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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Thomas Ray
Conducted by Jason Stewart
Date: 13 May 2010
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 Mr. Thomas Ray. Today is May
3 13th, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library on the campus of
4 Texas Tech and Mr. Ray is joining me by phone from Alabama. Okay, why don't we
5 begin if you could tell me a little bit of biographical information about yourself? First of
6 all, when and where were you born?

7 Ray Thomas: I was born in Montgomery, Alabama, on July 19, 1950.

8 JS: Could you tell me a little bit about your parents? What were their names and
9 what did they do for a living?

10 TR: My father was a physician, Dr. James C. Ray. My mother was a registered
11 nurse.

12 JS: Alright, did you grow up there in Alabama?

13 TR: Yes, I did. I grew up in Luverne, Alabama.

14 JS: Could you tell me, I guess, just a little bit about growing up and what that was
15 like for you there in Luverne.

16 TR: I actually grew up in the country. You know, we had horses and all of that
17 and pretty much grew up on the farm in a rural area. Luverne's a town of I think around
18 two thousand people. It was just a small-town upbringing.

1 JS: Alright, so did you grow up then doing a lot of work on the farm and that kind
2 of thing?

3 TR: Yeah, I did, yeah. I worked on the farm, had horses around, rode horses a lot
4 and stuff like that. Usually in the summer working on the farm gathering up hay and stuff
5 like that. We also had a farm, had cows, pigs, and grew some crops from there, also.

6 TR: Well as a kid growing up there, did you have many interests in the military as
7 a kid? Any relatives who had served in the military?

8 TR: Yeah, my father was in World War II. My uncle was also. Let's see, my great
9 grandfather and my great-great grandfather were in the Civil War.

10 JS: Okay, so a long background service then?

11 TR: Yeah, pretty much, yeah.

12 JS: Did your dad ever talk much about what he did in World War II?

13 TR: Uh no, he really didn't. I have some pictures that he had then and a few
14 things he brought back but he didn't really talk about it that much.

15 JS: Well, given the fact that you had this military background, as a kid growing
16 up were you interested in it yourself? Did you think about one day you'd probably be in
17 the military, too?

18 TR: Well yeah, actually I did. In fact, I actually volunteered in 1969 just right out
19 of high school. I think I'd been out of high school about a month. Instead of going to
20 college I just went ahead and joined the military.

21 JS: Alright, well before we get into the Army, if we could talk just a little bit
22 about education and school. Where'd you go to high school?

23 TR: I went to high school at Luverne High School. I graduated in 1969.

24 JS: As a kid growing up there, again, did you pay much attention to what was
25 going on in the world with the Cold War and U.S. Foreign Policy?

26 TR: Well, not really; I really didn't. I knew that the Vietnam War was going on.
27 We had had a few people from the county there that had been killed over there. Other
28 than that and watching it on the news and stuff; that was about it. I didn't really get into
29 foreign policy or anything.

1 JS: Watching it on the news there and hearing some of the local guys that had
2 been killed in the war, did you have much of an opinion about it at that point? Did you
3 think much about why we were there and those types of issues?

4 TR: You know, really, I didn't at that age. I really didn't have an opinion about it.
5 I don't think anybody can really, I guess, think about exactly how it's going to be or
6 anything else. When you go in the Army you don't really know what to expect. You
7 don't know the good and the bad, you just say, "I'm in the Army." I really didn't have an
8 opinion, you know, as far as I wanted to be in the military, but you know, I guess I was
9 more of a pro-Army more than I was more anti, I guess, being from the south.

10 JS: Well, what was it then that made you decide to join? Was it to keep up that
11 family tradition, was that part of it or was there more to it?

12 TR: You know, just thinking back I could think back some on it. I really just
13 didn't know what to do at that point in my life. I pretty much just went ahead, and I
14 joined the Army knowing that I could at least serve in the Army until I found out what I
15 really wanted to do. I was kind of unsure about what to do with my life.

16 JS: Well, when you did make that decision to join, did you figure with Vietnam
17 had been going on for a while at this point, you knew that you would probably be going
18 to Vietnam?

19 TR: Yeah, I figured it. You know, I guess I really didn't care one way or the
20 other. That didn't really bother me.

21 JS: Okay, well what did your family think about your decision to join?

22 TR: They weren't too pleased about it. They knew I was going to do whatever I
23 wanted to do anyway so there wasn't too much I could do about it. I mean, they were
24 supportive, but they really weren't crazy about me joining the Army at that time, for sure.

25 JS: You mentioned you volunteered in 1969. Of course, '68, the big year with Tet
26 and all that chaos and things going on at that point. Did you follow that fairly closely?

27 TR: I followed it a little bit, but I don't know if I could really comprehend how
28 bad it really was over there, but I did.

29 JS: Well, could you talk a little bit about the process of enlisting and how that
30 worked for you?

1 TR: Boy, you're asking me stuff that's a long time ago (both laughing). If I can
2 remember all of it. I actually went to Montgomery. I guess they called it the H&R point.
3 Of course, you go through the physicals and stuff, walk around with your underwear and
4 your shoes on while they're doing your physical and stuff. Just from that, I guess, I was
5 just sworn in at that point. They just had a whole line of us. Of course, the regular Army,
6 plus the ones that were draftees. Of course, there were a lot of people trying to get out of
7 it being draftees. They'd line us up, I don't know about how many people there were
8 lined up there. Toward the end of it after we're sworn in, they counted off about ten on
9 one end of the row there and pointed them off and said, "Congratulations, you've just
10 joined the Marine Corps." They said, "I thought this was voluntary." And they said,
11 "Yep, you just did, you volunteered." (Laughing) That's pretty much it after we were
12 sworn in. We got on the bus, and I went to Ft. Benning, Georgia, for basic training.

13 JS: So, you went to basic immediately then after enlisting?

14 TR: Well yeah. I was on the delayed entry program that delayed it a little while
15 before you went in. Probably about two, three months and then at that point then we went
16 up there and went to Ft. Benning, Georgia.

17 JS: Could you talk a little bit about your basic training and what the experience
18 was like for you as a new guy coming into the Army?

19 TR: It was pretty eye-opening there when we first got there on the bus when
20 everybody goes through there and I guess they issue all your clothes and stuff. You're
21 sitting there lugging around a couple of duffle bags and I think the bus pulled up. You got
22 about three big drill sergeants hollering at you and ran off the bus. I think the first thing
23 they did was they made us crawl into the buildings over there. They said there was a
24 snake under there and wanted all of us to crawl under the buildings over there. It was one
25 of the old World War II barracks. They told us to crawl under the building and don't
26 come out unless somebody had caught the snake that went under there. "Geez, things are
27 going to be kind of rough here." Basic, it was pretty rough, pretty physically challenging
28 for sure. Mentally I didn't have too much problem in basic. I could pretty much do
29 everything. Now, we did have people in there that I guess had never been hunting or
30 never did anything. It was pretty rough on them, but it wasn't that bad.

1 JS: You mentioned people that had never been hunting. I guess, with your
2 background of growing up in the country, did you think that helped you in some ways
3 then?

4 TR: Yeah, definitely did. You know, there was quite a few people from the South
5 from the country and stuff and we'd been hunting, we knew how to handle weapons, and
6 kind of knew how to shoot. Of course, they teach you how to shoot right, but yeah, I
7 would say that definitely helped out. You can really see the difference in the ones that
8 had been raised up in the country or had been hunting and stuff like that rather than the
9 ones that were raised in the cities and stuff like that. There was definitely a difference
10 there.

11 JS: Okay, will could you talk a little bit about just what the daily routine was like
12 there at basic or a typical day.

13 TR: Let me see if I can remember (chuckling). I think a typical day—well, it
14 started before the sun came up. Of course, you really didn't have to worry about what
15 time it was. They were going to tell you to do everything, so you pretty much didn't have
16 to keep up with what time it was or anything. As far as I can remember, the first thing we
17 did in the morning, you'd usually do physical training as far as running and stuff like that.
18 Just your basic soldiering skills, you know, drill ceremony, and stuff like that. I mean, it
19 was typical basic training and more or less, you break everybody down to where
20 everybody's thinking as one and you work as a team. I guess most of the stuff they were
21 trying to teach in basic training.

22 JS: How about your drill instructors there? Could you talk a little bit about them?
23 For one thing, were they Vietnam Vets?

24 TR: Yes, all of them were. The three that we had were Vietnam Vets and also, I
25 think all three of them were Rangers. Pretty tough and pretty stern, but they really knew
26 their stuff. I was impressed. I mean, they were very good.

27 JS: How did they enforce discipline? Were there discipline issues and if there
28 were, how did they enforce them?

29 TR: There weren't a whole lot of discipline issues, but of course, it's not like it is
30 today. They could actually put their hands on you or do whatever they wanted to. They
31 could pretty much enforce discipline anyway they wanted to. I remember we actually had

1 a coal fire heater for heat and for hot water. So, we actually had to have somebody up all
2 night to make sure that they shoveled coal in there so that we could have heat and hot
3 water. There's a little room over there and usually the drill sergeant would take
4 somebody in there if they had any problem. They also had what they called a
5 motivational platoon. You had no idea what they did there, but when they went there, and
6 they came back they were definitely different people.

7 JS: Well, you mentioned the fact that they were all three Vietnam Vets and that
8 they were all Ranger qualified. Did they ever talk about their experiences there in
9 Vietnam? Did they ever mention Vietnam during the training?

10 TR: No, not really other than the chants that you do when you're marching and
11 stuff like that. They talk about Vietnam, but as far as a one-on-one conversation, you
12 really didn't have that with the drill sergeants. They were the instructor, and they were
13 way up here and you were way down at the bottom. You didn't really have a one-on-one
14 talk with them or anything like that.

15 JS: Well, how about the weapons training? Could you talk a little bit about that
16 and what type of weapons you were trained on there in basic?

17 TR: When I went through basic, I guess we were the last group that went through
18 with the M14. I never touched the M-16 until I got to AIT (Advanced Individual
19 Training). So, we actually went through the rifle marshal ship and everything with the M-
20 14. As far as that and as far as teaching you how to fire and everything else and how to
21 shoot and everything, they were very good instructors on that. I shot expert with M-14
22 with a few men. It was quite a change going to the M-16.

23 JS: Well, overall did you feel that the training you received there in basic, was it
24 sufficient as far as preparing you for, I guess, like in the Army?

25 TR: Yeah, I would say so. I mean, they kind of teach you what to expect day to
26 day and I think it's just like it is. It's just a basic introduction to the Army, to the Army
27 way before you go to advanced training and stuff. Yeah, I would say yes as far as that. I
28 don't know as far as preparing you to go to war or something, but they pretty much
29 prepared you for just the basic Army life, I guess.

30 JS: Then did you feel that you were adjusting to the military pretty well at that
31 point?

1 TR: Yeah, I guess I prepared it well. I didn't really have any problems.

2 JS: Alright, before moving on from basic to AIT, were there any particular
3 memorable moments, humorous moments, anything like that, that stick out in your mind
4 that you could possibly mention?

5 TR: Gosh, I can't think. It wasn't very humorous eight weeks. I don't know if it's
6 humorous or not, but we would be so tired at night, I mean, you know, physically tired
7 that of course, we were in the old double bunks and everything. I remember one guy was
8 so tired he couldn't get up to go to the bathroom, so he wet the bed that night. He was so
9 physically exhausted he couldn't even get up. I was going, "Oh God." It was pretty
10 tough, as the training was back then. It's completely changed from what it was back then.

11 JS: Well, at the end of basic there, is that when you received your MOS (Military
12 Occupation Specialty) at that point?

13 TR: Yeah, at the end of basic what you did is they could call everybody in, and
14 they could pretty much tell you where your AIT was going to be. It was just a long line of
15 people. They would go in there and they would tell you pretty much where you were
16 going. From then, you pretty much knew where you were going after your MOS. You
17 know, that would say something like Ft. Dix or somewhere else like that. The majority of
18 us were going to Ft. Polk for infantry training. That's pretty much, I would say at least
19 seventy-five percent of men, or probably more were going to Ft. Polk, Louisiana, for
20 basic AIT.

21 JS: Was that—forgive me, I can't remember, but was that where the Tigerland
22 was as well?

23 TR: Yeah, it is. That's where I went.

24 JS: Okay, well could you talk a little bit about AIT and the type of training you
25 received there and your experiences there?

26 TR: Well, we just received our basic infantry training and stuff. Just tactics,
27 techniques, and stuff as far as infantry training. I'm just trying to think, you know, I
28 really think AIT is more of a basic because it really doesn't prepare you as far as going to
29 Vietnam or to war. I mean, I guess it helps some, but it's a whole different thing. When
30 you get over there, you pretty much got to learn on your own. It's just a different thing. I
31 guess its stuff they really can't teach you there. We did have some good instructors, you

1 know, and different things like patrolling and stuff like that. You know, as far as once
2 you got over there it was completely different. You just learn from somebody over there.

3 JS: So, this time during AIT, was it primarily training in the field or was there
4 classroom training as well or how did that work?

5 TR: Yeah, we had classroom training on basic first aid communications. At that
6 time, we had the old PRC (Portable Transceiver) 77 and 25s and you learned about that,
7 kind of stuff like that. We had some weapons training. I'm trying to think what else we
8 had. Of course, we'd go to the field and digging the box holes and having the aggressors
9 coming against you while you're out there. We had some identification, I think, with
10 camouflage and training with camouflage. We also had the—I can't remember what it
11 was called, but it was like a quick reaction course. We went through there with BB guns,
12 and you were supposed to shoot stuff real fast, I guess. That was to get you used to, you
13 know, a quick fire which a lot of stuff would happen in Vietnam. Other than that, we had
14 an escape and evasion course where they would send you out and you would have to go
15 from this point to that point and they had aggressors out there that would actually capture
16 you and take you to a POW (Prisoner of War) camp if they caught you. Well, they had a
17 little torture. They put you through different things to see if they would see if you would
18 talk.

19 JS: If you don't mind me asking, what type of things would they do to prepare
20 you and to see if they could get you to talk?

21 TR: Well, one of the things was it was a type of waterboarding. You know, they
22 would tie you down and pour water on your face and stuff. You know, they would ask
23 you, you know, "Who's your commanding officer?" They did one where it was called an
24 Apache Pole and they would stick you on a pole where your knees stuck out and they'd
25 come around and step on your knees and bring them down. You know, I actually made it
26 all the way through almost to the end and I slipped on a road, fell down, and I got
27 captured and taken to the POW camp. I went through three or four of those little torture
28 sessions they had. I escaped from the POW camp. It was pretty intense. I remember
29 thinking, I said, "This can't be too bad because we're all in the Army." I had second
30 thoughts about that after I had been there for a little while. It was pretty rough. I mean,
31 they would use their fists on you, they would use whatever. I think they had one guy that

1 had a dislocated shoulder. One guy almost broke his leg, I think. They had some they had
2 to take to the hospital after that. It got pretty rough. Not too long after that I think they
3 had a congressional investigation on that. They had too many people hurt or whatever.
4 They were beat up and everything else.

5 JS: Well, do you remember how you escaped?

6 TR: Yeah. They actually had me on an Apache Pole and had my hands tied. I got
7 my hands loose and there was, I think he was a corporal, and he was the one that had
8 tortured me on the pole there. He had walked off or something and just left me there. I
9 got my hands loose and finally got my legs untied so I could stand up. I just waited until
10 he had his back turned and there was like a two by four laying there and got the two by
11 four and hit it as hard as I could right between the shoulder blades and jumped over the
12 fence and escaped. I picked up a big stick and said, "I'll just beat somebody to death
13 before I go back there." I heard them hollering for me. They had just about everybody
14 hunting for me, but they never did find me. The next day I finally made my way back to
15 the company area.

16 JS: What was their reaction to your escape?

17 TR: Well, like I say, they had everybody out there looking for me. They weren't
18 going to find me, that's for sure. They were going to get beat with a stick.

19 JS: So, nothing was said after you got back?

20 TR: No, our company commander there came through there. When they would
21 take you through the different, I guess, different stations to see if you could talk. They
22 would mark your face with like a little star or something. I guess to say that, yeah, he'd
23 gone through that one and they take you to the next station and then they would mark on
24 your face that you made it through that one without talking. Then they'd take you to the
25 third on which would get a little rough every time. I think I was on my third or fourth
26 station. When I got back, I still had those marks on my face, and I guess they had got the
27 work out that I'd hit that guy. The company commander came by and just looked at me
28 and said, "Hmm, I guess you're the one they're looking for." "I guess so, sir." (Stewart
29 laughing) There wasn't anything done, anyway.

30 JS: Well, I know you talked about in basic you had trained on the M-14 and had
31 never touched it. Never touched the M-16 prior to coming to AIT, but once you made that

1 transition, what did you think about the M-16? Could you make a little comparison
2 between the two and what you thought about them?

3 TR: Well, after firing the M-14 and moving to the 16 it was like going from a rifle
4 to a toll way because it was so much lighter. We really didn't think a whole lot about it. I
5 think the only time we ever even fired it. I don't think we ever zeroed or anything. I think
6 we just went out there and fired it a little bit on automatic and that was about it. That was
7 my qualifications until I got overseas. We really didn't have any type training on it, you
8 know, that much at all. Once we got overseas, of course, that's what we were issued. I
9 didn't know a whole lot about them as far as cleaning or zero them or anything. The M-
10 14 is by far superior weapon. I understand the ammunition weighs so much more plus the
11 magazines. The M-14 weighs a lot more than the M-16. I could see why they went to it.

