is AC-47, Air Force gunship. And our armed helicopters that we usually
21 had. It's what we called the bug ships lighting bugs up every night. A team of gun, naval
22 gun ships and a Huey with flares. We could drop by two flares and take a look at there. If
23 the Huey came in, if you dropped this and then of course spooky has a ton of flares and
24 weapon about ready to fire up. That's the kind of thing we did at night. And you learned
25 tricks. If you didn't have all these other aircraft around, it's just you working with the
26 whole MAC-V team now and Vietnamese. You could go black out and turn all your
27 running lights off and fly around the edge of the flare, halo. We'd barely be seen, but
28 you'd be at an angle sometimes. You'd see more than you'd see. those are some of the
29 tricks. Sometimes the trick is just not letting the Kong know that you saw them until the
30 first round comes in, you know?

1 JS: Well, once you spotted an enemy in one of these free fire zones, since it's
2 called a free fire zone could you automatically go ahead and fire on them or would you
3 have to contact?

4 CB: That's why they would call that. It did require—you had prior permission so
5 to speak. You know, it was different elsewhere, but I'm sure there were a lot of incidence
6 over there of so called friendly. The Cong had a real nasty habit of fired a burst or two
7 out on the village at the gunships where they just flew overboard from one place to
8 another. Of course, the gunnies they react right away and sometimes, and this is what we
9 call a "One shot Charlie," it was more than one shot. We'd end up getting half a village
10 wiped out with a gun ship. Retaliation in these guys got out of control. I don't think
11 anybody was ever sent home or court marshaled after that because of. Sometime we got
12 to the point where if there was a populated area anywhere nearby, we'd just ignore one or
13 two rounds.

14 JS: Well, while we're on the subject of talking about the enemy and doing some
15 of these type things to cause friendly's, I'd guess you'd say, to be attacked. We did talk
16 just a little bit about your impressions of the enemy and how they operated in general.

17 CB: Well, they were very determined and pretty little people. They lived at the
18 swamps and the man in the mangroves and that's all the human forest was. They were
19 sometimes your next door neighbors. There was a lot of surreptitious deployment of Viet
20 Cong otherwise friendly villages. Some villages, they were at the edge of major Viet
21 Cong areas like this human forest on the Cambodian border. They even collected taxes
22 we were told from the local population in the form of rice. They were fairly sturdy to be
23 as small as they were. That was one thing that I think from all the Asians encountered in
24 the years. The Vietnamese were the smaller. You wondered how they could carry all that
25 stuff, but most of the—we were sort of—we were impressed with him. It didn't take you
26 too long to get that way. They weren't real smart. I didn't think would be desired. They
27 could have done more with what they did, I think. But anyway, I'm pretty sure none of
28 them are going to the military again. They would hold well until the last minute. They all
29 looked so young, too, whenever you did. They all looked like they were teenagers. Which
30 we didn't look much older then, I guess. They had tricks and looks pretty good. Certain
31 units were better than others. The local units like the Yu Man Tan was supposed to be the

1 nastiest Viet Cong in the delta. Up until Tet of '68 we didn't really have an NVA before
2 the Vietnamese Army in the delta. So many of the Viet Cong were killed during Tet that
3 it was pretty much all the NVA after that I was told. Of course, I got , but we used to
4 have an old saying that when you first got in-country and before you gained any respect
5 from the Viet Cong you called them Victor Charlie which is in phonetic alphabet for the
6 VC. As you got a little more familiar with it you just called him Charlie. And the last
7 couple months you were there you called him Mr. Charles. So it was a gradual gaining of
8 respect. I was quite shocked that they were prepared to lose as many people as they did
9 during Tet. Even after they. I don't know how if they. That's the only time I really saw
10 them up close. Otherwise it was aircraft to ground firing.

11 JS: All right, well how about the ARVN and the contrast of them? What were
12 your impressions of them?

13 CB: Not good.

14 JS: Okay.

15 CB: Not good at all. The Vietnamese in general had a problem with understanding
16 the notion and nation of it. rarely reach beyond their province chief and generally just the
17 village chief. So that's where our advisors tried to work at that level. It proved the chief
18 you approve the association between the US and the Vietnamese. Some of these guys
19 were the bulk of the local forces, RFPF, Regional Forces Private Force. These were the
20 black pajama guys. They literally —the only training they had was the training the village
21 chief and the American binders gave them. They didn't have basic training or anything
22 like that. They had to be taught and generally in their villages how to fire weapons, how
23 to patrol, and all that sort of thing. You know, there would be wide variances and
24 capabilities over there. I think the same old are in the Army. I'm sure you must have read
25 quite a bit about the political influences and how people got promoted into the ARVN
26 Army. It wasn't for heroism or affective military operation. The right family and the
27 support for the colonel and general. Every once in a while, you'd stumble on one that was
28 really a good getter. We had our first lieutenant that operated not too long and not too far
29 from Vien Long and he had a Vietnamese Calvary outfit with various models of the
30 M113 armored personnel carrier that a couple of them had called Zippos and some others
31 had various sized weaponry on them. They used them for reconnaissance to the delta.

1 You know, they provide some protection. A 50 caliber refutably would go through and
2 would go through the side of an APC, but smaller one, wooden. So they did provide
3 themselves protection. Plus they had a minimum of a 50 caliber machine gun. That's a
4 really good weapon if you're prepared to spend the time to keep it clean. Yeah, this first
5 was running his calve troop. I worked with him a little bit. He came down and flew with
6 me a couple of times. I was in operations and he was a go-getting. He had to be prevented
7 from going into an area. Somebody, somehow or another had to tell him, "No, don't go
8 on. You'll lose on your tracks." He would do it, he was a hard charger. I understand that
9 some of the bit kick people, one in which I knew, that's counter terrorist teams that
10 generally worked with Special Forces. Our Special Forces, they were full on to. Their
11 mission was quite literally political assassinations. They were supposed to be the Viet
12 Cong coming into country before they got there. Particularly worrying about their
13 instruction, their hierarchy to them. They were good. It was usually one or two
14 Vietnamese senior NCOs for young officers with these units. And the rest of them were
15 mercenaries Cambodians and some of those Cambodians, they could be quite large
16 people, larger than the Vietnamese. They always operated at the fringes of society and
17 reality. In my mind, the Vietnamese solider particularly an officer was rare. It was a not
18 contemplated. Though they have immigrated here and done so well out of the military
19 because I guess you start off with a head start if you basically feel safe in your own
20 country. It's probably one of the top physicians in almost every graduating class
21 Vietnamese that immigrated around here. Trang or Wynn or something, names I
22 recognize.

23 JS: We've talked about the VC and we've talked about the ARVN, what was your
24 impressions of just the average Vietnamese civilian? Did you have much contact with
25 them?

26 CB: Well, I did have some. We had service, I want to call it customer support
27 personnel who were generally Vietnamese when they hired as housekeepers or house.
28 You know, they're pleasant enough, but you were the boss. And you were born to hire
29 and they're hiring you so they tend to be subservient. But, Like I said, I had these
30 associations with some of the military that was pretty good, but it didn't actually have
31 that much in a way of friendships. I didn't, but now I see the guys that were the MAC-V

1 officers, they lived and slept with these guys and they knew them all. and they built up
2 lifelong friendships. We were just there in support. In my particular situation, I moved
3 around so much that, you know, I didn't get to know a lot. We sort of considered that
4 once the sun went down the night belonged to the VC anyway and so we didn't walk
5 around too much. except to fly missions. Anybody that got caught on the road in a
6 convoy usually got.

7 JS: Well, that brings up the next question I was going to ask you. These regular, I
8 guess, Vietnamese peasants or the Vietnamese civilians that you did come in contact
9 with, did you have any idea or any thoughts on their sympathies? Could you tell that they
10 were pro-American indifferent or secretly supportive of the VC?

11 CB: Well, sort of like a leprechaun. They didn't reveal much of themselves. The
12 Vietnamese were to my mind, and this just scores my , always had a hidden agenda. You
13 never could entirely. That's why those guys that got involved romantically, I never
14 understood how you could afford to do that. You never know what they're thinking. Of
15 course, there's always a language barrier. I don't think they had an intent to dislike for
16 the Americans though , but they have a problem if you didn't know which ones ahead.
17 Yeah, it was hard to know whether you were getting the and the real person or the
18 performance, an actual performance.

19 JS: All right, well I guess—

20 CH: I'm really a poor person to ask that because Asians have always puzzled me
21 anyway. So it's quite a lot of time , but I still don't understand that.

22 JS: Well, I guess getting back to the narrative and getting back to the timeline.
23 Once you were send down to—you went to Rock Shaw and you were able to get that
24 assignment. What was it like there? I guess describe the setting and kind of what it
25 looked like there.

26 CH: Well, the airstrip was nothing but a gravel patch that ran across the coast
27 road. They had two like World War II movies that the German soldiers always pulled
28 down or are up to let the maid through. They had a barrier on either side so in order to
29 land you had to buzz the field and wait for the Vietnamese guards to lower the barriers
30 and stop the traffic so you could land. Coast road ran right across the middle. It was a
31 screwy little area. We call that short strip. There was a long strip about ten, fifteen miles

1 out of bound which was only generally used in the daytime except for Vietnamese flights
2 and that sort of thing because it was basically insecure. Short strip was much closer to the
3 sound and that's where we operated out of. They were already in place when I got the
4 aircraft for two of our aircraft. Two of and two of Air Force FAC aircraft out of the TAS,
5 tactical air support, base at Bien Thui, but they live out there where the MAC-V takes us
6 to find bombs. And one Vietnamese Byrd Dog. They were all Byrd Dogs, five Byrd Dogs
7 on the field and a gas tank belonged to us, belonged to our unit. I think maybe we
8 swapped gasoline with the Air Force or something. We tried to keep the air craft up every
9 day. It's what we considered C-CON orders. That was usually around dawn or dusk. And
10 so in the bulk of the day we might be sitting on the air field with our shirts off working on
11 the aircraft or just loafing. You know, we didn't have a particular mission required. You
12 know, you had to take a rest where you could find it over there. We would have at least
13 two flights up a day before we tried to spread it out between the two airplanes.
14 Sometimes we'd go out of their mobile operation schedule for the area and then we'd be
15 called into wherever the listing of the helicopter unit was that was doing the lift and get
16 briefed in frequencies and where the artillery positions are going to be and all this sort of
17 thing. And then we would usually—we called them air shows. When the air show came
18 to town any of the old A, no question about that. What we did when we would be the first
19 guys on the spot on the scene for. First of all, we're unusual, but we own the Viet Cong
20 you used to see out there and take a look at theirs and find out if we could actually update
21 them on any intelligence before they lay in the units with their advisors. Then we'd move
22 off to the periphery of the LZ, landing zone. Kind of eventually a lot of air traffic and
23 we'd usually have an Air Force back up, too, at the same time. We would adjust the
24 artillery and the Air Force FAC would bring in fighters. Of course, the gunships did their
25 own thing. Each in his company had a gunship or two that was out in a platoon and had
26 integral through it. Whenever we had one of these air shows they used not much more of
27 the because if the Vietnamese ever got deploy on the ground took a little fire to the fuel
28 and the operation would break contact and the operation would be over. We did have a
29 great deal of respect for that kind of operation. Too much leak, too much information
30 leaks out about those kind of things. We would sometimes have inkling and there was
31 going to be a big air mobile operation and no specific source. Just that somebody would

1 say, "Hey, I understand they don't have big air mobile operation up at. I guess we better
2 get the oil changed on this." Sure enough they'd come up. It's just too many people
3 talking about it. That was one of our meeting the US Army flaws over there. We were
4 told in our training before we shipped out that if you were going to put fire on a particular
5 position, you could report information on it in the clear if you were going to put fire with
6 in. Well, we later found out that the Viet Cong and the NVA were intercepted a voice
7 message, you know, adjusting this firing and called in the fire missions while it was
8 going on. That was an erroneous concept. Our operations were all flawed sometimes. I
9 think without aviation over there the troops were a whole lot worse, particularly the
10 helicopter. The overall impression is that you're constantly flying; you're constantly in
11 the air. It would be one hundred hours a month. The Byrd Dog would take that. Every
12 twenty-five hours you have to check the plugs and change the oil. Every one hundred
13 hours you have to do a little more with it, but it's pretty really minor maintenance, so
14 called periodic minor inspection. But Byrd Dog is like a. It was a good machine. If
15 Bobby Wooly's book ever gets out you have to read it. He's got a great deal of respect
16 for the machine.