12 JS: Well, I know you said that AIT was an introduction basically to the infantry
13 and didn't really prepare you for Vietnam. Was it supposed to be focused that way where
14 is was to prepare you for Vietnam? I guess what I'm asking is did they talk a lot about
15 Vietnam, I guess, did they mention a lot, did they reference Vietnam a lot or no?

16 TR: Yeah, it was pretty much reference the whole time we were there because we
17 knew when anybody was going over there. They called it Little Vietnam over there at
18 Tigerland. That's essentially what they were training you for, but I guess as far as the
19 tactics and techniques that they were teaching, some were okay, but I mean as far as
20 really preparing somebody I don't think you really could compare on that type of training
21 to what you were going to have once you got into Vietnam. It was pretty much different.
22 I think most of your training was going to be like what they call OJT, on the job training.
23 So, you pretty much got training once you got to Vietnam.

24 JS: Not to get too far ahead here, but did you go through, I guess, what they called
25 a Charm School of sorts when you got there, or?

26 TR: What do you mean?

27 JS: I guess a little bit of training in Vietnam before you actually really went out in
28 the field or was it actually you got out there and went out in the field?

29 TR: No, just as soon as we got there we went to the field. Of course, my first job
30 out there was burning everybody's where they went to the bathroom. The unit was out in
31 the field at the time, so I had to wait until they got back before we went out. I think it was

1 maybe three of us when we were there waiting until they got back before we went out on
2 a mission.

3 JS: Well, before we actually get into Vietnam, I guess a few more questions about
4 your AIT there. As I asked with basic, any particular memorable moments during AIT
5 that stick out in your mind?

6 TR: Let me think, actually infantry AIT is pretty much about the same as basic
7 training. I mean, there's not a whole lot of changes and there are still a lot of physical
8 challenges, mental challenges. As far as that, I think the only things I can think of is after
9 AIT when right at the end of AIT when they're on leave they had a couple of people that
10 we heard went AWOL (Absent Without Official Leave) and left because they didn't want
11 to go to Vietnam. Had one guy that actually shot himself in the leg and got his girlfriend
12 and shot him in the leg to keep from going. Everybody was coming to the realization of
13 where they were going after that.

14 JS: So, then everyone that you went through AIT with, did they all end up going
15 to Vietnam with the exception of those guys who tried to circumvent that?

16 TR: Yeah, I would think so. If you went to Ft. Polk, you pretty much were going
17 to Vietnam unless you were in the National Guard or Reserves. That's the only ones that
18 didn't. Back then, you actually what they called an individual augmentee, so you may or
19 may not see anybody that you knew in AIT because once you got to Vietnam, they took
20 individuals and stuck them in units. They didn't really go as a group thing. I really didn't
21 follow up with everybody after AIT.

22 JS: Well, once you completed AIT, was it then that you received the assignment
23 so that you are going to Vietnam?

24 TR: Yeah. I was a holdover for a while. They didn't have any orders on me. I
25 think it was because there was such a backlog on people going over there. They really
26 didn't have my orders. I was held over there for about a week, and I finally got to go
27 home, and I had about a ten day leave and then they gave me orders to report to Ft. Ord,
28 California, to go to Vietnam.

29 JS: Once you finally received the assignment knew that you were going. Of
30 course, I'm sure you knew by that point anyway, but what was your reaction?

1 TR: You know, I don't really remember, but it wasn't anything like, you know, I
2 guess I didn't know what to expect. I'd been through basic AIT, so I figured that's where
3 I need to go. I don't remember being scared or anything like that.

4 JS: Well during your short leave there, what did you do during that time? Did you
5 get a chance to go home?

6 TR: Yeah, I was at home for about, I guess, for those ten days. I don't really
7 remember what I did during those ten days. I'm sure I drank a few beers or whatever and
8 just finished it with friends and stuff. You know, back then it wasn't like everybody knew
9 what was going on. You know, "You're going where?"

10 JS: Well, could you talk a little bit, I guess, about the actual trip over to Vietnam
11 and what that was like?

12 TR: We got to Ft. Ord there and we went through a little process in a place there
13 where they were just taking your names and giving orders and everything. I think I was
14 like two- or three-days late reporting and they had, I guess, a little clerk there checking
15 your orders and typing it up. If you were late all they did was—they had people that were
16 fifteen, thirty days late reporting. What they did was they typed up—I guess it was like an
17 Article 15 or whatever to take away money. Once you got overseas, she typed it up and
18 handed it to everybody. Of course, we'd go around the corner, tear it out, and throw it in
19 the trashcan. Then we got on a plane to go over there. We stopped in Hawaii first from
20 Ft. Ord. I think we stayed there anywhere from thirty to forty-five minutes. As I
21 remember, they had MPs (Military Police). They really didn't let us go anywhere other
22 than just leave the plane and then just come back on the plane. I do remember the MPs
23 standing there to make sure nobody tried to run. They had a quite a few that once they got
24 in Hawaii they would try to run. They did have MPs guarding everywhere.

25 JS: As far as the plane ride over itself, what was the mood like there? Were
26 people talking about it or was it pretty quiet?

27 TR: You know, I really can't remember what it was like. I think it was just normal
28 conversation. I'm not real sure.

29 JS: Well, time period wise, when did you arrive in-country and where?

1 TR: Let me see if I can get the dates right. It was right about the first of the year,
2 1970. So, it was probably in like January the first or second; somewhere around there. I
3 can't remember exactly. I'm not really good on these dates.

4 JS: Sure, that's fine. It doesn't have to be exact. Where did you come in-country
5 at?

6 TR: We came into Tan Son Nhut Air Base and landed there. They had a big
7 warehouse. That's pretty much all it was. No beds or anything. You went into—I can't
8 remember the name of it, but they just stuck everybody in the warehouse until they called
9 your name and told you what unit you were going to. They would pick you up from there
10 and they would go to their unit. I think we stayed there maybe two days. Just sleeping on
11 the floor there.

12 JS: What unit were you assigned to at that point?

13 TR: The first unit I was assigned to was the 199 Flight Infantry Brigade.

14 JS: And where were they at, at that time?

15 TR: Let's see, I'm trying to remember the name. I actually went to a fire base; a
16 fire support base and it was—I think it was close to the Nui Ba Den Mountains.

17 JS: Okay, so over there around Tay Ninh then?

18 TR: Yes, I just spent my entire time around Tay Ninh Province.

19 JS: Alright. How did you get there from Tan Son Nhut to Tay Ninh, do you
20 remember?

21 TR: I believe we rode in trucks.

22 JS: Okay, and I know you mentioned the first little bit of time there that your unit
23 was out on an operation, I guess, and you were there just waiting for them to come back?

24 TR: Right, they had one guy there, I guess, that met us when we got there. I
25 remembered when we got there that the forty of us, which another guy was with me, his
26 name was Tom Potts which we got to be friends, he was from Kentucky. Of course, we
27 came up there and they said, "Yup, so y'all are the new guys and these are the jobs that
28 we have open." They said, "We got to have a point man, a machine gunner, and a slack
29 man." I went, "Okay, what's a point man and what's a slack man?" He said, "Oh, you're
30 the point man." I went, "Oh, okay." And they made Tom Potts the slack man which is the
31 one that pretty much runs a compass for the point man. I guess that's what we were. By

1 the time the unit came out of the field then I was paired up with the guy that was walking
2 point at that time. I was assigned to a recon unit. We worked in twelve men and
3 sometimes six-man teams doing reconnaissance.

4 JS: Alright. So, is this like a lerp (LRRP, Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrol)
5 unit?

6 TR: Right.

7 JS: Okay, once you learned that this is what the assignment was going to be going
8 out in these small teams, how did you feel about that?

9 TR: I really didn't know. I mean, it was kind of—you don't really know what to
10 expect. I just kind of take it one day at a time to see what it's like. I remember it being so
11 goddamn hot over there and just sweating all the time. It was pretty hot during that time.

12 JS: Well, that brings up a question I meant to ask a few minutes ago which is, I
13 guess, your first impressions of Vietnam.

14 TR: Well, once we landed there and they opened the doors up we walked off. I
15 just remembered the smell. I mean, I don't know how to describe it. I just remember a hot
16 blast of air and you could just smell. It was real distinct. That was my first thoughts of
17 that place. I remember when we first got there, I guess it was when we were at the point
18 where they were going to assign us to our units. They came by and picked up some guys
19 for bunker guards to be up in some towers and they picked me and another guy. Had no
20 idea the first day in Vietnam and they stuck us on a tower with an M-60 machine gun. I
21 had no idea what to look for, what anything was. I think both of us stayed up all night.
22 We were seeing things all night. That was my first introduction to it for sure.

23 JS: Had you had much training on the M-60? Did you know much about it?

24 TR: Yeah, I mean we just had basic training on it, yeah.

25 JS: Alright, so that was just the first night or was it a few days there?

26 TR: No, it was just that one night. They just went through there picking people to
27 man the towers around the airport there.

28 JS: I guess if you could talk a little bit about those first days that you arrived at the
29 fire base there before the unit came back in. If you could talk a little bit about what the
30 fire base looked like and what the quarters and the housing was like there.

1 TR: Well, there actually weren't any housing there. All they had as actually
2 bunkers and stuff. We had, it was just a tent, but on the inside of the tents you had your
3 own—it was just room enough to maybe put a cot in there. You know the coverts that
4 they use for pipe and stuff? They would have half a covert stacked and have sandbags
5 stacked on top of it and sandbags all the way around the inside of the tent because of
6 incoming rounds; mortars, rockets, and stuff.

7 JS: What other things were you doing at this point besides burning waste?

8 TR: That's about all I was doing at that time was sitting there waiting. I really
9 didn't do anything else that I can remember.

10 JS: And how long then was it before the unit actually came in?

11 TR: I believe it was just a couple of days, two to three days. Most of the time
12 there, our missions over there were five-day missions.

13 JS: I guess if you could talk a little bit about your first impressions of the unit and
14 the guys that you would work with. You don't have to talk about specific names if you
15 don't want to, but if you could talk a little bit about some of the personalities and some of
16 your first impressions of the unit itself.

17 TR: I remember when they came in everybody looked so dirty, their boots were
18 ragged, their uniforms were ragged. We're all sitting there just kind of in awe of them
19 saw them coming in. Man, they look like they've been through the ringer. We were just
20 kind of, kind of not saying a whole lot just trying to see what they would say. The
21 replacement, my guy that I was going to replace, he came over. He was a sharp guy. He'd
22 been walking I think just about the time he had been over there. He was pretty good. I
23 mean, he tried to explain some stuff to me on what to expect. You know, as a whole it
24 seemed like a good unit to me, a good group of guys and everything. You don't really get
25 close to anybody; you know what I mean? When there's a new guy coming in. It's like a
26 trial period for you. They're going to take you out before they really get close to you or
27 really make friends with you. You know, you got to prove yourself first.

28 JS: Did it take that first combat with the enemy before that or when would that
29 generally change to where they would accept you?

30 TR: Yeah, and I think that's what kind of gets you in the clique more to say.
31 When you have your first combat and everything then everybody has something in

1 common. I think it's when somebody new is coming in you really don't have anything in
2 common with him. You know, he's a new guy so you just kind of, you know, keep them
3 to the side until they kind of prove their self.

4 JS: So, was part of it they wanted to see if they could depend on you?

5 TR: Yeah, I think so, yeah. It's all a matter of trust, who you can trust. On the lerp
6 units it's actually voluntary. In other words, if you have somebody in that unit that you
7 don't think you can trust, you know, you just don't really think you can fit in you can
8 always move them out. You can get them sent to a line unit.

9 JS: Was it voluntary on your end as well?

10 TR: Well, no, I didn't volunteer, I was sent there. That's why I was asking
11 somebody after a while. Looking around I think after a while, after I'd been with them, I
12 figured I'd rather be out with that many people that I can count on rather than being with
13 a line company, you know? Thirty to forty people that you really don't know.

14 JS: Alright, well given the fact that it was pretty late in the war by 1970, of
15 course, how was morale?

16 TR: You know, when you talk about morale, you know, you're talking about what
17 you think about the war. I don't remember that even coming up. Is it right or wrong or
18 whatever? You pretty much just doing a job and you want to do the best job you can, you
19 know, regardless of what the job is. You know, you want to take care of everybody that
20 you're there with.

21 JS: So, then I guess from early on you could see that everyone in the team get
22 along pretty well then once you got to know everyone and experience that first combat?

23 TR: Yeah, we did. We got along great.

24 JS: Alright.

25 TR: And that was the only problem was that you had individuals coming in at all
26 different times. It wasn't like you had trained as a unit. You continually have a turnover
27 of people because it was a one-year tour and once your tour's up you're gone. A lot of the
28 experience was leaving and if you ever had to train up who came in there the best you
29 could.

1 JS: Okay, well before we get into going out in the field, I guess if you could talk
2 just a little bit about what a lerp team was, what you guys did, how many members were
3 there in the team, and what were their jobs, the different types of jobs?

4 TR: Well, you know, I was with two different units over there, two different alert
5 teams. I was with the 1st Calve Division and the 199. The 199 operated a little bit
6 different than what the 1st Calve did. The 199 we usually used twelve men to go out. I
7 guess, you know, of course I was a private so I'm not privy to the information on why
8 they were sending us out on different missions because some of the missions we would
9 do would be ambushes just going into different areas and seeing what we could find.
10 Sometimes we'd find caches of weapons, food, we would do ambushes of certain trails
11 and stuff. A lot of times we'd go out and as you're walking through the jungle, if you
12 came up on a trail, you would try to identify whether it was what we called a hot trail or a
13 cold trail. In other words, were they using it or were they not? Was it an old one or an
14 animal trail? A lot of times we would set up ambushes and look for a good spot for an
15 ambush on there. A lot of our time was just spent walking through the jungle looking for
16 different things. We also did bomb assessments. In other words, if they had a B-52 raid or
17 whatever a lot of times they would send up in there to see what the results of the raid was.
18 Sometimes we would come up on bunker complexes and we could either call airstrikes
19 on end or just different things. One of our missions, I remember one. Trying to
20 differentiate between the 199 and the 1st Calve. A report came back from one of the
21 locals in the area that the VC (Viet Cong) had taken— I guess it was the Montagnards
22 who were up there close to where we were. They have taken some of them I guess, as
23 slaves or whatever. Work and grow food and stuff like that on the different camps. We
24 went out and tried to find a camp where they were being held hostage, I guess. We found
25 the camp, came up on the camp, eliminated the VC and got all the Montagnards that they
26 had imprisoned there and sent them back. I think at that time they were used in relocation
27 camps. That was one mission. We'd just do numerous things. I mean, it was just
28 whatever they decided we needed to do. We did a lot of combat assaults, air assaults in
29 helicopters and stuff. That's usually how we got to wherever we were going. We always
30 went into a—they never prepped the LZs (Landing Zone) like they did for the line
31 companies. In other words, line companies going into a landing zone, they usually

1 prepped it with artillery or whatever, but on ours we just came in there and tried to do it
2 as quietly as possible and tried to just insert us when they didn't know we were down
3 there. Does that answer some of it? Trying to think a lot. We did so much and of course,
4 when I was working with the 1st Calve Division it was a little bit different in our
5 operations there. Do you want me to get into that?

6 JS: If you want, we can wait and talk about the 199th first. Well, let me ask you
7 this question though, how long were you with the 199th before you moved over to the 1st
8 Calve?

9 TR: Probably about, let's see, I think it was right after the Cambodian invasion I
10 went over to the 1st Calve.

11 JS: Okay, so in May then?

12 TR: May, I believe.

13 JS: Okay.

14 TR: Or somewhere around there.

15 JS: Okay, alright.

16 TR: To tell you the truth, and you've probably heard this before if you've
17 interviewed any other ones, I never knew what day it was up there. A lot of times I didn't
18 even know what month it was. I didn't even keep up with anything unless we got back
19 and I go, "What month is it, what day is it?" I guess cause everyday was the same.

20 JS: If you could talk a little more about some of these specific things you said you
21 did. Things you talked about, your different assignments such as a bomb assessment.
22 What would you do during a bomb assessment?