17 JS: Well, being out there at Rock Shaw with a very small unit there, did you have
18 any type of other protection there at the airstrip there?

19 CB: Not much, we had about maybe half a squad, four to six something like that
20 of Vietnamese soldiers and two old French armor cars.

21 JS: Okay.

22 CB: They were the same ones that lowered the barrier for you to land, but the two
23 armed guards sat there at the barrier and that's what passed for security in the air field
24 because as I mentioned earlier rock soil or so-called long strip. That's about ten miles
25 away. They had no security at all in the MAC-V compound which was, again, on a
26 leash. They had gate guards. That was it. All of these fellows, one of the reasons they
27 used them was they already had walls, they were already walled in. So they just broke the
28 broken glass top of the walls so they could climb. Tried to flow all of the traffic,
29 particularly vehicle traffic to the one gate, but, but as you could imagine because they
30 took one of the existing buildings, you get a variation about that, you know? But most of
31 them did have walls and that's one of the reasons why they use them. In theory they had

1 the possibility of close-end fighting defense. Every guy every once in a while, some VC
2 would get a wild hare and put a couple of rounds by the gate guard which would end up,
3 you know, in the floor, but not much, not very much. In fact, we didn't even—our mess
4 hall was a separate building. It was across a canal from where we lived. They had taken
5 this villa and cut it up with plywood. Plywood was in these separate cubicles, if you will.
6 Rather than having the VC in there you have and usually a wall locker. If you had a foot
7 locker they were usually. You has some privacy. You generally didn't have doors on
8 them, but somebody would come home with some sort of door covering there that you're
9 probably familiar with seeing them in movies. I kept mine decorated with Playmates I
10 just remember everything as being very routine, even the firefight we got into. You just
11 expected it. You know, we would joke about it, "Let's go stir up some trouble." We
12 almost meant that because we figured we were there to find the Viet Cong and we
13 worked at it on a daily basis. But the security, I think, was your basic collection and. If
14 you'll read that section of *My Pictures from Charlie*, when they hit those short strip from
15 the 28th of November of '67. They didn't have any trouble getting over the air fill and
16 they blew up four airplanes.

17 JS: Yeah, I certainly want to ask you more about that action a little bit later on.

18 CB: Well, our company commander, he was our 2nd company commander to go
19 for after to go up to group headquarters. There was. Anyway, he was on USAR pilot and
20 he'd fallen in Korea during the war and come back. I was surprised at how many people
21 were that eager to go. He came in that day to take a look at the carnage of the airplane.
22 We were standing there talking. I was quite sure I was going to be court marshaled for
23 losing the two airplanes. But instead he took that tactic and the damn place wasn't secure
24 in the first place and lose you guys up for that way it's more secure. You know, they
25 abandoned this as a strip. We still flew out there and got missions and that sort of thing,
26 we just didn't base anything there for months. And then eventually, right around the tail
27 end of my tour, the shot guns took it over here.

28 JS: Well, we've been going for an hour and half now and I know obviously we're
29 not going to be able to finish today so would you like to go ahead and take a break for
30 today?

31 CB: Sure, if you want.

1 JS: Okay.

Interview with Charley Baker
Session [3] of [3]
Date 8 February 2010

1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University continuing an Oral History Interview with retired Lieutenant Colonel Charles
3 Baker. Today is February 8, 2010, I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections
4 Library on the campus of Texas Tech and Mr. Baker is joining me by phone, once again,
5 from Laurel, Maryland. Okay, last time you sent me an e-mail saying to remind you to
6 talk a little bit about sector flight ops. Do you want to begin with that?

7 Charley Baker: Yeah, I would like you to know after we hung up that I sounded
8 like we had made it a routine. The same time of day, same days and all that sort of thing,
9 which, of course makes you very predictable and that's not exactly what we wanted. The
10 reason was, when we were active and when we were up and patrolling at specific times a
11 day is because that's what Charlie was doing when the VC was moving. And then we
12 caught at dawn and dusk, but we would also go out two, three times during the day. That
13 was our main task was air patrol and what we call visual reconnaissance, VR. So that's
14 what we did. We would do about one hundred hours per aircraft. So it was not as
15 predictable as I perhaps made it sound.

16 JS: All right, it was primarily based in on enemy activity?

17 CB: As much as we could. Of course, they didn't consult with us.

18 JS: Right, sure, sure. But you said they were most active primarily at dusk and
19 dawn?

20 CB: Yeah, well actually they were most active in the dark.

21 JS: Right, sure.

22 CB: They would start moving before and they would probably still be moving
23 after if they were moving supplies touring our units from one place to another. So that's
24 when we would most likely catch them and catch or some blank field.

25 JS: All right. Well, last time when we left off you were talking a little bit about
26 that firefight with the human regiment. I know that there were—first of all, in the
27 questionnaire, well not in the questionnaire, in the memoire that you filled out, you
28 mentioned two pretty big things happening to you down there while at Rach Gia One, if

1 you don't mind talking about you little trouble there with dysentery and then, of course,
2 the fire fight with the Yu Min Regimen. If you don't mind talking about those incidence.
3 CB: Okay, I moved out to Rach Gia in sometime in the early fall. September I
4 would guess. One time I tried to run that down with orders, but there, you know, when
5 I've been reassigned to another part of the unit, but they had a procedure in Vietnam and
6 I'm sure it's not original with Vietnam. It's probably been gone for years. He let the
7 administrative pay for it and catch up when you got the time. They had this trick called
8 VOCO, that's local orders to commanding officers confirmed. In other words, they might
9 stick a day to them as to when you're reassigned some place. It may have almost nothing
10 to do. It could be a projulent. It would have very little to do when you actually moved.
11 Tagging exactly what I want to do would be hard to say. Within a month of when I got to,
12 I contracted dysentery. I don't quite understand where it came from. We all ate at a
13 common mess hall and I was over in the town, one canal away from where Ting Laos
14 was. So whatever I got I contracted it either there or in a little club they had in the MAC-
15 V compound. The Vietnamese had a habit of pouring beer over ice to cool it which most
16 Americans. They go to the common beer was buys, beer 33. I'm sure I must have had
17 some of that poured over ice in the club at one time or another, and that maybe where it
18 came from, where the dysentery came from because god knows where the water from
19 that ice came. Anyway, it was, as I say in my little memoir, that was pretty rough. I
20 couldn't keep anything down and it happened that before I really got bad, I have a partner
21 in Rach Gia, Jim McGee, the little ranger, he and I already arranged for an R&R or his
22 airplane was dead or something, but he wasn't there to fly. I was alone to fly all the
23 missions and sick as a dog most of the time. I couldn't keep anything down, but
24 Budweiser always beer in those days. Anyway, and of course you couldn't drink and fly.
25 I was stuck. What I would give for some Perrier back then. I dropped about forty pounds
26 in thirty days and doesn't feel any good. What had happened is one of our advisors was a
27 V7 of sergeant first class, Special Forces qualified. One of his qualifications in the SS
28 was a medic and he got and started me on a regimen of—you call them no sweat pills
29 because they also give them to you for social diseases. Jet cycling. Anyway, you can
30 overdose on these a good amount, too. I didn't have any even affective good , so to
31 speak, that helps you digest your food. So I have an effect that was a straight through

1 system. Finally, I got to the point where my clothes were falling off of me. I couldn't tag
2 them up anymore. I would just look like shit or hell when I got up in the morning. I flew
3 into Bien Long to the flight dock to flight surgeon and he says, "You're overdosed man,
4 that's the problem with you." And he changed the medication and made me stay there
5 two days. He cleaned me right up. It lasted essentially a month. It just about did me in. I
6 didn't have any more problems there. Of course, ever since my digestive system. It hasn't
7 given me permanent damage. So far, the colonoscopies haven't shown me anything.

8 JS: Let me ask you, one thing real quick regarding— you said it probably came
9 from the beer and the ice.

10 CB: That's a guess.

11 JS: Right, right, but just thinking about things like what type of food would you
12 be able to eat or would you be able to get at the club and at the other place you mentioned
13 at the place where you could eat?

14 CB: I always ate at the mess hall.

15 JS: Yeah, the mess hall.

16 CB: The approximated American food as much as possible. Fortunately
17 everything we got landside in Vietnam was canned or dried just like any other war. The
18 only place you could ever find dairy products or anything fresh in the way of fruits and
19 vegetables is if you went to the Navy base or an Air Force base because they literally
20 flew it in.

21 JS: Right.

22 CB: That's the only way you got a hold of those things. Which I did that every
23 now and again. If I had any excuse to go into Bien Hoa or anything and I did. I flew later
24 in the tour; I flew people in the jets go home. Frequently I would head to the closest ice
25 cream joint. It was sitting off of Rach Gia and very easy to spot on a map of Southeast
26 Asia. There's a little pork chop shaved island called Phu Quoc. You're familiar with it?

27 JS: Yes, sir.

28 CB: Okay. Anyway, it's on the southern tip of that. That was a really strange
29 island. I understand now that there's an international airport there, but anyway, back then
30 it was the northern two thirds was triple canopy jungle and the southern third on the very
31 tip, the southern tip of it was the Pan joy naval base which was manned by the naval

1 patrol Navy that operated in the delta with some coast guard. They had a dynamite club
2 there and it looked like—it looks like something out of trails of the south pacific. The
3 sands were gleaming white. It's really quite a nice place. Whenever I fly there I'd try to
4 eat at each once with the Navy before I went up north in the triple canopy, they had a
5 little strip car out for Special Forces camp. And they were right on the Cambodian
6 border. The border ran off shore there just off shore of that island. The Viet Cong, the
7 doors would infiltrate in that area. Every once in a while, we'd get a request from them to
8 come on out, "We need your help." We never turned anybody down to help. That's what
9 I found out. Every bad noise my engine made you get out of with mainland behind you
10 about ten minutes before you pick up. You know, single engine high wing model planes
11 wasn't nothing on, but a. It's just not all that comfortable. I thought it was awarded for
12 anything. I'm trying to think of something more descriptive. We got a lot of rice
13 obviously. I swore after Korea and Vietnam I'd never eat rice again. We got potatoes,
14 fresh potatoes, but they were more like yams or, you know, sweet potatoes than they were
15 russets or something, you know? The flavor—the consistency was like a regular potato,
16 but that flavor had a sweetish taste to it, a sweet taste to it. You know, the problems
17 we've had with E.coli and all that sort of thing in the US, it was to say that whatever did
18 show up looked fresh and appealing wasn't already infected when we got it.

19 JS: Fruit, you know?

20 CB: I know there was no DEA investigation about it, FDA investigation about it
21 with all of it.

22 JS: Yeah, it just got me thinking to ask you about the types of food that were
23 available and things like that, so. All right, well, I know in the memoir you gave a very
24 good description about what happened with that firefight with the human regimen. Would
25 you mind describing the firefight itself and what happened? I know last time you talked a
26 little bit about the aftermath and the destruction of the planes, but would you mind going
27 through the actual, the firefight itself?

28 CB: Like I mentioned earlier, we would try very hard not to turn anybody down
29 for a mission. We figured that that was the only reason we existed was to support ground
30 troops. We had little pockets of advisors and the Vietnamese, they advised in little places
31 all over. Kin Yang was quite a large province, but by enlarge it was open except for

1 pockets of mangrove swamp here and there, but until you got down to the human force.
2 There was a cement plant up north that had people stationed there. Two or three advisors,
3 American advisors about a company of Vietnamese Army. Then most of them organized,
4 and I used the term advisedly. Vietnamese Army troops were organized into three
5 divisions as of the 7th ARVN and all the infantry. The 7th ARVN, the 9th ARVN, and 21st.
6 These guys moved all around the Delta. You never knew exactly who you were talking
7 to, but for some reason they knew how to get a hold of you. And so we got a call through
8 our section advisor to ask who the intelligence officer and the intelligence advisor. one
9 afternoon, it was the 28th of November to be precise in '67. I happened to be the only on
10 the ground at the time. They said there's one of the battalions of the is in contact around
11 the edge the edge of the Uman and they're trying to break contact and get out rather than
12 get overrun. I said, "Yeah, there's shooting down that way." He says, "All right, well,
13 why don't you go see what you can do for them." So I got the frequencies, radio
14 frequencies and I took off and headed down there. By now it's late afternoon, it's going
15 over toward dusk and I'm having trouble finding them because there's a lot of sound and
16 light going on. I made contact with them over the radio and then we had some gunships
17 come in and tell them to break contact and basically from that point on their big thing
18 was to get out and dodge. They're trying to get back into a secure area. So I was helping
19 them wherever I could. I think we had a backup for a little while. Put in an airstrike
20 behind them which I'm not sure did any good or not. Then they had like four canals to
21 cross before they get back into a secure area. And so I tried to stay with them all the way
22 back. they were pretty clear of the Viet Cong, which is the Uman 10 regiment. They
23 turned me loose; I was getting low on fuel and had run out of rockets and everything. It
24 was just about dark and so I landed back at Rach Gia, refueled, rearmed and I told them
25 I'd wait to call. Then the next thing I knew—I couldn't give you a decent time line of
26 this. It was. We had a little Heinz 57 puppy that we kept in the airfield, a little female.
27 We named her Choy Dagoy which is Vietnamese for. Anyway, she was always in and out
28 of everything. All of a sudden, she froze and looked down at the opposite end of the run
29 way, from the land side of the runway. There's a canal that ran off right the end of our
30 runway on the landside. On the waterside, of course, was the coast. She barked and I said,
31 "What's wrong, girl?" I looked down that way and I saw some shadows moving down at

1 the end of the runway. This not being a very long runway, maybe eight hundred feet
2 down the road. And then they decided to open up. I'd been sitting in the old Keizer jeep
3 that they gave the advisors over there. I crawled down behind it and I got to the radio and
4 called them and said that there was a jagged short strip, I need help. And then my crew
5 chief mechanic—

6 JS: Was it Mike Roberts?

7 CB: Mike Roberts.

8 JS: I'm looking at the thing here.

9 CB: Yeah, he came down and kneeled beside me and homed up with his M-16
10 and pretty well suppressed than I thought for a while. And then I heard the two armored
11 cars that normally stay at the barriers pull away and I said, "Oh no you don't." I went
12 running to them, but they were already out of sight. By the time—we were right in a
13 corner of the revetment where the ranger aircraft full of medics in there so it makes me
14 think he must have had it in for maintenance or something because mine was one
15 revetments over. You understand what these revetments are, right?

16 JS: Right, yes, sir.

17 CB: Okay. I asked Mike, I said, "How much ammo you got?" He says, "I got a
18 bunch of them." When you ran through that box in no time flat. There were three of us
19 there at that point, three Americans, me and Mike and a gas pumper whose name escapes
20 me, always has. Anyway, somewhere in there one of them put a B-40 rocket into the
21 gasoline tankers, an aviation gas tanker and it went up like a roman candle. It smoldered
22 for three days, by the way. Anyway, somehow the POL man moved, the gas pumper had
23 gotten across the airfield under fire and gotten over to the point where we were. This was
24 like the point where we could best get away from there. In the meantime they started
25 blowing up airplanes with sergeant. They got one of the Air Force back aircraft, all of
26 them were Byrd Dogs, got him first and then somewhere along the line they got the V-
27 NAF in this air force Byrd Dog which is on the right side of the runway in a POL tanker.
28 It was a wonder it didn't go up with a tanker. But anyway, suddenly just—this may have
29 been a telescope; this may be a half hours' worth of firefight. Telescoping was things like
30 minutes and that's what happens when you're under fire. Easy to strict it all out and you
31 compact it. Anyway, the POL man showed up and we had openings in the back of the

1 revetment so you didn't have to walk in front when blades were trying to get behind the
2 aircraft to load rockets. Anyway, he showed up and popped up between the revetment we
3 were sitting in front of, an empty revetment and the one where my aircraft was. He said,
4 "They're coming." And it's wide-eyed. So I motioned him to come on and join us at just
5 about the time he moved clear of that hole, a grenade went off and I concluded that that's
6 where I got the scratch, I got on my forehead that night that I didn't even know I had until
7 later somebody told me about it. Anyway, I said, "All right, let's get out and dodge. Let's
8 get the hell out of here. So we all ran down the road toward the town until we got to
9 where the armored car had stopped, that armored car had stopping. With both
10 casticulating with my .45 and, you know, a pigeon Vietnamese in French, we were able to
11 get them to move back up to the airfields. Of course, by that time we got back there's
12 nothing left to say. And then we just stood there slack job for a while when the VC had
13 done their damage and already pulled out. That was the way they liked to play things.
14 Anyway, I was standing there slack looking if the damage had been done and then this
15 same advisor that overdosed me on the and the guy, he was an advisor to, Sergeant Major
16 Bonqug, who I had become fast friends with in early operations. I don't know why,
17 really, we just seemed to have the same clique. They had come out on their own and
18 Bonqug and half a dozen of his men to help us without any orders. They knew I was in
19 trouble so they came out and helped me. And one of them, I think the Intel advisor was
20 there, too. He said, "Hey, you know you're bleeding Charlie." I said, "Oh, really?" He
21 wiped my forehead and showed me. I said, "It doesn't hurt." He said, "You ought to go
22 get that taken care of." And so we decided no more damage we could do, the Viet Cong
23 could do that at night. I think Bonqug and his advisors set out the perimeter there to hold
24 on to whatever what was still worth holding on to it. Then we got in a jeep which had not
25 been destroyed. I drilled my troops to the two guys who were with me to the hooch's to
26 sleep. I'm figuring it must be about one o'clock in the morning by now. So you could tell
27 things are contractive here. Anyway, the way we got medical treatment sector like that
28 was from an outfit called Milphat, it's Military Health Assistance Program. They were
29 public health service doctors and nurses. Generally they were not in uniform. I guess,
30 they thought they'd give them some advantage and didn't. There was someone killed,
31 anyway, or death. Anyway, he forgot seat and got some alcohol and wiped down all the.

1 He put a band aid on it, gave me a tetanus shot and said, "Here, take this little brown card
2 and fill it out." Give it to you and you get a Purple Heart. I said, "You've got to be
3 kidding me." I slammed it down on the table and said, "Thanks, doc." And bye. That's
4 my combat wound. Anyway, the next morning after I had about three hours sleep, I
5 guess, which is about all I ever got over there. Someone woke me up breaking through
6 and somehow the ranger had arrived from wherever he was. He said, "Man, the airfields a
7 mess." "Yeah, it is, man." He said, "Glad to see you alive." I said, "I am, too." was going
8 to be arriving pretty soon to survey the damage. Whoever was with him, he had one other
9 officer in the Byrd Dog. I think it must have been newly men in major named Bob Jones
10 who was easy, he was a friend and I think he was playing operations officer at the time.
11 Anyway, I met him at the air field and everybody just shook their heads. I was quite sure
12 I was going to be court marshaled. Anyway, he took an entirely different tact. He said,
13 "Well, the damn place was never secure anyway." He moved us into which is only, oh, a
14 215 minute flight landside back to Bien Long. Had the reputation of a homeless man,
15 pretty much a secure area. It seems that in the days of the Vietminh when the French
16 were still there. It was primarily populated by a religious group called Awahou. Have you
17 heard of them?

18 JS: Yes, sir.

19 CB: Yeah, and somewhere along the line as Mateo goes, and I can't vouch for it.
20 The VC assassinated the Awahou leader and Awahou had been ticked off ever since. So
21 it was a very secure area and that's where our platoon headquarters was. They had a
22 fairly big team house down town. So we just moved the rest of the time I was in Rach
23 Gia. And we would go back and forth, you know? We'd go back to Rach Gia because of
24 course had to clean up our mess. We would go back to get missions and some briefings
25 and that sort of thing. We would fly over the same ground that we did when we were
26 operating out of Rach Gia. We just tracked an extra twelve minutes flight. Then that's
27 about it to that except much expose. We ran into, not literally ran into, encountered on the
28 internet a guy who was looking for the ranger. He had flown with him at one time and he
29 was an advisor with the 9th. His name is Stuart Jameson. It turned out that he was the one
30 that was advising that unit that night. He thought it'd been the ranger that had gotten him
31 out of there. I said, "Oh no, that was me." We must have exchanged two dozen e-mails

1 there. Found out how many things we had in common and all that sort of thing. It's really
2 strange to forty years later, talk to somebody who you were talking to on the radio.

3 JS: I imagine so, yes, sir.

4 CB: Yeah, I'll bet you there are two or three others like that.

5 JS: Well let me ask you just a couple of more questions about that firefight and
6 afterwards. About how big was the VC unit, do you know?

7 CB: Well, we estimated our platoon, that's why all the decoration right ups. It was
8 at least a squad. There was a lot of shadows moving around. They were fairly lightly
9 armed and we were even less. I mean, we were less well-armed. All we had was I had a
10 car beam, an M2 car beam and Mike had his M-16. I assumed that a field man had his.16
11 at one point, but I never saw him use it. My around the ammo we had. I wrote him up for
12 a bronze star and he got it just before we left. He was a real trooper. a good time and to
13 get everyone out alive and I created him a good shooting if you keep us alive. I think he
14 was from North Carolina.

15 JS: Now you said you had been there at Rach Gia for about four months or so?

16 CB: About two, that was right.

17 JS: About two months, okay.

18 CB: All of October and this is the end of November. That was probably part of
19 September I was there, too. Then we got over there in mid-July in '67. We actually took
20 off from Texas at Bergstrom; I think is where we flew out of. Anyway, we took off from
21 Texas on Bastille. It's an easy one for me to remember.