23 TR: What they did on the bomb assessment is we would go into the area and try
24 to go around where they had bombed. Actually, then they were obsessed with body
25 counts and how many dead bodies there were out there, what all did they kill, what did
26 they destroy? It's pretty much that. I remember—I guess it's a base camp or something
27 they had hit on one. Of course, they'd call back in on the radio and they would want to
28 know specific information stuff and the number of bodies. I remember we called back
29 one time and said, "Well, we've got a lot of arms, legs, bodies." I said, "How do you
30 want us to do it? Do you want us to count up all the legs and arms and divide by four?"
31 We would do that. On ambushes we would just stake out a certain place and maybe sit on

1 the trail for a couple of days. I know one time we came up on a trail. I can't remember
2 exactly where we were or anything. Of course, I was walking point at that time. I noticed
3 there was a lot of heavy traffic on that trail. And so, we actually—you didn't follow the
4 trail, but you would actually get off the trail and then come back and look at it again. You
5 never walked down the trail. We kind of paralleled the trail and then came back in and
6 had gotten a lot wider. At that time, I saw where it looked like you could tell where there
7 were wheels where they were pulling something. We figured out it was probably one of
8 their machine guns that they were pulling down there. We looked on the map and it was
9 just a few clicks from one off the major fire bases that was in the area. We had to call into
10 them and tell them that there's a lot of people moving their way, they're going to try to
11 attack the fire base. Of course, sometimes they'd take my word for it, sometimes they
12 wouldn't. All we could do was tell them what we thought was going to happen. I guess
13 we trailed on up to probably about, you know, about a click or so many clicks close to the
14 base camp to set up and we were going to set up an ambush on there. What happened
15 was, I think it was the next day or the next night they actually hit that fire base and
16 overran it. Of course, when they started firing and everything the fire base started
17 shooting back. Of course, the bullets were coming over us and everything else and we
18 pretty much had to hit the dirt and try to get out of the way of our own bullets coming
19 that way, especially .50 caliber bullets and stuff. Then, of course, the NVA (North
20 Vietnamese Army) and everything were treating right through us, so we had to pretty
21 much hunker down on the ground and just kind of wait it all out. I remember that. We
22 acted as a quick reaction force (QRF) sometimes if they needed us anywhere. In other
23 words, we were on standby to go anywhere they needed us. I remember our commanding
24 general was killed over there, General Bond, but we have a calve unit attached to us. I
25 think it was the 17th Calve, they had APC's (Armored Personnel Carrier). They were
26 attacked on the big ambush on the road, and I think General Bond was flying around this
27 helicopter and they just about wiped them out. I guess he was going to get down on the
28 ground and take command or whatever, but I think he stepped out of his helicopter, and
29 they shot and killed him. We were on a fire base not too far from there. Of course, they
30 activated us as a QRF, and we had to go in there and try to mop up after that. Most of

1 them had already gone by that time. I can't think of anything else. You know, it comes to
2 goes to me.

3 JS: Well, I know you talked about—well first of all with your assignment right
4 away being put as a point man, how long did it take to learn to figure out and I guess to
5 feel as comfortable as you could feel about knowing what you were doing?

6 TR: It took quite a few months to really feel comfortable. The guy I replaced, I
7 think he stayed for about another month, I guess. What he did is he just kind of shadowed
8 me right behind me. It was a learning experience to say the least, but you had to know
9 what to look for. In other words, if you were going through the jungle you didn't want to
10 walk into a bunker complex. It has a lot of pressure on you there. I made a few mistakes,
11 I'm just glad it didn't get anybody hurt. You know, I've walked up on bunkers before and
12 saw them. He would point them out to me. Then he kind of showed me what to look for
13 as far as when you came up on a suspected bunker complex. Just look for smaller trees
14 that were cut down there anywhere around there. That's usually what they built them out
15 of. Just different things. I remember, I think it was probably the first or second time I was
16 walking point by myself up there. I ran smack into an NVA column and probably within
17 twenty feet of each other. Him looking up; me looking up and I just blasted away, and he
18 blasted away. That was an eye opener there, for sure.

19 JS: So that was your first encounter with the enemy?

20 TR: That was my first encounter, yup.

21 JS: Alright.

22 TR: Head-to-head. I mean, I wasn't in country very long at all.

23 JS: Did you guys end up taking any casualties as a result off that?

24 TR: No, we didn't. I think I got one or two of them and we didn't suffer any. Of
25 course, I was probably—I was ahead of the unit there, so I was probably ten, fifteen yards
26 ahead. Most of those were just going over my head cracking around me. They turned
27 around and they hauled butt. Anyway, we found a bunker complex from there. There
28 were actually blood trails leading to that.

29 JS: Well, about how many were there?

30 TR: Of them? I have no idea. I just saw the ones in front of me and I let go.

31 JS: How many did you see then?

1 TR: Well, there were three that I saw. I mean, in the jungle you can't see. It was
2 pretty thick where it was. That's the reason, I guess, that we got so close. They weren't
3 making any noise, and neither were we going through the bushes. Most of the time when
4 we would have contact it was like that. It was very close because we didn't make any
5 noise, usually, not much noise anyway going through the jungle. Not like the line
6 company. You know, you could hear them half a mile away, but us usually for our
7 safeguard we were pretty silent going through the jungle. Most of our contact was up
8 close and personal.

9 JS: Well, I know you talked about the way they would disguise their bunkers
10 cutting down the small trees and things. Did you talk, I guess, a little bit more about how
11 they would use the environment to their advantage, I guess, how they would camouflage
12 things and how all that worked.

13 TR: Well, most of the time on their bunkers they would be covered with ground
14 cover. On their bunkers it was just maybe a two-foot-by-one-foot opening, you know, and
15 they would place light bunkers around different places like that. They were pretty well
16 camouflaged. You really had to be short to pick them up. That's what happened a lot of
17 times. You would walk right into the middle of one before you even knew it was there.

18 JS: Well, from your perspective, I guess, if you could talk a little bit about your
19 impressions of the enemy and how would you evaluate, I guess, their fighting ability?

20 TR: Well, I mean they've been fighting a long time. They were really adaptive to
21 jungle warfare. After a while, I think, after we'd been in the jungle for a period of time
22 maybe six, seven, eight months we were probably on their equal as far as that. You know,
23 it's one of those things where you really have to get in there and live like them and
24 operate like them. You start almost getting like them, in other words. You know, they
25 were different ones. You had the VC and then you had the NVA. I guess they operated
26 slightly different as far as their tactics and stuff. The VC were probably more at a, I
27 would say, they were mostly a hit and run. A lot of the NVA would stand and fight, but
28 most of the VC were hit and run tactics.

29 JS: Which were you more likely to run into at this point? Early on would it be VC
30 or NVA, or did it just depend?

1 TR: It really depended on which area you were in, but there were quite a few
2 NVA within the area where we operated. You know, you could tell by the uniforms. I
3 remember one, I guess it was one of them that we had killed in an ambush, and he was
4 actually—you got to where you could almost tell them apart by looking at them. Not
5 profiling or anything, but you could pretty much tell where they were from or from what
6 area. In other words, the Vietnamese, the VC were very small. Some of the ones that
7 came from the NVA if they came from either the Chinese border or if they were from
8 way up north were a lot taller and more of a Chinese build. Some of them were almost as
9 big as an American.

10 JS: Well, speaking of the differences and the size and everything coming from the
11 Chinese border, did you ever come across any enemy with any other nationalities? Khmer
12 or Chinese or anything like that?

13 TR: Yeah, actually the Cambodians looked a little different. They were a little
14 darker. I don't know, their facial features were a little bit different. Plus, some of the ones
15 were either Chinese or they were from close to the border with China and North Vietnam.
16 Their facial features are a little bit different. The Montagnards were more of Indian
17 looking, I guess. They looked even different. Of course, they weren't fighting against us.
18 There was also—I know we had, gosh, two or three different times we had reports of a
19 Caucasian fighting with the NVA that somebody had spotted. They would send a team of
20 us out to try to find it. We got one glimpse of him one time.

21 JS: Oh, really?

22 TR: Yeah.

23 JS: Wow.

24 TR: We actually took a shot at him, but he was too far away.

25 JS: What nationality, what did you think he was a Russian advisor or...?

26 TR: Like I said, I was a Spec 4 or private and I had no idea of the Intel reports.
27 We'd give them the Intel dump when we got back, but we never knew what was going on
28 in the minds of those above us. I think that's probably what they thought they were really
29 after. I mean, there was numerous times they would give us up and we'd give them a
30 report, they'd give us a grid square. We'd go in there and we'd go look for him. I think at
31 one time we see him, and we were on the side of a mountain looking over a valley over

1 there. I don't know how far he was, but we did pick him up walking with a bunch of
2 them. That's the only time we ever saw him.

3 JS: Alright, you mentioned coming into contact with the Cambodians. Did you
4 guys ever go across the fence?

5 TR: Uh, quite a bit (laughing). You putting that in?

6 JS: If it's okay for you to talk about.

7 TR: Yeah, yeah. How many years has it been? '70, '80, '90. There were quite a
8 few excursions in Cambodia. We did it quite often just for different things. For intel
9 reports. There were major trails leading out of Cambodia into Vietnam and you probably
10 know if you've lived in Vietnam there was a lot of major infiltration routes coming in
11 from there. A lot of times that's what we would monitor. Trying to see what was coming
12 in. I mean, we also did, you know, we would also do the recon. In other words, setting up
13 and watching to see how many came by or whatever.

14 JS: So then monitoring movement down the trails?

15 TR: Yeah.

16 JS: Alright, did you guys ever come into any contact while you were over there on
17 that side?

18 TR: You know, a lot of times we never knew which side we were on, you know,
19 but I'm sure we did. Most of the stuff over there was with recon in an area or something
20 like that. A lot of times we would recon an area and I guess it was for later on if they did
21 a B-52 strike on them or something. It just took so long for them to get, I guess, clearance
22 for a B-52 strike.

23 JS: Well, if I could back up just a moment. You talked about setting up the
24 ambushes. Could you talk, I guess, about the tactics involved with an ambush. Would
25 they always be night ambushes or how would that work?

26 TR: No, it could be day or night. And then once you set up on a hot trail you just
27 waited. You'd set out your claymores. Our basic load was a little bit different than what
28 the line units took. The line units usually—they packed everything in their rucksack for
29 usually three days and they would get resupplied after three days. We didn't usually get
30 resupplied in the jungle because that would give away our positions. Our normal mission
31 was five days, so we had to carry five to six days (of supplies) with us. Our rucksack

1 weighed half as what one of the line units would weigh. We had to take five days' worth
2 of food, five days' worth of water if it was a dry season. I think my basic load was I
3 carried twenty-one magazines plus one in my weapon. If we took a (M)60 machine gun
4 with us, every man usually had a hand of one hundred rounds with them. Also, you
5 carried claymores. It just depended on how many claymores you took. I usually carried
6 two claymores. We also carried two radios at least, sometimes three. I always had one
7 that was always on our support frequency which could be dependent on what we were,
8 artillery, air, whatever. I think I usually carried two claymores. We also carried two
9 radios at least, sometimes three. I always had one that was always on our support
10 frequency which could be dependent on where we were; artillery, air, whatever. The
11 other one was usually for whoever was keeping up with our base, our base unit. As far as
12 the claymores, that's what we would do as far as setting that up. If you had more than one
13 then you, of course, would have some dead cord to daisy chain them together. We would
14 just set them up on certain places in the trail, camouflage them and back off, hide, and
15 wait for someone to come down the trail, pretty much.

16 JS: How often, I guess, if you could venture a guess, how often during these
17 ambushes would they actually be successful? Would the enemy actually come through
18 the ambush position?

19 TR: Good question. I don't really know. I mean, we set up quite a few and some
20 were successful. I'd say maybe twenty percent of the time we would have a successful
21 ambush. That was just one of the things we did. We would always set up an ambush.
22 Sometimes we would—of course, every night when you would set up a camp wherever
23 you were going to stay for the night, you also set your claymores out with a trip player
24 also. We have had them walk through a trip player before. Then you would blow up a
25 claymore on them.

26 JS: How would a night position work as far as people being awake and sleeping
27 and all that? How did that work?

28 TR: Well, what we did is usually we slept in a type of a circle so that, of course,
29 from dark to daylight there was always somebody up. We'd just pass it from man to man
30 to whoever was on. Usually, we had claymores set up in a perimeter. We had all the

1 clackers set so that you could hit and clacker at any one time. You know, whoever was on
2 call. Not on call, but on guard.

3 JS: So, it would usually just be one person at a time?

4 TR: Yeah, they just let one person up. Unless the situation dictated different.

5 JS: Right, right. I guess since you were a recon unit, in most cases were you
6 supposed to just observe and not make contact, or did that just depend on the mission?

7 TR: Well, you would think so, but I'll tell you, we pretty much made contact and
8 did everything else. It just depended. As far as I remember, if we had twelve men, I mean
9 we would take on an equal number of enemies. I mean, at least. Even when we were
10 working as five men we'd taken on as many as twenty before.

11 JS: Were there times whenever you guys would see a larger unit and you were
12 just to sit there and observe and not to make contact?

13 TR: In fact, one time after they sent us out after that Caucasian guy, we took a pot
14 shot at him and we moved from there and set up. I guess they sent out a lot of people
15 looking for us. It was pretty scary there. We pretty much had to crawl one hundred yards
16 and hide and everything until they passed. They probably sent out a whole company
17 looking for us. I guess they figured it was a small unit. There was a pretty good bounty, I
18 think, on us. Yeah, we've done that before. I mean, they'd come as close as I could
19 probably reach out and touch one.

20 JS: Oh, wow. So, in cases like that would you guys just lay still in the grass as
21 camouflaged as you could be?

22 TR: Yup, sure do. Just try to get down as much as you can and hopefully, they
23 won't see you. Like I say, they would send people after us a lot of times. I don't know if
24 they were sappers or whoever, but if they ever figured out you were a small unit, they
25 would literally try to send somebody after you.

26 JS: Did that happen very often? I guess you said you could almost reach out and
27 touch them?

28 TR: I mean, yeah, that's quite a few times. I mean, we were just doing a recon and
29 we knew there was a large number of them. We wouldn't really wreck an ambush or
30 anything, but there's quite a few times we would sit there and watch them walk down the
31 trail just to give a report back. A lot of times they would drop artillery in on them because

1 they wouldn't know where it was coming from or if we were looking at them. We had
2 snipers. Well, I get the two, so I moved over to the 1st Calve Division, and we had snipers
3 attached to us. We had four snipers attached to us. Usually, we took one out per team.

4 JS: Well, if you don't mind, I'll ask you about that in just a few more minutes
5 when we get to whenever you made the transition to the 1st Calve. This early time here
6 with the 199th, did you ever come across any booby traps or anything like that?

7 TR: We did come across some, but they weren't as bad there in the areas where
8 we were. Usually they were, you know, on a map or something or they knew where they
9 had gotten a lot of booby traps before. They weren't as bad where we were. I think plus
10 working in a small unit we didn't go where normal units went, in other words. On the
11 booby traps they usually put them out for somebody to, in other words, buy a village on
12 main routes that they knew a soldier might take. We were mostly in the jungle. We were
13 probably in the areas that a human hadn't even been before. We never had problems with
14 booby traps as far as we were.

15 JS: Well, being out in the jungle then, away from the population, did you guys
16 ever come into contact with the local civilian population?

17 TR: Very rarely. Mostly where we operated was in the free fire zone. We didn't
18 really have to worry about that. I mean, other than sometimes if we were getting inserted
19 in a different way, they had inserted the teams before by one time it was like a convoy
20 going out: A, B, Cs and stuff. We got on a convoy, and they stopped to take a break and
21 at that point it was at a time where they wanted to insert us into a certain area. We would
22 go from there and walk into the jungle, sometimes. We've been around some of the
23 populous, but not very many.

24 JS: Well, I guess being out in the jungle, did you guys come across as much as
25 wildlife and insects and things like that?

26 TR: Yeah, snakes of course. We had set up a perimeter and we've had either
27 tigers or something, big cats walk up to us. You could hear them at night. Elephants, I
28 think we saw. We saw a few elephants while we were out there. There weren't that many
29 there I guess, because of the war, but we have seen them. Sometimes we're working
30 down toward the rivers and lowlands. You see the big anacondas. We saw probably—oh
31 god, I don't know how big this one was. We were going toward the river; we had crossed

1 this river. We were going down close to it, and I was walking point and I walked over
2 what I thought was a log and it got back to about the 5th man back, "Hey man, this log's
3 moving." I didn't know what he was talking about. He just took the butt of his M-16 and
4 he hit it. The damn snake's head rose up about twenty feet over there on the other side of
5 it. I guess it was a big anaconda. It's time to get out of there.

6 JS: Was anyone ever injured or hurt from snakes or any of the wildlife at all?

7 TR: I don't remember of anybody. Not in our unit there never was. You wonder
8 why. Really while I was out there, I wasn't really looking. Of course, that was the least of
9 your worries was a snake or something. I never remember anybody getting bit or
10 anything.

11 JS: Well, I guess getting back to the population for a moment. I know you said
12 that you guys had some contact with the Montagnards. What were your impressions of
13 them? What did you think about them? I guess could you talk about their loyalties and
14 where they lay?

15 TR: Well, of course we couldn't speak to them because we didn't have anybody
16 that could speak that. Even the Vietnamese interpreters couldn't speak to them. Maybe
17 because they spoke a different language. I mean, they were pretty primitive. One of the
18 villages that we came into was they were actually using crossbows, homemade
19 crossbows. Of course, the women didn't have anything up top. The men pretty much
20 wore the loin cloths and stuff. I mean, they were pretty much like an American Indian I
21 guess would be back at that time. They were pretty much just existed off the land. I think
22 at that time, probably the South Vietnamese were, too, but I think they were being
23 exploited. I don't guess as far as education; I don't think they had any education. I think
24 they pretty much lived up in the mountains and everywhere else kind of on their own.

25 JS: Well, how about South Vietnamese troops, ARVN (Army of the Republic of
26 Vietnam) troops. Did you guys ever do any work at all with them or ever have any
27 contact with them?

28 TR: We did. One of our missions one time, there was a South Vietnamese ARVN
29 Ranger unit that they wanted us to take out. I guess they told us to take them out and get
30 them bloody. That's pretty much what they said. In other words, get them into contact. I
31 think we had the first night we were out we had four of them go AWOL. I guess they

1 went home. I think some of them were okay, some of their special operations were okay,
2 but I didn't think a whole lot about the South Vietnamese Army in general. I think they
3 were there to let the U.S. do the fighting. They wanted to sit on their fire bases. They
4 really didn't go out and patrol and do stuff like we were. It was a lot of animosity
5 between the U.S. troops, the actual troops that were out there doing the fighting and the
6 South Vietnamese troops. They didn't get along real well.

7 JS: Well, one other question I'd like to ask you. Let's see, I know you talked
8 about being out in the field you would generally go out five days at a time, right? When
9 you would come back in, how long would you be in before you'd go out in the field
10 again?

11 TR: Of course, it varied according to missions they had for us. Usually, we
12 weren't in it for maybe a couple days and then we were going back out. We'd come back
13 in long enough to let me take a shower, if we could, depending on where we were. And
14 get resupplied and then go back out. A lot of times it was just come back, get resupplied,
15 and go right straight back out.

16 JS: Alright, when you did have a little bit of time a couple of days or so, how
17 would you spend your free time? What would you guys do?

18 TR: Just trying to get something to eat. Trying to get a shower or something, but
19 pretty much just kind of laying around.

20 JS: Was sleep a big thing at that point?

21 TR: Yeah, it was. I mean, you know, depending on missions sometimes they'd
22 send us out to a certain area. We'd leave that area and go to another area. Maybe come
23 back into somewhere. We really didn't have a set base. I mean, we had a base where
24 some of our stuff was, but most everything that we owned, everything you carried in your
25 rucksack because you never knew when you were going to come back to that area. I
26 remember — I think there was—I can't remember what the operation was, but we were
27 gone for seventy-eight days before we actually came back to our base. It was pretty much
28 seventy-eight days without a shower or anything other than just resupplying my own
29 food. The only way we bathed was if there was a river or something, we'd try to wash off
30 in the river. Our uniforms would pretty much just rot off of us because of the humidity
31 and everything. You know, prickly heat. I guess you've heard of prickly heat?

1 JS: No, I haven't.

2 TR: They call it prickly heat. I guess it's like little bumps that come up all over
3 you I guess from getting nasty and sweaty, dirty clothes. You would have that all over
4 you plus the leeches if they were all over. You'd have leech bites that would get infected.
5 It was a mess.

6 JS: During this time when you would come into the fire base whenever you did
7 get the chance to come in, would you do things like write letters home at that point?

8 TR: Yeah, usually that's what you did. At least if the mail had caught up to you
9 by then. You'd get your mail. They also have what they call an SP (Sundry Pack)
10 package or something. It had candy, cigarettes, and stuff like that in it. They usually had
11 some of those for us. Just try to get new uniforms or whatever you could get, you know,
12 the next mission out is trying to refit before you went back out.

13 JS: Well, as far as the food and things were concerned, was it pretty much always
14 C-rations?

15 TR: Yeah, well they had hot meals on the fire bases if we could ever get one. We
16 might get one once every two weeks and get a hot meal, but it was mostly sea rations. We
17 also had what they called lerp rations. It's like a freeze-dried. It comes in a little package
18 you put hot water in it and just kind of seal it. It was pretty good, real good rations. The
19 only problem was it depended on the season. If it's a dry season you didn't carry much
20 lerp rations because you didn't have that much water to spare. Usually we carried more
21 C-rations in the dry season. In the wet season it wasn't a problem to carry a lot of lerps.
22 Plus, they were lighter. They came in a package's kind of like what the MRE's (Meals
23 Ready-To-Eat) do today. It was a great package, chicken stew, beef stew. I could
24 probably name every one of them. As far as C-rations you didn't carry the whole box of
25 C-rations. You broke them down into what you thought you would need. As far as
26 weight, I usually just carried enough, like some fruit or something like that and hot
27 chocolate, coffee, and stuff like that. Just try to get it down so all you had was like one
28 meal a day in the evening and just some fruit or something during the day. So needless to
29 say, you weren't going to get fat over there.

30 JS: Was that difficult to only be able to eat one time a day or is that something
31 you get used to?

1 TR: No, you get used to it. You do it because of the weight. By the time we got all
2 of our rucksacks packed with everything we had to carry, I don't know how much I
3 weighed on that first day when we went out, but it was heavy. You know, you couldn't
4 really get off the ground. You'd have to grab a tree and kind of work your way up. It was
5 heavy. You know, humping that thing, it was pretty hard there at first and usually after
6 that first night out, our first evening out you'd try to eat some stuff and it got lighter as
7 the day went on.

8 JS: On those days that you would stay out and on the times that you would stay
9 out more than five days would you be resupplied by helicopter or how would that work?

10 TR: Yeah, we could be or if we were close to a fire base, we could actually go
11 into a fire base to get resupplied. It was one or the other.

12 JS: Okay. I know you talked about water being an issue particularly during the
13 dry season, but what would your water sources be during the wet season and the dry
14 season?

15 TR: Well, in the wet season it was whatever you'd call it when it was raining, or
16 you stopped by a stream or whatever and fill up. The same way in the dry season except
17 there's not much water available.

18 JS: Okay.

19 TR: You're going to have to go down to, you know, if you're at high ground
20 you're going to go down low to try to get some water, you know, try to find it. Of course,
21 they had those little iodine tablets that you put in there. I usually carried it when I left to
22 go out on a mission I had a 5-4 canteen, I'm thinking a 2-quart and 1-quart.

23 JS: Alright.

24 TR: You tried to ration yourself in the water that you drank, especially in the dry
25 season.

26 JS: Well, you talked about some of the things in more general terms, but I guess
27 getting back to operating out in the field particularly during these first few months with
28 the 199th, are there any particularly memorable moments or firefights that stick out in
29 your mind that you can possibly talk about or operations or anything like that?

30 TR: Well, of course I already told you about the one that came face to face with a
31 guy there, that one. I'm trying to think of some of the others. Some of the others, you

1 know, they go pretty quick. It might seem like a while when you're in a firefight, but they
2 actually go pretty quick. Most of them just kit and runs. Not a whole lot. I was trying to
3 think, the only other one would be, I guess one time we were out and I actually, when I
4 was walking point and I actually ended up in the middle of an NVA base camp. I came
5 through the backside, I guess, and I didn't see any of the signs that it was a base camp. I
6 came through and there were a couple sitting there. I opened up on them and they shot an
7 RPG (Rocket-Propelled Grenade), and somebody caught me through the foot and arm
8 and everything and so I was sitting there, and I was kind of in-between my unit that was
9 firing and them firing over me. I can't think of too much more. This is just for the 199th,
10 right?

11 JS: Right. Well, I guess that time you took the shrapnel from the RPG, was it
12 serious enough to be medevac'd?

13 TR: Yeah, they medevac'd me. Came back to the 93rd evac in Bien Hoa. They
14 sewed me up and I stayed in the rear a few days and then came back to the field.

15 JS: Alright, overall, how would you say the medical treatment you received—how
16 would you rate it?

17 TR: Oh, they were excellent doctors and everything over there, very good. I guess
18 I left, and I had the stitches in my foot. I came back to, I guess it was the 199th
19 headquarters there. That was in Long Bien I believe. Of course, I was supposed to stay
20 out, I think he said two weeks until it's all healed and stuff, the doctor did. I ended up, I
21 think, the next couple of days they needed somebody to do convoy security, so they stuck
22 me, wrapped up foot and all on a jeep and I had to pull security for convoy for a couple
23 of days. I came back and they sent me to the field. I think on the next mission we came in
24 contact. My foot busted open again. I guess from getting wet and everything. So, it
25 busted open, so I actually had to be medevac'd again back to the same doctor and he
26 sewed it up. Of course, he was raising hell, you know, why I was already out in the field.
27 I said, "Because they told me to." So, he wasn't real pleased and I think he called up the
28 commander, so I actually stayed out a little bit longer that time before I went back. I was
29 ready to get back in the field. I didn't like being in the rear anyway.

30 JS: Did you go back to your regular team?

31 TR: Yeah, I just went back.

1 JS: Did they have a replacement for you while you were out or did, they just
2 operate without you?

3 TR: No, I guess some guy took over. I had, all along we kind of trained together.
4 Tom Pots, the guy that was walking behind me, so he just took over as point man. I
5 walked point the whole time I was over there.

6 JS: I know you said you couldn't remember specific dates or anything like that,
7 but how long into your tour was this when you got wounded?

8 TR: You know, I have no idea. I don't know what month it was. I was thinking it
9 was toward the end, the end of when I was with the 199th.

10 JS: How often do you think when you guys would go out in the field from at least
11 five-day tours out in the field or longer, how often would you actually come into contact
12 with the enemy or at least see the enemy?

13 TR: You know, we were probably different than some of the line units. We saw
14 them a lot more than most of the line units did. I talked to people before that might not
15 have even seen it while they were over there for the whole tour, but as far as—there was
16 a lot of down time where you wouldn't do anything. You wouldn't see anybody or
17 anything. You kind of got complacent, you know? And then other times you would see
18 them every day, so it just really depended. You know, you never knew. I think one of the
19 bad things was, you know, I guess complacency. You haven't seen anything in a long
20 time. Everybody gets kind of lax and then all of a sudden something happens. I don't
21 really know how many times as far as that.

22 JS: Alright, well before moving onto the 1st Calve, during this time with the 199th,
23 if you don't mind me asking this question, did you guys take any casualties during that
24 time?

25 TR: Yeah, we did. We had one guy killed.

26 JS: Now, I know you talked about just people coming in and out as their DEROS
27 (Date of Estimated Return from Overseas) came up, as their year came to a close. How
28 much overturn was there during that period? I guess by the time the two got there—by
29 the time that you left with the 199th to go to the 1st Calve, how many of the original guys
30 that you were working with were still there?

31 TR: You mean still with the 199th?

1 JS: Yes, sir.

2 TR: Gosh, you know, I don't really know. There was like three of us that came
3 around the same time so, of course, we were going back at the same time. We just had
4 people coming in all the time, just different times. Gosh, I mean the only one I kept up
5 with was Tom Potts because we left the 199th and both of us went over to the 1st Calve to
6 the same unit which was unusual. Of course, we were glad.

7 JS: So, by the time you left the lerp unit with the 199th, did the team look pretty
8 different than from when you started?

9 TR: Yeah, well it looked different, but I think it was pretty good team, you know
10 what I mean? We had a very good officer over there at one time. We went through about
11 three to four lieutenants over there. Not necessarily killed but shot. One that we had that
12 really stood out, his name was Obi Adams, Lt. Adams. He was a very good officer. I
13 think we had had another lieutenant that came in and he lasted about a month, and he got
14 shot through the neck. I had another one come through. I think they shot him in the leg. A
15 lot of times if they came up, they would try to take out the officer and they would usually
16 look wherever the radio was and they would take out whoever was talking on the radio or
17 close to the radio. We had another lieutenant who was shot through the leg. I just thought
18 about that, just thinking about him getting shot in the leg. We had come up on a bunker
19 complex where we were actually searching the bunker complex and went in one of the
20 bunkers. It was a full medical hospital set up and had medicines and everything up there.
21 You'd see where they had taken him in there. I think that was not too long before we'd
22 had an ambush and there were still bloody rags on the table. We left there and went and
23 set up, I guess, had left the bunker complex and set up for the night. That was where, I
24 guess, they had some of them trailing us. They opened up on us late that evening. It was
25 almost dark and that was when we got our one lieutenant shot into the leg. He survived,
26 but it was pretty bad. If that happens at night, then what do you do? You stay there or do
27 you try to move? Go in some of the bunker complexes and actually go in and search
28 them?

29 JS: Well, you mentioned if someone was wounded at night, that brought up a
30 question I meant to ask you earlier. As far as setting up your night position, would you

1 generally set up somewhere and then move for security purposes or would you stay
2 where you set up?

3 TR: Well, in that particular instance we moved about maybe fifty meters to a
4 different place that was a little more secure. We just typed up the perimeter. We really
5 couldn't move anywhere because of where we couldn't move. We didn't travel at night. I
6 think they were the only one's that travel at night most of the time. Yeah, we pretty much
7 had to hunker down here. That's the only problem, too, is trying to get a medevac in, you
8 know, when it gets dark or stuff like that. A lot of times we couldn't get a medevac in,
9 might not be able to get someone out until the next day. That was a problem.

10 JS: Were there, I guess, what I want to ask here is you talk about the relationship
11 between the guys on the ground and then helicopter crews. I know you guys relied on
12 them for medevac and for resupply, but how did all that work? Was there, I don't know, a
13 relationship as far as appreciation and things like that between you guys? I've heard some
14 veterans talk about that. If you could comment on that.

15 TR: Well, we didn't have a whole lot of interaction with them other than them
16 picking us up and dropping us off on the surface somewhere. The medevac units were
17 excellent over there. They had some of the best—they'd fly if there was any way
18 possible. They would come in there and get somebody out regardless. As far as that, we
19 didn't have a whole lot of contact with them other than the gunships and stuff like that. I
20 talked to them on the radio before. I mean, most of the time as far as going out on a
21 mission, we never saw the aircrews. We talked to them once we got there. Just pick us up
22 and insert us somewhere. We didn't have a whole lot of one on one talking time or
23 anything.

24 JS: You talked about the lieutenants and some of them being wounded. Would it
25 always be the lieutenant team leader out in the field with you guys? How did that work?

26 TR: Well, actually if we had a lieutenant with us, sometimes then it got to a point
27 where I guess they didn't have anymore. I guess they didn't have any more lieutenants to
28 send with us. It was just whoever had the most experience. I mean, the thing was we had
29 lieutenants come out there before and we pretty much just used them to monitor the radio
30 and call-in stuff. If they had just gotten there, they might tell us where we were supposed
31 to go and what needed to be done, but, you know, we relied on people that had been there

1 a long time and wanted the experience. Not to say that we were disrespectful, but, you
2 know, a lot of times it's not ranked, it's in charge in the jungle. It's the one with the most
3 experience. Most of them understood that.

4 JS: In most cases, the one with the most experience, would it usually be an NCO
5 (Non-Commissioned Officer), or would you have privates there that had more
6 interference at times?

7 TR: Well, of course this is just about to be either an NCO or Spec 4 because we'd
8 been there the longest. It could be an E5 (Sergeant), you know.

9 JS: Okay, next question, you talked about the bunker complexes, and you've
10 come across the hospitals, could you talk a little more about that and what it was like?
11 Also, were there tunnel complexes as well like down at Cu Chi, in particular, were the
12 famous tunnels. Did you guys come across them as well?

13 TR: You know, we never went in them. We'd mark them on a map or something
14 and I'm sure some of the line companies might have come in later and went in them. This
15 particular one just happened to be, we just happened to go into this one. It was a hospital.
16 It was connected somewhat to some tunnels, but I'm not sure where they went. I wasn't
17 going to crawl in the tunnel to try to find out where it went. You know, that was the only
18 place. The only reason we went into that is, like I say, we had seen some blood trails out
19 there from ambush and it led into there. So, we actually went in there to see what was
20 there. That's where we found that. We really didn't—I mean, we didn't have any, what
21 you say, tunnel rats. Most of them were with the line companies. It was something for
22 them to do. If they were going to go in there and blow up a tunnel complex or whatever,
23 that was up to them with some engineers or something. That wasn't our job.

24 JS: Well, I guess is there anything else we should say about your time with the
25 199th? Any other memorable moments or anything like that before moving onto the 1st
26 Calve?

27 TR: I can't think of anything right now. I'm sure I will later on.

28 JS: Alright.

29 TR: Some of them kind of get mixed up. I can't remember which is which. That's
30 all I can think of. As far as with the 1st Calve, we weren't in five-man teams rather than
31 twelve. Pretty much the same type missions with a few other missions added in. We

1 actually did prisoner snatches. In other words, we would sit on a hot trail and wait for
2 somebody to come through there. They'd tell us they needed a prisoner so we would go
3 out there in a certain area and go snatch one up for you. Some of the other things we did,
4 we did, we did what they call a "stay behind" ambush, which was the 1st Calve was
5 notorious for coming into a place, establishing a fire base and staying there for two weeks
6 and they would grab everything and go. You know, because of the air mobile concept.
7 They move around fairly quickly and, I guess, the S2 or the Intel session found out that
8 when they would leave a place like that, a lot of the NVA and VC would come in there
9 and scavenge for stuff. In other words, GI's, they would leave stuff laying around with
10 stuff that they could use. So, they came up with a bright idea of sticking a team of us on
11 one section of the fire base, get in a bunker, double sandbag, make sure the only avenue
12 of approach would be to affront where we could see and wait till a bunch of them came
13 up and started scavenging stuff. You know, we'd call in artillery and gunfire on them. We
14 did mechanical ambushes which is a little different than a regular ambush. They call it
15 mechanical ambush instead of calling it a booby trap because that was, I guess, the
16 Geneva Convention. What that was, was pretty much you would hook claymores and
17 daisy chain them together, run a trip wire across the trail, and usually powered by one of
18 your used PRC-25 (Portable, Radio, Communication) batteries and use a C-ration spoon
19 and a clothes pin and put two tacks on it and that's your contact and when they trip it, a
20 spoon comes out, tacks hit, and all the claymores go off. We could usually set that and
21 then we could get, you know, one hundred meters or so away, so we didn't have to be
22 right there by it. We'd use that. They sent us out, sent five of us out with a—I'm not
23 really sure what they were. It was a group that weren't South Vietnamese, they were
24 pretty much mercenaries, I guess. They sent five of us out and what we were supposed to
25 do was we were the radio communications back. We traveled to them while we went
26 through and did different missions. They would run through a village and pretty much
27 killed everything that was there. We were just there pretty much as observers. What else?
28 We did sniper missions. We had one sniper per teams. We had four teams, usually three
29 teams were out, and one team was back. We did our own radio communications with the
30 base. So, we carried two radios per team. One team would do all the radio

1 communications with the other teams that were out. I'm trying to think of something else.
2 It's all I can think of right now.