22 JS: So, after this happened you guys were pretty much immediately transferred to
23 Long Xuyen?

24 CB: Yeah.

25 JS: Okay, how long were you there?

26 CB: Around a month because I was transferred back to Bien Long to take over my
27 platoon and I was there by Christmas. I've got some photos of us getting together with a
28 phony little tree my parents sent me. So yeah, that's the 28th of November. I was in Bien
29 Long a week in December, at least I think by Christmas.

30 JS: All right, were there other guys there at Long Xuyen? Was it already being
31 used?

1 CB: Yeah, Platoon headquarters was there.

2 JS: Okay.

3 CB: And this is one of the things that a platoon leader initially was—well,
4 initially a preferred platoon leader was me back in Texas. And then we got and young
5 majors just before we left. Larry Joyce who unfortunately has already passed away was
6 the platoon leader when I was in the 3rd Platoon primarily. And just before I rotate, Nick
7 Kapps, who I mentioned before, came out to take over the 3rd platoon. I went to Bien
8 Long and took over the platoon. He had the general support platoon. For a very brief
9 period or maybe a week or two I was in Kapps' platoon after Larry Joyce had left. He
10 went onto some staff jobs. So from then on once I got back to Bien Long just before
11 Christmas, I was there for the next six months.

12 JS: All right, well could you, I guess—were there any interesting instances or half
13 stances prior to Tet '68? What were you doing at this time prior to Tet and Bien Long?

14 CB: Well, as I mentioned earlier, the primary function of my platoon, under the
15 newly acquired platoon was a cover of all the airfields when it rained and the compounds
16 when it rained. We primarily flew at night, flew night missions. Whenever we got a call
17 from any of the outposts that they were getting in, we'd get them some fire support and
18 chase Charlie away. Every once in a while, we would get mortared. That was our only
19 real vulnerability in the delta. The ground was so soft they couldn't really fire rockets out
20 of it. And so they fired, by enlarge, .82 or .81 depending when our captured throw mortars
21 at us. They got to be pretty about that. They learned how to find low angle or fire mortar
22 rounds so you couldn't always see the flashes from above. It was a cat and mouse game.
23 They'd pop a few rounds. Our guns, you know, our helicopter gunships would take off
24 and go pop a few rounds with them and shut them up and everybody would go back to
25 sleep. It was just harassment. They knew we were going to pick up and leave and we
26 knew we weren't going to get rid of them. So anyway, we just flew a lot of night
27 missions and then I had quite a few myself, I guess. I probably flew over four hundred
28 hours at night over there. And then I would take all what we used to call ash and trash
29 missions. Those trips back to Bien Long for people to rotate I was telling you about
30 earlier. I would go the supply officer I had to check in the E6 Beaver. One of us or both
31 of us would fly around and pick up things. Trading sometimes, trading material.

1 American beer in particularly was in great demand on the Special Forces camps along the
2 Cambodian border. If you could stack enough beer, cases of beer up in your airplane you
3 could bring back most of the combat. That's sort of what our day was like. I mean, their
4 days were like it was a bit more relaxed atmosphere back at Bien Long because we had
5 one Quonset hut that we had divided off and air conditioned. We had our first sergeant,
6 our first sergeant had as his HDAC guy and he knew how to work on refrigeration and air
7 conditioners. Just before we left, he'd gone through one of the Air Force bases in Texas
8 and I'm sure there were many or were in those days and gotten what the Air Force has
9 declared surplus. Some of it worked, some of it didn't, but those that didn't work he fixed
10 it and that was the deal. He just picked it up a little bit. Anyway, two refrigerators and
11 three window air conditioners they have for Quonset huts so we used that as a club.
12 When you weren't on the flight schedule, you'd go in there and bet you've always. It's
13 like play cards. We were still monopoly fans back in those days. A couple of us played
14 chess, but you build a time here like write letters. You know, the VC almost never
15 attacked a class at midnight. Maybe to the to move into position and then everybody
16 would need to be on their toes right at midnight because if they started driving mortar
17 rounds in. You definitely wanted to be able to make your way to the bunker. They told us
18 early in their tour over there that you might do better off to run barefoot rather than
19 putting on flip flops and shower thongs because you'd get caught in the PSP and it'd trip
20 you. That's one of the early evacuated casualties last year was a guy that tripped on a
21 PSP. You don't get any Purple Heart for that. Anyway, that was kind of what the days
22 were like. We had running water and showers, common showers. Our hooch's were very
23 much like the rooms were partitioned. Very much like what I had out at Rach Gia. You
24 know, I'm returning not only to the same installation where I come from to go to Rach
25 Gia, I ended up in the same bunk. It was like coming home and it was no big deal. Of
26 course, by then we had all shuffled out a little bit. We joked and we called it the Zero
27 Shuffle. They'd expect him to return from overseas. The administrative people called
28 themselves with this zero shuffle to keep the whole unit who had come over there
29 together from leaving together. And so they had to change their personnel to two or three
30 different units. That's how we got Bobby Woolley because he came down south from his
31 203rd. Anyway, it didn't quite work because it'd end up when we and Bien Hoa, Long

1 Bien, Bien Hoa, San Francisco. On the way back we found out that better than half the
2 unit was still leaving at the same time anyway so it didn't quite work. We had spaces.
3 Right about this time—I probably told you I was a unit instructor pilot. Right about this
4 time we started getting in the guys who hadn't flown the Byrd Dog except for the very
5 last couple of weeks of flight school. They had been trained in the 172 with the Army's
6 designations, T-41. That was a with a pitch drop. Anyway, they got in-country not
7 knowing how to fly the machine from my point of view. And so we had to check them all
8 out. There were about three of these in the unit. If they were going out to a sector that had
9 I would only give them a dollar ride and show them around the delta and deliver them to
10 the IT and then I'd say, "Let me know what he said in the unit, okay." So I spent as much
11 as my time in daylight flying checking these new pilots out. Believe me; I had some
12 choice words to say about Mother Rucker. One funny thing happened when I was taking
13 this one guy. We were out at, I guess, a statute of limitations that's going on. We were on
14 one of those free-fire zones I was telling you about. It was an old ruin, really. It looked
15 like a castle had fallen down. Anyway, they were using it as a target to check this kid out
16 to open his rockets. We had from time to time, and our maintenance officer may be in the
17 , but we had from time to time some circuit problems. Originally, the Byrd Dogs just
18 didn't use the shackles that much mountain rockets and flares and things. Every once in a
19 while, somebody would check them out. In fact, from time to time I've been in place
20 where they even pull the shackles all off, the bottom shackle off from under the wing. We
21 had problems with the wiring from time to time. It was short out. And you'd get some
22 really weird manifestations. Like if you—the rocket which you're trying to get them to
23 fire would fire when you released the trigger rather than when you pull the trigger and
24 strange things like that. Well, that's exactly what happened that day. We had a pin, a
25 safety pin that went through the trigger that keeps it from interestingly pulling it back
26 when you're on the ground. And he rolled in and he's taking the pin out and squeezed
27 and the rocket didn't fire. He was running out of airspace and I said, "Pull up, pull up." I
28 said, "Don't"—"and right before I got it out of my mouth, he released it and it fired and it
29 headed toward Cambodia. So we'd climb out, it was a steady climb. I saw a C-130 in the
30 distance and I said, "Oh please Lord, no." He didn't hit anything. It splashed somewhere
31 down the road a couple miles away. in war time.

1 JS: Sure (Laughing) How many of these guys did you have to check out?
2 CB: Gosh, it seems like a constant stream, but it probably wasn't all that big.
3 JS: Okay.
4 CB: Half a dozen, maybe as many as ten. I did some sort of orientation with.
5 JS: And what was the overall size of the unit's contingent there at Vien Long do
6 you think?
7 CB: I should have brought. We were about fifty pilots.
8 JS: Okay.
9 CB: And that's always plus and minus, you know, with what's going on. I want to
10 say 110 enlisted personnel. That may be short. We were a little less; we were rank heavy,
11 of course. We were a little heavy for—you still there?
12 JS: Yes, sir.
13 CB: Yeah, we were a little short infantry company, but we were not much shy of
14 that I don't think. And then there was an aviation company.
15 JS: They were pretty much spread out all over the delta though?
16 CB: Yeah, there was a concentration in Bien Long like I talked about the other
17 day. Some parts of three platoons were there in the company headquarters. The parts of
18 two platoons and then the company headquarters. The 3rd platoon was all out in the bush.
19 That's the unit that I was with.
20 JS: Right, well is there anything else we should discuss before moving onto Tet?
21 CB: No, I guess not.
22 JS: Okay. Well, were things pretty quiet before Tet hit? Did you notice any
23 evidence of a build up at all or anything?
24 CB: We were having more frequent supply activity on the part of the VC. You
25 know, I told you that some of those indicators, they told us about the stacking up of the
26 caskets and heavy movement the same time in the marsh area. We had several guys
27 report that and it had been the very morning, the day before the attack that night in the
28 31st of January which was when Tet started. Several of our guys, our pilots had spotting
29 heavy sand pan movement and they called in gunships on it. There was a lot of moving
30 and shaking. We needed that; we just didn't know what was going on. I think I had
31 probably landed on an early night flight and come to walk back up to the building area

1 and had started watching the last episode of “The Fugitives” and I had been trying to
2 catch up three. But the AFV on TV was running that in Saigon. I hadn’t even popped a
3 beer when I got a call from down at the flight line. I get in the move and watching this
4 TV show was later, I guess. It wasn’t quite dark. I got a call from the flight line and said
5 that the Ranger had just come back from Bangkok and he wanted to tell me all about his
6 trip. So I got a jeep and rode down to pick him up and the guy that brought him in. He got
7 a bottle of Jack Daniels and he said, “I’ll tell you all about Bangkok before we get rid of
8 these.” I said, “You now, that doesn’t sound like a bad plan.” We went on back to the
9 hooch and somewhere in there we ate because. I wouldn’t be drinking hardly without
10 having any, but it got dark and I was trying to watch that show and keep up the
11 conversation at the same time. Then I got a phone call, they wanted me to come back
12 down to the operations shack. In that month or so that I had been back I also took on the
13 major additional task of being the flight operations officer. The guy who I had worked for
14 earlier, you know, didn’t really get along with very well, and had moved onto a 20 engine
15 radio research aviation unit which is what the kind of flying he wanted to do anyway. So
16 a new company commander, Major Jacobson, “You know, I think part of the problem
17 while you and Hope didn’t get along was because he kept trying to be your boss and he’s
18 not supposed to be.” I said, “Well, what are you going to do with the Ops officer then?
19 He’s running the flight ops with the old company and in my platoon fills the slots here.”
20 And he says, “Well, why don’t you do both?” So I’d become the operations officer at the
21 same time. I was called down to Op shack because the company commander was
22 standing there with me with one of the guys, one of his company commanders. They had
23 gotten in some Intel. They had piece of paper. I don’t know if you’ve ever seen those
24 guys, but you had to train to read them because they get so washed out after the third
25 copy or something. I predicted that we were going to get overrun that night. And I think I
26 know what the source was now working in Intel. Then I didn’t realize it. Usually, if we
27 got something that wasn’t from a ground unit, we didn’t pay much attention to it. It turns
28 out that we weren’t the only ones in the Army. Anyway, I had to be there, too. Either
29 witness instructions of TS documents, time saving documents and the company
30 commander I went to and the two guys in the unit had the clearance. So I either had to
31 witness its destruction or store it. We opted to store it. We didn’t quite believe it. So then

1 we walked back up to the building area from the Op shack and as we were walking up
2 there's a whole lot of sound and light going on all around us. Some of the tracers were red
3 and some of them were green. The green is usually Soviet Based tracers. When the new
4 air field commander had been there a couple weeks and he said, "Well, looks like the
5 Vietnamese, you know, Tet as in New Year's." They were enjoying themselves. I said,
6 "I'm not so sure, Colonel. Most of those tracers are green." And so anyway, we got back
7 up to the building area and the party had already broken up, everybody had gone to bed.
8 So I went and cleaned up and went to bed, too. And within two hours, I'm sure, we the
9 first mortar rounds who dropped it in. They were amazingly accurate at night. I made it, I
10 think, about two steps ahead of the first mortar round that landed right outside of the train
11 area. We had heard, of course, the signs and the controls. Two of ours. One, it was air
12 tag. You know, the mortar tag one if it was going to attack. And it changed tone just
13 about the time we got into the bunker I said, "Oh boy." So I hadn't helmet and my
14 underwear and I slipped on my boots and my socks. I ran back into my hooch and suited
15 up in a flight suit with a weapon and everything. I put my flak jacket back on and started
16 heading down the flight line which is a procedure we were supposed to gather in the Op
17 shack and order from the commander from there and then move from there to do
18 whatever we were going to do. How were we going to react? Well, when I got the object,
19 nobody was there. And so I debated whether a group to take with me or whether I chose
20 to go on down and see what was happening. A lot of firing going on. There was a big fire
21 going and what we called a hero hooch. It was a helicopter gun team and a flare ship with
22 flares on board. They parked separately from everybody else and right close to an ammo
23 cash. This is where they could load fast and get up. Right behind them was this huge,
24 bright flame going up and I got to the edge of our maintenance air which is also the
25 edge's runway. I looked down the runway and there was this shooting going on
26 everywhere. I saw very quickly that if I cross that runway, I was going to be sky lighted
27 by this flame behind me. That's where my troops were and that's where my flames were
28 and I so I had to get over there. I started on crossing and I got a burst pretty close and I
29 rolled around in the PSP and then I got out in the middle of the runway. I saw the Sea
30 Wolf Pilots, the Navy gunships, helicopter gunships that they flew on the cast off Army
31 aircraft, dogs primarily. Anyway, he was riding in pain and his name was Dick Marks. I

1 said, "That's probably one of the dumbest things I ever said to anybody in line." But I
2 said, "Come on March; put your on. You're an officer for." Just about time I got in there
3 to help him, Bob Jones rode up a three quarter ton truck, I believe it's three quarter.
4 Maybe he had a quarter truck, maybe in a jeep. Anyway, to pick him up and we dumped
5 him in there and then he pulled it all off and then I went all over to the revetments and
6 slowly, but surely, we got a group together in the revetments as people arrived down the
7 east end, the extreme east end of the runway. The runway runs at the 08260, I think.
8 When we first got to the revetments the company commander and the first sergeant met
9 us coming back from down at the opposite end of the revetments where the hangers and
10 the aircraft were. They appeared to be in shock. The company commander got a thirty
11 caliber round to go through an earlobe and the first sergeant had creased down the steel.
12 And I figured they probably had seen that war for the night. I figured they go to the
13 dispensary and I didn't know that much. It didn't appear that the CO was bleeding very
14 much, but I guess that's fairly clean. Anyway, so I'd hollered back to some of the guys,
15 the group that was building up there and I couldn't tell you how many there were. There
16 was at least a dozen in the long run. But there was a mix. Somehow it got pilots, some fix
17 wing pilots, some mechanics. The only ones that were weld on, of course, would be the
18 helicopter pilots as the mechanics. I said, "Somebody needs to get some hand grenades."
19 Somebody went back and brought a mail sack full of hand grenades. They were still in
20 the carton. They come in these little cylindrical shaped cartons and you'd have to take
21 tape off of them and all that. So we were disassembling grenade cartons and chucking
22 them from one revetment to the other. Somewhere in there, Rick Shoe, one of our
23 warrant officers, never particularly close to even though we're both from Florida. We had
24 a bit of a smart mouth. Anyway, he came up and he had been shot in the ankle. I'd make
25 the same suggestion for him as I'd made for the other to that'd come back. He wouldn't
26 have any part of it. He says, "I don't want to get." So he was part of a fight from then on.
27 We and when we got to about my unit, in my platoons little hanger, it was a little hanger.
28 It was only big enough for one Byrd Dog to attack. I found body and he was already
29 dead. He had been my operations clerk, really fond of the kid. I leaned over and closed
30 his eyes and this is as I was coming up from burst of weapons fire went by my ear and
31 changed from PSP office to revetment and cut me. I said, "Oh no, not again." I emptied

1 my.45 into the corner of that revetment in the dark. I couldn't see anything. I didn't even
2 see the mussel flashing the last group of rounds that was produced. When the sun came
3 up, I just signed to the Viet Cong. It wasn't without. By the time that I'd reached the end
4 of our flight when I was out to the west end of the runway the sun had started coming up.
5 Somewhere along in there two and timeline. The VC and what they had done is they'd
6 come over. It was almost as though we prepared it for them. I don't think it was
7 intentional, but they had been, there was a new air Calvary squadron not new, not even
8 new in-country, but new to us, was coming down from 3 Corps from 3rd Corps and they
9 were filling in some to make the building areas and work areas and landing pads and that
10 sort of thing. All helicopters except for one round of calve troop which was very useful to
11 have later on in the story about Tet. So they had been dredging war, dredging sand eye on
12 the Mei Cong and jumping it right along the sense line. To the point that you could just
13 walk over the fence line. And that's what the VC tried to do. Now we had earlier in the
14 evening, the company commander put out a couple of—I guess it was after we got the
15 message. I had put out a couple of machine gun installations and they suppressed a lot of
16 movement from time to time over the fence and into the airfield. We figured we got
17 about, oh, eighty minute sappers, sapper unit company. They called them company even
18 though they were so small. We had that much on the air field where you'd count it for
19 fifty of them being about a dozen prisoners. We pretty much wiped out the guys ahead of
20 us. That's the one I was doing as the sun came up was counting bodies. We lived with
21 those bodies for quite a while, but the Vietnamese wouldn't cut me up. Somebody near
22 the dump truck down into the runway for days in the heat. I guess by then I was just
23 about exhausted. I had stopped—I fancy that I stopped him. I don't know who you who
24 he was, but one solider had already jacked around in his chamber and was just about to
25 put one of the VC out of his misery. He said, "I'm going to kill a son of a bitch now." I
26 don't think so. "you don't need to clear your weapons. Just go on." Once I got on, you
27 know, some Vietnamese help to move the bodies out to make sure the ones that were
28 moving those bodies were, in fact dead. And then the other ones that were wounded, they
29 moved them back up to the dispensary for treatment. I've got a picture of that group, too
30 for some of them the next day. Anyway, I trudged up to my bunk and come to find out,
31 lived up his name and they landed in the street between and the dispensary which is a

1 concrete building. His cover, our bunks and all that stuff was about an inch of dirt. I said,
2 “The hell with it.” I pulled back the corner of the GI blanket and threw it off and it
3 crashed. Then about probably about three hours later, two to three hours later I woke up
4 with this god awful crash and I rolled over on the floor and pulled everything back on
5 again. What had happened that was what I’d heard was a close rifle rim that went into
6 that water purification plant right by training in the back of our hooch. There was some
7 Viet Cong on the roof of the convent which is right just outside our convent. A group of
8 convent and orphanage was shooting 50 caliber rounds down into our hooch’s. I said,
9 “This doesn’t seem like a good place to.” I ran out into the street between the dispensary
10 and our hooch and got behind some concrete part of that dispensary. Just about time I had
11 gotten cover, I looked up and I saw two of these old model Huey’s and lift up almost
12 straight up off the pad and put three rockets into the top floor of the convent. They just
13 collapsed. I think, “Well, that’ll take care of you guys.” Anyway, we walked and I started
14 walking on down to the flight line to see what was happening and somehow, they
15 recovered before I ever got to the flight line which you might have some understanding
16 that even though the Mei Cong had a muddy bottom, we thought when the sand was
17 dredged, it cleaned the light almost. It’s surprising, they looked almost like a beach area
18 in the Southeast. Anyway, that’s where we had a couple of three some bunkers that had
19 been working on earlier and it built up and just about time I got on that gleaming white
20 sand and made for such a good target, the reestablished a fifty caliber on top of what was
21 left of the convent and Brown started plugging in the sand around. I ran into our bunker
22 which was closer to my platoon so I ran in there to Gerry Johnson , we called him John. I
23 said, “Boy, that was close.” And he said, “Yeah, this guy’s going to try to kill us.” I said,
24 “Hey, I’ll tell you what, if I ever get out of this alive then we’ll come.” And he said, “Oh,
25 yeah, yeah, yeah.” He said, “First of all, that would be a riot.” And then from there on
26 most of Tet is a blur. I remember pop up here and there and chasing some—most of the
27 cities in the delta were taken by the VC. At one point we had to take them. Somebody
28 said something more stupid than I did. Some major talked about veto they had to destroy
29 to save it. It was closer being the FAC for just about every town in the city, I mean the
30 delta. We were flying constantly, but I was chasing a handful of VC down to the streets
31 of the 150. A gunship, a pair of gunships pulled in behind the helicopters and said, “Hey

1 Fox, get out of here so we can kill these bastards.” “Okay, you’re better armed than I
2 am.” And so I let them have them. That kind of thing was happening all the time. It was a
3 good, I’ll say, close to a month. It was at least three weeks before things settled down
4 back to the old status quo. The rest of that’s sort of a blur. They had us evacuate a couple
5 of times which was not a good idea because. As it turned out most of us made it through
6 it. They had killed and we had like three wounded, but everybody else made it through.
7 We already started a counter offensive before we ever left. The Viet Cong were hurt
8 terribly by their operations there at Tet. I mean, we just killed great numbers. They really
9 didn’t exist in the delta anymore after that. the North Vietnamese Army. The Viet Cong
10 in the area was essentially destroyed there at Tet. Of course, it was all interpreted
11 differently back here. I was pretty bitter about that for a while after I got that. It’s one of
12 the greatest numerical victories the American Army ever had. It was never read that way
13 by the press.

14 JS: So the enemy activity in the area, where they actually active in Bien Long
15 itself for about three weeks?

16 CB: No , they would move in and take an objective and then almost immediately
17 to get a response. I’ll give the Vietnamese credit for this. That’s one period in that war
18 they actually fought. They would not—like an eye that’s going after a Viet Cong unit.
19 They’re fighting for their homes. The people who were normally staff advisors, E7s and
20 above, majors and above, the Americans, they were at a promise level stance and even
21 higher at division level stance ended up being out in the bush on the line there because
22 they needed every gun they could get. They even came on to our airfield at one time
23 when we thought it was going to be a big push. I think the biggest disappointment I ever
24 saw, I ever had here in that period was the 9th US Infantry, which is based out of Don
25 Tam, just north of the Mei Kong. One of their bridge commanders had come in strutting
26 around and saying, “It’s full, Colonel.” “Well, we’re going to help you guys out; we’re
27 going to help you guys out here.” They flew in what they called reinforcement stuff at
28 night when the shooting started again. The only thing that was worth them flying in was a
29 mortar crew they pile in a little bit. Other than that, this is supposed to be a company with
30 14 people. I said, “You got a war zone then go lie down in the revetment and go to
31 sleep.” Yeah, I didn’t have much respect for the next USS. That kind of thing is just

1 going to be, it's going to pop up in memory. I have that paper here somewhere, but you
2 don't want it directed from hers I wouldn't think.