3 JS: Okay. Well, one question I have for you is how did the transfer from the 199th
4 to the 1st Calve take place and what prompted it?

5 TR: Well, actually the 199th was going home. They went home and we went, I
6 think a little bit before that or during that time. Sometime around that time they
7 transferred us over to alert team in the 1st Calve.

8 JS: So, your whole team went together then?

9 TR: No, uh-uh.

10 JS: That's right, I remember you saying just you.

11 TR: Yeah, just the two of us. Me and Tom Potts were the only ones that actually
12 went to the same team.

13 JS: Okay, alright. I know you said it happened right around the time of the
14 Cambodian Incursion. Did you guys actually participate in that? Did you go into
15 Cambodia with that?

16 TR: No, not with the 1st Calve, no. That was during the time when, let me see, I
17 think it was General Casey. We'd been there just a little while I guess when General
18 Casey's father was killed in a helicopter crash. I think that was in July, though.
19 Everybody was coming back down.

20 JS: Well, again, asking similar questions to what I asked about the team with the
21 199th, again, you don't have to get into specific personalities, but could you talk a little bit
22 about this new team with the 1st Calve?

23 TR: Well, we have no officers with us.

24 JS: Okay.

25 TR: It was all in the five men. Usually, the highest rank was an E5. Like I say, we
26 had four teams and we pretty much just operated on our own. They had us kind of, even
27 on the fire base they had us pretty much separated. I think they had barbed wire between
28 us and everybody else there. They kind of thought we were a little strange. So, they kind
29 of kept us away to ourselves over there. We had some characters to say the least.

1 JS: Alright, well, you talked about you just mentioned being separated from the
2 line companies in that way, but did you guys have some contact with them and was there
3 any sort of rivalry, anything like that?

4 TR: Well, the only time we ever saw them was when we could hear them coming
5 through the jungle or they actually almost ran into one of our ambushes one time because
6 a lieutenant had read the map wrong. That was almost a disaster. Of course, we had to
7 hide because we knew if we popped up, they were going to shoot anything they saw so
8 we had to hide until they almost came out up on us until we reached them and grabbed
9 them by the arm and scared the crap out of them and said, "Hey, we're here. What are
10 you doing here?" So finally, we had to get the lieutenant there and said, "Hey sir, with
11 respect, you screwed up. You almost got your people killed."

12 JS: Did you get any sense of feeling that, I guess, I don't know how to phrase it,
13 but did they look at you guys as kind of a lead compared to themselves? Did you kind of
14 get any feelings of that or did you see anything like that?

15 TR: Well yeah, most of us they thought it was crazy. Other than that, I don't
16 know. They thought we were a little different which, I guess we were. Yeah, I know,
17 speaking back to the operations I remembered one thing at one time. We were on top of a
18 mountain. I don't know where, but we were a radio relay for an artillery for a big
19 operation they were having down in the valley, and they just sent five of us on top of a
20 hill. We were calling in artillery over us and sent to the valley over there most of the
21 time. That was something else. They'd have short rounds and then we'd hit the mountain.
22 We had to call it in then duck. That was another mission they gave us. We always said, "I
23 think there's something up there just thinking up stuff for us to do."

24 JS: Do you guys operate basically in the same area there in III Corps at Tay Ninh
25 or was it in a different area?

26 TR: To tell you the truth I'm not really sure where we operated, but I would
27 assume it's fairly close. It was in III Corps, and I believe it was around Tay Ninh because
28 I don't know where the parrot's beak is. We were right on the Cambodian border. We
29 operate in that area right up in there. Fairly close to, I think it was the 25th division had an
30 AO (Area of Operations) that was close to us. The only reason I know that is the 25th
31 division, one of their cobras fired on us one time because they picked up a sensor they

1 dropped on the wrong place. So, I would assume that was right next to us over there. It
2 wasn't a good feeling to get strafed by a cobra.

3 JS: Well, we've come up on that two-hour limit for today. If you don't mind if we
4 could go ahead and take a break for today?

5 TR: Okay.

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Interview with: Thomas Ray

Session [2] of [2]

Date: June 24, 2010

1 Jason Stewart: This is Jason Stewart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University continuing an Oral History Interview with Mr. Thomas Ray. Today is June 24,
3 2010, and this is interview session number two. Okay, one of the things I want to start off
4 with today, if we could, I had some questions about the e-mail that you sent me, the
5 write-up that you made about your tours of duty.

6 Thomas Ray: Okay.

7 JS: First of all, you mentioned in the e-mail you talked about a mission where you
8 guys rescued some Montagnard prisoners. Could you talk a little bit about that for the
9 interview?

10 TR: Uh yeah, let me pull that up. What they had done I guess is from what I
11 remember, anyway, but intel would come up with a report that either the VC or the NVA
12 had some Montagnards, I guess, in their base camp and they were using them pretty
13 much as just prisoners or slaves or whatever. They gave us an approximate, you know,
14 grid coordinate. So, what they did is they sent a team of us in there, you know, to check it
15 out. Of course, it was close to a river, I remember that. When we came up on it, we saw
16 some mountain yards out there in the village and we pretty much just kind of snuck up on
17 these there trying to see how many VC and NVA it was before we just went into the
18 village and everything. After recon for a little while, there weren't that many. I forget,
19 probably five, six, seven, that we actually saw so what we did, we just assaulted the
20 village pretty much trying to, you know, trying to distinguish between—well, it was
21 pretty easy to distinguish between Montagnards and VC or NVA, you know, by how they
22 were dressed. So, we got in there and we rounded up all the Montagnards that they had
23 prisoner there and called in and they sent a chinook. We established a landing zone, and
24 they sent a chinook in there and we rounded all of them up and they loaded it in the
25 schnook and took them back. I'm not sure of where to a relocation place wherever they
26 were taking them. That was pretty much what it was. I just remember one thing, the
27 Montagnards, we didn't really have anybody that spoke their language and we were
28 trying to get them onto the chinook. You know, they really were pretty apprehensive
29 about getting on a chinook. They didn't understand what that was. I think somebody said

1 later on they were thinking it was a big bird and it was swallowing on the mud that in the
2 back, but we actually got them in there somehow and got them all in.

3 JS: About how many Montagnards was it?

4 TR: Hmm, they pretty much loaded up the chinook. So, it's probably, I'd say,
5 twenty to thirty I would think?

6 JS: Was this when you were with the 199th?

7 TR: Yeah

8 JS: Okay, well they were a little concerned about getting the chinook, but I
9 assume they were happy to see you guys though.

10 TR: Yeah, as much as we could tell. Of course, the Montagnards, they were pretty
11 much, you know, the guys wore loin cloths and the women, of course, didn't have
12 anything on up top. I remember some of them had little crossbows that they had made. It
13 was pretty primitive. They were pretty primitive people. I guess that was the first time we
14 had been around any particular Montagnards.

15 JS: Alright, another question I had based on the e-mail that you sent me, and I
16 know you talked about it a little bit before, but you talked about Lt Obi Adams being one
17 of the best officers that you had worked with. I guess, could you talk a little bit more
18 about that. About what was it that made him such a good officer?

19 TR: Well, I guess the main thing was he kind of just fit in with everybody. As far
20 as when he would take guard with us, I mean, he was really, I don't know how you would
21 say it, but you felt secure in his leadership. In other words, we were real decisive in what
22 he did, and you could tell he knew what he was doing. He just made everybody else that
23 was in the team of the squad, you know, the felt secure around him which we didn't with
24 some of the other ones we worked with. He pretty much let everybody do what they were
25 supposed to do, and he would, I don't know, he made real good decisions as far as in
26 combat and everything.

27 JS: About how long did you work with him?

28 TR: Gosh, you know, I'm not real sure. You know, I didn't even know what
29 month it was over there. As far as what day it was, the month? You know, I'd come back,
30 and I'd ask what month it was. I would assume he was with us three, four months maybe,
31 three months?

1 JS: Okay. Another thing you mentioned was—and I think we talked about this a
2 little bit the last time. I can't completely remember, but a little bit about one of your
3 duties was prisoner snatches. I guess can you talk a little bit more of how that actually
4 worked, how you would get a prisoner?

5 TR: Well, it's pretty much just what it says, prisoner snatch. We'd pretty much
6 just find a good spot where we could be off what they call a hot trail. In other words, they
7 would say take a prisoner from a certain area and we would go through the area and find
8 what they call a hot trail. One that had been, you know, you could tell it was being used
9 every day or so. We would just set up on the trail, actually, and just wait for one to come
10 by that we thought we could snatch. We'd pretty much just snatch them up. Just haul butt
11 with them. And we would have a predetermined LZ, and we would bundle them up and
12 put them on the chopper and they'd take them back to Intel. I've actually got a picture of
13 one that we took, one of the prisoners. If I could find a way to scan in, I'd send it to you. I
14 didn't know how those other pictures turned out.

15 JS: They turned out well, yeah.

16 TR: Okay, I've got a picture of it of one of the prisoners if I can get them scanned
17 in, I'll send them to you.

18 JS: Okay, I appreciate that. Now, would you guys always grab if it was just a
19 solitary guy by himself?

20 TR: You know, you never really knew what was going on. In fact, this one that I
21 got a picture of when we snatched him, he was actually a lead element of a company-
22 sized force. Of course, we didn't know it. A lot of times they would travel in just small
23 packs, you know, of maybe three, four something like that. That's who we would try to
24 take. Maybe eliminate all but one and take him. We actually took this one and come to
25 find out it was about a company behind him, so we pretty much had to grab him and be
26 on our way, very quickly because the company was coming up behind him. So, we
27 actually got out of there. A lot of stuff, I guess, working in small teams and stuff, you
28 know. You talk to people that were over there the whole time and never actually even
29 saw a VC or an NVA. Just about every time we went out, we saw one. I guess because
30 we were operating kind of like them and we were quiet and silent when we went through

1 the jungles and stuff. You'd end up running right into them a lot off times. That happened
2 quite often.

3 JS: Given the fact that you guys observed them quite a bit whereas typical line
4 units, as you said, wouldn't see them very often, but you guys would see a lot of them.
5 Just observing them, how did they operate out in the field? Were they very cautious with
6 the way they moved?

7 TR: It actually depended on where you were. A lot of times we were in places
8 where you could tell that they had no idea there were any U.S. troops in the area. You
9 know, this is, I guess, when I was in the 1st Calve because we were working in five-man
10 teams. We sat there and counted like seventy-five just walked by us. We've seen them
11 move at night; we've seen just different things. I mean, it's just stuff that I guess we were
12 pretty quiet getting into the area and we never suspected we were there. Now, if they ever
13 did suspect that there was ever a small team in the area, they would send everything they
14 had trying to either kill that team or to capture somebody. I guess it was a big bounty on
15 us at that time. We had some pretty hairy incidents with that trying. You know, we
16 crawled on our belly over one hundred yards one time trying to get away from them. We
17 had taken a shot at one of them a pretty good way off. I guess they sent a team trying to
18 hunt us down. They figured out it was a small team. We pretty much had to crawl on our
19 bellies about one hundred yards and really try to escape because they would try to
20 surround us into town, but actually got loose.

21 JS: Was this the incident that you mentioned in the e-mail where they sent quite a
22 few after you guys?

23 TR: Yeah.

24 JS: Okay.

25 TR: Probably was, yeah.

26 JS: Okay, alright. A few other incidents that you mentioned if you could talk a
27 little bit about. I know you talked about there was a time whenever you guys actually set
28 off some sensors and were strafed.

29 TR: Yeah, our area of operation bordered the 25th division. At least they told us it
30 was anyway. We were operating, I think it was, right on the Cambodian border. What
31 happened was they sent these little sensors out. They looked like a piece of dog mess or

1 something like wooden is what they were supposed to be. We actually saw one, but we
2 figured they were ours and they were supposed to know where we were supposed to
3 know where we were. When we were walking down the trail, we actually saw one and as
4 we went by then we heard some gunships coming on, you know, flying over and we
5 didn't really think anything of it until they striked the area where we were which was
6 where we were. Of course, when they did that, we started running and we found a river
7 with a high bank on it and we jumped into the river and pretty much just paced it our self
8 against the wall there, against the bank of the river until he finished. I think they strafed
9 us two or three times. Some of the guys were going, "Hell, I'm going to go out there and
10 shoot his butt down." Nah, that's probably not a good idea. They have everything on this
11 end. We didn't, we just pretty much just waited, and he went off station. Of course, we
12 called him back to our headquarters and they were in turn calling, I guess, division to find
13 out what gunship was in the area while they were firing us up. Apparently, they figured
14 out it must have been the 25th division bordering our AO over there. I guess they put the
15 sensors out in the wrong place, which was common over there, you know. So finally,
16 they called them off. You sound like you got a cold.

17 JS: Yeah, I've got a little bit of one. Unfortunately, I've had it for a while, it's still
18 hanging in there. Just won't quite go away. I know you talked about there was a morning
19 when you came across a wounded NVA female, could you talk about that?

20 TR: We were set up one night and you hear all kind of things out in the jungle
21 anyway, but we heard moaning and what we were saying it sounded like a female crying
22 or something, but we figured it was either a tiger or some type of a cat that kind of
23 sounded alike, I guess. We heard everything out there. So, we didn't think much about it,
24 but then the next morning we'd heard it again and we went over to investigate, and it
25 was—I guess it was an NVA female. I think later on they said she was a nurse that I
26 guess had been with a bunch of NVA when they got caught in an ambush. Not our
27 ambush, but I'm not sure who. Anyway, she was laying on the ground. She wasn't armed
28 at that time, and we went up there. Our medics went over there to trade her and try to find
29 out exactly what it was. They turned her over and I think it was her right cheek of her butt
30 back here was completely blown off by maybe a claymore or somebody had shot her
31 through it. It looked like they had put maggots in there to, I guess, somebody said later to

1 eat the dead flesh and everything. We did everything we could for her and then we
2 medevac'd her back out of there.

3 JS: Did that happen on other occasions where you'd find a wounded enemy
4 soldier and were there any other incidents.

5 TR: That's probably the only time we've ever found one like that. There wasn't
6 anybody else around, so I don't know if they were just in a hurry and just left her behind
7 or she was the only one left.

8 JS: Alright, another incident you mentioned was being stuck in the field as a
9 result of a typhoon.

10 TR: Yeah, I'm assuming it was a typhoon. I mean, we didn't have the weather
11 channel back then, but what happened, it was either that or a tropical storm or something.
12 I have no idea because this is in—I don't know what month it was in '70. I was going to
13 look back and see if they actually did have a typhoon hit over there during that time, but
14 they'd sent us out on a mission. I forgot what the mission was, but it was supposed to be
15 a five-day mission was our usual routine. About the fourth or fifth day the weather started
16 turning bad which was unusual in that time. So, we call back to see if they were going to
17 distract us. They said, "Well, they want to distract us in the next morning." You know,
18 we gave them where we were and everything like that and what happened was the
19 weather came in a little early and it grounded all the aircrafts. We were stuck out there
20 for—I can't remember if it was two or three days out there and it rained for two solid
21 days just as hard, I guess, as it could. I mean you couldn't even see the person across
22 from you and everything. We had to move to higher ground on the side of a mountain or
23 hill or something to get out of the water. I mean, it was flooding everywhere. Yeah, we
24 usually took two radios with us, and both the radios got wet and they quit working. I
25 mean, everything—of course, all we had was a poncho and that was it so there wasn't too
26 much sleep. It was pretty miserable. I got up the next day and we couldn't make contact
27 to try to get picked up. So pretty much out there for two days with nothing, no comm, no
28 nothing. Finally, I think on the third day what we did is we had claymores with us, and
29 we just broke up the claymore and got the C4 out of the back of it and lit it and held the
30 radios over it to dry them out and everything. We finally got one radio working. I think
31 we had one battery left and we finally got in touch so that we could tell them where we

1 were and to get a pickup point where they could come and get us. Woo, that's pretty
2 miserable, I'll tell you.

3 JS: Had you guys had enough food and supplies to last that time, or had you run
4 out by that point?

5 TR: No, we had run out. If you packed for a five-day mission, I mean you packed
6 just the bare necessities. Usually, I would have packed one good meals of C-rations or
7 lerps, either one, but we had those in the evening and just some fruit or something like
8 that. That was pretty much it, so you didn't take anything extra because that was just
9 extra weight. Now we had given out food and everything. We had some choice words for
10 them when we got back. I don't think it did anything.

11 JS: Well, any other memorable moments from either unit that we should mention
12 before moving on?

13 TR: I think I told you about when I had first gotten over there with the 199th. I
14 was walking point there. I think we'd already gone over that when I ran into them. I can't
15 think of anything.