3 JS: All right, let me ask you a few more questions about Tet. First of all, I know
4 you mentioned a kind of interesting little incident with a Cobra during this time.

5 CB: Oh!

6 JS: Could you talk about that?

7 CB: Yeah, that was during Tet or counter Tet or whatever you want to call it. I
8 can't swear it was a Cobra. I had landed just about early morning nautical twilight. When
9 it starts getting first light. It was after we went off and had been in the cockpit about
10 twenty of those twenty-four hours. The guys had mechanics that built me a small little
11 bedroom type bunker out of sandbags and PSP and put cotton in it for me. So whenever I
12 was free, I could sleep. For some reason, I don't know whether that was the platoon
13 sergeant or they came over themselves. One of them would stand guard by the opening,
14 by the entrance to it the whole time I was in there. It gives one a comfortable feeling.
15 That night—and they loved to get their hands on a.45 for some reason. A.45, particularly
16 the issue ones we had back then, not or anything. It's like throwing rocks, really. The
17 accuracy of them was terrible. But for some reason want a pistol. I didn't know why, but
18 whenever I pulled off my pistol belt, I just passed them my.45 and went into lie down. I
19 don't know how long it was, probably less than an hour. The some started peeking
20 through the opening. I guess you could say it was southern exposure so I had to get up in
21 the sky a little bit more or so. I saw this who I gave my weapon to standing at the door.
22 He was one of those wonderful beige blends of ethnicity from Hawaii. He was one of the
23 handful that we had gotten about a week after Tet started. they were serving with the 25th
24 back into the rear. They had already had a tour in Vietnam. We got them back so it's sort
25 of like this stop off thing they do nowadays to the guys over in the Middle East. It's
26 whatever they call it. That basically means you're screwed. I wasn't sure how angry any
27 of these guys were about it so I tried to treat them pretty peacefully. You know, I wasn't
28 sure how stable it might be. Anyway, I saw the Monzano and pull out my.45. He may
29 have said, "Don't move." I don't know. All I said was, "Wait a minute Monzano, we can
30 talk this over." And he said, "Stay still." And he fired. I don't know if you had any
31 experience firing a.45, but it's the noisiest weapon in the world. Particularly it's inside of

1 a closed container like that. Both of our ears were ringing for a couple minutes there and
2 then settle down. I look over where he had fired and there was a , he said, “Cobra.” And
3 then walked away. That was my close call with a snake. I can’t say I ever saw a Cobra or
4 a Bamboo Crater or any of those that are supposed to be very deadly over there when I
5 was there. I’d see snakes from time to time, but the little green things or black things, you
6 know, you’d see in Florida woods. Anyway, something like we’d see in Florida woods.
7 It’s conceivable, the cobra, I guess. Boy, if I make a mess of anything.

8 JS: Sure, right. Well another question about Tet itself. I know you talked about
9 the way the media handled it. Were you aware at all of the media coverage of Tet while
10 you were there?

11 CB: Only that it scared my family to death.

12 JS: Okay.

13 CB: Back at stateside. I know I didn’t have any children those days. I married my
14 first wife then. Every letter that got through from them, worry jumped off the page
15 because of the way it’s being reported. You know, it’s a little like combat
16 correspondence. I guess combined, obviously, but it’s a little like the local news. If it
17 bleeds it leads. And that’s what we get. I know when we get local news cast here; of
18 course the snow has been the big news. Before that, before you get anything that you
19 really want to air about, you get about thirty minutes of mayhem with washed in the
20 street. So that’s what the whole expression came from. “If it bleeds it leads.” I guess war
21 correspondence have been that way, too. If they can’t stand an engine fire got in a fight
22 and look like they were really involved without really being in trouble, then that’s what
23 they want to put on film. Yeah, it was strange how the word of that got around. That
24 NETO quote about destroying the villages saying. We heard that, we heard it out of
25 maybe something like “Stars and Stripes.” I don’t know exactly what we were reading. I
26 got a hometown newspaper from time to time, but our hometown newspaper was no great
27 shake at reporting war. Yeah, we had a sense that something wasn’t quite right because
28 we were all prepared to inch it up and go finish off the VC. And apparently, they had
29 already starting telling Westmoreland to cut back on the casualties.

1 JS: So based on that would you say then that do you feel that the war was going
2 pretty well at that point? Could you tell, I guess, after that point that the DC had
3 underestimated by what you saw?

4 CB: That was in reports. I did see in at least three instances I'd go into airfield,
5 you know, I don't know. I think going from one reason or another to worth in operations
6 on there seemed to be a credible number of bodies lying around. It's backed up and they
7 had to use it to stack like cord wood. There was bodies everywhere. The only conclusion
8 that I could draw was they were VC lies because the Vietnamese are very big on funerals
9 and they would have buried, you know? Of course, the Viet Cong probably—nobody was
10 around to blaze them up. So it did seem there were an awful lot of dead bodies lying
11 around. Yeah, I had a clear indication that there was a victory of major proportion.
12 Apparently, that work never got back here to the states.

13 JS: How about the VC casualties? How did this play out later on in your tour? Did
14 you notice that—let me ask you, were things more quiet?

15 CB: Oh, yeah.

16 JS: Okay.

17 CB: They got very quiet. I guess they would probably rebuild the structure. Once
18 the light did fly down a little bit, I had two very important events I had to and one was to
19 go R&R in Hawaii. And the second one was to go on a second R&R in Hong Kong. So it
20 seems if things would calm down enough, things were quiet enough that you felt you
21 could risk that. Because I knew when right in the middle of Tet, things were hot and
22 heavy. I don't understand how we were able to keep our communications up as well as I
23 would like to read some more about that myself and so forth. People who still think of
24 themselves and call for Rach Gia into Bien Long; I talk to them on the telephone. One of
25 the guys that I served with in Germany was at that cement plant I was talking about. He
26 got killed and his commander, the major he works for called me and said, "I." He said,
27 "Did I want to his body." He said, "I can't leave there. You know, I'm sort of like Mel
28 Gibson. I'm up to my ears in Vietnam." And so I didn't scare them. My first wife went to
29 the funeral and stayed with his wife for a while. You know, it was just become a regular
30 telephone and make that call and I was shocked to find out they were calling from Rach
31 Gia. I say we were via radio, but somehow, we could get pretty good communication all

1 through that scrap. And they were all over us. I mean, we had all the Viet Cong we
2 wanted for a while.

3 JS: All right, were all of the other outposts such as Long Xuyen and other places
4 hit as well?

5 CB: Well, one night that we evacuated, we evacuated in Long Xuyen.

6 JS: Okay.

7 CB: And while we set up the guard post, we never got hit. Long Xuyen turns out
8 was a pretty safe area until Saigon fell in '75.

9 JS: When you had to evacuate from Bien Long, how long before you could
10 return?

11 CB: Well, we were back the next day.

12 JS: Okay.

13 CB: It was, like I say, it was a mistake anyway in my mind. Of course, nobody
14 had slept very much. Yeah, we closed down; I'm sure by noon the next day.

15 JS: All right, so after Tet came to a conclusion, you said things did get relatively
16 quiet?

17 CB: Yeah, it was even more quiet than the status quo landing. We weren't getting
18 mortared in for a while. Of course, we had also had an addition to the family. The 7th
19 Squadron of either the 7th or 8th of the 1st Cav Black Ops. Their calve squadron had
20 moved in by then and they were very, very useful because they put out ground foot
21 patrols with their ground calve company. Also, they had reclosed rifles and they didn't
22 mind using them. So yeah, things were very quiet quiet there for a while. And then they
23 started taking some aircraft casualties and they didn't get quite the air patrols at night so
24 we had to wrap up our night flying, but they had these LOH's you used, Light
25 Observation Helicopters that they used for the scout ships. Then they had cobras or
26 Cobras from gunships and they had base models slick. They had about half of their scout
27 ships had been shot up and had been down for bullet damages in about three weeks after I
28 got there. So we had a three week squad and then we got back to it pretty much what the
29 status quo was before Tet. They were until they got the entire squadron in. They were
30 constantly improving on their with the standing up which is right opposite my hanger so I
31 watched these guys up here and I gained new respect for combat engineers. I was

1 watching one day when this guy was operating a road grater leveling off right opposite
2 my hanger. We had gotten ten bricks out of a pagoda that was down on fire land on the
3 other side of a creek canal. They would get a couple of rounds every now and then on a
4 flight run. We swore we were going to take it out someday. They said, "Oh, no, no, no,
5 no." He goes, "They're just out to kill a." Anyway, this engineer was out there. He had
6 his M-14 strapped across. He was shirtless, hatless, with an M-14 strapped across his
7 shoulders. He was leveling out that sand and all of a sudden, he heard very cracked,
8 "Ting, ting, ting." He stopped; he got down behind the motor grater and bulled out and
9 PRC-77 and someone was talking on it. I could see all of this. I was just looking at it
10 from behind a resentment wall. All of a sudden here comes his rifle team and just kept
11 hauling butt beside the motor grater. Nobody conquered anybody. They just took out a.
12 We headed back up on the Jeep, took off, and the engineer got back up on his motor
13 grater and went to the motor grater again. That's all a working bunch of people, I'll tell
14 you. They were quite prepared to do it under fire, too.

15 JS: Well, you said that after Tet you were preparing for your R&R's. How did
16 you end up with two R&R's?

17 CB: Well, see the big thing was you qualified for R&R depending on how much
18 time you had in country. And it was where we wanted to go made a difference, too. So
19 you had to be in-country eleven months. And this is only months before you're going to
20 leave, right? Eleven months to go to Australia. And so that was the prime thing for a lot
21 of bachelors. You could go to Bangkok or Kuala Lumpur or something, one of the locals
22 Southeast Asian spots after about four months in country. But you had to be in country
23 about eight months to go to Hawaii to meet your family. And that was the prize for
24 married guys was to go to Hawaii. And then after that, then suddenly they popped up
25 with extra R&R's in places like Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, like I said. Manila, I guess,
26 but nobody wanted to go to Manila. Somebody told me that there was an R&R available
27 in Hong Kong in May and I took it. It was three of us, three slots. You know, it was a
28 good place to fill in all that empty space around your belt like and had some suits made,
29 but you couldn't wear them six months after you get home, didn't fit you. The usual
30 corral, but it was a fun place to be. Back in those days it was still British.