16 JS: Did you get a chance to go on R&R (Rest and Recuperation) during your
17 tour?

18 TR: Yeah, I did. I went on R&R to Thailand, to Bangkok. Most of the single
19 soldiers, that's where they went there, and I think it was Manila in the Philippines or most
20 of the married people went to Hawaii to meet with their wives and stuff. Most of the guys
21 wanted to have a good time in Thailand or something.

22 JS: Sure.

23 TR: A very good time, you know?

24 JS: And that was a week. Was that a week?

25 TR: Yeah.

26 JS: Did that come pretty late in your tour?

27 TR: Yeah, I took it almost at the end. I think I'd been over there ten months
28 before I took an R&R.

29 JS: Okay.

30 TR: What it did is you were pretty much assured of getting an R&R slot the later
31 that you were over there. In other words, they did it by how much time you had in-

1 country. You could actually take an R&R and one leave, I think, a week leave. I never
2 got to take leave. I put in a four week leave to go to Australia, but I couldn't go because
3 of operations going on. They couldn't spare me the leave, so I ended up just getting the
4 R&R.

5 JS: Just a few more questions here about this part of your tour. Did you guys ever
6 participate in any kind of civic action or med cap things at all? Anything like that?

7 TR: No, we actually didn't. Now, we had operated—one time, I'm not sure, I
8 guess it was a bunch of—I'm not sure the specifics on it, but we did take a local—I guess
9 it would have been a platoon size element out and we were actually the radio
10 communications for them. They were for lack of a word, mercenaries. A lot of times they
11 would send us out for radio relay, just a team of us out for them and we pretty much just
12 travelled with them for whatever they had to do, usually the villages, destroyed the
13 villages and I think got to keep whatever they found or whatever.

14 JS: How would you guys be able to communicate with them?

15 TR: Well, you know, I don't remember right off hand. I guess there's a lot of—I
16 think they had one guy that spoke English, one guy and that was it. We pretty much—I
17 think we were there to make sure that they knew where we were at any one time. Or
18 either we had to call in artillery or gunships or if anybody got in trouble and stuff. We
19 had taken out some—other than that we took out some ARVN rangers before that were, I
20 guess, out of school. A lot of times they would get us just to take them out on missions
21 and stuff. I think what their commander said, try to take them out bloody. In other words,
22 get them some combat experience. They would send us out with them.

23 JS: Well, anything else we should mention before discussing the end of your tour
24 and coming home?

25 TR: No, I can't think of anything.

26 JS: Alright, well what was out-processing like? Did you come out of the field any
27 time before—did you come out of the field the time period before your tour came to an
28 end or was it up to the last day that you were still operating the field?

29 TR: I think most off the people they would actually give them a break before the
30 end of their tour. I never did get a chance to take it. I think we were very short on people
31 at that time, and I actually stayed in the field until I think it was one day, I think I was set

1 to leave. I came out of the field, got to the fire base, gathered up my stuff and went back
2 to the rear to go home.

3 JS: Did you have any, I guess, the short-timer's syndrome, concerned that
4 something could happen there at the last few days?

5 TR: Yeah, yeah, I did. Probably that—I don't know if it was a month or weeks or
6 whatever. I don't even think I slept. You know, I stayed up the whole time. I think when
7 you first get over there you have this attitude that I'm going to be over here for a year and
8 you're really not that scared at all. You just pretty much take stuff as it goes and the
9 closer you get toward the end of your tour it seems that you start thinking about stuff, you
10 know.

11 JS: So, did it make you, I guess, act more careful and more aware, or...?

12 TR: Yeah, I guess so. Like I say, I was in pretty bad shape. I knew I couldn't
13 sleep at all so I ended up taking a lot of people's guard (duty) at night just because I
14 couldn't sleep anyway. Yeah, it was pretty bad.

15 JS: I know we talked about this last time a little bit, but about not really having
16 any idea of the bigger picture of the war. By the time you left, did you have any thoughts
17 about the way the war was going? Did you think that we were winning, we were losing,
18 or how the war was going?

19 TR: You know, never really had any thoughts about that. I think the only thing I
20 was concerned with was trying to stay alive and try to make sure that my team stayed
21 alive. It's pretty much that's all you're fighting for is just the team that you're with.
22 That's pretty much it. It's like a job. You go out there and try not to get killed and try to
23 keep your other buddies from getting killed. That's pretty much it. I had no idea about
24 that. I knew that as far as fighting the war over there that it was a lot more productive to
25 use small teams than it was for company-sized elements. Just from the fact that our kill
26 ratio was about, I don't know, fifty or one hundred times more than the company level.
27 Our five-man team probably, you know, we probably had a kill ratio of all the rest of the
28 companies combined. Probably because we came into contact so much.

29 JS: Alright. Well, let me ask this way. How was the trip home? What was that
30 like? And this may be a silly question, but how did you feel about leaving?

1 TR: Well, I mean, yeah, I was ready to get out of there. I don't know why you get
2 this way just like when I was medevac'd over there and taken out of the field when I was
3 wounded and taken back to the rear and stuff. I was actually ready to get back to the
4 team. I kind of felt like I should be there with them and really wanted to get back. As far
5 as when the EPS came, I was ready to come home. I was pretty much ready to come
6 home. You know, I don't remember a whole lot about it. I remember getting on the plane.
7 It was pretty, like I say, I came straight out of the field and straight back to the rear had
8 khakis back then and they had us a set of khakis with whatever. I remember going
9 through the medal ceremonies that you got there to put on your uniform and stuff which
10 you just came down a line and they just threw them in a bag for you. You put whatever
11 on and I can't remember, I think I landed in Japan on the way back and (flew) back into
12 California.

13 JS: What was your homecoming like? Did you run into any war protests or
14 anything like that?

15 TR: I really didn't. When we got to California, we saw a few, but I actually never,
16 you know, came one on one on anybody that said anything to me as far as protesting the
17 war. It's probably a good thing because I don't imagine I would have been in any mood
18 to actually listen to them. I'm trying to think, it was one of the guys that was one our
19 team. We came back at the same time, and we came into San Francisco, and I pretty
20 much just threw all my clothes and everything away or whatever I had in my bag just got
21 on the plane for coming home. There were some guys they were recruiting. I'm not really
22 sure who they were or what they were recruiting for, but I've come to find out I think
23 they were recruiting for people to come back to go to—I don't know CIA, who it was
24 recruiting. They recruited folks; I think they were going into Laos. A buddy of mine
25 came back with me—they came over to talk to us and I just said, "No, I'm going home. I
26 don't know what you want. I'm going home." My friend, his last name was Clark. He
27 was from Kentucky. He actually talked to them, and I think he ended up going back. I
28 have no idea whatever happened to him after that.

29 JS: Well, how about when you actually got back home? Did you go back home to
30 Alabama at that point?

31 TR: Yeah, I flew into Montgomery.

1 JS: Alright, how about your reception there?

2 TR: It was just my family there. I mean, I got back, and it was like nobody knew
3 what was going on. It was like there wasn't even a war going on. Even people that I saw
4 it was kind of like, you know, everything's been going on. Like nothing, I guess. There
5 was no homecoming, no nothing. Quite different than what it is nowadays.

6 JS: I know you later on ended up getting back into the Army, but had you gotten
7 out by that point? Were you finished with the Army at that point?

8 TR: No, I actually left there, and I was on leave for a while and then I went back.
9 I still had time left and I went back to Ft. Hood, Texas. That's where I was assigned. I
10 actually came back from—when I came back from overseas, I really didn't have an
11 assignment. They just said, "Go home and we'll send you your assignment on where
12 you're going to go to next and I didn't really know. I just went home, and they actually
13 called later on, and they had assigned me to Ft. Hood, Texas, where I didn't even know
14 where Ft. Hood, Texas was at that time.

15 JS: Well, what was your assignment there?

16 TR: At Ft. Hood?

17 JS: Yeah.

18 TR: Well, when I got there with my MOS I guess my MOS was 11-F which was
19 Operations Intel, the only ones that had the MOS was either Special Forces or Rangers.
20 So, I came to Ft. Hood, and they were going to put me in the Ranger company that they
21 had there at Ft. Hood. I had just a little bit of time left, and I went—I knew it was
22 voluntary supposedly, so I said, "No, I don't really want to be assigned to a ranger
23 because I'm not staying in, and I don't really want to do a bunch of hooah stuff. I'm just
24 trying to do my stuff and get out. So, after that I tried to find out what they could assign
25 me to with that MOS. They actually assigned me to the 2nd Armor Division in what they
26 call an armor recon or an armor scout. They assigned me to that as a platoon sergeant. I
27 was actually a platoon sergeant with stuff I had no idea what it was. I never even driven
28 one, ridden one, or whatever. That's what I ended up being platoon sergeant as.

29 JS: How long did that assignment last before you were done?

1 TR: I'm not sure. I don't think it was—was it a year? It might have been a year, I
2 guess. I had a three-year commitment, so it was whatever was left after my tour over
3 there. It was probably close to a year. I got out early, three months early to go to school.

4 JS: Did you have, if you don't mind me asking this question, did you have any
5 difficulty in transitioning back to, I guess like outside of the combat zone?

6 TR: I had a lot off problems with it. It was a lot of drinking and whatever else that
7 came about. There was a lot of drug use, a lot of drinking and all that. Morale was pretty
8 much as low as you could get back then if you came back. There was no, like they do
9 now with the post-traumatic stress disorder. I'm sure I probably had that, but like I say, I
10 cured it with two years with a bottle of tequila every year for two years and that pretty
11 much geared it up. I don't if it burnt the brain cells up or what. Yeah, it was pretty bad. I
12 had a tough time for a while.

13 JS: So, it took you about two years to adjust?

14 TR: Yeah, at least.

15 JS: Alright. You know, you said that after you got out of the military you went to
16 school at that point?

17 TR: Yeah.

18 JS: Where'd you go to school?

19 TR: I went to Troy State. Yeah, the reason I actually ended up at Troy State, I had
20 applied at different places, but Troy State, if you went there, they were on a quarter
21 system. I had applied and was accepted at the University of Texas, Troy State, and
22 University of Alabama. Texas and Alabama were on a semester system. Troy was at that
23 time under a quarter system. Actually, if I went to Troy, I got out of school—I got out of
24 the Army three months early. So that's how I ended up at Troy.

25 JS: What did you major in there?

26 TR: At that time, I was majoring in business.

27 JS: Okay.

28 TR: I was pretty much majoring in partying.

29 JS: Was there any type of anti-war things going on there at Troy?

30 TR: No, not at all.

31 JS: Did you end up finishing up and getting a degree there?

1 TR: Well, I actually went to Troy, and I ended up transferring to University of
2 Alabama at Birmingham.

3 JS: Okay.

4 TR: Yeah, I came out of there and I was a registered respiratory therapist.

5 JS: Okay. Well, timeline wise, what year would this have been?

6 TR: I actually went to Troy for a few years, stayed out for a year and worked. I
7 came back to Texas and took a job, a construction job for a year to save up money and
8 then I came back to Troy. So, it was probably over a span of like five years from '72 to
9 '77 or something like that. I went to school on the GI Bill.

10 JS: During this time as the War in Vietnam was winding down, did you pay any
11 attention to what was going on?

12 TR: Well, a little bit. Whatever I saw on the news and stuff. Back then they were
13 saying that the U.S. was pulling troops out and the South Vietnamese were going to take
14 over. My only comment was, I said, "Well, as soon as we pull out, the South Vietnamese
15 taking over the North Vietnamese will take over the country." I pretty much knew that.
16 You know, everybody else was going, "How do you know that?" I said, "Well, I know
17 the South Vietnamese and how they fight."

18 JS: How did you feel about that?

19 TR: Well, I didn't have any feelings one way or the other, I really didn't. I was
20 just glad to have finished.

21 JS: How about when the war came to a conclusion with the fall of Saigon? Did
22 you have any feelings about that at that point?

23 TR: No, I really didn't. It was just something that I expected and figured it was
24 going to happen anyway. I mean, you know, I knew it was just a matter of time once the
25 U.S. pulled out. You know, I think it might have happened a little quicker than I thought.
26 It came to the same conclusion that I figured was going to happen anyway.

27 JS: Also, during this time period after you had come back when the war was still
28 going on, did you talk to anyone about Vietnam? Anyone interested in it?

29 TR: The only ones that I talked to were some friends of mine that were going to
30 Troy that were Vietnam veterans. Those was the only guys that I talked to. Nobody else
31 actually—they really didn't know anything about it. It's like—I don't know, they really

1 didn't know what to ask or anything else. The only person you could actually talk to
2 about it was another Vietnam veteran. That's the only ones that actually understood.

3 JS: Well, I guess getting back to the chronology of your career and all. After you
4 graduated from college, what did you do at that point?

5 TR: Well, I got a job and I got married in between there to my first wife. I moved
6 back to Troy, and I was the cardiopulmonary manager there at the hospital. I started there
7 and I stayed there for, gosh, nineteen years, I think. I was married for about two years and
8 then got a divorce.

9 JS: When did you decide to get back into the Army and what made you decide to
10 do that?

11 TR: Well, you know, I'm not real sure. I think I was just sitting around at one
12 time; you know. I was looking around to see if anything actually had anything that was
13 fairly close to what I had done over there as far as MOS. The only one's actually that had
14 the same MOS was the Twin Special Forces. They had a National Guard unit in
15 Alabama. I actually joined with them. I think it was '81 was the first time. Yeah, and I
16 stayed with them about four to five years. I got married again and actually, that was
17 taking up a lot of time of the Special Forces. It's not just a weekend or two weeks a year
18 for sure, so. I ended up getting out then or I guess going inactive. I stayed out for, oh, I
19 don't know. It was about a year. Actually, a friend of mine talked me into getting another
20 National Guard unit that was getting ready to go to Panama. I said, "Well, never been to
21 Panama." So, I went back, joined up with them, and went to Panama.

22 JS: What were your duties there?

23 TR: Actually, with the Special Forces I was a medic in the Special Forces. I was
24 an assistive team medic. When I got back out, I got in and there was a unit that was close
25 to home, but they were a transportation unit. I actually got in there and they put me in
26 charge of the arms room, that was the armor.

27 JS: Was there any difficulty in getting back in and did you have to undergo any
28 further training or anything like that?

29 TR: Well, when I got back in the Special Forces I'd never been through airborne
30 training. Although I was supposed to have been before I went to Vietnam, I was supposed

1 to go to airborne training, but they never sent me. When I got in Special Forces I went
2 ahead and went off airborne training and the medic training that I had.

3 JS: So, did you actually participate in the operation in Panama?

4 TR: No, this was actually before. This was like '85. I guess it was a humanitarian
5 person down there. I was actually down there. I'd been to Panama four different times.

6 JS: You say humanitarian mission. What type of things were you guys doing?

7 TR: They were building a road from one side of Panama to the other. We were
8 actually hauling supplies and stuff up there and doing whatever needed to be done. We
9 were hauling whatever they needed. It was engineer units down there and they were
10 building schools, building a road and stuff to actually to be able to get from one side of
11 Panama to the other.

12 JS: Any other memorable or memorable type operations or things you guys did
13 prior to getting into the more recent conflicts in 2003 with Iraq that we should mention?

14 TR: Well, I went to Honduras also. I was over in Honduras doing pretty much the
15 same thing. They sent me down there to be, I guess, like a liaison. I had to get all the
16 equipment. That was when they were taking equipment down there to Honduras and
17 trying to get it up. They were doing another humanitarian mission. We had to get the
18 equipment over a couple of mountains over there to some base camps we set up at the El
19 Salvadorian border. That's pretty much what I did then. I was at Sodo Cano Air Base,
20 we'd get the equipment there and take it across over into the other bases which is about a
21 day's drive.

22 JS: Well, now once you got out and got back in, did you stay in that whole time
23 up until recently?

24 TR: Yeah, once I got back in in 1985, I pretty much stayed in until now. Yeah,
25 without a split then.

26 JS: Alright. Any other deployments before getting to Iraq?

27 TR: Not that I can think of. I think it was about four times I went to Panama and
28 Honduras. I'm trying to think if I went anywhere else. Not that I can think of.

29 JS: Well, I guess moving on to Iraq then in 2003. When did you receive orders?
30 Was it at the beginning of the war that you received orders to go there, or...?

1 TR: Yeah, our unit was actually mobilized in February. From there, at this time I
2 was with what they call an area support group out of Mobile. We were mobilized and I
3 think it was February the tenth and we went to Ft. Benning, Georgia, to mobilize out of
4 there. That was when you had a little bit of pre-training before you went over there.
5 Mostly, at that time, it was chemical training and stuff because they thought that Saddam
6 was going to slime us when we went over there. That's pretty much it. Weapons
7 qualifications, chemical training, that was about all we had. Some of us actually went to
8 some different schools over there because there was a lot of down time when they were
9 trying to get everybody over there. When Turkey closed the border, it probably would
10 have been over there. We were supposed to have gone into Northern Iraq, but once
11 Turkey closed the border over there it kind of changed things up and kind of backed
12 everything up.

13 JS: So, did you arrive in Kuwait?

14 TR: Yeah, we flew into Kuwait International at that time. We were moved to
15 Arifjan which is a base in Kuwait.

16 JS: What were your early impressions of Kuwait?

17 TR: Pretty hot. Well, we got there at night. At that time, they were flying at night
18 and stuff. They weren't coming in the daytime. They were still shooting rockets over into
19 Kuwait. They actually shot—I'm not sure how many. There was a couple of rockets shot
20 from Iraq to Kuwait at the time when we got over there. One hit one of the malls back
21 there and of course, we had our JSLIST (Joint Service Lightweight
22 Integrated Suit Technology) which was a chemical suit and our mask and everything like
23 that we had to carry with us at all times. Really not a whole lot. I mean, there was just
24 people everywhere. When we got there, there wasn't anywhere as far for anybody to stay
25 so all they did is they just crammed everybody into some buildings they had there like
26 warehouses. That's where everybody was housed in the warehouse.