31 JS: How long after Tet were you able to take your first one?

1 CB: Oh, about two months.

2 JS: About two months? Okay.

3 CB: Yeah, so that would be probably a couple of weeks after it calmed down. Not
4 much over that.

5 JS: Well, what was that like for you to experience of actually leaving a combat
6 area to go on R&R? Was that strange?

7 CB: Well, I'd been looking forward to it for so long.

8 JS: Sure.

9 CB: I thought I had it coming. My first wife met me in tears because she said I
10 looked like I'd just gotten off a pretend death march. I was then. I guess I gained five
11 pounds in the five days I was in Hawaii. It took some adjusting. Every noise I read as if I
12 were in Vietnam. I had some problems trying to make some reservations from Vietnam.
13 Both the women I've been married to require me to do all the planning of the trip.
14 Anyway, I did get three— at the end of five days we had to move once. or something
15 else. It was a very nice motel. One of the places we stayed the elevator got stuck.
16 Everything on Waikiki was a high rise, or was then, at least three fours. The elevator got
17 stuck and the alarm bell went off. It didn't really sound as I reflected on it later. It really
18 did sound like a siren in the control tower, what I took it to be. My first wife went over
19 and patted me on the floor and said, "What's going on?" and I said, "Get down, they're
20 coming in." And every time—I'm not sure how many cars I've ever heard backfire
21 everything's even sounded like a round being fired I reacted to. I didn't get rid of that all
22 before I came back. I guess it's good I didn't because I needed those reactions. Yeah, you
23 know, I can understand why a lot of people have a hard time adjusting. I mean, we all had
24 bad dreams. I had made up my mind when I went over. Like I said, just after the war, I
25 didn't have any children at the time. I made up my mind and I was not going to shoot at
26 anything that shoot at me first. I'd come home with a and says, "Wait, it didn't help all
27 that much. I still had the bad dreams." Even now, this long after forty years after every
28 once in a while, I'll have one that I'll wake up and be perspiring or adrenaline and my
29 wife will say, "Are you back in Vietnam again?" I said, "No, I don't think so." What it
30 was, was in some combats where I mixed people I knew from 'Nam with people I knew

1 in the National Guard later. It's crazy; it's crazy what your head will do to you
2 sometimes. I learned how to live with those things.

3 JS: So the R&R was a week?

4 CB: Five days, actually.

5 JS: Okay, five days.

6 CB: And the way the figured the transportation you probably actually got six, but
7 it was one day transit each way.

8 JS: Right, right. Well, we're going to ask you about a few more incidents that you
9 mentioned during the last few months. You talked about one time hating rough puff
10 troops in contact in April of '68. Could you talk about that?

11 CB: Yeah, let me see what the exact date was.

12 JS: April 6th maybe?

13 CB: That's the one again in the DSC. 6th of April, yes.

14 JS: Okay. Yeah, I was just out on a regular night patrol and the guy called.
15 Apparently strategic, not a strategiestic word there. There was this position advantage to
16 one of the sectors on outpost just south of Bien Long. It's a little old town called Bacang.
17 Anyway, the road bent across and made a canal there. And that bridge was always
18 vulnerable to Bien Yet. The pack of team house must have been very close to that. I'm
19 trying to remember exactly who it was. Later I went down on the ground there. The guy
20 that called for help that night and wanted to make sure that I got to know the guy in the
21 Vietnamese commander. He was advising and anyway, it was a sector advisor, senior
22 sector advisor had called. They need some help and one of the platoons of rough puffs, I
23 think it was a company, was moving through the area and they stop to sleep and spent the
24 night in Bacang in the town. The minute they had settled down they got hit by the Viet
25 Cong from both sides of the road. One of which would be in a canal. One side was a
26 canal line and the other side was a patty line. The rows of houses on both sides of the
27 road. So anyway, he called me over there to see if I could help. I called up and asked for
28 spooky dull AC-47 gunship, some gunships. It happened that we got a team of the few
29 from the. They were pretty close by. So I climbed up out of there and they popped the
30 flares and looked up on the for a little while and they had to come back up for refuel and
31 rearm. Just before spooky showed up, as the gunships were pulling off, I noticed they

1 were getting some fifty caliber rounds. They looked like green baseballs coming out of
2 the tree line on the other side of the patty. Let's see, you got canals, houses, road, houses,
3 patty, the other side of the patty, and a tree line well away from where the road was. It
4 was opening up on fifty and it seemed like he maybe was not so flush with ammo cause
5 he wasn't popping off that many rounds. When one of those hit green, tracers come up.
6 They get your attention because one of them messed an airplane up pretty bad. Anyway, I
7 climbed up to less effective use of flares about fifteen hundred feet and went blackout
8 because another aircraft went around at the time. I thought the flare was flying around the
9 edge of the technique I was telling you about the other day. What I did was not real
10 smart. I salvoe all my rockets and where I saw them was a load of flashes whereas I just
11 should have shot one at a time. I thought I had more left to do something with. Anyway, I
12 stayed around the edge of the flare. The.50 never fired again and later on they sound
13 some pieces of one out there. They said, "So, I guess that's all we'll ever want a clay man
14 like a clay man.50. Then we got the gunships in and the gunships came back, the spooky
15 came up, and eventually the con ran away. It was a few moments of intensity and maybe
16 an hour or so of a real good firefight. That was about it. The guys on the ground sure
17 appreciated it. The lieutenant who was with this rough puff moving through town and had
18 gotten separated from his radio which is death over there. You'll never get separated
19 from your radio. I was trying to orchestrate all this activity up there without benefit of his
20 perspective, but it apparently worked and the senior lies in there thing saying he has
21 captain duty. He came through Bien Long to go on R&R. He was going. Anyway, he
22 wanted to find me. He only knew because of my call sign. So he said, "I got to tell this."
23 We sat down and had a cup of coffee and he said, "I put you in for DFC. " "Okay." I said,
24 "Pretty routine night for us around here." He said, "Well, it wasn't for us." Yeah, and
25 then later after he got back from R&R, he had me down for awful Vietnamese food first
26 lieutenant that he was advised. And then it was a town. Yeah, that and a few other
27 occasions I had to socialize with the Vietnamese. You just gave me a very curious
28 perspective on the Vietnamese. They had no understanding much of nationhood. Their
29 loyalties rarely went beyond the province chief. Sometimes not outside the village chief.
30 They didn't have a clue about military operations originally. That gives the long enough
31 they picked up a few corners. About ready to wrap this up?

1 JS: Well, I still have some more I'd like to talk about, but if you'd like to wrap up
2 for today?

3 CB: Well, how much more do you want to talk about? I'm just about at the end of
4 my tour.

5 JS: Right.

6 CB: Well, I told you about a round of parties, I put it in the paper anyway.
7 Sending a round of parties we had. It turned out a lot of command structure was going
8 home around the same time. The company commander who had taken us over there, we
9 ran into in Long Bien and Bien Hoa and flew into Alaska and to San Francisco. Actually,
10 flew into Scott and then rode the bus over to San Francisco International. And that's
11 where we all split up. There were about three out of three into the southeast, two to
12 Florida. No, one to Florida, one to Alabama. I was going to my sisters where my first
13 wife was staying in Clayton, Alabama, and going into Atlanta. We all went to Atlanta and
14 then we three split up and then we were home. I'd already gotten my assignment and I
15 already have applied for graduate school in Carolina and accepted by the time I got home.
16 I knew where I was at and I had four months to do on active duty to finish out and round
17 out six years of active duty which was the total commitment back in those days. Six years
18 of active duty reserve. Until I figured out my goal and anything. I requested release from
19 active duty and they gave it to me. In the meantime, the four months that I was there at
20 Fort Stewart Georgia, which is the closest to my home of record in , I got blessed by the
21 actual training base. I'd been logging the instructor pilot time for years. I've never been
22 gone and through what they call MOI, Methods of Instruction with a so-called
23 professional teaching how to fly above a back seat and all that. I knew how to do all that.
24 So anyway, then it turned out I was one of the senior captains. They gave me a training
25 flight. What we were doing was a fix wing qualification course. We were checking out
26 helicopter pilots. and recent vantage, some of them were at the turn around students from
27 flight school. Some of them had been on a presidential flight. That gives you a broad
28 band of experience. Believe me; the ones that just got out of flight school are easier to
29 teach. Anyway, the others already had bad habits engrained in them from a fix wing point
30 of view. It was a pretty good bunch and we had a good time. I pushed the envelope from
31 time to time and one of them actually bland of horse landing weren't really supposed to

1 do that. When you got the power on and let them tell you they were set up good and let
2 them take them around out of the ground. They appreciated that, appreciated the
3 confidence. It actually wasn't a bad time. It had been reflecting of what I really wanted to
4 get out of the Army. And then I saw the next casualty, I said, "Maybe not." Actually, I
5 got sidelined with an injury there. You know that one scratch in 'Nam and nothing of
6 consequence. I broke a bunch of bones and one of my bones. One of my feet playing
7 basketball which I was never really good at anyway. And so I had to be on a soft cast for
8 the rest of the time. Fortunately, it also coincided with the Christmas parade. Now that I
9 got out in January 4th and I'd come out on active duty January 5th of '63. So I got January
10 4th of '69 and I was out of the cast by then so everything would go all right. I moved from
11 there to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and found out I didn't know nearly as much about
12 history as I thought I did. I'd taken all my electives as an undergraduate at Auburn in
13 history. I loved history, I always read it. These people were making work out of it. It was
14 a whole different environment. Once I got well settled in, I loved college campuses. I
15 could live on one the rest of my life. It's always some kind of excitement. You're in this
16 little bubble. You know exactly what I'm talking about. And about a month or so after I
17 got settled in and Apple Hill, I got this letter from USAR, form letter, asking me if I
18 wanted to do—I was or still had a USAR commission because I didn't resign my
19 commission. They said, "Why don't you come earn retirement points and fly with us this
20 summer, so and so USAR Aviation Company." I don't know about that. Anyway, I think
21 maybe it was Easter we were flying out of to Florida on Easter. I looked over at the ramp
22 and there's a National Guard facility Army guard, Army aviation facility there right next
23 to some of the cargo hangers. I looked out there and the place was loaded with bird. I
24 wonder if those guys need any help. When I got back from the trip I called and they were
25 just glowing. They just loved to help a Vietnam Vet. Within a year I was running the
26 place because there was only one or two others that had been to 'Nam in much in the way
27 of active duty. I stayed there as long as when GI Bill lasted. I was offered command of
28 that unit and considered taking it while I tried to commute back and forth from Maryland
29 after I'd gotten a job here at to commute back and forth for drill week and that didn't
30 work. I transferred up to the guards. I was still flying and I flew until summer of '77. I
31 had a heart attack and got grounded on Bastille Day. Everything happens to me on

1 Bastille Day. I can't talk about much of anything I ever did here. I was active in the guard
2 all along. And when I had the heart attack, I thought surely, they're never going to muster
3 me out. But you know, I take apocalyptic views just like those airplanes we had
4 destroyed. The general, which is guard officer in any state, who colonel and I had
5 worked for time to time, asked me if I wanted to stay in, stay in the guard. I said, "Sure. I
6 don't quite have twenty of them; I'm about a year short of twenty." No, I was a few
7 months short of twenty; joined in '57, the reserve. They said, "No, we could use you up
8 here to stay at headquarters." I'd been the staff officer course at Fort Knox and it did
9 come out pretty well from , that sort of thing. Some of the higher-ups apparently thought
10 I was and so they took me out of tactical unit and to stay at staff here. Every year or so I
11 would have to take a stress test to show there'd been no deterioration and that sort of
12 thing. It went along pretty well there physically and even when in '84 and '85 when they
13 started talking about bringing in a light infantry division and one in the card which would
14 be the 29th the Beach. At least a third of it had always been from the Maryland guard.
15 They reactivated that, but they didn't have all the same units they had the last time it was
16 activated in the sixties. They needed a reconnaissance squad and a gallery squad. Well,
17 when we got it had been an air experience and ground cab experience. I had and he said,
18 "Okay, Jude." These days and the way they'd deploy the guards when they stay back and
19 there's no way I was feeling in the guard under that circumstance. I mean, if they would
20 have sent them overseas every time you turn around, I wouldn't be what would be called
21 deployable level in my. My timing was particularly good with that, I guess. That's some
22 of the best time I ever had in the Army. When you were in uniform was the last two years
23 when I commanded before I retired. A great bunch of guys who were based in Annapolis,
24 state capitol, love that town, too, an old colonial town. I don't know, I don't know what
25 else to tell you.