27 JS: How about your impressions of the Kuwaitis? If you had any interaction at all
28 with them. Were they friendly?

29 TR: I really didn't have any contact with them when I first got there. Later on, I
30 did. Well, I got to be friends with one guy that was a Kuwaiti over there and actually
31 went out and he had a place on the Persian Gulf over there and actually went out and ate

1 with him and a couple other of his friends who were part of the royal family. What
2 happened when I went over there with the Mobile unit, they were supposed to have gone
3 into Iraq and some kind of deal and somebody else went. They didn't really have a job
4 for them up there. They stayed at Arifjan as kind of a mayor sale. In other words, running
5 Arifjan. I didn't have a job. I was in like Host Nation. Host Nation is the ones where we
6 go out there and we contract services and stuff like that. So, there was a theatre support
7 group that wanted us to come work with them. It was 377th TSC (Theater Sustainment
8 Command), which was in charge of the whole theater; Iraq, Afghanistan, everything else.
9 So, we actually went over to their sale that they were working out of which was a
10 different sale. So, we started working for them and from there, they started up a—this
11 was when all the coalition forces were coming into, you know, when President Bush had
12 all these countries that were going to come into Iraq. In other words, which was a true
13 coalition force. They really didn't have anybody that was in charge of the coalition
14 forces, so they formed a task force for some people there and I volunteered for the task
15 force. And so that's how I got on the task force gator which had to do with all the
16 coalition forces coming into Kuwait and Iraq.

17 JS: Alright, what were some of the other nations or some of the troops from the
18 other nations that you were working with? Where were they from?

19 TR: Gosh, we had thirty-seven countries. The ones that we had the most
20 interaction with, I guess, was the Latin American countries which was El Salvador,
21 Nicaragua, we had the Dominican Republic over there. We did a lot of work with some
22 of the Eastern European Countries. Latvia, gosh there was a slew of them. I mean, there
23 was actually 37 of them. There was the polish. You know, Iraq was divided up into
24 different sections. The ones we mainly worked with was what they called MND Central
25 South, which was Multinational Division, Central South which extended from around just
26 south of Baghdad all the way down to the border with the Brits who had the southern part
27 around Basra. So, we went all the way through Babylon to Nasiriya on up to Al-Kut on
28 the Iranian border all the way over to Karbala in the central part. So, we had all of the
29 forces that were going within that section.

30 JS: Were there any problems between the different nations as far as getting along
31 or did they all seem to get along and cooperate pretty well?

1 TR: Yeah, I don't know if I can really talk about that. How many years has that
2 been?

3 JS: Not too long. About seven years.

4 TR: Yeah, there were problems. Some of the nations didn't get along with others.
5 I can suffice to say that. The Polish were actually in charge of MND, Central South so
6 that's pretty much who we worked with as a command. Under them, you had the
7 Ukraine, we worked a lot with the Ukrainian soldiers over there. They probably had the
8 second most soldiers over there behind Poland. Then the Latin Americans were
9 actually—all of the Latin American countries were actually under the Spanish. There was
10 a Spanish brigade over there and they actually fell under the Spanish brigade probably
11 because of language. That's the only thing I can figure. They weren't too pleased about
12 that. If you know how the Spanish feel about, I guess, people from other countries other
13 than Spain, they don't get along that well.

14 JS: That old history of colonialism.

15 TR: Right. I guess the El Salvadorians, we did a lot of work with them. The
16 Nicaraguans we had some with and all the other ones. El Salvadorians, I really enjoyed
17 working with them. It was a good group. Most of them were their actual best soldiers that
18 they had in the country at the time which a lot of them were Special Forces soldiers had
19 been trained by the U.S. Special Forces.

20 JS: Other types of duties? I think you mentioned in the e-mail something about
21 convoy duty as well?

22 TR: Yeah, what we did is we pretty much had, I mean, we did everything for the
23 coalition troops if they need it. In fact, when coming in-country they didn't have all of the
24 supplies and everything that they needed. It was our job to find out what they needed and
25 get it to them. That was pretty much it. What we ended up doing, the state department
26 would e-mail me with a request or actually I would get in touch with them and tell them
27 what they needed. They would, in turn, usually send the supplies directly to me to be put
28 in a warehouse in Kuwait. From that, I would fill orders in that and take convoys up there
29 to the different nations and stuff and distribute the supplies and stuff. They ended up
30 getting a lot of uniforms that we had, the desert camos and stuff. We ended up getting
31 those boots. Even from helmets to, oh gosh, anything you would actually need there. It's

1 according to what they call it's an ACSA (Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement)
2 agreement. It's an agreement between the U.S. and that country that we would sell them
3 supplies at the U.S. cost. So, you know, it's not like they were given to them. I'm sure
4 they were. We pretty much did that. We went into different areas. We'd take the coalition
5 forces up into Iraq to whatever base that we were going to go into, and we would actually
6 try to advise them on certain stuff to do as far as security. Try to get them communication
7 with everybody. They pretty much did it to try to get them coordinated and everything
8 with the Polish set so they could do their mission. We ended up having to run the
9 convoys back and forth. Usually, one convoy will take about ten days by the time we
10 went to all the different places.

11 JS: At this point, was there much danger involved with that? Would you guys
12 come under fire from insurgence?

13 TR: Yeah, we pretty much came under fire every time we went on a convoy. Most
14 of it was not, you know, it wasn't like a firefight like I was accustomed to, but most of
15 the time it was just some of them getting on top of the buildings and stuff and just
16 shooting at us from the top of the building and duck and hide and it wasn't like a
17 coordinated attack most of the time. We did have a few problems over toward Al-Kut.
18 They were more organized toward the Iranian border. They were probably Iranians is
19 what they were saying they were that had come across the border when the U.S. invaded.
20 I mean, it was just mostly small arms fire that we came under most of the time. Other
21 than that, the IEDs were there, but they were actually pretty primitive at that time. You
22 could usually spot them. You just had to be cautious on your convoys.

23 JS: As far as small arms fire, was it primarily things like AK 47s and stuff like
24 that?

25 TR: Yeah.

26 JS: RPGs and stuff like that as well?

27 TR: Well, yeah, they shot a couple of RPGs at us once we were inside of a base
28 one time, and it went through—we had some what they called Texas barriers which are
29 those big concrete barriers. Yeah, they hit the concrete barriers and they hit a building
30 behind us over there. They pretty much tried to, or I guess at that time when they were
31 getting organized, they tried to target the coalition forces because that was the big thing.

1 Target the coalition forces to get them to try to pull out and stuff and make the U.S. be
2 the only ones there. That was a big thing with them to get Intel on that.

3 JS: And would the convoy's response just keep moving?

4 TR: Well, the rules of engagement changed numerous times while I was over
5 there. When we are first up there it was, "Hey, you shoot anybody that's got a weapon."
6 And so, it changed from that to, "You can't shoot anybody with a weapon unless they're
7 pointing it at you." It changed from that to, "You can't shoot unless they're shooting at
8 you." We actually operated—we were under control of the first (inaudible), the Marine
9 Corps. When we first started the convoys, we had one platoon. A scout sniper platoon
10 attached to us. Between them and us we provided our own security for the convoys
11 because there wasn't anybody else. At that time, we went by Marine Corps rules so if
12 they fired at you, you stopped in pursuit. The Army at that time did not pursue, they just
13 ran through.

14 JS: On these convoys, what would your specific duty be?

15 TR: Well, I was actually—once I had my Humvee fixed, I had a .50 Cal mounted
16 on that. That was actually the .50 Cal gunner up top. Yeah, I was the NCOIC (Non-
17 Commissioned Officer in Charge) of the whole thing so that pretty much just whatever
18 needed to be done. I was most familiar with heavy weapons and stuff. I guess I kind of
19 volunteered myself to be gunner.

20 JS: You mentioned having the Humvees fixed. Could you talk a little more about
21 that? I know in the e-mail you talked about them not having armor.

22 TR: Yeah, when we first went over there, actually in '03, '04 they were very
23 limited up armored Humvees. That was before they saw fit to get into the up armored and
24 especially the National Guard units. We didn't have anything. We had what we brought
25 with us which were zero up armored Humvees. There just weren't any available. So,
26 what we did is we found out we needed a little more armor and we needed a little more of
27 something on there, so we pretty much did it ourselves. I talked to a guy that had worked
28 with—he worked over at the Aniston Army Depot. He came up with an idea. I told him I
29 wanted to mount a machine gun on top of my Humvee. So, he came up with the idea of
30 putting a medal frame like inside the Humvee and putting what they call a ring mount on
31 top of it, and we can mount a machine gun on there. We went with that, and he actually

1 mounted that in there. I got a ring mount and put a .50 Cal up on top, so it was an
2 improvised gun truck. I'll have to send you a picture of that. It was something else. They
3 did an article about that in the Mobile Press Register. Yeah, they came over there and
4 they saw my—I'm trying to think of the guy's name, the editor down there at the Press
5 Register. I can't think of his name.

6 JS: I can't think of it, either.

7 TR: He came over there a couple times and visited all the Alabama troops. At that
8 time, he saw that, and he took pictures of it and interviewed me about it. I was just telling
9 him how we came about fixing it up. That was commonplace. I mean, there were a lot of
10 people doing that because there just wasn't, you know, wasn't anything in the supply
11 chain and you just tried to help yourself the best you could. We put sandbags on the floor,
12 put some of our Kevlar, if you could find another IOTV or your vests and stuff. You'd
13 hang them on the doors if you had any. I mean, it was pretty much do what you had to do.
14 Yeah, most of the up armored were going to the active-duty units that were coming in
15 there. They had them lined up there, but nobody could use them.

16 JS: Did your Vietnam experience help you at all interact did you think?

17 TR: Yeah, I think so, yeah. I think everybody there could ever actually been in
18 combat, been in a warzone or anything else. That was one reason I decided to be up on
19 the .50 Cal because I think I could size the situation a lot better. When to fire, when not to
20 fire, what to do about it.

21 JS: So, were there any other Vietnam vets or were you the only one?

22 TR: There was one other guy that was over there. He was with the 101st. He was
23 with the 101st in Vietnam, but he had real bad skin cancer so we just decided we couldn't
24 take him on the convoys because we were out in the sun all the time. It ended up me
25 being the only one that was there. The only other one that I met was a Marine Corps
26 colonel. He was a Vietnam vet in the Marine Corps, Col. Alan Cruz.

27 JS: Were you able to, I guess, pass on any of your Vietnam experience to the
28 younger guys who hadn't had any combat? Did you talk to them about I guess, what to
29 expect and that type of thing?

30 TR: I did. In fact, a lot of them didn't have experience on different weapons and
31 stuff. I tried to train some of them on the .50 caliber machine gun, you know, what to do

1 about that. There were sometimes when they would kind of get too excited and I would
2 try to calm them down. Sometimes there were different things that would happen. I
3 would try to give them a shoot, don't shoot kind of situation if you know what I mean.
4 There were a lot of things that happened where probably legally you could have gone
5 ahead and shot, but really it wasn't one of those situations where you should have. Our
6 convoy, our Humvee was rammed by a van as we were travelling one time. Of course,
7 anytime you see a van coming in from the side you would think, of course, an enemy.
8 Actually, it was just a stupid Iraqi driver. I kind of recognized that because I was up on
9 the .50 Cal, and I had already had a beat on him was actually getting ready to fire. When I
10 looked at him and saw, the guy just wouldn't even look. He just ran into it. My driver
11 saw at the same time, and he pretty much just swerved over there and clipped him and ran
12 him up on the curb and wrecked him and everything. I just kind of shook my finger at
13 him when I went by like, "Hey, you were about two seconds from being dead." It was
14 just stuff like that. It was an experience working with a population out there for sure.

15 JS: What was your impression of them in general if you could?

16 TR: The Iraqis?

17 JS: Yeah.

18 TR: Well, I think they had been under Saddam for so long that they had lost the
19 ability to actually think for themselves and actually try to rationalize what to do. That's
20 the big problem. We were on a convoy; we came up on where there was a wreck. I
21 noticed the traffic was just backed up for two miles on each side. That's one thing you
22 don't want to do is stop. So, we finally went out there and we're trying to find out what
23 was going on. They couldn't figure out how to, you know, move one car and let this line
24 go for a little while and then stop and let this other line go. I mean, you know, I don't
25 know. So finally, we actually had to get out, lock and load and actually put a rifle on
26 somebody and threaten to shoot them if they moved so that we could get the other cars
27 going so that we could get all the traffic going. So, we finally got out and got the traffic
28 moving. It's just like they have a, I don't know, it's like a fifth or sixth grade—I wouldn't
29 say sixth grade. Probably a fifth-grade education as far as that. I think they've been told
30 what to do for so long they have a hard problem trying to figure out what to do. You see

1 the same thing; their military was kind of like that. They have to have a leader showing
2 them exactly what to do all the time. They just can't think on their own.

3 JS: As far as your interaction with the average Iraqis, did you find at this early
4 point, were they friendly, hostile, somewhere in between, or?

5 TR: You know, it really depended on what area you were in. A lot of friendly. I
6 mean, they would come out and wave at you and everything. It seemed like the different
7 sections where we traveled you can tell a distinct difference. Some of them were not
8 friendly at all and whereas some of them were. You came to know which areas you could
9 go into and who was friendly and who was not. You learned that rather quickly. That was
10 a lot of—especially early on, there was a lot of in-fighting. We were actually, the city of
11 Najaf was where the El Salvadorians were, and I don't know if you remember back when
12 kind of a moderate cleric was there, and he was killed in a car bomb.

13 JS: Oh right, that does sound familiar.

14 TR: That was when Sadr took over. Actually, we were across the street from that.
15 That's where the base was, across the street when that happened. You could see quite a
16 change. He was actually trying to blame the U.S. for it which the people would pretty
17 much believe anything. I mean, you could tell them anything and they would believe it.
18 Especially if they came from a cleric. That was a lot of what you had to deal with. You
19 had to deal with—after that it kind of changed. From that, I think we had left. That was
20 later on in '04 when they actually went to war with Sadr over there with his Army in the
21 City of Najaf. We were there for the first of it. It was getting a little hairy back then with
22 him. I think he was trying to take power. Yeah, there was actually one time over there
23 when they said, you know, of course all the soldiers wore sunglasses there and they put it
24 out that the soldiers could actually see through your clothes with the sunglasses. You
25 know, that offended them because you were looking at their women, you were looking
26 through their clothes over there. There was a lot of little kids that would always want to
27 look at your sunglasses. You know, we'd get them and let them look through them and
28 they'd look around. I guess they figured, "Hey, you really can't see through your clothes
29 with these things." Wild.

30 JS: Were most of the kids pretty friendly there?

1 TR: Yeah, all the kids were real friendly. I mean, they kind of hung around, of
2 course, being soldiers you'd give them stuff. Food and whatever and they'd bring you
3 stuff. Whatever you wanted you can ask them for it. During that time there was no beer
4 allowed, of course. Of course, you can go to the kids and say, "Hey, go get me a case of
5 beer." And they'd come back with a case of beer. Yeah, it was an experience. I mean, we
6 pretty much went on a convoy and slept. Usually had cots with us and we'd just sleep
7 wherever we were at that time. We'd sleep on the ground.

8 JS: Another thing you mentioned a little earlier, you talked about the Iraqi Army.
9 Did you guys have much interaction with them?

10 TR: We had a little bit of interaction with them. Not a whole lot. We didn't have
11 any, you know, responsibilities as far as training or anything like that. You know, we had
12 a little bit of interaction with them around the different bases that we went to and there
13 were some being trained on one of the bases where we had coalition forces. I think there
14 were some of them being trained by the Nicaraguans. The Nicaraguans had the EOD
15 (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) mission for the multi-nationals. I think they were training
16 some over there. We had a little bit of interaction with them.

17 JS: And you said your impression of them was much like the Iraqi people that
18 they couldn't really think for themselves?

19 TR: The Iraqi Army? Yeah. For the most part just the everyday soldier. In other
20 words, I remember later on we had meetings with officers and senior officers. They get
21 hung up on the—a senior Iraqi officer thinks and tries to do stuff as in the U.S. Army that
22 an NCO would be doing. They get down in the weeds of the little stuff and they're not
23 looking at the big picture. I think that's one of the main things and I think that's what the
24 Army was trying to do was trying to beef up the NCO corps over there. Trying to get a
25 cadre of NCOs that could actually take some of that pressure off so that you had more of
26 a U.S. Army chain of command.

27 JS: Oh, one question I meant to ask you a little bit earlier. How much, from your
28 perspective had the military changed since Vietnam?

29 TR: Oh god, yeah. About ninety degrees, I guess. Well, one of the differences was
30 back while I was in Vietnam, they could give a shit less of a soldier. In other words, you
31 were a draftee or even if you volunteered and you were there you were stuck. And they

1 could care less anything about it. It's like I told somebody, "if you want to see the vets
2 from Vietnam that had a post-traumatic stress disorder", I said, "you could go visit either
3 the prisons or either they're dead." You know, there was no care given to the soldiers
4 coming out of Vietnam. It was pretty much zero. Now, I think maybe because it's a
5 popular war. Not popular, but maybe it's all volunteer and you also have the National
6 Guard involved, some of the different states involved. I mean, there's all kind of
7 programs or anything a soldier could get to with that. As far as that, you know, it's
8 changed completely. I mean, as far as living conditions, living conditions have improved
9 100%. As far as the pay, the pay is up there now whereas it wasn't that much during the
10 Vietnam times. Even comparable to the year difference.

11 JS: Well, based on your experience of experiencing Vietnam, did you get the
12 feeling then—I guess if the military and the American people in general had learned
13 some of the lessons from Vietnam?

14 TR: You can actually see some of the lessons that were present during Vietnam
15 that are present now as far as, you know, I think the normal—I guess you would say the
16 people in the United States, they like, what would you say, their attention span is very
17 short. I think that the longer a war goes on, the less support you have for it because it's
18 not being flashed on television and you're seeing it all and everybody's involved in it. As
19 it goes on longer, people tend to start getting into a different routine of doing something
20 else and it's something that happened long ago. So, your support is gone on there. I think
21 that had a lot to do with it and I think that's where they lost support in Vietnam. I don't
22 think I can see it now as compared to back from 2003 when it started up until now with
23 Afghanistan going on strong. It seems to me that the support has gone down. I haven't
24 seen anything done as far as that to find out, but it seems to me that the support is going
25 down from what it is. People just can't realize that, you know, a war's not going to be
26 like the first gulf war. It's not going to be eighty days and it's finished. This is not what
27 these are about.

28 JS: Well, anything else we should mention about your first tour in Iraq? Any other
29 memorable moments? Moments that stick out in your mind?

1 TR: Gosh, I can't think of any. That was really the only one where I was actually
2 kind of in the combat portion. Of course, my other deployments I guess my rank had
3 gotten so where I wasn't able to do all that.

4 JS: Well after the 2003 deployment, what did you do at that point? I know you
5 didn't go back again until '06, but what were you doing in the meantime?

6 TR: Well, actually I was still in the same unit then which was the 226 ASG out of
7 Mobile. We came back in 2004 and, you know, all of those hurricanes we had. You said
8 you're from Mobile.

9 JS: Yeah, I'm from Mobile, yeah.

10 TR: You know all the hurricanes, so we worked all the hurricanes between, gosh,
11 I forget how many we had. It was like three or four.

12 JS: The Ivan and Katrina.

13 TR: We had Ivan, Katrina, there was a couple closer. In Mobile we were set up—
14 which continues to this day were called Task Force South there at Ft. Whiting and we are
15 actually the nerve centers of any of the hurricanes or anything that comes into that area.
16 So, we coordinate all the support from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management
17 Agency), work with all the EMAs (Emergency Management Academy) around there.
18 We're actually supposed to be just for Alabama, but a lot of times we'll kind of coexist
19 with some of the other ones. Especially Mississippi, we supported them a lot during
20 Katrina and even down into Louisiana. That's pretty much what we did when we got
21 back. Then, of course, they deployed the unit again in 2006.

22 JS: When you guys were redeployed, when you heard that you were going to be
23 redeployed, what was your reaction to that?

24 TR: Well, my reaction was, "Boy, I wonder what my wife's going to say?"
25 Actually, you had the choice because they deployed us so quick which usually the units
26 were supposed to get about four years in between deployments after you got back. So that
27 would have been like 2008 or something before. They could have got us again, but there
28 was only, I think, a total of fourteen people that actually went on the 2006 deployment
29 that were on the 2003 deployment. The rest of them opted not to go. At that time, I was
30 asked if I would take over as the command sergeant major for that. I went ahead and I

1 took the command sergeant major and I felt obligated I had to go back because if I was
2 going to take the rank, I was going to go with the unit. So, I ended up going back again.

3 JS: And where in Iraq did you go this time?

4 TR: We were in Al Asad which is in Anbar Province. We were actually
5 operational command from the 1st MEF again. 1st Marine Expedition Force. That as a
6 Marine base there at Al Asad. They got us as we were pretty much the Garrison
7 command for that base. We had a lot of marines, mostly marines there. We had some
8 Army units. Some units were doing a convoy all the way to the Jordanian and the Syrian
9 border where they were bringing in some supplies. That was back when Anbar Province
10 was pretty rough, too back then. They usually lay it with the most deaths from IEDs
11 (Improvised Explosive Device) and stuff. It was pretty bad.

12 JS: Well along those lines, how much did you notice that things had changed
13 since your first deployment?

14 TR: Well yeah, a number of things had changed. I mean, of course I didn't have
15 to go out on convoys or anything else. I was pretty much a stay-at-home base. I didn't get
16 to go anywhere. They got a whole lot like up armored Humvees you didn't even go off
17 the base unless it was an up armored Humvee and that's when they first started getting
18 the MRAPs (Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected) out there. We were the first to get the
19 MRAPs because of all the IEDs and stuff that we were having around there. It was just a
20 lot had improved as far as technology, as far as some of the systems that we had to
21 counter the IEDs. We actually had a counter IED team that was there on base, and they
22 tried to keep up with everything that was going on. It had gotten a lot better. As far as the
23 living conditions had gotten a whole lot better than the first time I was over there. They
24 actually had trailers set up and that's where we were housed. I guess the only difference
25 was the water. We were kind of in what they call a wadi. Barely close to the Euphrates
26 River. That's where we got our main water supply. It came from Euphrates water from
27 the Euphrates River. There was a treatment plant. Of course, it was outside the wire. It
28 was in an Iraqi town. We got water from there and we also had wells dug on in the wadi
29 with water that we got from there, but it wasn't real good water. I mean, it had a high
30 sulfur content and everything else. It had to be purified and everything like that, so I
31 guess when the Iraqis get mad, they blow the water line up and you'd be on water rations

1 for a week until we'd go out there and fix the water and all that stuff. We got rocketed a
2 few times, but from where the base was it was hard for them to actually get close enough
3 to actually lay any accurate fire on the base. I think it was one of the Navy's or Marine
4 Corp. It was an air base and I think it was one of the busiest that they had.

5 JS: Could you talk, I guess, a little bit more about your specific duties during this
6 tour?

7 TR: I was just the senior non-commissioned officer on base other than the Marine
8 Corps. I pretty much had things to do with everything other than the Marine Corps units,
9 so I had all of the Army units pretty much had them and everybody else that came on
10 base. I worked with the Marine Corps sergeant majors. So, we worked together and
11 anything that happened we never had any problems and worked well with them. We got
12 along great, but anything that had to do with any of the Army units on there, they would
13 go through me.

14 JS: Was this a year-long deployment?

15 TR: Yeah, it was actually longer than a year. Yeah, the whole deployment was, I
16 think sixteen months. We got kind of caught up in that when they were extending
17 everybody, so we got kind of caught up in it.

18 JS: Well, any memorable moments from this deployment that stick out?

19 TR: Not really, just really a routine deployment. The unit that went over there, we
20 pretty much just had to grab people from the State of Alabama. I mean, they came in
21 everywhere because, you know, with only fourteen of the original unit that went over
22 there. Of course, we had some of the best that came from the State of Alabama, so we did
23 a very good job over there of what we had to do.

24 JS: Along those lines, I've heard some critics in the media and stuff say that
25 multiple deployments of our National Guard units damaged and, in some ways, weakened
26 morale, ground them down kind of thing. Is there any truth to that from your perspective?

27 TR: I don't really think so. I mean, you have so many people that are, I guess it's
28 because the economy is so bad, they just go from one deployment to the next. I mean,
29 I've had some that were on this last deployment came to me trying to see who I knew so
30 they could get on another deployment. I mean, that's actually someone's job now. Going
31 to one deployment to the next. I mean, as far as grounded down, I don't really think so.

1 You get quite a bit a time of when you get back. I think it's probably different from what
2 type of unit that you're going over there with. I'm sure it would be a little different and
3 morale grinding down and everything else if you were like an MP unit actually having to
4 get on the ground doing things and are with an infantry unit that had to go door to door
5 kicking in doors and stuff. The combat units, I'm sure, would have a tendency to get kind
6 of ground down. The thing is, you know, the National Guard has met its strength every
7 month and I think they're one hundred percent now. If it's grounding it down, apparently,
8 you've got people signing up to go. I'm not really sure what they're criticizing there.

9 JS: Alright, another question I have for you. I know that 2006, 2007 this
10 deployment was a pretty bad time in Iraq and what was going on at that time, but by the
11 time you returned in 2009, 2010 the surge was already taken place. Had things improved
12 much from your perspective for that last time? Could you see a difference?

13 TR: No, there was a big difference. I mean, there was just a complete turnaround.
14 Of course, we were based in Kuwait then, so we didn't have a whole lot to do with Iraq
15 with the unit I was in. We had most of the northern camps that were in Kuwait and then
16 we had units coming going to Iraq and we were attached to a brigade out of Wyoming
17 who actually did the convoys up into Northern Iraq and back. So, we knew what was
18 going on as far as convoys. There was very little activity. Just an occasional IED, an
19 occasional sniper, and they were just around in certain areas. I mean, other than that, it's
20 gotten very safe over there. I don't think the brigade actually—our company lost one
21 soldier and I don't think the brigade lost any in Iraq. We lost one soldier because of an
22 accident. I think they had a couple—they had one guy that was shot and a lot of them, I
23 think, there was a couple that went through IEDs, but other than that everything was, you
24 know, pretty good. (Ringing in background)

25 JS: Do you want me to stop for a moment?

26 TR: Yeah, hold on.

27 JS: Alright, this last deployment, what were your duties this time?

28 TR: Well, when I came back and I went back to Mobile as a command sergeant
29 major, you know, I knew my ETS (Expiration-Terms of Service) getting out and my
30 retirement was around 2010. We got back and ASG, the air support groups changed over
31 to what they call maneuver enhancement brigade with combat units under it which I kind

1 of liked anyway being combat. There was a difference, there was a new general—we fell
2 under troop command and there was a new general that came in there and she decided
3 that she wanted to change things up, so she was going to send me from Mobile all the
4 way to Decatur. She wanted me to take over as a CSN for a unit up in Decatur. Which,
5 my gosh, from one end of the state to the other. Which I didn't quite agree with, you
6 know, but there wasn't a whole lot I could do about it. Like I told her. "Hey, you're the
7 general. You make the decisions. I either go along with them or I get out." That's what
8 she was going to do so I just decided that since I didn't have, but a year left before I
9 retired, I might as well go for another deployment. I called them up and told them I just
10 wanted to go to another deployment to see what was out there. I actually wanted to go to
11 Afghanistan, and I was going to go on an ET Team, embedded trainer team over to
12 Afghanistan, but the times didn't work out and I really couldn't get in. Then this actual
13 deployment was the only one that came up. And they had a slide open for an operation
14 sergeant major which has to do with all the operations that, you know, you handle all the
15 operations that come in. In other words, you're kind of the nerve center. You know, like a
16 command center and you just handle anything that comes up. I told them I would go
17 ahead and take that one then. That's how I ended up there. I was responsible for any of
18 the operations going on. We had different sections under us. We had border operations
19 with Kuwait and Iraq. We just had over side of all the units that came through. That's a
20 big training base where we were on. Training all the units before they go to Iraq. Of
21 course, this is mostly around my contractors, but we had oversight on that. We had
22 something to do with all the life support that was on the base. We did a lot with contracts
23 and stuff and civilian contractors. We were kind of the military oversight for those
24 contractors. I did the operations if anything needed to be done was run through us.

25 JS: Alright.

26 TR: Kind of like a 911 for the base, I guess. Pretty much what I did. I never knew
27 what I was going to do for one day to the next. I like it like that, something different.

28 JS: How long did this deployment last? Was it a year?

29 TR: Yeah, from April 15, 2009, we actually came back. We deployed out of Ft.
30 Hood, and we actually came back in March? I think it was in March. We came back a
31 little early. Yeah, over there now the National Guard has a policy where from the day that

1 a unit is activated, they can only stay for one year. So, if you stay somewhere and you
2 train up for two months then, you know, that just gives you ten months in country. Rather
3 than before it was one year of boots on the ground which meant after all of your training,
4 whatever your first day for one year was when you set foot in Iraq.

5 JS: Okay.

6 TR: So that's changed.

7 JS: Alright, well anything else about this last deployment we should mention?

8 TR: No, I can't think of anything.

9 JS: Alright, and have you retired at this point?

10 TR: No, I haven't yet. I'm still on active duty so don't say anything to get me in
11 trouble.

12 JS: (Laughing) Right.

13 TR: My retirement date is July 19th which is my birthday and I'll turn sixty years
14 old. That's my retirement date. When I got back, they owed me 125 days of leave. I've
15 actually been on leave ever since.

16 JS: Well, before wrapping up the interview, if I could ask you—usually wrap the
17 interviews up asking some broad questions regarding Vietnam just to kind of close things
18 out. Looking back on your experiences in Vietnam, how do you feel about your service in
19 Vietnam and American involvement in Vietnam?

20 TR: Well, I'm proud of my service over there, of course, I always have been. It
21 just seems kind of funny and the difference in me and a lot of the veterans that aren't still
22 in is kind of, I don't know. When you come back from Iraq or whatever there's all these
23 parades and everything else. I kind of think back, it would have been great if the Vietnam
24 veterans had that. It's just so much of a difference in that and attitude of people from
25 Vietnam veterans to now. As far as that, you know, American involvement, I don't know
26 if it did any good. I think a lot of wars are probably fought for the wrong things and most
27 of them are fought for the economic games. We used to kid ourselves all the time because
28 we worked and fought on the Michelin rubber plantation down at III Corps. That's just
29 part of it, I guess. Wars are fought for different things. As far as my service over there, I
30 was proud of my service over there.

1 JS: You mentioned about coming home since Iraq and all and there being parades
2 and public support. I guess, how did that feel in some ways finally getting this when it's
3 something that most of the guys that you served with in Vietnam never experienced that?
4 Could you talk a little bit more about that?

5 TR: It was pretty emotional, really. You know, other than that I guess it brings up
6 old thoughts.

7 JS: Again, with Vietnam, looking back on it, how did you feel about things like
8 the media coverage of the War in Vietnam? Did you give much thought to that?

9 TR: Well, of course like now you have embedded reporters and everything. We
10 never had one of them there. In fact, I never saw a reporter over there. I would assume
11 they wouldn't imbed them with a small team like us, but we didn't have a whole lot of
12 interaction with them at all from where we operated out of. I don't think they would
13 probably allow them to go that far forward and everything. I think I was over there when
14 they had the Kent State where the National Guard killed those students over there. You
15 know, we got the Stars and Stripes over there and everything was pretty much, you know,
16 they censored everything over there; the mail, whatever. Which they don't do now. I
17 remember not really knowing what happened at Kent State until we got back to the states.
18 There's a lot of stuff you didn't find out until you got back. It was a lot of stuff that
19 happened over there that never got out into the media.

20 JS: Well, along the lines of Kent State and the likes of that, what did you think
21 about the war protests and the protest movement in general?

22 TR: Well, I never participated in it or anything like that. I felt like really, I'm not
23 really sure if they were really sincere in that more than they were just wanting to do it to
24 go against the establishment. You know what I mean? I don't know that the war was
25 actually, in some of their mind, I think it was just more of a "Hey, follow the pack, let's
26 protest the war."

27 JS: So more of not an actual protest against the war based on moral feelings or
28 anything like that, just wanting to kind of go against this. Do you think someone could
29 have been not wanting to actually serve themselves?

30 TR: You know, it possibly could. You know, I don't really know. Of course, a lot
31 of them did. You know, you take Jane Fonda, for instance, going over there. Somebody

1 like her, you know. I kind of liked it when I read, she was signing her book and a
2 Vietnam Vet went and spit in her face. I thought that was pretty nice. Crazy lady.

3 JS: Well, what your opinion of, I guess, modern day Vietnam and U.S. policy
4 towards Vietnam and the developing relationship we have with them with trade and
5 tourism and things like that?

6 TR: I don't see any reason they shouldn't. I think they should open up trade and
7 everything else. I have nothing against the Vietnamese people. Actually, it's not
8 different—they're a lot better than some of the other countries that we trade with. I see no
9 reason why we don't.

10 JS: I know in recent years, the last ten, fifteen years or so a lot of Vietnam
11 veterans have gone back to Vietnam. Have you ever given any thought to that?

12 TR: I really haven't. You know, I've watched some on television where they went
13 back to different places and different fire bases and things like that. I would have no idea
14 where any of the stuff, where I was and where it is. I mean, we went to so many different
15 places and most of our places and most of my time was spent in the jungle. We didn't
16 spend anytime back in the rear. We just went fire base to fire base. I couldn't tell you
17 where any of them are. I don't really—it's actually probably a beautiful place in parts of
18 the country. It wouldn't be a bad place to take a vacation.

19 JS: Last few questions. Have you ever visited the Vietnam Wall and if so, what
20 did you think of it?

21 TR: No, I never have. I have thought about going.

22 JS: Well, is there anything else we should cover? Anything else we haven't
23 mentioned at this point?

24 TR: I can't think of anything.

25 JS: Alright.

26 TR: I appreciate it.

27 JS: I appreciate it as well, Mr. Ray. Let me go ahead and stop.