26 JS: All right, well, before wrapping up if you don't mind if I could ask just a few
27 follow up questions from that time period and some more broad questions to get your
28 opinion on in the war on some issues.

29 CB: Okay.

30 JS: First, when you were at Capitol Hill, the war was still going on at that point,
31 correct?

1 CB: Oh yeah.

2 JS: Okay. Were there any protests on campus?

3 CB: Yeah.

4 JS: Okay.

5 CB: I characterize them as phony.

6 JS: Okay.

7 CB: One of the things you have to bear in mind, first of all, I'm one of the oldest

8 guys on campus.

9 JS: Okay.

10 CB: Students, oldest students. I'm not alone. Had a lot of other Vietnam vets on

11 the GI Bill. It's very similar to what happened after the war, World War II, of which we

12 still call the war down there.

13 JS: Right.

14 CB: The Civil War is the least unpleasant. Anyway, one of the things that I did

15 when I first showed up, I was trying to juggle exactly how much money I got. And then I

16 started going to the National Guard drills and that was additional income. I applied for

17 and got a graduate assistantship which gave me—first of all, it gave me in-state tuition

18 and it also gave me more than a small stifle. The amount, if I even knew what it was

19 today would sound trivial, but it was good enough at the time. As long as I kept

20 matriculating and kept right back to work going to the VA and doing my job as a

21 graduate assistant everything was cool. Well, I proctored a lot of it as I am. Every once in

22 a while, I'd even get to teach or set a point up for precisely who was out. I ordered all the

23 history department's books, via the library. You could collect them from various

24 professors, what they would like to take a look at and then we'd order one book with the

25 proviso of it if you wanted to use it in the class. There would be orders of many more

26 coming, but anyway that sort of thing. I generally wore a tie, a coat and tie to class. The

27 kids sort of looked at me as a. Every once in a while, one of them that I know for a class

28 had seen me in jeans and a t-shirt and they'd say, "Mr. Baker, what are you doing in

29 jeans?" "I'm not in the classroom today." "Oh, okay." Anyway, when the Cambodian

30 took place I was amazed. '72, is that right?

31 JS: Let's see, Cambodia was '71 and then Laos was '72.

1 CB: Yeah, you were talking about the Easter Offensive in our earlier
2 conversation. Are you talking about Lam son 719?

3 JS: No, what came about a year later after most of the Americans had pulled out.
4 At the end of March of '72.

5 CB: When they tried to cut the country in half.

6 JS: Right.

7 CB: Yeah.

8 JS: Innovated across the DMZ, yeah.

9 CB: Anyway, this is right at the end of the semester, it was the spring semester
10 and the kids were just making a mockery of trying to go to school. They run up and down
11 the halls. "On strike, shut it down. On strike, shut it down." So the chancellor unfortunate
12 capitulated to the mob and he said they could either go home for the semester, take the
13 grades they had now or come back for finals and take whatever resulted. They set up
14 three grand busses to take people to Washington to protest for Washington. Sort of like a
15 scene out of "Forest Gump," right?

16 JS: Right.

17 CB: They couldn't fill one of them the next day. And they never had such a
18 weekend at the beach. It was the biggest bunch of phonies I ever saw in my life. Anyway,
19 that was the main thing that happened at Gossum. Now see, we were well after Tet and
20 all that by the time I got home. The next event that got everybody riled up, got the kids
21 all riled up was. They were in the middle of summer of '68 when I got home, you got to
22 remember that. This is when Johnson said he wasn't going to run again. I considered he
23 deserved it. Of course, all that business in Chicago, the Democratic Convention. All that
24 was very much a for me. This is what I saw I told you.

25 JS: Well, when you came home and you saw all these things going on, what was
26 your opinion of the anti-war movement?

27 CB: Well, first of all I tried to be a spokesman for the troops overseas and I said,
28 "We won Tet." I'd tell people that and not everybody paid attention. Yeah, I was a little
29 disillusioned to tell you the truth. The longer I was out of Vietnam the more I eased to the
30 conviction and the decision that we just shouldn't have been there in the first place. And
31 so that's my position that I made in life. It was probably not worth we had spent on it.

1 JS: Well, did you follow the developments of the war fairly closely after you got
2 back?

3 CB: Oh yeah.

4 JS: Okay.

5 CB: Anything that showed up on television, anything that was in the newspaper I
6 read. Bear in mind until '77 I was still, still flying helicopters in an air calve outfit. I had
7 a slick platoon. We had been off training one Saturday and we had a favorite spot up in
8 Hartford County called the Flight Star. It was nothing but pizza and draft beer. Once we
9 got on the ground for good, we'd go in there and get a couple pizzas and sit around. All
10 my crews would sit around and we would eat pizza and drink beer. That's where we were
11 that afternoon in '75 when they were showing the film of them pushing those Huey's
12 over the side. He needed those Huey's. We almost brought tears. The one phrase that you
13 heard so much then, particularly from the Vietnam Vets and my old platoon was, this is
14 so damn sad. "We couldn't find any redeeming so you." Yeah, it was sort of depressing.
15 It could be around '75. I still don't eat Vietnamese shrimp.

16 JS: All right, well, before wrapping up let me ask you just some broad questions
17 about some of the broader issues of the war just to get your opinion on those. I know you
18 mentioned that as you settled back into civilian life you came to the conclusion that the
19 US shouldn't have been—we never should have been involved in Vietnam. How about
20 looking back on it? How do you feel about your own experiences in Vietnam and your
21 own participation in Vietnam?

22 CB: Well, you know, that's changed.

23 JS: Okay.

24 CB: Every one of these reunions I got to I gain a different perspective. Well, the
25 first then I learned at the first reunion is that I didn't win that war by myself. You tend to
26 take that kind of approach home with you. It turns out there were an awful lot of things
27 that went on that I never knew about. I thought I was in the center of the pub of activity
28 there and flight operations. There was an issue about having machine guns on the Byrd
29 Dogs. According to the Air Force and the Army made over there where we gave the Air
30 Force a caribou and we were supposed to have a sole say about gunships. We weren't
31 supposed to have any armed fix wing aircraft and then made them pull them off of the

1 Mohawks. They were flying delta hogs, they flew out and bugged down. And soon that
2 was etched in stone. Well, apparently mine was the only Byrd Dog and a company didn't
3 have one. Anyway, that kind of thing changes and your prospective changes, but I'm
4 proud of my service over there. I don't have any question about it. As I told you, I
5 probably from the beginning, the way I wanted to go. Flying those airplanes I wanted to
6 fly and somewhat control of my own fate. I never—the possible exception of that attack
7 on Rach Gia at night for a while, I never felt like I'd ever lost control of my own fate
8 over there. I think some of these young troopers, particularly the grunts; they feel like—
9 for platoon whenever they get off that C-123.

10 JS: Right.

11 CB: And the looks on their faces, "Oh man, what am I into now?"

12 JS: Right.

13 CB: I never felt that way.

14 JS: Right.

15 CB: I always felt like we were controlling what we did and how we did it. That's
16 a very important thing to me and you can tell. I do have some control over my fate. I
17 usually. I probably got far off your question that way.

18 JS: No, no, not at all. Just a few more. I wanted to ask you, you talked about the
19 reunions. If you could just talk a little bit about the significance of the reunions and if you
20 could talk just a little bit about the reunions themselves.

21 CB: Well, we've had —the way we got into it to begin with was this website that
22 Doc Jennings put together. Are you familiar with that?

23 JS: I believe so. It seems like I remember checking that out.

24 CB: Yeah, it's 199th Swat Fox or something.

25 JS: Does it have the collection of all your stories on there?

26 CB: Yeah.

27 JS: Okay, yeah.

28 CB: Yeah anyway, people starting emailing back and forth and dredging up forty,
29 even forty year old memories. Then we found out that this successor command to the one
30 we belonged to when we were over there, we had a company, we were in a battalion and
31 within a group and that had started off to one battalion, the 13th of Delta battalion and just

1 grown like even to all these units came into country. Then when they started the
2 Vietnamization program, everything started shrinking again and they started turning
3 Huey's over and airplanes over to Vietnamese and that sort of thing and the units started
4 shrinking.

5 JS: Right.

6 CB: Well, in that time frame our group that absorbed into another group which
7 became the 164th. I'd never heard of it, but then some guys was smart enough to write
8 down the history of how it occurred and put it on the website. I said, "Sure, I'll go have a
9 beer with these guys." And it particularly said they were going to Mother Rugger which
10 is home country for me anyway. It was sort of disappointing. It was dominated by the
11 helicopter. I hadn't made up my mind whether I was going to go to another one or not
12 when somebody decided they wanted to have one just us, just the 199th. And so they
13 chose Fredericksburg, Texas, for it and it's one year after the we had at Rugger then we
14 had the one at Fredericksburg which is Admiral Emmett's hometown. It had a nice little
15 place. I enjoyed it, I enjoyed it. That's the one I enjoyed the most so far. Then two years
16 after that which had been in '06, no wait, '07, we went to Fort Walton Beach and they
17 cobbled together a reunion with us and the shotguns that was in the delta, a Byrd Dog
18 unit. I never much cared for shotguns as I might have mentioned earlier. That didn't
19 appeal to me all that much, but I went anyway just to see the real guys. Not the same
20 people attend every time if you can imagine. Some people get it all, some people fly as a
21 requirement to go to a wedding or something, whatever. You don't get the same group of
22 people. Even though ninety percent of them are retired. And one of the first things that I
23 did the first night there for my birthday, slipped and fell getting out of the shower and
24 cracked eight ribs. So I spent most of that reunion in one hospital or another until they
25 finally decided there's nothing you can do about cracked ribs anyway. They gave me
26 some pain meds and sent me loose. So I didn't object strenuously to going back to Fort
27 Walton. I didn't really see anything down there or see anything of it. I knew Fort Walton
28 and knew most of the Florida beach, but we called that the "Redneck Rivera" when I was
29 in. That's where we went. There and Destin where we'd have our house party. I was
30 really disappointed in this last reunion and I probably will go to another. The shotguns
31 just dominated everything. There was too much religion and too many memorials and too

1 few drinks, you know? It just wasn't my style of party. I think anytime we do anything
2 with shotguns it's going to be that way. There's more of them, there's something like
3 three times as many of them as there are. See, they were there from '65 to '73 or '72, '72.
4 '65 to '72. So that's seven years and we were only there from '67 to '71. You know,
5 there's bound to be more of them than us. They don't mind flexing their political muscles
6 either. They're all right with Genghis Khan. I have a hard time having a conversation
7 with democrats. I have been most of my life. And a great Obama took order, by the way.
8 The only campaign fund that I was driven into. I never really felt that it was appropriate
9 for serving officers to give and much of my life has been spent that way. I didn't ever
10 discuss politics much until I got out, got off active duty.

11 JS: Right, right.

12 CB: I always thought that's the way you're supposed to be like. People say
13 nobody actually knew whether the pike was a democrat or a republican and I think that's
14 probably true. The same with probably all truth with Colin Powell until he declared.
15 Those are the kind of people I like to take my examples.

16 JS: Is there anything else we should cover? Anything else you'd like to say before
17 we wrap things up?

18 CB: No, I guess not. Could you tell me, is the tape going to be the final form of
19 this?

20 JS: Yes, sir. Let me go ahead and stop it real quick.